

META | Restoration

INTRODUCTION

Grab your Bibles and open them up to **Acts 1**. Today is the last day in our series the Meta, on the story of Scripture. The Bible. Front to back. I want to remind you of why we thought this was a good idea. The Bible has a major theme: the redemption of God's people. That story is told through a few key ideas: kingdom (a perfect world) and covenant (relationship with the God of the world). When we open up our Bibles and focus on a verse, we are grabbing part of that story. If we don't understand what the larger story is actually about, we can easily take that piece and treat it as something that stands on its own. Doing that, what are the chances that you would properly understand what you are reading.

Can you imagine taking a book of the shelf at the library and reading part of a page and putting it back and assuming you know the depth of what you just read? What if you went to the library every day and read a little bit in some random order? You may be able to piece some things together, but you would miss the a lot because you are so entrenched in the three sentences for today. I am not discouraging daily Bible reading...as a matter of fact, we have committed together as a church to read through the Bible this year. But what I want to make sure is that we do everything we can to truly understand what we are reading. I pray that we are a people who do not use God's Word as a tool for our own agendas. That we don't simply grab on to the parts we like and avoid the stuff that is a bit more difficult. We don't read the Bible to make God happy. We read the Bible to know Him. As we continue on today, let's look at what we have learned about God so far.

RECAP

I want to tell the first 4 acts of our story a little bit differently today. Last week I said that the NT serves to continue the story, shed light on the revelation, and fulfill the promises given. I want to go back and look at everything that we have seen in light of Jesus Christ.

We start with creation. **John 1.1-4** tells us:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The trinity, God in 3 persons were the us that Genesis 1 refers to, who worked together to create a kingdom in the image of God. Jesus provided the life that made Adam and Eve live, but more than that, He held the world that they lived in together in peace.

God made a covenant with His creation, that they must relate to Him as creator in order to live in His kingdom. They were to live this out by not eating from one tree in the garden...everything else was theirs to enjoy. But Adam and Eve acted against God, they brought darkness into a world that up to this point was fully light. That darkness, this evil, polluted every part of God's perfect creation. But what we now see is that though the absolute tragedy of sin broke the relationship between God and His people, it was being used to show the greatness of God. In Genesis 3, in the aftermath of human beings denying God, we see the promise of Jesus Christ. That one will come from the seed of woman to crush Satan. God's not saying I'll figure it out as I go, but I already have a plan. Jesus is right here and He knows His part. He's ready to go.

God chooses Abraham and makes him a great promise. He promises him that He will be blessed, he will be a great nation, and that through him all of the nations of the world will be blessed. The promise is once again Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abraham who would be able to bless all nations through His life and death. **Galatians 3.7-9** makes it clear that the nation that God was

promising Abraham was not one of blood, but a spiritual nation that would be brought together because of Jesus. Here's what it says:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Who are the children of promise? We are. We are the recipients of the promised Messiah. *those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham.* To us belong the all promises of God to His people. That is a huge statement, but we are not going to sit here, we have to move on in the story.

The next big event in the story is the Exodus. Israel (the descendants of Abraham) grows and God uses their rescue from Egypt as a means to show them who He is. In saving them from Egypt, God defeats their enemy, rescues them from bondage, and calls them to follow Him. There is even this picture of baptism, as they pass through the water of the red sea to be saved. God brings them to Mt. Sinai where he makes a covenant with them. He gives the law, a law that shows them what it means to live in proper relationship with God, others and the world. What this law also did is gave the people a very clear picture of just how far from holiness they really were. As they failed to meet the requirements again and again...and again, it magnified the need for Jesus. **Romans 5.20-21** tells us this:

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The rest of the Old Testament serves to show us all the ways that Israel, given the word of God, and blessed specifically by God, failed to be a holy nation. It is to show us that even with the benefit of all of these aides; human beings still can not do it on their own. It doesn't matter how hard you try, your heart is bent toward evil. You don't need help, you need a savior.

The prophets at the end of the OT give us hope that although we have no ability to restore ourselves, that through Jesus, God is going to restore us from the inside out. **Jeremiah 31.31-33**:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jesus comes to establish His kingdom and to restore His relationship with his people. As we saw last week, the people were waiting for this...but they were not ready for how he planned on doing it. Jesus came in poverty not in power.

He came in weakness, not in strength.

He suffered humiliation and death, not celebration.

