

## How About Some Good News – Defining the Gospel (Part 2)

11/15/20

I am sure that most of you have checked the news online or watched the news on television the last few weeks. The news we receive certainly impacts us in a variety of ways. We may act differently because of the news we have received, and we certainly will feel differently because of the news we receive. Listen to how Proverbs puts this in Proverbs 25:25 and Proverbs 15:30. Both of those Proverbs talk about the refreshing and positive impact of good news on the soul.

And yet, so many Christians use up their God-given hours filling their minds and hearts with contentious, angry, manipulated sources of news. It's no wonder we can at times be grumpy people. Let me encourage you this morning to think ahead to this week in front of us and intentionally set aside time to think about good news so that your soul may be refreshed and edified. And I'd like to help you with that by explaining the greatest news of all to you in our time together this morning.

This news comes to us in four parts and begins at the beginning with the creation of the world.

### **1. Creation**

*"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* God, the eternally existing, Triune God, who is sovereign over all, speaks and creates all things by the Word of His mouth. Now, since He creates everything by speaking, He rules over everything and you see this clearly in the creation account in Genesis 1-2. He speaks and creation comes into existence and obeys His commands. He is the King and His creation is ordered and good. In fact, as He wraps up the 6<sup>th</sup> day of creation week, we get this assessment in Genesis 1:31.

And these words, at the end of Genesis 1, come right after the high point or pinnacle of His created world has been made. Everything in creation builds toward God's special project, the creation of human beings. In fact, the rhythm of the creation week slows down when we get to human beings and God actually has an intra-trinitarian dialogue discussing the purpose for which He will make mankind. Listen to Genesis 1:26-28. With these words God defines humans and creatures made in God's very image. In other words, they are made to reflect and

represent Him on the earth. Human beings are similar enough to God to represent Him and are designed to be in close fellowship with Him, yet are still creatures who are accountable to Him as the sovereign king.

As humans live in God's presence and enjoy His fellowship and communion with one another, God gives them a task to accomplish. They are to rule and reign over creation as God's representatives and cultivate the world for their good and His glory. It's a glorious life and a worthy task. One set of authors described it like this:

*"At its beginning the creation is redolent with shalom, the Old Testament word for peace, meaning the rich, integrated, relational wholeness God intends for his creation. The life of Adam and Eve is the life of shalom. They walk with God, they have each other, the garden provides all they need as they till its fertile soil and prune its burgeoning plants. There is no storm cloud on this horizon, no hint of trouble to come. What could possibly go wrong?"* – Craig Bartholmew & Michael Goheen

Yes. What could go wrong? This leads us to our second part of the story of the gospel.

## **2. Fall**

As we turn the page to Genesis 3 we find an intruder into God's good world. The serpent comes to Adam and Eve and challenges God's authority by challenging the truthfulness of God's Word. Everything in the creation account has pointed to God's authority through His words and His goodness toward His creation. Yet, here we find a created being attacking God and trying to undo his rule and reign over His image bearers.

And, tragically, Adam and Eve listen to the lies of the serpent and doubt God's goodness to the point where they willfully disobey His command. They take of the tree and eat in defiance of God's rule and reign and plunge the entire creation into division, death, and disarray.

The immediate aftermath of their decision is heartbreaking. They feel guilt and shame and try to hide from one another and hide from God. They begin to attack one another by shifting the blame for their wrongdoing. You can summarize the results of their sinful rebellion by pointing to three areas. They now have a broken

relationship with God, broken relationships with one another, and a broken relationship with the created world. All is not as it should be, and we can summarize the consequences of their sin with the word death. Another set of authors put it like this:

*"Yet, now in light of human rebellion, God's rightful rule over the entire creation is foolishly rejected by the human race. Sin is essentially rebellion against the claims of the King - moral autonomy - and so, as a result of our sin, we now stand under God's judicial sentence of condemnation, guilt, and death (Gen. 2:16-17; Rom 3:23; 6:23)." – Peter Gentry & Stephen Wellum*

The human couple are cast out of the garden and away from God's presence and are given a litany of specific judgments for their sin in Genesis 3:14-19. But, keep in mind that the God who created this world is pure goodness and grace. He loves His creation and will not allow His creation to descend into everlasting death. So, in the middle of the judgments for sin, He makes it clear that division, disarray, and death will not have the last word. Instead, there will be redemption and here is where the good news really gets going.

### **3. Redemption**

This is the point where our understanding of the gospel takes a serious hit. We understand the sin of human beings and then jump all the way ahead to the death of Jesus Christ. But when we do this we miss the unfolding of God's plan of redemption and don't really understand the good news. Listen to this promise from God right in the middle of the judgments of Genesis 3. Verse 15 says this. This is a promise that the work of the serpent will be undone and that a deliverer will come through Eve's line. This deliverer will restore God's rule and reign through human beings on earth. Hope is found here and this is the overture that points to the rest of the story.

Last week I told you that one of the key things that we often miss concerning the gospel is that it is the climax of the story. Here's the point where we must press into the story and not skip it. And here's what you need to understand about God's work of redemption: It is a slowly unfolding plan that comes in pieces. It starts here with this somewhat vague promise, but then it gets more specific as it goes, and it builds toward the climax which is given to us in the New Testament.

