

widely understood as “friendship evangelism” is not really evangelism at all but simply the means for developing a healthy context for evangelism” (p. 166).

Written in a non-scholarly fashion by someone who is well-read and experienced, Steve’s book is ideal for giving to British or other Western Christians who are trying to figure out how to break through to their Muslim neighbours or colleagues. For instance, he shows how the Qur’an can be used in building bridges in the chapter ‘Echoes of Grace’.

reviewed by David Lundy

His chapter on eleven reasons why Christians should extend grace to Muslims gave me a couple of fresh ideas of how to impart vision to churches I speak in about their responsibility to make sure that Muslims are not forgotten in their mission mandate. Bell’s well-documented contention that God is at work among Muslims today as never before will stir your heart, even as it will help get people reaching out to the diaspora at their doorstep.

SURPRISED BY HOPE: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church

N. T. Wright (New York: HarperOne, 2008) 332 pages.

Why review a book like this one, written to convince Christians that they have gotten much of their core *theology* wrong and to show them the right way to *think*, in *Seedbed*? Isn’t *Seedbed* all about practical issues and discussing the day-to-day challenges of our ministry in the Arab world? One of the topics that *Seedbed* recently dealt with was the interconnection between church planting and transformational ministry. For much of my adult life, I have wrestled with this question. A recent edition of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (2008, 25:2) was devoted to this topic and was

entitled *Word and Deed: A Century of Polarization?* The title suggests that I have not been alone in my struggle to find resolution of the tensions when we try to bring together an emphasis on church planting with one on transformational ministry within the same ministry organization. I believe that the resurrection-based understanding that Wright presents in *Surprised by Hope* offers a sound biblical way to understand and overcome the tensions between ‘word and deed’ that many of us have wrestled with for so long.

Writing in a forceful and persuasive style, world-renowned New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop N. T. Wright argues that the main reasons that so many of us have struggled with the practical dualism of *either* focusing on 'spiritual' work, *or* focusing on social and justice issues is that we have an unbiblical dualism implicit in our understanding of salvation and of God's intended future for the church and the earth. In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright seeks to demonstrate that modern evangelicalism, along with many other branches of the contemporary church, has fallen into much serious error in its understanding of what the Bible teaches that God accomplished in Christ through his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Wright argues that far too many Christians have succumbed to an almost platonic dualism in how they understand salvation. He states strongly that:

The normal Western Christian view: that salvation is about 'my relationship with God' in the present and about 'going home to God and finding peace' in the future.... is simply not what the New Testament teaches (p. 196).

Instead, he says that, 'salvation, then, is not 'going to heaven' but 'being raised to life in God's new heaven and new earth' (p. 198).

Wright shows that what we believe about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is *core to our entire theology*, which in turn influences what we

believe about *everything else*. Wright believes that it is because we have departed so far from the New Testament and classic Christian understanding of the resurrection that we have gone so far wrong in our understanding of the mission of the church in this present era. The theological dualism that we have unwittingly adopted is the source of the practical dualism we experience in our understanding of the mission priority of the church.

In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright covers a lot of ground. He begins setting the scene by showing how distant much typical Christian understanding of the resurrection and the hoped-for future is from the belief of the NT and early Christian centuries (Part 1: Setting the Scene, pp. 1-76). Then he carefully demonstrates the proper biblical, and especially New Testament, understanding of our future hope, of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, of heaven, of the new creation, of Jesus' return, of the redemption of our bodies and of paradise and hell (Part 2: God's Future Plan, pp. 77-186). In his third and final section, Wright explores a number of significant ways that a properly *biblical* understanding of our future hope should reshape our understanding of salvation, of the Kingdom of God and of the mission of the church, as seen in the New Testament, and how it ought to shape our practice in the twenty-first century (Part 3: Hope in Practice: Resurrection and the Mission of the Church, pp. 187-289).

As I read *Surprised by Hope*, I was surprised to find myself whole-heartedly agreeing with his affirmations, even as he repeatedly demolished some of my long-held convictions about the nature of salvation and the future that God has planned for his people and the earth that he created. I will need to read it more than once in order to be truly shaken free from much of what I have previously embraced as biblical truths. Rereading *Surprised by Hope* will help me change my thinking **and** my practice so that it lines up more closely with the understanding that Jesus and the Apostles had. This perspective, which is so radically different from so many contemporary Christian perspectives, empowered the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to turn the world upside down within a few generations.

I encourage everyone to buy and read this book. Wright's style of writing is easy. This is not a book written for academic theologians (although they would do well to read

it!). It is written for everyone who desires to live their life in obedience to Christ in our generation. Let me give Wright the last word:

I hope I have said enough to make it clear that the mission of the church is nothing more or less than the outworking, in the power of the Spirit, of Jesus' bodily resurrection and thus the anticipation of the time when God will fill the earth with his glory, transform the old heavens and earth into the new, and raise his children from the dead to populate and rule over the redeemed world he has made.

If that is so, mission must urgently recover from its long-term schizophrenia. As I have said before, the split between saving souls and doing good in the world is a product not of the Bible or the gospel but of the cultural captivity of both within the Western world....

When the church is living out the kingdom of God, the word of God will spread powerfully and do its own work (pp. 264-265 & 267).

reviewed by Don Little