

Story of the New Testament

A Biblical Theology of the New Testament

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Central to Jesus' story is Jesus' Death and Resurrection. Without Jesus' life, His death wouldn't have mattered, but without His death, *nothing matters*.

The story of the cross is proclaimed in all four canonical Gospels, and the first thing that strikes us is how much space it occupies in the overall narrative. Mark, for example, devotes eight of sixteen chapters to the last fateful journey following Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, and one fifth of his material is taken up with the story of the crucifixion itself. The same focus on the cross appears in Matthew, who again makes the concession Caesarea Philippi pivotal. In Luke, Caesarea Philippi is placed in chapter 9, while no fewer than four-and-a-half chapters (19:28-23:56) are devoted to events between the triumphal entry in the resurrection. John omits all reference to key events such as the baptism, the temptations, the transfiguration and the institution of the Lords Supper, concentrating, chapter 7 onwards, on Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem. He devotes chapters 13 to 17 to the last night of Jesus is life, and two chapters (18-19) to the crucifixion. ... However important the teaching of Jesus, it was not there that his primary significance lay. It lay in his death. Muslims may glory in the teaching of their prophet. Christians glory in the death of theirs (Gal 6:14).¹

If Jesus is the focal point of the whole Bible, then His death and resurrection is the focal point of His life.

Story Lines

Relationships are at the center of who God is. For God is both triune and one. Central to who He is is a community of persons, both three and one. Further, He created us for relationship with Him. He created image-bearers to promote His character throughout His created world.

We often approach relationships with a strong degree of self interest. For all relationships we pursue, we pursue with the governing question, "What's in it for me?" We might not like to admit that, but for most of our lives and most of our relationships, this underlies our desire for others in our lives.

In our city, relationships are an interesting animal to understand. People desire authenticity, yet long for comfort. Relationships should be easy and simple and mutual and consensual. They shouldn't be challenging or hard or work. The moment they are, we're out.

Bread and wine recall God's faithfulness to His people. While God's people were grumbling around the wilderness for 40 years, they began to grumble that they were hungry and thirsty. In His sovereign goodness and parental care, he blessed them with "bread from heaven" called manna. Each morning manna would be found on the ground around their camp and they were to take only what they needed. He blessed them with clean or "sweet" water that they could drink to the brim in an area that is full of brackish, bitter, undrinkable water. God's provision is the exact sustenance we need; no more, no less.

In John 6, Jesus finds Himself surrounded by a hungry crowd who has listened to Him preach for possibly hours. He takes five loaves of bread and two fish from a boy and feeds five thousand men, not including women and children. When all the people had eaten,

¹ Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 15-16.

And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." 13 So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. 14 When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:12-14)

Jesus provides over and above the needs of the people. He nourishes them with food.

Speaking again to a large crowd, Jesus says,

Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:31-35)

41 So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" 43 Jesus answered them, "Do not grumble among yourselves. 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. 50 This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

John 6:52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." 59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. (John 6:41-59)

Jesus teaches us to pray with

*"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
10 Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread,
12 and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
(Matt 6:9-13)*

Jesus is the true nourishment from heaven. He is the provision and sustenance that we need more than anything. He is the daily sustenance we desperately need to survive and thrive.

Take and eat reversed. In the Lord's Supper, we also get a beautiful reversal of two of the most powerful words in the entire Bible. The words whispered by the great tempter, Satan Himself long long ago in a garden are "Take and eat, for the fruit of this tree will surely not harm you."

Jesus takes the words once used for our folly and makes them the words used for our flourishing. He turns an echo of temptation into a gospel rhythm that the Church uses on a weekly basis.

A New Covenant. A covenant is a relationship that God sets up with us and is guaranteed by His Word. God has instituted a number of covenants throughout the Bible.

In Genesis 1-2, Adam and Eve in the garden were in a relationship with God guaranteed by His Word. His law sounded like,

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."(Gen 2:15-17)

The Word sounded like filling the earth with the image of God through making babies, tending the earth by cultivating and guarding it, and not eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There was a relationship and a law.

