

TheoTalk

Engaging Theology that Matters

Who is Jesus?

Part 1: God's Messiah: the Promised Savior-King

This series is all about Jesus, the central figure in the story of the ages: the story of God's eternal purposes revealed in human history, and the story we find ourselves in. Therefore, this series is also about us who belong to Him. We will see that redeeming a fallen people is at the heart of Jesus's mission to fill the earth with God's glory. So, as we explore who Jesus is and what He has done to fulfill this purpose in and through us, we will celebrate what it means to be His and flourish in Him.

Key Takeaways:

1. The story of Jesus is at the heart of the larger story of the Gospel, which has 5 main components: God, Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Restoration.
2. The story of Jesus is inextricably tied to the story of God's Kingdom triumphing over the Kingdom of darkness.

The Gospel Story (what some call, "the God Story") has five main components:

God: The first four words of the Bible, "In the beginning, God," remind us that the story we find ourselves in isn't ultimately about us, but about the God who was there before there was anything else: the holy, sovereign, uncreated God who is the eternal source of life and ruler of all things.

Why is it important to understand our stories begin with God? How should this shape the way we live?

How does beginning with anything other (less) than God shape the way we live?

Creation: God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1b) out of nothing. He created us in His image (Genesis 1:26-28), that we might fill the earth with His glory by flourishing under His righteous reign as our Creator-King.

Why is it important to understand we were created by God?

Why does it matter that God created us in His image? How does this shape our understanding of who we are and who we were meant to be?

What are some examples of false creation narratives? How do these false narratives rob people of the life God created us to enjoy?

Fall: After flourishing in Eden under God's righteous reign for a time, Adam and Eve, God's first image-bearers, rebelled against their Creator-King by following the Evil one (Serpent) into sin, thereby plunging

themselves and us, their descendants, under the curse of sin (Genesis 3:16-19; Romans 5:12). Having become worthy of God's righteous wrath, we (as a race) alienated ourselves from the One in whom we live, and move, and have our being. Consequently, as victims AND culprits of the fall, we became alienated from ourselves, one another, and the rest of creation, so that neither we nor our world are what we were meant to be, since we forfeited the flourishing God designed for us by rebelling against Him.

What evidence of the fall do you see in our world today? In your life and/or relationships?

Why is it important to understand that our rebellion against God is the source of brokenness in our world?

What other things do we tend to blame for the brokenness in our world? How does this hurt instead of help us?

Rescue: Before pronouncing judgment on humanity (Genesis 3:16-19), God promised to fix what we had broken, by sending a Champion to rescue us from the curse of sin and the Evil One who had temporarily usurped God's Kingdom in Eden (Genesis 3:15). After thousands of years, during which God revealed Himself in many ways, especially through the nation of Israel, the Creator-King became our Savior-King in the person of Jesus Christ, to rescue His people from sin and reestablish His righteous reign upon the earth (Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 53; John 1:1-5; Mark 1:15).

What, specifically, did Jesus rescue us from?

Restoration: God's purpose was to fill the earth with His glory by filling it with human flourishing that points to Him. What Adam and Eve failed to do, God accomplished through Jesus, the Savior-King. Through His perfect life, sacrificial death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, Jesus re-established God's righteous reign upon the earth, having rescued His people from sin, death, and the Devil (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:1-10; Colossians 1:13-14; Colossians 2:12-15). In so doing, He restored to us the life we were created to live, long to know, forfeited at the Fall, and can only rediscover in Him (Isaiah 61; Luke 4:16-21). We who are His experience this life, in part, in the present age, and anticipate its fullness in the age to come, believing that, in Christ, God's Kingdom has come (Mark 1:15), is coming (Matthew 6:10), and will one day fill the earth (Revelation 21:1-5).

In what sense has the restoration Jesus brings already begun?

In what sense is this restoration still to come?

----- Good Stopping Point -----

Now that we understand the Gospel story, we can focus on Jesus, who is at the center of this story.

Read Mark 1:15

Why does Jesus refer to the Gospel in terms of God's "Kingdom?"