The people are justifiably confused. They thought the kingdom of God was going to be their great moment, and now Jesus says the kingdom is here and then gets killed. He had been trying to explain to them the shift, that what they thought and understood was not the whole picture, that their history was a shadow of the things to come.

Jesus didn't come to fight an earthly enemy, but to defeat the evil of Satan through obedience to God, once and for all.

He didn't come to restore Israel by gathering together Jewish people back into the Promised Land, but to be the sacrifice for the sins of God's people; to make them holy so that they could be restored in relationship.

He didn't come to deliver a temporary wealth on this earth, but to show His authority over death and offer His people eternal perfect life in the presence of God.

That is where we pick up our story today: what does it mean to live in this world post-resurrection? If the promises have been fulfilled in Jesus, what are we still doing here? We start in **Acts 1.6-11**:

NOW, NOT YET

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

This is one of my favorite passages, because I can just imagine what is going on in the minds of these guys. Important to note that they have been with Jesus through all of his ministry: miracles, the claims of being God, the prophesying of His death, they saw him die, and then he came back to hang out with them for 40 days. In that 40 days, Jesus taught them about the kingdom of God. That's a good Bible study. After all of that. They come together and the first thing they ask is: so are you going to restore the kingdom now?

If I were Jesus, I would get new disciples. These are the last guys I would trust with anything. But instead of rebuking them, Jesus says: you are entrusted with the kingdom. You are the witnesses of me. You are the ones who are going to take this blessing to all nations: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Now you can imagine what a shock this is for to them (we get stressed out when Aaron asks us to teach a bible lesson to kids), but Jesus promises that He will give them what they need: they will receive the power of God when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Still confused, Jesus disappears into the sky. He goes to be with His Father in heaven. Luke describes the scene of a bunch of guys looking up into the sky. Just standing there. Waiting for something to happen. Two angels shock them out of it: why are you staring into heaven? He will come again in the same way he left, in a flash. Until then, go do what He said. So they do.

They go to Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit. They are all hanging out celebrating Pentecost together in a room, when all of a sudden a wind whips through the room and they all now have tongues of fire resting on their heads. These flaming tongues represented a much greater fire that had been given to them. The Holy Spirit had come to them, filling them with the power and wisdom of God. We see two results:

1. They begin to speak in a variety of languages. As people called to reach the nations with the gospel, God is revealing to them that He will provide the means to get this done.
2. Peter stands up and preaches a powerfully convicting sermon to the people. This is the same Peter who had recently denied knowing Jesus in order to avoid getting hurt. Now he is boldly proclaiming the truth. What made the difference? The Holy Spirit took what Peter already knew in his head and wrote them on his heart. From here on out we see a different Peter emerge.

The results of this sermon and multi-lingual teaching is that thousands were added to the church. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the whole assembly. There is a great vibe in this early church. **They gather together** regularly for communion, prayer and Bible reading (Acts 2)

They get organized (acts 6)

Reveal the wisdom of God in teaching (acts 4)

Manifest the power of God in signs and wonders (acts 5)

Then they experience persecution. There are a lot of people who have this desire to get back to the first century church, but without all of that 'Christians being used as human torches thing.' The problem is that the depth of their faith depended on what they had to give up for it. And the fact that a great as this dynamic church sounds, God doesn't want it to stay there...he acts to bring the good news to all nations.

He dies this through a man named Stephen. Stephen is one of the faithful men that the apostles appoint to help manage the growing church. His teaching ruffles some feathers, and so they seize him and it says (**Acts 6.13-14**):

they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us."

His great crime is that he is teaching the same transition from the earthly signs of holy place and law to Jesus that got Jesus killed. They put him on trial, and he preaches a brilliant sermon. [aside, if you are looking for a great in depth study you do on the Bible, study the various sermons preached in Acts] James' sermon is not well received; as a matter of fact they begin to stone him (talk about a tough crowd). As they stone him, he looks up into heaven and he sees the glory of God and proclaims:

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

They start doing that thing that little kids do when you put your fingers in your ears and make noise so you don't have to hear something. What James is doing, knowingly or unknowingly, is declaring Jesus as the prophecy of Daniel 7(which you will have to read on your own).

Though Jesus has left, He has not left his people alone. Not only is the spirit present in our hearts, but Jesus is present on the throne. He has dominion over this world. Though the church is in persecution it is not because Jesus isn't there. Instead, He is working through the suffering of His people in the same way that His suffering was necessary for their redemption.