In Genesis 3, they broke the only prohibition there was, not to eat from the only tree they weren't allowed to. They broke the covenant, they severed the relationship, they chose to disbelieve God by disobeying His Word.

But God's rescue plan has a relational aspect. It has intimate relationship at the heart of it because that's how He created us. He created us for Him.

In Genesis 6, God promises to be merciful to Noah's family in the great flood that will wipe out the nations (Gen 6:18). Then God promises to never wipe out the entire earth again (Gen 9:11-13).

I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Gen 9:11-13)

In Genesis 12, God promises to start building a people for Himself again. He says to Abraham,

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Gen 12:2)

In Genesis 15, God reiterates His promise to Abram by meeting Him in a dream. In the dream, Abram envisions a burning pot that walks through an animal sacrifice. Usually in covenant relationships, both parties of the covenant walk through the sacrifice to signify the condition of their breaking the covenant. That should they break it, they will be like the sacrifice ... dead. In Abram's dream, only God walks through, signifying that He alone bears the burden in this relationship. He says,

On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, (Gen 15:18)

... that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." (Gen 17:2)

"Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. (Gen 17:4)

God promises to multiply His people through Abraham.

When God's people fall into Egyptian bondage (Ex 1-2), Exodus 2 says that,

And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. (Ex 2:24)

God *remembers* His covenant relationship with His people. He eventually redeems His people, removing their chains of slavery, and delivering them (*eventually*) into His promised land of rest and presence.

He says to them on the Mountain through Moses,

"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Ex 19:3-6)

The Story: The Upper Room and Lord's Supper

Matt. 26:26 Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Luke 22:14 And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. 15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." 17 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. 18 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

On the night that the Passover began, Jesus and His disciples went up into a room above a house. They celebrated the Passover, one of the most important corporate rituals for God's people up to that time.

Mark's account of the Lord's Supper is almost identical to Matthews and John omits the event from his story.

A remembrance. Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper as *a remembrance*. It is a cultural rhythm established to call to mind the things of God's redemption. In the Bible, God often uses physical objects to remind of spiritual truths. For example, when Joshua and God's people crossed over into the Promised Land, God command them to set up a memorial.

Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 5 And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, 6 that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever." (Josh 4:4-7)

The reason God had Abraham and all his descendants circumcised was to *remind* them of His covenant with them. Circumcision is a daily reminder of God's covenant love for His people.

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better covenant. Jesus is the relational means by which God has reconciled us to Himself. Jesus is the means that God has revealed His covenant love, His steadfast loyalty to those He has purposed to redeem. For He is the nourishment God's people need, the perfect reminder of God's faithfulness to them.

Physical reminders of spiritual truths. Part of our response to the gospel is to remember the things of God. A simple word search of the word "remember" brings up 174 instances in the Bible. That's with one word in Greek and one word in Hebrew.

God desires that we remember His faithfulness, that we remember His goodness, that we remember His patience, and remember our salvation. He desires our remembering these things because our sin causes our forgetfulness. To some degree we participate in active forgetfulness because we don't actively remember the goodness of God in the gospel of Jesus.

In the ordinances — baptism and communion — we remember our salvation. We rehearse the gospel story, we practice our salvation, we reenact our conversion by individual and communal rhythms that force our wandering hearts to *remember* what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

God's covenant love. Those He has saved He keeps. Our God is a covenant keeping God. Throughout the Old Testament, God's covenant loyalty is used to describe His faithfulness to His people. One word in the OT that is typically translated "covenant love" or "covenant loyalty" occurs 230 alone. Not to mention the passages that are talking about the concept without using the word. As Sally Lloyd Jones defines it in *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, God has a "never-stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love."

Story Lines

Suffering is something we all go through at some time in our life. In varying degrees and ways, pain and hardship are something we have and will experience. If one hasn't suffered, they simply haven't lived long enough.

