

Story of the New Testament

A Biblical Theology of the New Testament

Jesus' Life

Jesus lived a human life. A life much like many of our lives. He worked. He rested. He walked and stumbled. He had relationships. He had a family. He slept and ate and pooped. He grew in knowledge. In one sense, Jesus had a normal life just like you and me. As Donald Macleod says,

"there is little that is unique in the catalogue of Jesus' sufferings prior to Gethsemane. They express his solidarity with us, but do not set him apart from us."¹

In another sense, Jesus' life was *extraordinary* in the truest sense of the word. Jesus lived a perfect life. A sinless life. A life that was wholly unlike any other life in the history of living. One paradox of Jesus is how remarkable and unremarkable He truly is because He is both God and man. He is both human and divine. He is both supernatural and normal.

The Story: Jesus' Baptism and Temptation in the Wilderness

Matt. 3:13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Matt. 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Matt. 4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 6 and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you,"

and
"On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone."

Matt. 4:7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

¹ Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 4.

(Matt 3:13-4:11)

Matthew portrays Jesus' ministry beginning with His baptism, which is immediately followed by His wilderness wandering. Jesus' baptism is to show His anointedness with the Holy Spirit.

"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matt. 3:11)

Jesus doesn't need baptism. Unlike you and I, Jesus doesn't need to be baptized in the way we do. Baptism is a cultural marker of our being made new in the image of Christ. Baptism is a gospel reenactment where the one baptized declares to a watching world that they have died to self and resurrected to new life in Jesus.

Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't need to be baptized. He doesn't need to repent because He is sinless. Yet Jesus was baptized. Why? For one of the same reasons we are: identification. We are baptized to identify with Him. He is baptized to identify with us.

Lord of Baptism. His baptism signifies that He is the Lord of Baptism, the One for whom baptism is now a foretaste of what life in the kingdom is meant to be. The Holy Spirit comes to rest upon Him, for He is God's anointed One, the promised Messiah. The Father speaks His blessing over His only Son, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17). The language here is highly evocative of Exodus 4 where God calls His people His *firstborn Son*.

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'" (Ex 4:22-23)

Shortly after being endowed with the Spirit, the Spirit of God drives Jesus into the wilderness. After forty days of fasting, Jesus was hungry and Satan came to tempt Him. Jesus responds to the Tempter's lies with truth from Deuteronomy and eventually Satan's appetite is satisfied.

The texts from Deuteronomy that Jesus quotes are all "drawn from Moses' commentary on Israel's failure during the wilderness testing."²

Jesus is baptized and then driven to the wilderness to be tempted.

Story Lines

While this story is helpful for thinking through fighting off the temptations of Satan, it is more than just an applicational story. The gospel writers are attempting to portray Jesus as the *people of God*. God Himself tells Moses that Israel is His Son (Ex 4:22).

A great nation. Earlier in Genesis 12, God promises Abraham that He will make Abraham a "great nation."

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 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. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3)

² Ibid.

God is making a people for His name. God promised to make a renewed people who have been brought into relationship with Him.

In the Exodus. In the Exodus, God's people wander the desert for forty years. They traipse around the Sinai starting skirmishes and spying the Promised Land. Shortly before their wandering tenure, God's people walk through the water on dry land (Ex 14-15). God splits the Red Sea that they might walk through. As they come through the sea, the sea walls fall, crushing their enemies and imminent demise.

God will build a house. In the era of the great Kingdom, David vows to build God a temple or a house. In 2 Samuel 7, David looks at the lap of luxury he's dwelling in and feels convicted that God's ark is out back in a broken down tent. So he decides to build God a house. In His sovereign humor and mercy, God says He will establish David's "house" or lineage. God promises to bless the family line of David.

Our Story

Jesus is the true and better people of God. The gospel writers and the New Testament portray Jesus as the true and better people of God. The Exodus event was paradigmatic for God's people in the Old Testament in understanding their salvation. Their salvation from Pharaoh and his army in the plagues, the Passover, and the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds) was the part of the Exodus event. But the wilderness wandering and the eventual conquest were the framework that they understood life.

