

1. (What do you really think about church? From a biblical perspective it is described as a family, a body, a bride, as the called out. All too often now it is viewed as an entrenched institution, out of step and inflexible and self-absorbed--part of the church failure discussion of last week. Others approach church with a consumer mindset--sizing up their church choice based on whether or not the worship, the youth group, the preacher or the programs meets their expectations. So the answer to that questions likely would include both the more-healthy and less healthy responses. So, this month I will endeavor to take up the idea of church--not necessarily in any of these ways, but rather as a kind of alternative community dedicated to doing God's will on earth. Here is my approach)
  - a. The Church as the Kingdom Community
  - b. The Church as the Post-Racial Community
  - c. The Church as an Outreach Community
  - d. The Church as an Essential Community
2. (So jumping right in) The Church as the Kingdom Community (so just why did God plan on this thing called church happening? Why did Jesus clearly state that he would build his church and hell would have no chance to erode it--Matthew 16:18? Sounds like a big deal. Sounds like a major investment by heaven. Maybe then the way to see the why is to put it in a kingdom focus. **By God's design the church is now where God wants his kingdom to break out--to be the place in which folks can definitively and absolutely encounter what God intends his kingdom to be and look like on earth.**)
3. "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."--Matthew 6:10 (From Christ's prayer in the SOM--this is a loaded statement with perhaps broader end time consequences--it speaks directly to who the church is to be--actively about heaven's will on earth. It is exactly why we are the called out--1 Peter 2:9. **And it informs every aspect of everything else that is church!**)
4. What Does this Mean?--Matthew 5-7 (context of SOM provides answers)
  - a. Values are redefined (think beatitudes--weakness becomes virtues; Heaven is seen in what we give up--not what we grasp for)
  - b. Others are elevated (especially so--those who are the weakest, most vulnerable, and disenfranchised--the kingdom welcomes the little ones)
  - c. Identity is Transformed (no longer about me--when someone slaps me or exploits me for a mile's worth of labor or when I pray, fast, give or serve God. Making it about me is not heaven on earth)
  - d. Priorities change (it is now seek the kingdom first; laying up heaven's treasures--not earths; it is about trust not worry.)
5. What Does this Look Like?
  - a. Justice, righteousness, mercy, truth and love define us
  - b. Forgiveness, acceptance and forbearance guide our relationships
  - c. Repentance, transformation, hope and renewal become our message
  - d. Peace, joy, fellowship and harmony as a result reign in us
6. (A true alternative community--a community honoring heaven above all and demonstrating that on earth--a community of Jesus. Remember what was said of him after he delivered the SOM?) Matthew 7:28-29 MSG (Isn't this what we should be after? Heaven on earth should be like nothing folks have ever seen before, right? So church should be that too--the living body of Christ, not so much concerned about what gets compartmentalized just on Sundays, or about what is in it for me, or filled with folks who honestly do not look or live much differently than anyone else--but folks filled with God's Spirit living out faith authentically, joy-filled at the thought of living out heaven on earth! Don't get me wrong--there is tension here--living in two worlds, but of those two--which do you want?)
7. (I think maybe Jesus had that question in mind with his last SOM story) Matthews 7:24-27