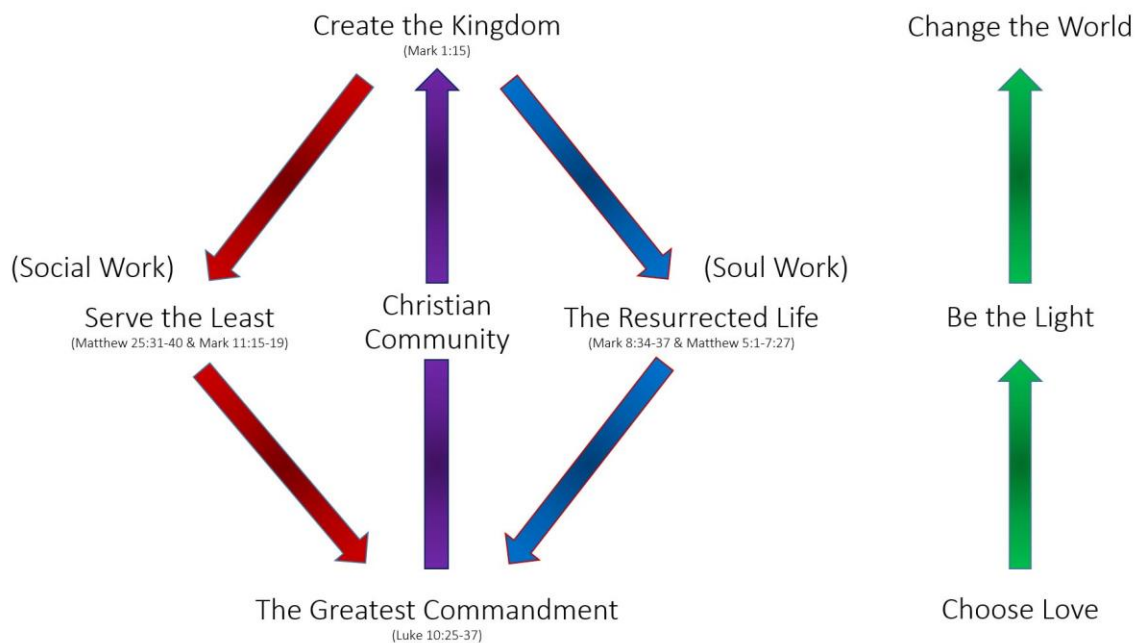


# THE CHRISTIAN MISSION



**The Christian Mission** begins with the first words that Jesus speaks in Mark's gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." (Mark 1:15) These are the words that initiate Jesus' ministry and they tell us that Jesus' goal is to bring **God's kingdom to earth**. God's kingdom is a place where every human has food to eat, clothes to wear, a home in which to live and medical treatment for their illnesses. In essence, God's kingdom is a place where no one is forgotten.

There are two ways God's kingdom will be created. Either we have to wait for Jesus to return from heaven to create God's kingdom or Jesus expects his followers to create God's kingdom on earth in the present. If the former is true, then we are simply preparing ourselves for Jesus' return. If the latter is accurate, then we become Jesus' hands and feet in the world. I choose to believe that we are the ones who are responsible for the creation of God's kingdom. There are two paths that allow Christians to achieve the goal of creating God's kingdom in the present. Each path is equally important as both help to fuel and serve the other:

1. **Social Work:** In Matthew 25, Jesus calls on his disciples to serve the least by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick and visiting those who are in prison. Jesus also calls on his disciples in Mark 11 to follow his example of overturning systems of injustice that restrict or prevent our fellow humans from being able to experience the fullness of life that God intended for the creation.

2. **Soul Work:** In Mark 8, Jesus tells us that any who want to become his disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. In other words, Christians are expected to live a life of sacrifice where we kill off those parts of ourselves that are selfish and greedy and replace them with the principles taught by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7. This is better known as the Resurrected Life and is the internal transformation that all Christians strive to achieve in their hearts, minds and souls.

As we strive to make gains in both of these areas, we are forced to engage and follow the **Greatest Commandment** to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In essence, by doing the soul work of striving to achieve the Resurrected Life, we are pressed into deeper relationship with God's love, creating unity and equity within ourselves. Conversely, by doing the social work of serving the least, we are pressed into deeper relationships by loving our neighbors, particularly our neighbors whom we dislike and with whom we disagree (e.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan Lk. 10:25-37), which creates unity and equity in the world.

If we focus our efforts on these three core elements of the Christian Mission, then the result will be the transformation of the world and the eventual creation of God's kingdom on earth. A sign of positive progress towards this goal is the formation of a strong **Christian Community** that is reflective of the values of God's kingdom. In other words, if your church is fully engaged in the Christian Mission, then a by-product of those efforts will be the creation of a community that is welcoming, loving, diverse and willing to nurture the souls of people from all walks of life.

Therefore, even though every person must walk the Christian Mission as an individual, they quickly become part of a community whose collective strength provides support in the midst of challenge. In this way, every person who engages in the process of creating God's kingdom will be a critical addition to that Christian Community and will contribute gifts that will help bring God's kingdom to fruition in the world.

**Choose Love. Be the Light. Change the World.** This tagline distills and synthesizes all the elements of the Christian Mission into an easy to remember formula. The first section of the tagline, **Choose Love**, references the Greatest Commandment. The idea being that Christian love is a choice. One must choose to love God and to love one's neighbor as yourself because these forms of love are not innate to our way of being.

The second section of the tagline, **Be the Light**, references the actions that one takes as a Christian through social work and soul work as a result of that choice of love. To be a light for others to follow is to actively change the way you live your life by changing the person who you are internally and tangibly changing the lives of the people with whom you interact externally.

The third section of the tagline, **Change the World**, references the end goal of the first two sections, which is the building of God's kingdom on earth. When we actively choose love and when we become a light for ourselves and others, we transform the world around us into a true reflection of God's kingdom.