Jesus is the true and better people of God because he identifies with His people through a similar series of events. He goes down in the water and comes back up. He is then rushed off to the wilderness for a length of time of 40 in which He was tempted and tried. Jesus is the true people of God because we were unfaithful sons and daughters, rebellious image-bearers who failed to keep the covenant. In our testing and our trial, we constantly fall away from our Father. We spurn His ideals. We tramp upon His law. We put faith in our intuition over trusting His clear direction. We are the sinful people of God represented in Israel, and Jesus says, "I can be perfect. I can be sinless. I can be tempted but not fall," in order that we might be sinless when we are *in Him*. As Vaughan Roberts says,

"[Jesus] is what the people of God were meant to be: the true Adam and the true Israel."³

Jesus empathizes with us. We have a God that so emphasizes with us that He took on flesh. We have a God that loves us so, not because we are lovely, but because He is good, that He works hard to get to know us in the most intimate of ways. He so desires to identify with us that He became man, He lived a hard and painful life, He died in order that we might live.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 5:1 For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. (Heb. 4:14-5:4)

³ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 109.

Jesus empathizes through His baptism. His baptism shows that He is the true Son of God who empathizes so with sinful humanity that He is baptized. His baptism is an identity marker, showing that He is *one of us*.

Jesus empathizes through His temptation. Jesus went through temptation and trial, not just in those 40 days, but throughout His life in order to know us, in order to be like us, in order to identify with us.

As Graeme Goldsworthy says,

“They were not prepared for the true people of God to be one man. They could not see that everything that God had intended for Adam and then for Israel was being fulfilled in the perfectly sinless human existence of Jesus.” He later goes on to say, “The temptation narratives are to be read in light of both Adam and Israel as sons of God who failed the test.”⁴

What if in our relationships we attempted to know people so well that we entered into their worlds?

Jesus is the identity marker of the Church. The Exodus event, wilderness wandering, conquest of the Promised Land were all paradigmatic for Israel’s cultural history. The Exodus was the defining cultural moment in Israel’s history. Jesus reframes the defining moment in our cultural history not around His baptism and temptation, but around His death and resurrection.

The Story: The Sermon on the Mount

Matt. 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

Matt. 5:2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Matt. 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven....

Jesus ministry was a teaching and preaching ministry. He healed people. He built relationships. he made disciples. But at the heart of all those things was a desire and purpose to shape people through teaching and preaching. *Everything Jesus did preached. Jesus’ was a living, breathing sermon.*

Jesus was the best preacher ever. The Sermon on the Mount was His magnum opus of public addresses. Jesus taught on many things, all of them apropos to our lives today. Money, marriage, anger, generosity, and prayer to name a few.

Storylines

Mountains are biblically significant. Going up mountains has significance in the Bible. Abraham takes his son Isaac up the mountain to sacrifice him as obedience to God (Gen 22). The prophet Elijah goes up a mountain to combat the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). But the most significant mountain in the Old Testament is Sinai, the Mountain of God.

God revealed Himself through His law at Sinai. After God saved His people in the Exodus (Ex 12-13), He met them on a mountain top in the Sinai wilderness (Ex 19-20). Moses, God’s prophet, went up the mountain to receive instruction on Covenant living. God was delivering His message of redemption to His people. He was informing

⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 204.

them as to how to live within the context of His Kingdom. Through Moses, God's messenger, God delivered His message of redemption and its implications to His people.

The Covenant and the law. There are many covenants discussed in the Bible, but none are more important in the Old Testament than the covenant God enacts with Moses on Mt. Sinai. A covenant simply explained is a relationship. The covenant is a kingdom relationship between a King and His people.

The law is about kingdom-living. The law is the prescribed way of living within the reign and rule of the King. Now, we tend to think that laws are arbitrary rules meant to restrict our liberty or perhaps a legislative means to impress our political ideology upon the masses. But biblically speaking, laws are expressions of who we are. God's law actually gives us a picture of who God is and what He values and how His mind works. So when I create rules within my house, they are rarely random laws; rather, they reflect something of who I am and what I think the good life is.

Our Story

Jesus is the True and Better Message and Messenger. The gospel is message and messages need messengers. Moses' authority was in the message He delivered. Jesus' authority was in the fact that His message was Himself. In Mark 1, Jesus inaugurates His Kingdom by saying, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*" (Mark 1:14-15). His message was that the Kingdom of God was bound up with who He is and what He is doing in the world. When Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is "at hand," that means it is *near or in Him*. This good news or gospel is embodied in His person and work, not just the message, but *in Himself*.