There's something about suffering that everyone, Christian or not, recognizes isn't the way it's supposed to be.² We all recognize that pain isn't right. No matter what a person's worldview is founded upon, we all believe that pain is wrong. So we avoid it, at almost all costs.

As a culture, we've started to believe that pain or hardship or anything associated with it is the opposite of what the good life is supposed to be. And this is where our next story takes us.

In Genesis 1-3, the setting is a Garden. By the time we get to end of Revelation, chapters 20-22, we find a city. Much happens in between.

After Adam and Eve sin in Genesis 3, God pronounces judgment on both of them and upon the serpent. Yet in the midst of His judgment, He promises one who will come to make things the way they were meant to be, the way they were created to be.

In Genesis 3:15, God says to the serpent,

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

All three will suffer for their utter rebellion. All three will feel the pain they caused with their God and Creator. Yet here in the opening chapters of the Bible, we get a glimpse the means of God's redemptive program. He tells the serpent that He will raise someone up who will crush the serpent's head at the expense of His own suffering.

Throughout the book of Isaiah, a messianic figure is promised over and over again. But in Isaiah 52-53, this figure is described in detail.

Is. 52:3 For thus says the LORD: "You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money." 4 For thus says the Lord GOD: "My people went down at the first into Egypt to sojourn there, and the Assyrian oppressed them for nothing. 5 Now therefore what have I here," declares the LORD, "seeing that my people are taken away for nothing? Their rulers wail," declares the LORD, "and continually all the day my name is despised. 6 Therefore my people shall know my name. Therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here I am."

Is. 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." 8 The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion. 9 Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. 10 The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.

Is. 52:11 Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD. 12 For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

² Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*.

*Is. 52:13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.
14 As many were astonished at you— his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—
15 so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.*

Is. 53:1 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Is. 53:4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Is. 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Is. 53:10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

God's people will be redeemed, though not with money (52:3), instead with the life of a suffering servant. This servant of God will bring good news of peace because a mighty King has conquered His enemy and now His Kingdom can celebrate His victory (52:7). This good news is for all people, not just the high and mighty (52:10).

And yet, this servant will suffer in His redemptive work. He will be beaten past recognition (52:14). He will be abandoned by those around Him, rejected by the people He came to save (53:3). He will bear our burdens, our insecurity, our despair, our anxiety, our pain, our guilt and yet we fail to honor him. He will be,

pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6)

For He will be a man of sorrows (53:3).

Story

Jesus started to prepare His disciples for His impending death. In Mark and Luke, He comments,

Mark 8:31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:12 And he said to them, "Elijah does come first to restore all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"

Luke 22:15 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Then He celebrates the Passover with His closest friends. After the meal, He and His disciples go to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

And they went to a place called Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. 34 And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch." 35 And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. 36 And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." 37 And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? 38 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." 39 And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. 40 And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. 41 And he came the third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Mark 14:32-42)

And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. 44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:43-44)

Jesus is full of anguish. He is visibly distraught. His divine hatred of sin is as palpable as His human fear of death.

Gethsemane. Gethsemane means "oil press." The setting of Jesus' anxiety and dread of the cross is a place named after a burdensome boulder crushes olives into oil. The setting is actually part of the scene, describing the feeling Jesus has as He moves minutes closer to His cross and death.

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better suffering servant. On the cross, Jesus bore our sin, but He also bore our fear, our guilt, our shame, and our pain. He is the one who was bruised by the work of Satan ... death itself, only to rise again to new life, conquering Satan's schemes once for all.

The gospel brings identity. We all have things in our lives that have shaped us over time. Moments in our life that have had aftershocks we didn't realize or can't see. Perhaps a tragic death or divorced parents or a relational falling out. We all have people who shaped us more than we can tell. People who have cultivated *our identity* more than we have. People who have created life rhythms that we do but don't understand.

Because Jesus was both God and man, he empathizes with us. And as He walked to Calvary, he nailed our insecurity, our guilt, our anxiety ... everything to the cross.

