

Rich Lusk

Follow up to the sermon--

Obviously, there were many aspects of last week's sermon text (Mt. 19:16-30) that didn't get touched on in the sermon. If you want to study the passage further, look at my lecture notes from the 2005 Christ Church Ministerial Conference on Justification (<http://www.trinity-pres.net/pastor.php>) or listen to the August 1, 2004 PM sermon from Auburn Avenue Presbyterian (<http://www.trinity-pres.net/audio/austin-monroe.php>).

One point I wanted to note further here concerns the meaning of the term "regeneration" in Mt. 19:28. In evangelicalism and Reformed systematic theology, the term "regeneration" is generally used to refer to an inward, secret change of heart that the individual experiences when God's Spirit converts him. But biblically, the term only occurs twice (Mt. 19:28; Titus 3:5), and it refers in each case to the new world order that God established in the death and resurrection of Christ. As Titus 3:5 indicates, the believer ordinarily enters this new order of things in baptism. Mt. 19:28 identifies the regeneration with the reign of Christ as the New Adam (the "Son of Man") and says that in the regeneration (or in the kingdom of God), disciples will share in Christ's judgment and rule (cf. Eph. 2:6). While the evangelical usage of the term may have its place, biblically "the regeneration" is not so much something that enters us, but something we enter into.

To be "in the regeneration" is to be "in Christ," participating in the powers of the age to come, through the Holy Spirit. It's to share in the new life of the risen of Christ, dead to sin and alive to righteousness. The regeneration is the new creation of 2 Cor. 5:17; the new covenant of Heb. 8:8; the world to come of Heb. 2:5; and the new heavens and earth of Rev. 21-22. It is already a definitive, present reality in the world, as Christ and his Spirit are present with the church; it is growing dynamically and progressively to fill the earth in the present era of history, as the nations are brought to Christ; and it will be fully and finally present when Christ comes at the last day to consummate his redemptive work.

Literally, the term "regeneration" ("re-genesis") refers to "new creation" or "new beginning." This new creation was established in the death/resurrection/ascension/session of Christ. It will be culminated at Christ's final coming, when we are raised up bodily and completely glorified, along with the rest of creation. That last point is important: "new creation" ultimately means "*new creation*" in the fullest possible sense. God is not going to scrap this world when history is completed. Rather, he is going to perfect it and glorify it. That's why so many Christian prayers end with the phrase "world without end, amen." We will live for all eternity in the final form of the "regeneration" -- a renewed and restored world, in which heaven (God's realm) and earth (humanity's realm) are totally united. Just as our bodies will be resurrected, so this world will be "resurrected" as well. If you want some sense of what the final regeneration will be like, imagine if Adam had never fallen into sin, and history had gone on for centuries and centuries...until finally, Adam and his descendants had perfected their dominion over the world. The Apostle Paul tells that what the first Adam failed to do because of his sin, the Last Adam has taken upon himself to complete (cf. 1 Cor. 15:21-28).

This is why in the sermon I cited C. S. Lewis' point from *Mere Christianity* that Christianity is the world's only fighting religion. We believe the whole world will be made new someday. We believe not only souls, but bodies are being redeemed; not only individuals, but corporate entities, like families and nations; not only a "religious" segment of life, but the whole of human culture. Therefore, *we fight*. We believe that God will make all the sad things come untrue, that he will make death work backwards. We believe God's original project for the creation, outlined in Gen. 1-2, will be fulfilled, despite the entrance of sin into the world. As Lewis says, a Christian can look at cancer or at slums and *know that something must be and will be done about it*. From a secular perspective, there is no way to say this. The secular person cannot give any reason why it's better for a surgeon to kill cancer than for cancer to kill a person. Whatever is just *is* -- and there's

no basis for saying things should be or ever will be different. But from the Christian perspective, the resurrection of Christ has changed everything. Because redemption is comprehensive and cosmic, we are interested in seeing God's grace touch every nook and cranny of life, even in the present. And we know that our grace-driven efforts to make the world new will not be in vain in the end -- every good deed we do will live on for eternity in some form or fashion (cf. Rev. 14:13). God not only brings saved sinners into his kingdom -- he transforms the kingdoms of the earth so they can enter his eternal kingdom as well (cf. Rev. 21:24).

For a more complete discussion of this theme, I highly recommend Sinclair Ferguson's book *The Holy Spirit*. This whole book is outstanding, but the chapter on the Spirit's work of regeneration is especially good. Also, while I have my reservations about some aspects of the book, Anthony Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future* has some good thoughts on the cultural effects of the gospel and the eternal value of our efforts to contribute to the building of a godly civilization. Other good books that develop some of these themes include Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*; Peter Leithart, *The Kingdom and the Power*; Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*; and Henry Van Til, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*.

Christianity Today magazine has recently put out two OUTSTANDING articles that I strongly encourage you to read. Both these pieces have a strong bearing on the kinds of things I think TPC needs to be thinking about:

CT's "Christian Vision" project has produced a lot of helpful material. Christopher Wright's article on "mission" is excellent: http://www.christianvisionproject.com/2007/01/an_upsidedown_world-print.html. Wright reminds us of the seismic shift that has taken place in the "center" of global Christianity, and calls on Western Christians to reorient their way of thinking about the church accordingly. Wright also has several books that are well worth reading -- so if you like this article, you can always find more.

Mark Galli's article "Stopping Cultural Drift" follows Simon Chan in demonstrating that evangelicals can only reclaim their identity and function in the world if they adopt a significantly "higher" ecclesiology than they have had in the past. ("Ecclesiology" is one's view of the church, from the Greek term *ekklesia*.) Indeed, many of the cures proposed for evangelicalism's woes (e.g., the emerging and home church movements) may make things even worse -- at the very least they fail to challenge evangelicalism's flawed core presuppositions. Chan calls for a more Anglican (and I would say classic Calvinian, or "Reformed catholic") ecclesiology. The article is available here: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/november/33.66.html> I'd especially encourage those interested in our Local and Global Mercy and Mission Committees to read these articles and discuss them.