God is a speaking God. The God of the Bible is a self-revealing God. He has chosen in space time history to disclose Himself to people. He reveals Himself through creation in a general way, often times called *general revelation*. *But another category of revelation is called special revelation.* In special revelation, He chooses to reveal Himself personally to certain people along the way. He shows up in people's dreams. But the primary way in which He reveals Himself is through His Word.

Our self-disclosing God has chosen to make Himself known through words. Hebrews 1 says,

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, (Heb. 1:1-3)

In the days of old, God spoke through prophets. He used people as mouthpieces for His rules and mandates and revelations. But now, God has spoken *through a person or in a person*.

Hebrews 4 goes on to say that Jesus is,

12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Note that it doesn't say that Jesus is living and active, or that God is living and active. It says that "the word of God is living and active." Yet the description is very clearly that of God Himself and more specifically Jesus.

John's commentary on Jesus' birth is helpful. John says that in the beginning, a clear reference to Genesis 1:1, the Word was with God and the Word was God.

The gospel is proclamatory. The gospel is inherently word-driven. Therefore, if Jesus is the incarnate Word, the means by which God is revealing Himself to a sinful world that desperately needs to hear His message of redemption, then we must be word-centered people. The gospel isn't just a life to be lived; that is an implication of the gospel. Instead, the gospel is good news to be spoken, to be heralded, to be declared, to be preached.

Everything we do preaches. The gospel is a word-driven, but our lives preach *something*. None of us will live perfect lives, but the way in which we exhibit a gospel that effects every day life will in turn affect our relationships with those that don't know Jesus. How we live says something of what we believe to be true at a fundamental level.

Jesus our revelation. We often desire that God speak to us. We want to know what He has said *specifically to us*. We talk about a God who is intimate. We tell others that our God is our friend, which implies that we know Him and He communicates to us. But we quickly desire that He communicates with us on our own terms. We want Him to text us frequently. We want Him to send emails. Not long emails, but short emails because anything over a sentence or two we don't have the time to read.

We forget that God has spoken and need not speak again. At least, God doesn't need to be say anymore for us to know Him, to know what He desires, or to know how to live. He has revealed His character and nature consistently through the person of Jesus and the work of Jesus and we can be thankful for that.

Jesus is both the messenger of God's redemption, He is the message of God's redemption. For Jesus went up on a mountain to deliver God's message to His people, and later on in life, Jesus will go up a mountain to become the message of God to His people.

The Story: Jesus' Miracles

Matt. 4:23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matt. 9:35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

John 2:6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:6-11)

Jesus did supernatural things. Jesus turned water into wine. He didn't just thin wine out to make it last longer. He didn't add water to a massive jug of wine to make it go a littler farther. He actually changed the constitution, the

essence of multiple jugs of water into wine. He walked on water (Matt 14:22-27). Jesus lived a normal life in many respects, but He *did supernatural things*.

Jesus healed people. A lot of people. Matthew 8-9 contains a concentrated section of Jesus' healing. Jesus heals a leper. He heals a Roman soldier's servant. He heals many people throughout this section. Over and over again, Jesus reveals his ability to heal people. By the mere touch of his finger or even a word to a grieving and fearful parent, He cures chronic disease and halts a little girl's imminent death (Mark 5:21-43).

The Story Lines

Jesus harnesses the power of God to reverse sin's power in this world. In Genesis 1-2, Adam and Eve were allowed to eat of the Tree of Life all that they wanted. They had perfect bodies. Their bodies saw no harm. They were unblemished, unweathered, and complete.

In Genesis 3, sin's entrance into the world brought physical decay into a world that God created and called "good" (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Sin isn't just a moral or spiritual issue, it affects everything. Sin contaminates everything. The logical end of sin's power in people's lives is death. But along the path to physical death is physical decay. Our bodies will slowly rot away as we pass our days trying to stay young and beautiful and tan and have tight lips.

In the story of Joseph (Gen 37-50), Jacob's favorite son is delivered to Ishmaelite traders. His hateful brothers went back and told their father that their brother, his son, was dead. Joseph's life was tumultuous. He descended to death's doorstep in an Egyptian prison. He ascended to the functional prime minister of the most powerful country of his day. After revealing himself to his desperate and starving brothers, he sends for his father. Upon their reunion, Jacob sees a living son he thought was dead. He says,

Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." (Gen 46:30)

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.