He lived the life we chose not to live, but He also *died* the death we deserve because of our sin. He took our suffering upon Himself. He took our burdens that we might have life. He says to you and to me,

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

He speaks over us that no longer do other people or events in our life define *who we are*. No longer are our identities rooted in those things. They’re part of our story, but they aren’t who we are. Now, Jesus represents who we are. Who He is defines who we are. And what He’s done defines our history.

No longer does what you’ve done or what’s happened to you define who you are. Now what Jesus has done and who He is defines who you are. This is good news.

Storylines

We are a democratic people. We think *representatively*. We don’t think *mandatively* or *dictatorially*. Kings and kingdoms are far off places for story books and third-world countries.

But the Bible is full of kingdom language. Kingdom is one of the governing metaphors of the entire Bible. So surely our understanding of what life is supposed to look like must be challenged by the Bible’s understanding of Kingship. Let’s look.

Jacob tells his son Joseph that someone from His line will one day be the king of God’s people.

“When you come to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ 15 you may indeed set a king over you whom the LORD your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16 Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ 17 And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

Deut. 17:18 “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (Deut. 17:14-20)

God prepares His people for a King even before they enter the Promised Land.

In the book of Judges, a cycle of a leader or judge rises to power, leads the people astray, God judges them and then they repent. Then the cycle repeats. Four times in Judges, these words are spoken,

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judg 17:6, cf. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25)

God’s people need a king.

In 1 Samuel, God's people cry out for a King. Envyng the surrounding nations, they desire what all the other kids on the block have, a king to rule over them. A King to provide for them. A king to lead them and protect them. But they don't want God's King.

They want a king instead of God rather than a king under God.³

They didn't realize that God was their King. So God gives them what they want and what they need, even though it's not what they should want. God gives them Saul. And Saul's reign looks promising from the beginning, but eventually he becomes a megalomaniac. After David, God's anointed future king, kills the giant Goliath, Saul becomes paranoid and jealous. His suspicion drives him to utter madness.

In 2 Samuel, God's anointed assumes the throne. David ruled God's people well. And while he was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14), he too failed as a King. He was a murderer, an adulterer. He abused his power as King and ultimately failed to be the true King of God's people.

After Solomon's rule (David's son), the Kingdom divided and both the North and South started a sinful trajectory into a Judge-like livelihood. God's people continued the pattern of the judges where they walked away from their God and King, He judged them, they repented *momentarily* but then recycled.

God's people needed a King.

As God's people entered exile in Assyria in 722 (Northern Kingdom, Israel) and Babylon in 605-596 (Southern Kingdom, Judah), you can only imagine their desire that one would rule over them who loved them, who cared for them, who protected them. For almost a century, they lived under the rule of many evil kings.

God's people need a King.

Story: The Trial

The book of Mark starts without reference to Jesus' birth, but instead with Jesus inaugurating God's Kingdom.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

Mark is uniquely concerned with presenting Jesus as King. But His presentation as King intensifies as He comes to His trial before Pilate and crucifixion.

Pilate calls him "King of the Jews" three times before handing him over to the guard.

Mark 15:2 And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so."

Mark 15:9 And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"

Mark 15:12 And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"

Then Pilate's soldiers mock Him.

³ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 80.

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. 18 And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15:21 And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. 22 And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. 25 And it was the third hour when they crucified him. 26 And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." 27 And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. 29 And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself, and come down from the cross!" 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. 32 Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

(Mark 15:16-32)

The King. In v.16, the soldiers take Jesus into "a palace" or a place where Kings are found. They put upon Him a purple robe, the color of royalty. They made a crown and placed it upon His head. They saluted Him as King and mocked him over and over again.

The soldiers mock the true King. What's ironic about the scene with the soldiers is that unbeknownst to them, they were exalting the true King of Heaven. They were saluting the one to whom all honor and authority and glory lay. They were bowing down and revering the One who is wholly other, totally different than all of us.

