

Atlantic Baptist Article

It's Not About Us... Or Is It?

By Lois Mitchell

May 20, 2004

The first time I heard the phrase, "it's not about us" was when Gary Nelson (General Secretary of CBM) was speaking at our Convention Assembly a few years ago. Since then, the phrase seems to have become something of a mantra amongst evangelical Christians in North America. Max Lucado even has a new book out entitled It's Not About Me.

In a culture where it **is all about us** (and proud of it!), it's refreshingly counter-cultural to assert that it isn't. But, if it's not about us, what **is** it about for Christians? And how can we live within this self-centered culture in a way that demonstrates that we know that it's not about us? How can we effectively disentangle ourselves from the tentacles of self interest and self-promotion, even within our church culture?

John the Baptist went ahead of Jesus throughout Galilee saying: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:1). Jesus himself came preaching and teaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Matthew's gospel (1:14-15) says:

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

People always hear the message of the Gospel within the context of a particular culture – a time and place and way of thinking about the world. In seeking to be relevant within our culture, we need to be careful that we are not molding the gospel to fit the fashion and whims of the world.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for evangelical Christianity in North America is to present the gospel – the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand – in a way that puts the emphasis on the Kingdom, not on ourselves. This society elevates and celebrates individualism so thoroughly that it's very difficult for us to put community ahead of individual needs and interests. We admire the church portrayed in Acts 4:32 where:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

But do we aspire to actually **be** this kind of community? Beyond the sharing of material resources, what about our understanding of who we are within the Kingdom of God? And of what God intends for us as participants in that

Kingdom? We say that it's not about us, but is this consistent with things we commonly assert in our churches and in dialogue with those who might be seeking Christ? When we say, for instance, that "Jesus died for you" or "if you were the only person on earth, Jesus would have suffered and died on the cross just for you" or "Jesus wants you to be happy and healthy" or even when we say that "Jesus came so that we can have abundant life" – are we putting the emphasis on the right place?

What if it's really not about us but about the Kingdom of God? What if Jesus died, not so that individuals could be blessed, but so that the Kingdom of God – the domain under God's reign and rule – would be extended? What if God's focus is on the Kingdom, not on each one of us? Is that a gospel message that can be spoken and heard in our culture?

By the way, this is not to say that God doesn't care about each one of us. He does! And it's not to deny that it's only through Jesus' death and resurrection that each one of us has access to eternal life. We do! It's a matter of emphasis, of which comes first. God's purpose and plan is to build His Kingdom. As we align ourselves with that purpose, we experience abundant life and the blessings of a right relationship with Christ. But it's not for our sake – it's for the sake of the Kingdom.

As John the Baptist languished in prison, he began to wonder if he'd got his signals crossed. He'd baptized Jesus and announced that He was the Messiah. But now he was having doubts and he sent messengers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Luke 7:20). Jesus told them:

"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Luke 7:22).

What's He saying? I think He's saying, "John, I am the one who was prophesied to come. I know what you're going through, but it's not about you. It's about the Kingdom and everything is happening according to God's will. Hold on – don't fall away. The Kingdom is coming." After the messengers headed back to give John the message from Jesus, Jesus tells the crowd, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28). And yet, what became of John? Shortly after this King Herod had him beheaded to fulfill a pledge he had made to Herodias' daughter whose dancing had tickled his fancy! Hardly a glorious death for a man whom Jesus described as the greatest among men!

Think about it. If God's priority is our safety and security more than it is advancing the Kingdom, John and the martyrs through the ages would have lived

long and full lives and died comfortably in their sleep. For His kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, our theology needs to be adjusted!