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.

In Luke 15, the story of the Lost Son, a father loses a son to a life of wayward and willful disobedience. For all he knows is that his son is dead in a ditch. As the son sees His plight in the situation he finds himself in, he returns to his father.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:17-24).

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.

Jesus’ works affirmed and bolstered Jesus’ words. His works, His miracles, what He did always corroborated or justified His words. Sandwiched in the middle of many stories of miraculous healing are passages where Jesus’ words are at work. In Matthew 8:23-27, Jesus calms a sea squall by mere command from His mouth. In Matthew 9:9-13, Jesus says to local tax collector, “Follow me.” The tax collector leaves all he has to follow in Jesus’ footsteps. These passages aren’t located within Matthew’s gospel account arbitrarily. They are there because the purpose of miracles is to affirm the power of Jesus’ word. They are intentionally situated to point to the unbridled influence of Jesus’ words. Jesus healed people while He heralded His good news. What He did always established or strengthened what He said. His miracles affirmed His message. His works pointed to His words.

What He did brought credibility to what He said, particularly the message of God’s redemption, the message of the Kingdom, the good news that a King has conquered the final foe.

Jesus is God’s powerful intervention in a world marred by sin. Jesus is the culmination of God’s powerful intervention in a world gone wrong.

In Genesis 22, Abraham goes up the mountain to sacrifice his only son. God miraculously intervenes, staying Abraham’s hand and providing the substitutionary sacrifice needed.

In Joshua 10, God’s people are going up to fight five armies in the land that God had promised them. God promises victory, but instead of solely working through His people,

the LORD threw down large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died. There were more who died because of the hailstones than the sons of Israel killed with the sword. (Josh 10:11)

In 1 Kings 18, the prophet Elijah calls God’s people to follow Yahweh alone. He challenges 450 prophets of Baal to a god-duel. He tells the prophets of Baal to call out to their god and see if he will start a bundle of wood on fire. To no avail they cry out to Baal for a spark.

“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.” (1 Kings 18:27)

After their failure, Elijah creates an altar to His God. Places a burn offering bull upon it and then proceeds to douse and drench it with water. He soaks both the wood and the offering. Then he digs a trench or a pool to add more water to, so that the whole altar is basically a swamp.

He prays to God that the fire might be lit and oh is it lit.

Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.” 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.” (1 Kings 18:37-39)

God intervened powerfully.

In Daniel 3, followers of God are not allowed to pray to anyone but the King. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego continue to pray to Yahweh and are thrown in the fiery furnace. After a time in the furnace, someone looks in and sees them alive and well. The three men are delivered out of the furnace unscathed. God intervened powerfully.

Jesus’ ability to heal wounds and diseases and ailments further strengthens the fact that He was God. Not only that God was working through him — something that happened occasionally with other people in the Bible (e.g. Acts 3:1-10) — but that He actually *was God*. He harnessed God’s power because he was wholly divine.

Our Story

God does powerful things. We worship a God who works in unbelievable ways. Psalm 86:10 says,

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Our God is a wonder-working God.

Jesus is able to heal. Because Jesus healed then, we believe that Jesus really has the power to heal people now. Does He heal everyone? No. Did He heal everyone he was around in the gospels? It doesn’t appear to be so. But as a Church we believe in a God who is able and frequently heals people in miraculous ways. Our prayers reflect a deep trust that God has healed before and will heal again as a signpost of His power and of our future deliverance from death and its effects.

Our deepest need has been healed. In chapter 8, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 53 saying,

This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.” (Matt 8:17)

He doesn’t just heal our physical infirmities, he reconciles us to God through His death on the cross and resurrection. Our deepest need is that our sin be dealt with, that our guilt be removed, and God’s wrath satisfied. Jesus definitively and decidedly deals with these issues through His atoning work on the cross.

He actually deals death a deadly blow. The logical end of sin is death. And Jesus crushes death.

...through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 5:14-15)

He is the great physician, healing all the effects of sin in the world.

Our ultimate healing will come in our restoration. Jesus’ powerful healings are a proof that He is reversing *all the wrongs that sin introduced to this world*. As Jesus says in Revelation,

And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

(Rev. 21:5)