As the King of eternity was taken to be exalted on His throne, above everyone, the charge against Him read,

"The King of the Jews." (Mark 15:26)

Mockers cried out,

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. (Mark 15:32)

Hanging on the cross, Jesus speaks Psalm 22. Psalm 22 was written by David, the King of God's people.

John also goes to great lengths to show Jesus' Kingship.

John 1:49 Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 6:15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

John 12:13 So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

John 12:15 "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming,

sitting on a donkey's colt!"

John 18:33 So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

John 18:37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

John 18:39 But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the King of the Jews?"

John 19:3 They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands.

John 19:12 From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."

John 19:14 Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" 15 They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

John 19:19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

John 19:21 So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better King. Jesus is the King God's people need. Jesus is the king who conquers the enemy. Jesus is the one who protects His Kingdom, but fights to the death for those He is commissioned to care for.

Jesus reigns in all things. If Jesus is the one, true King of the universe, then that means His reign and rule include the jurisdiction of our hearts and lives. We are not outside His reign and rule, but deeply embedded within it. We may, and often do, rebel against His reign, but His good news is such that it replaces Him firmly on the throne of our hearts.

In this, He now is allowed to dictate what is right and wrong. We no longer determine morality within the framework of our own minds, but within the context of His Word. His rule now means that we are to follow our King in the ways He's commanded us to live.

Jesus' reign is subversive and countercultural. Jesus' Trial and eventual death are inherently opposed to the way that the Jews of His day thought the Messiah would come. They thought He would come with power and pomp. They thought He'd come with an army. They thought He'd reign victorious over the geo-political authorities of their day.

Instead, Jesus came with little to no international notoriety. Though He was growing in popularity, He wasn't forming an army. He didn't come with sword drawn on a horse. He came with almost nothing, riding on a donkey. Jesus' kingship was exercised in humility and meekness. Meekness isn't to be confused with weakness. Meekness is the intentional stewarding of power. Meekness is bridling the authority He had to meet the needs of those around Him. His power absolute, He chose to die in order to perfect His reign and rule. In order to show His power

over death, He died to set death on a mortal trajectory. In order to show His ability to give life, He rose from the dead to initiate a new paradigm for eternity, one full of life.

Our lives should take traditional power structures and flip them on their heads. When we sin, we should confess and repent and seek forgiveness. Our love for others should bleed sacrifice and putting others before ourselves. Our ambitious desire for climbing the corporate ladder should take a back seat to our desire to see others flourish.

Storylines

Everyone desires justice. Deep inside all people is a longing to see wrong things made right. Everyone desires to see good people thrive and bad people brought to account. Everyone desires that justice is enacted.

At the center of most good stories is the battle between good and evil, right and wrong. The AMC television show *Breaking Bad* has a number of qualities, but one of the reasons it is so engaging is that it constantly walks the terse line of right and wrong, good and evil. Everyone believes in right and wrong.

Where we disagree is on the question of “*What is right?*” And by implication, we then disagree on “*What is wrong?*” And therefore, we don’t agree on what punishment or justice for the wrongdoer looks like. Those three questions — What is right? What is wrong? What does justice look like? — are at the heart of much conflict in our society, our families, and our relationships.

Most conflict comes to fruition where there is a difference in the definition of right and wrong. In our hearts, we want justice for others, but not for ourselves. We desire punishment for other people who do bad things, but not for ourselves when we sin.

So let’s spend a little time tracing this theme of justice and any associated themes through the Bible.

In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned, God judged them. He had to. His response to sin is judgment. Judgment isn’t an inherent characteristic of our God, it is a responsive characteristic in light of our sin. He was not a judge before there was something to be judged. God judged the serpent. He judged Adam. He judged Eve. The perpetrators of His law were brought to justice and paid the penalty for their sin. Justice is only present in a world where sin is present.

