

APRIL 2006 – *Kingdom Substitutes*

Jesus Christ came preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand and therefore people should repent and believe the gospel. To those who accepted his message, he said, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt. 6:30), and “if anyone would follow me he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Mk. 8:32), and “if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching...he who does not love me will not obey my teaching” (Jn. 14:23-24). Some who heard these words accepted Jesus and his message, but most simply ignored him. They preferred to continue ordering their lives around “kingdom substitutes,” substitutes that enabled them to avoid the claims of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The call of Jesus was radical in his day, and it is no less radical today. And now as then, most people choose substitutes that suit their own desires and chosen way of life. They avoid the claims of Jesus in order to gain or maintain a way of their own choosing. C.S. Lewis spoke to this matter in the last sermon he preached, when he said...

For He claims all, because He is love and must bless. He cannot bless us unless He has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims all. There’s no bargaining with Him.

That is, I take it, the meaning of all those sayings that alarm me most. Thomas More said, “If ye make indentures with God how much ye will serve Him, ye shall find ye have signed both of them yourself.” Law, in his terrible, cool voice, said, “Many will be rejected at the last day, not because they have taken time and pains about their salvation, but because they have not taken time and pains enough”; and later, in his richer, Behmenite period, “If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God, it will make in the end no difference what you have chosen instead.” Those are hard words to take. Will it really make no difference whether it was women or patriotism, cocaine or art, whisky or a seat in the Cabinet, money or science? Well, surely no difference that matters. We shall have missed the end for which we are formed and rejected the only thing that satisfies. Does it matter to a man dying in a desert by which choice of route he missed the only well?¹

One of the substitutes in Jesus’ day was a corrupted form of true religion. As we survey the American religious scene—including the Evangelical world—it is becoming increasingly obvious that the processes of corruption are well advanced. Evangelicalism is shaped far more than we dare imagine by the American Dream than the kingdom of God. In such a time as this, what better way to preserve our souls than to immerse ourselves in the gospels, reacquaint ourselves with the true Jesus, and expel all substitutes from our lives.

*And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them,
“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.
For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.
For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?”*

MARK 8:34-36 NASB

¹ “A Slip of the Tongue” C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, a division of HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 190-191.