Let's explore the connection Jesus makes between God's Kingdom and the Gospel.

In Jesus's day, the "gospel" referred to history-shaping "good news" connected with the triumph of a King for His Kingdom. This included the ascendancy of a king who established or extended a flourishing kingdom, as when King Solomon succeeded King David in 1 Kings 1:41-43. But the "gospel" was often a message of restoration-through-confrontation between kings and kingdoms that ultimately led to the vindication of one king and kingdom over the other(s).

This is why, in the ancient world, jubilant runners would proclaim the "gospel" that "our" king had vanquished the enemy king(s) in battle. Old Testament examples include, 1 Samuel 31:8-9 and 2 Samuel 18:3, while the story of Pheidippides and the (Greek) battle of Marathon suggests a similar practice existed in the ancient Greek world.¹ Moreover, The Priene Calendar Inscription (9 B.C.) celebrated Augustus Octavian's birthday and "the gospel" that he had vanquished Lepidus and Mark Antony to bring peace, unity, and flourishing to the Roman Empire² — affirming the ancient Roman world understood "gospel" in this restoration-through-confrontation sense as well.

1st century Jews clearly understood "gospel" in this way, based on the ancient promise of Genesis 3:15 that predicted a violent, decisive battle between God's Messiah and the Serpent that would destroy the works of the Devil, conquer the power of sin, and make all things new. This understanding was amplified by the Prophet Isaiah. In the 630's BC, Israel had been exiled in Babylon for decades. They felt abandoned by Yahweh until Isaiah announced the "good news" (gospel) that God would release them from captivity (40:1-2) and one day reign as King over all the earth from Zion (40:3-12).

Isaiah proclaims in 52:7-8, "How beautiful...are the feet of him who brings good news (*the gospel*)...of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, **Your God reigns**. 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.**"

560+ years later, faithful Jews listening to Jesus were still waiting for Yahweh to establish His righteous reign upon the earth. They believed God's reign would be restorative, though established through violent confrontation with the kingdom(s) that opposed Him, based on passages like Genesis 3:15 and Isaiah 42:11-17. But Jesus, affirming Isaiah 53:1-11 and Jeremiah 31:31-34, made it clear that, at His 1st advent, He came to inaugurate God's Kingdom, spiritually, and cause this Kingdom to expand on the earth through His Kingdom people (Matthew 13). Only after this, upon His return at the end of the age, would He establish God's everlasting, geo-political reign predicted by Isaiah and Jeremiah (Matthew 19:28-30).

Jesus inaugurated God's spiritual Kingdom by overthrowing the kingdom of darkness; that is, by vanquishing the Evil One who had usurped God's Kingdom in Eden, even as He (Jesus) redeemed a Kingdom people for Himself (Matthew 8:28-34, Mark 1:27, Luke 10:17-20; Colossians 1:13-14; 2:13-15; 1 John 3:8). In **Mark 1:15**, Jesus refers to the gospel in terms of God's Kingdom, then, to affirm that, according to the ancient promise, He had come to triumph over the enemy king and his kingdom through the violent, decisive battle predicted in Genesis 3:15, that He might one day fill the earth with

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Marathon#ref1252799>

² <https://webpages.scu.edu/ftp/cmurphy/courses/sctr027/artifacts/priene-calendar.htm> and <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Augustus-Roman-emperor>

God's glory. But as Isaiah 53 predicted, Jesus would (ironically) overthrow the Evil One and establish God's righteous reign upon the earth through the Evil One's violence against Him at the cross.

How does all this affect your understanding of the Christian Gospel?

To experience the power and joy of the gospel Jesus refers to in Mark 1:15, we need to go back to the beginning.

Read Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:7-9

God created all things and mankind in his image (to be reflectors of him), that we might enjoy a priority, self-defining relationship with Him, through which we would fill the earth with His glory.

What was the first thing Adam saw when he opened his eyes? His first conscious moment?

What does the way in which God created man (Genesis 2:7) tell us about God's desire for a relationship with us? About his design for us to live in relationship with Him?