In Genesis 22, by God’s directive, Abraham takes his son Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him. In a rather bizarre test of faith, Abraham goes through with the act to the point where God has to stay his hand just before the knife ends Isaac’s existence.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.” (Gen 22:13-14)

God provides the sacrifice that He demands.

In Exodus 12, after God through Moses has enacted nine plagues upon Egypt as a people and land, God tells Moses and Aaron to prepare for the Passover.

Ex. 12:1 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, 2 “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. 3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. 4 And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his

nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, 6 and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

Ex. 12:7 “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8 They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. 10 And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11 In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13 The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

(Ex 12:1-13)

As TD Alexander says,

According to Exodus 12 ,the Passover ritual consists of three distinctive parts: (1) the slaying of a lamb or a young goat as a sacrifice, (2) the smearing of its blood on the doorposts and (3) the eating of its meat.⁴

These three parts function respectively to atone for our sins, cleanse us, and sanctify us.

Atonement can be defined as *satisfaction by substitution*. Atonement is the means by which a holy and just God has made to satisfy his holiness and justice with sinners. In Exodus 12 and eventually in the law (see below) God instituted sacrifice as a means of assuaging God’s anger and removing our sin or guilt.

Propitiation, biblically speaking, means to remove God’s anger or wrath. Expiation, biblically speaking, means to remove our guilt and sin. These are two aspects of what occurs in the atonement.

In the Exodus, God was judging the sin of Egypt. His anger burned for Pharaoh’s hard-heartedness and Egypt’s enslaving Israel. So God provided a means to avert His judgment, to avert His wrath, to avert His angry response to sin; namely, a sacrifice.

In the case of Exodus 12 and subsequent celebrations of this meal, a goat or lamb, known as the Passover lamb or *paschal lamb*, was sacrificed. Their blood covered the households of God’s people signifying their allegiance to the Lord.

The animal was to be spotless or “without blemish,” marking its innocence and purity.

And in the story of Exodus 12, the angel of the Lord came and punished the firstborn son of all of the houses who were not covered in the blood of a lamb. Pharaoh’s own house was affected as all good kings were preparing an heir to take their throne one day.

⁴ T.Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 127.

As the story goes, Egypt was so wrecked by the Passover that they begged God's people to leave as fast as they could.

A holy God needs sin to be satisfied.

In the book of the law, God instituted a Passover type ritual that led to corporate cleansing of God's people. In Leviticus 16, a "Day of Atonements" was declared. The High Priest would sacrifice multiple animals to atone for the sins of God's people. A bull would be sacrificed to atone for the sin of the High Priest and his family. Then a goat would be sacrificed and the blood sprinkled within the Tent of Meeting, within the Most Holy Place.

Lev. 16:15 "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. 16 Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

And then another goat would be utilized in the Day of Atonements.

Lev. 16:20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. 21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

The first goat averts God's anger and wrath. The second goat removes the sins of the people, taking them out into the wilderness, removing them from the people.

As Hebrews says,

Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. (Heb 9:22)

Every single year, this ritual would be enacted. God's people would gather, the High Priest would kill the bull and the two goats, averting God's wrath and removing the people's sin. Every year it needed to be performed yet again.

In all these instances, we see a pattern developing of *life through death*.

Story

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, 2 for they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people." (Mark 14:1-2)

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." 29 A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:28-30)

Mark and the other Gospel writers build constant tension as Jesus treads closer and closer to the cross. In Mark 10, we hear the words from the lips of the Savior that His life is purposed to purchase the redemption of many. His life is intended for the sake of others. His life is not His own, but someone else's to be wielded and used for the good of others.

And as Mark gets to the narrational mountain top, the climax of the story, we find that it is time for the Passover. Now remember that Passover is a cultural identity marker of God's people. It has been celebrated for thousands of years to this point. By Jesus' day, hundreds and thousands of people would travel to the holy city to partake together of the Passover lamb. They would come as families and clans to remember what God had done for His people in the Passover found in Exodus 12. Thousands of lambs and goats and other animals were being slaughtered to represent their sacrifice for God's satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Jesus' enemies are scheming as to how to kill him. At a time when the chief priests and the leaders are supposed to be preparing to kill the paschal lamb, they're preparing to kill Jesus. At a time when they are to be celebrating what God has done in their life, they are plotting to kill His one and only Son.

