Workshop

Can Dispensationalism Speak to Today?

Yes, but only if it sees the kingdom and its ethic as not about the future but also about the present as rooted in an unfolding, united progressively revealed kingdom promise coming in distinct stages of administrative stages that is not about people groups alone but about how God has grouped peoples together in Christ. That divine gathering forms a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-racial diversity that transcends the people group model we often think of as at work in the biblical program of promise. It produces a oneness that overlays the diversity that also is present and affirmed within it, so that Jew and Gentile can be one and yet remain Jew and Gentile as reconciliation remains on display even to the end. Showing this possibility is not a sideshow but is at the core of what the gospel produces taking us to shalom. Witnessing to and for it now is a concrete and visible means of showing God’s heart. To get there grace and justice are wed as word and deed come together to show how the believing community is to love their neighbor both inside and outside the church.

Dispensationalism has to see the church as in the promise program of God as laid out in the Hebrew Scripture. Dispensationalism has to embrace a series of key texts about the promise as inaugurated. This is not Laddian; it is reflective of biblical promise. It is not Laddian; it is kingdom theology seen within a unified dispensational narrative of God’s program.

The premises:

1. The promise always saw Gentiles as blessed through the singular seed of the Christ. It is this continuity in PD that makes this possible for Dispensationalism. Without that continuity dispensationalism struggles to unify the biblical program and ethic. Discuss the history of the Seron on the Mount in Dispensationalism as the example of the problem.
2. All the covenants have been inaugurated. They were for Israel but not just for Israel but for the sake of the world. That is why Gen 12: 3 ends as it does. God promises to Israel was never about Israeli nationalism but about how Israel was to be an example of God’s grace for the world.
3. Some key texts make this undeniable. Isa 2:1-4; 19:23-25; Luke 10:23-24; Luke 11:20; Luke 17:20-21; John 6: 44-45- key text; Acts 2:30-38; Col. 1:14; Matt 28:18-20; Rev 1:4-7.
4. The Great Commission and Great Commandment makes this undeniable. The premise of the judgment is Jesus’ current authority that makes people accountable to him and the kingdom. The ethic of the kingdom promise reflects a changed heart that lives out what the prophets taught and what Jesus called for from us. A prepared people: Luke 1:16-17; 3:10-14.
5. Reconciliation and Restoration opens the door to Genesis 1 and the creation mandate restored, as well as to Rev 5-7 with its vision of a peoples of many tribes and nations speaking to a world divided by nationalisms, tribes and race. Two core images: the creation mandate and the picture of the worship of the Lamb by those from every tribe and nation. The gospel is an anti-tribal message about reconciliation in a tribal world.
6. Public space can be approached in the hope the witness to the gospel can be found in how the community approaches the world to show the heart of God. The gospel is about hope not just condemnation (Challenge and Invitation- 1 Pet 3:13-18). The gospel is about reversing corporate estrangement by giving us a unifying center in Christ.
7. The world is not to be abandoned by us but engaged with the hope of the gospel, pleading for the preciousness even of fallen humanity and for the search people have to make sense out of their lives, something only the gospel in its corporate fullness can do. Our calling is not to fix the world but to be faithful in witnessing to the One who is the solution, showing that knowing who we are before God and realizing what he has done for us all in Christ gives a searching world the potential fore real location.