As God created Adam in a priority relationship with Him, He created Eve while Adam was sleeping (Genesis 2:21-25), to bring *her* into a priority relationship with Himself before presenting her to Adam.

Why didn't God create Adam and Eve side-by-side and bring them to life simultaneously?

Read Genesis 2:15-17; Genesis 3:1-19

As long as Adam and Eve obeyed the God who had made them for Himself, they would live and flourish. But, God warned, if they rebelled against Him, they would make themselves worthy of His judgment and ultimately die; first, spiritually, through their alienation from Him (Genesis 3:8). Then, because God created them to find their identity in Him, their alienation from God would lead to alienation from themselves (Genesis 3:7), one another (Genesis 3:12, 16), and the rest of creation (Genesis 3:16-19). Finally, they would die physically (Genesis 3:19).

Why was their rebellion against God so devastating?

Many refer to Genesis 3:15 as the proto-evangelium, or first telling of the Gospel. *Why is this?*

Herein lies the good news of the Gospel: Though Adam and Eve deserved God's wrath for their rebellion against Him, instead, God promised to redeem them. Specifically, before God pronounced His (merciful) judgment on Adam and Eve (3:16-19), He promised to send a Champion (3:15) who would crush the leader of their rebellion (The Serpent), to re-establish God's righteous reign upon the earth by restoring to them the life they forfeited through sin. But make no mistake. The fall in Eden was catastrophic.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3; Romans 3:9-11

How does Paul describe our state as fallen people, apart from Christ?

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

In verse 5a, how does Paul describe those whom God graciously unites to Christ?

To be spiritually alive is to experience eternal life.

Read John 5:24; John 17:3

How does Jesus define eternal life?

We enjoy eternal life all and only because God, in His grace, did two things for us. First, He gave us new (spiritually alive) hearts, so that we who were once spiritually dead, with no desire or ability to seek Him would long to know and follow Him.

Read John 1:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 6:1-4

The resurrection of our dead hearts is called “regeneration,” being “born-again” (John 1:12-14; 3:3-8), or becoming a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through regeneration, God graciously restores our ability and desire to know and follow Him, thereby compelling us to place our faith in Christ to bring us into a *right relationship* with Him.

Making us right with Him is the second thing God graciously did for us so we can enjoy eternal life in Him.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21

According to this verse, when we are united to Christ by grace through faith, what does God do with our sin that once separated us from Him? What do we receive from Christ?

Here we find the beautiful doctrine of “justification.” Specifically, the moment we come to Christ by faith, God imputes (assigns) our sins to Christ who cancels them at the cross, and then imputes (assigns) to us the very righteousness of Christ so that, now, He sees us just as He sees Christ. God does this to reconcile us to Himself as He adopts us as His covenant children, that we might know and enjoy Him forever and, thereby, fill the earth with His glory. We will unpack these beautiful realities moving forward.

Additional Study

To better understand the meaning of the word, “Gospel,” see:

- The Bible Project, [What does the Word, “Gospel” mean?](#) and [Mark’s Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel](#)

To better understand the story we find ourselves in, see:

- John Mitchell’s book, [Fire Song: Rediscovering the Ancient Melody](#), chapters 1-2.
- [The Story of God](#) resources.

To think more about how Adam’s sin affected us see:

- [Fire Song](#), pp. 109-110; 123-126.

- [The Story of God](#) resources.

The title, “Messiah” is interchangeable with the word, “Christ,” and means, “anointed one,” “consecrated one,” and/or “servant of God.” Jesus is called, The Messiah/Christ, for example, in John 1:41. And Jesus affirms He is the Messiah (Christ), for example, in John 4:25-26.

For more on Jesus, the Messiah:

- See, The Bible Project, “[Messiah](#).”
- Read, [Jesus Christ, Anointed One](#)
- Listen to Pastor John's Sermon, [Jesus the God-man Messiah](#).

For more detail on Genesis 3:15, including implications of Messiah crushing The Serpent’s head, see:

- [The Proto-Evangelium](#)
- [The Significance of Genesis 3:15](#)