As Jesus was hanging there in agony, He decided that *it was finished*. What He had come to accomplish was no in full effect. He yielded up His Spirit and died.

*But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Is. 53:7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:5-7)

Jesus is the one that Isaiah saw hundreds of years before the Messiah's birth. He is the One crushed for our iniquities, wounded for our sins. Instead of defending Himself on the way to Golgotha, He kept His mouth shut. For He is *the lamb led to the slaughter*.

Paul in 1 Corinthians comments that Jesus is

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Cor 5:7)

Hebrews says,

Heb. 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? 3 But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Heb. 10:5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me;
6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.
7 Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'"

Heb. 10:8 When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heb. 10:11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.
(Heb 10:1-14)

Jesus has declared that "it is finished," that He has once for all dealt with sin through His own death and resurrection.

In Revelation, John pictures Jesus as "the lamb of God," time and time again. A lamb who is slaughtered, but still seated on the throne of all things. He reigns and rules though He has been slain and yet is alive.

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better sacrifice. Jesus is the true sacrifice, the true passover lamb who was slaughtered that God's anger might be assuaged and our sin might be forgiven. He is the true lamb that was beaten and killed that the people of God might be passed over by the angel of death and judgment. He is the true and better goat that removes the sins of the people from their sight, as far as the east is from the west. Jesus is our atonement.

We are a blood-bought people. The Passover was an identity-forming cultural marker for the people of God in the Old Testament. Jesus' sacrifice is *the identity-forming cultural marker* for God's people today. His work on the cross is the event in all human history that gives life and definition and meaning and purpose to *everything* we do. His death on a cross was at center of His ministry, therefore, it shall and must be at the center of *our ministry*.

Our sin has been totally and definitively dealt with through the atoning death of Jesus. He has removed it from us and has averted God's anger through His own suffering on a bloody cross and dying. He lived the life we chose not to live and died the death that we deserved to die in order that we might live *in Him*.

Do you have any idea how freeing this is? Do you have any idea how good of news this is? Do you have any idea what this truth — not idea, or concept, or possibility — but historical fact, does to your fear, to your anxiety, to your sin, to your selfishness, to your pride, to your insecurity? It crushes it.

We are a sacrificial people. If our God and King lived His life with sacrifice in mind, we then are a sacrificial people. We are a people marked by giving of ourselves in painful ways. We are a people who give to those who don't deserve it because our God gave Himself for us when we were ill-deserving. Not just undeserving, but ill-deserving.

Storylines

Death is a hard subject to broach in our culture. To some degree, death frightens most people. No only the fear of the unknown or "what's after death," but the possibility that the Bible's take on life after death causes fear in the

strongest of people. For many people, life is but an attempt to avoid death. We create endless distractions to avoid the most absolute thing in our human existence, the certainty of death.

Death is a direct result of the Fall. Before The Fall, *death was not*. Death didn't exist. It had no residence on earth. Death is the logical end of sin. When sin was introduced to the world, death is the natural endpoint of a world thrown into a path of decay and destruction.

At funerals or around the obituary section of the newspaper, we'll usually hear somebody say something like, "He died of natural causes." But nothing could be farther from the truth that death is natural. Death is the most unnatural thing in the entire existence of the world because it is hostile toward life, which was God's intention in Creation. God's purpose for creation was life with Him. Good life. A life of abundance and relationship.

Let's trace the storyline of death through the Bible.

In Genesis 3, death is introduced to the world because sin happens. Death happens where sin happens. And this doesn't just mean that Adam and Eve are susceptible to death, though it does mean that. It also means that all of God's creation is thrown into a tailspin of decay and destruction. It could be said that if in Genesis 1-2 God created everything, then in Genesis 3, everything started a pattern of *de-creation*. God created everything and we started to *de-create* that which God told us to re-create or cultivate in the Garden.