This persecution scatters the church. The disciples flee in all directions and with them goes the good news of the gospel. God will get his word out to the nations through persecution.

And through the persecutor. Saul (who was introduced in the story of Stephen as the guy who signed off on the execution) is on his way to Damascus to arrest more Christians, when all of a sudden Jesus appears in front of him, knocking him off of his horse and blinding him. Jesus says to him (**Acts 9.4-6**):

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Saul goes to the house of Annanias, who had been prepped by God that the Christian killer was coming to his house. Annanias lays his hands on Paul and prays: be filled with the Holy Spirit, and all of a sudden, it says, the scales fell off of Paul's eyes and he could see again. That physical

reality of going from blindness to sight was what God did to Saul (whose name was changed to Paul). It is also a picture of what God was going to do amongst the nations. Put within them a new heart. Change them from being enemies of God to be His witnesses.

So Paul, set apart by God, goes out to spread the gospel though Asia Minor. They experience God's word changing the hearts of people from all nations. Paul continues to travel and preach, and to set up churches as he goes. He is imprisoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, put on trial numerous times. All of these travels give us the background for the letters that he writes to the churches (Romans-Philemon). Same goes for Peter, James, John...

These letters are focused specifically on what it means to be the people of God. They are written to help us to understand this great shift in the church and how we are to see ourselves in light of Christ. They answer that original question I asked: what does it mean that the kingdom has come, but life is not perfected?

1. we recognize that we have been redeemed.

We have been given the Spirit. We have been made new. The Christian life is about grappling with the idea of who we are. We are a people who have our salvation gifted to us in Christ, but still have the sin of living in this world. Our lives then are about accepting what God promises us will happen as we put effort into doing what God calls us to do. BEING AND BECOMING.

Colossians 3.1-3 lays this out for us:

If then you have been raised with Christ (that has been done to us), seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.(that is what we are to do) Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (we do this) For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (this is done to us).

So we are to fight to believe that Jesus is sufficient, as we allow the power that He has given us to change us.

2. this process will be evident to others.

As we struggle to overcome the sin in our lives and live in a world that has a different goal than the one that God has given us, we will begin to look different to the world. Our otherness will have an effect. **1 Peter 2.9-12** says:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This should sound familiar because it is very similar to the covenant God made with Israel at Sinai. It should sound heavy, because it is similar to what Jesus told His disciples before He ascended into heaven. But how are we to live up to such a lofty role. Peter goes on:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

We are to abstain. We are to have different goals. We are supposed to fight in a different way. Why? So that when people look at our lives they will recognize from the outside what God has done on the inside. Israel's great sin is that they desired to live the same way that the godless nations did.

3. in this struggle with our flesh and pursuit of holiness we manifest the kingdom.

Our life is not just a picture of the kingdom of God, but He is present in our lives, giving us access to a relationship with God. This means that the kingdom of God is present in this broken world...and it is present in us. **Ephesians 2.18-22** says:

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

See what just happened. The last verse talked about us being *sojourners and exiles*...people who don't belong. But God hasn't just made us a people without a home. He has made us *fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*. We have a home, we have a king, we have a family (other Christian believers) to live out the kingdom with. This is what is called the Now but not yet Kingdom. We are redeemed, but we still sin. We are made new, but the old still holds on. We are united to each other, but we do everything we can to keep people away. We belong to the kingdom, but we live here.

We need to see the end of the story of we are going to understand what our place is. We are in the story, it is still happening, and yet God's shows us what the end will be. In Revelation 19 we see Jesus returning to usher in this Kingdom, to punish the sins of the world, and to once and forever banish Satan to eternal torment. While people want to argue the details surrounding this, the one thing that cannot be denied is that Jesus is coming back and He is coming in POWER. He is coming to bring full restoration to His creation. The new heavens and the new earth, a perfect world (kingdom) in perfect relationship with God (covenant) replaces the world broken by sin. As chapter 22 promises us:

No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We are citizens of that kingdom. We don't have to prove ourselves here, we have already been approved because of Jesus. Our part is to prepare ourselves and others for this kingdom. As Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 28.18-20**:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Jesus has the authority as the king of the kingdom. He wants us to introduce people to the kingdom. Baptize them into the church, the earthly manifestation of the kingdom. Learn and teach what it means to be members of the kingdom. All until the end of the age when we part of the kingdom in its fullness. My prayer is that we take this seriously. That we don't treat God as someone to be appeased or impressed, but that we worship Him NOW as we will for eternity.