I want to try to give you a basic introduction in how to read your OT as a gospel book that climaxes in the life and work of Jesus. God's plan of redemption unfolds in three major ways in the Old Testament.

- Promises

The plan of redemption begins in Genesis 3 with this promise. But then as we read further in the Old Testament, we find several big promises, called covenants that serve as the backbone of the story. Everything in your Old Testament hangs off of these covenants or promises and these promises carry the work of redemption forward and give it more clarity and specificity. So, what are these promises? Well, we can't get into a whole lot of detail here, but the major covenants of the Old Testament that carry the story of redemption along are these:

-Noahic Covenant – found in Genesis 9 and this guarantees that God will not destroy the earth through the flood again but there will be a consistency of seasons and order to creation. This common grace covenant makes God's work of redemption possible.

-Abrahamic Covenant – God advances the rather vague promise of Genesis 3 by promising Abraham that His family will grow into a great nation and that they will dwell in a land of promise in order to be a blessing to the world. (Genesis 12:1-3) The goal is that God's rule and reign, through humans, will come through Abraham's family to the rest of the world.

- Sinai Covenant – Abraham's family becomes a nation, Israel, and God rescues them from Egypt in order to dwell with them and bless the world through them in the promised land. Exodus 19:4-6 make this clear. They are to model for the world what living under God's rule and reign looks like. So, God gives them laws to obey and dwells with them through the tabernacle and Temple to bless them in order to bless the world.

Davidic Covenant – God's focus moves to the kingly line of David. The deliverer will come through His line and bless the world. (2 Samuel 7)

New Covenant – As each of these other covenants have been made, there has been an obvious problem. Human beings cannot follow through on their responsibilities. They are to submit to God's rule and reign and obey His Words.

But they don't. Over and over again they pursue other gods and rebel against His authority. So, God promises a new covenant where their sins will be finally and fully dealt with through forgiveness and they will receive a new heart and new desires. This covenant is predicted in the prophets of the OT and it is expected that it will come through a future Davidic King, who is in the line of Abraham, a seed of the woman.

These promises move the plan of redemption forward in the OT and so you must always be aware of how these promises are pointing forward to the NT and of how they are influencing what you are reading in the OT.

- Pictures

But, the OT is also filled with pictures of redemption. The Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The Passover Lamb. The tabernacle and temple. The Old Testament is filled with types and pictures that show us what God's final redemption is like. And so, as you are reading through the OT you must look for these pictures of redemption as well.

- People

The OT is filled with people who take up the task given to Adam and Eve and then fail to properly fulfill that task. They are in need of redemption as well as people who imperfectly foreshadow and point forward to the redeemer. Abraham. Moses. The OT Priests. Joshua. David. The Prophets. They foreshadow the work of the redeemer through their actions and they show their need of a redeemer through their failures.

Without these three areas, you cannot really grasp the person and work of Jesus in the NT. What does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah? What does it mean that he is, according to John 1, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? What does it mean that He is our great high priest? What does it mean that He represents the nation of Israel and obeys where Israel rebelled against God? Why does Jesus come preaching the kingdom of God?

The OT gives us the unfolding plan of God's redemption to set things right and then the gospels show us how Jesus is the climax and fulfillment of that plan. He is the one promised in the covenants, represented in the pictures, and needed by the people of the OT. He comes preaching the kingdom and showing what God's

rule looks like through his miracles. But in an incredible twist in the story, He actually inaugurates God's reign through His own sacrificial death for His people. He initiates the New Covenant and forgiveness of sins by dying "for our sins" according to the Scriptures. Here is a helpful explanation:

*"The cross represents the climactic victory of the kingdom of God. God's rule was disrupted by human rebellion and all that came with it: demonic power, sickness, suffering, pain, and death - every kind of evil. The root of all opposition to God's rule was human rebellion, and that could be destroyed only at the cross as Jesus bore the guilt and sin of the world."* – Craig Bartholomew & Michael Goheen

And when He dies for His people, He rises from the dead, showing the victory of God over death and Satan, the enemies we find in Genesis 3. His resurrection anticipates the final part of the good news, the consummation of all things.

#### **4. Consummation**

Through God's plan of redemption fulfilled in Jesus the Christ we are living in between as the church. We have become partakers of the New Covenant and our sins are forgiven, yet we wait the final arrival of God's kingdom when everything will be set right. What does this consummation mean? Several things.

- A new creation. A creation freed from the bondage and dominion of sin and where God rules and reigns through human beings. (Romans 8:18-25)

- Resurrection bodies. 1 Corinthians 15 goes into detail on this. Bodies freed from sin and capable of enjoying God's creation and presence forever.

- Eternal life with God on the new earth. Let me read you two passages from Rev. 21:1-4 and 22:1-5.

So, this is a short and very broad presentation of the good news of the gospel. We must understand God's original purposes for creation and how His plan of redemption progressively unfolds in the OT in order to truly appreciate this as good news. On the sermon reflection questions I've listed several books that will help you get a better grasp of this, but let me encourage you to take some time over the next few weeks and go introduce yourself to some aspect of this story that you don't know very well. It will serve you well and be like cold water to a thirsty soul or good news from a far country.