In Genesis 4, sin results in the first death recorded in the Bible. The first offspring of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel have competing desires for pleasing the Lord God and Cain ends up killing his brother Abel out of jealousy and envy. In just one generation, sin has led to murder. *Sin leads to death*.

In Ezekiel 36-37, we see a picture of death reversed. In Ezekiel 37, the Spirit of God takes the prophet Ezekiel to a valley full of bones. The bones were as dry as could be, bleached white. In other words, these bones were deader than dead. There was *no life in them*. God tells Ezekiel to speak to the bones, commanding them to come to life. Ezekiel obeys and so do the bones he preaches to (Ezek 37:10). Earlier in Ezekiel 36, God talks about removing our cold, dead, lifeless hearts that are completely unable to change ourselves. He will do a heart transplant, giving us new, fleshy hearts warm to the person who created us.

God isn't on a Jim Collins mission; He's not in the business of making good people great, He's in the business of making dead people live.

In John 11, Jesus returns with Mary and Martha to save their dying brother.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." (John 11:23-27)

Jesus is rooting resurrection power in Himself. He's helping His disciples understand that He has the power to undo what sin has undone.

Story

Matt. 27:45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My

God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” 47 And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, “This man is calling Elijah.” 48 And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.” 50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

Matt. 27:51 And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, 53 and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. 54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

(Matt 27:45-54)

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. 5 And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” 8 And they remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb they told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, 11 but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling at what had happened.

(Luke 24:1-12)

24:36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” 37 But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

Luke 24:44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

(Luke 24:36-49)

After Jesus died on Friday afternoon, the sabbath began. The women and other disciples wouldn't have gone to the pseudo-cemetery during the sabbath (Friday at sundown to Saturday and sundown), so they went on Sunday morning to prepare the body of Jesus for his long term interment. Upon arrival, they found the stone door removed and no body in the tomb. Angels revealed the whereabouts of the Savior.

Why do you seek the living amongst the dead? All people go to cemeteries to remember the dead. But in this place of the dead, Jesus wasn't there. The question asked by the angel isn't just a rhetorical question to key the women into the fact that Jesus was alive. It was a question that helped them understand that from that point on, Jesus was on a mission to make dead people live.

Resurrection is bound up with Jesus. When Jesus died, but before He was resurrected, people around Jerusalem were resurrected to life. People who had died long ago were coming back to life and appearing to family members and acquaintances on the streets and in their homes. These weren't apparitions, but real people coming back to life. This happened to show that resurrection life was bound up with the person and work of Jesus. Through His death, people ... dead people, would come back to life.

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better creation. Or another way to put it, is that Jesus is the true and better image-bearer. We were created for life and life abundantly. Our eternal destiny was living with our God and King. But our sin brought death into the world. In order to ransom us from the effects of the fall, He had to both live the life we couldn't live, and die the death we deserved to die. But it didn't stop there. Jesus was raised from the dead in order to give life to those destined for eternal separation from Himself.

Change is at the heart of Jesus' work in the gospel. Jesus just didn't come to give people a helpful outlook on life. He didn't come to offer good advice and great wisdom. Jesus didn't just come to give people "happiness," at least not in the sense that most of us think of happiness. Jesus came to give life. He came to make dead people live. That is to say that He came to change people. One of the primary headers on Jesus' job description is change. God's in the business of change and therefore, change is necessary.

You frequently hear people say something like "They're Christians, but they don't really act like it." Or "He's a Christian, but he's just not following Jesus right now." Please hear me. This can be true. But more often than not, we say those things because we want to believe them, when the Bible holds out little credence to claims like that. I'm not saying people who don't live in perfection aren't Christians. But the people doesn't have a category for Christians who aren't changed. Who aren't being changed by the gospel.

The gospel demands growth and growth implies change.