

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 7: The Death & Resurrection of Jesus

Questions for Personal Study

- Review the Story. What are the major points so far?
- Read the last 3 chapters of Luke. How does Luke connect Jesus to the OT?
- What does Luke seem to be highlighting as he tells the story?
- What details does Luke not elaborate on?
- What surprises you about the disciples walk to Emmaus?
- Why did they not understand what had happened with Jesus?
- In what ways do you miss the Story because you have wrong expectations?

Questions for Study in Community

- What struck you this week as you reflected on Jesus' death & resurrection?
- Does the cross & resurrection move you? Why or why not?
- What does it mean for us to be a community of the resurrection?

Questions for Staying on Mission

- "The cross & resurrection is public truth." Discuss.
- How can we die so our neighborhood can experience resurrection?
- What are we doing this spring to demonstrate the good news together?

For Further Reading and Learning

"Do you know how a fox gets rid of its fleas? The fox goes along the hedge-row, and collects little bits of sheep's wool. Then he makes it all into a ball of wool, which he holds in his mouth. Then he goes to the stream, and slowly, slowly, walks down into the water. He lowers himself right down into the water, with the ball of wool in his mouth, until at last he is totally submerged; then he lets go, and ball of wool floats away downstream, carrying all the fleas with it. The fox emerges, clean. In this image, Jesus is the ball of wool... He takes the weight of the world's evil upon himself, so that the world may emerge, clean." (N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus*, p.48)

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Understanding The Story

Over the last 6 weeks we've tried to trace the storyline of the Bible. Beginning in the Garden of Eden, we've watched as God - the hero of the story - has pursued a creation that has chosen rebellion. The Creator God - wise, gracious, holy, and good - made a people who could enjoy his fellowship and blessing and spread his kingdom to the ends of the earth. This chosen and blessed people - Adam and Eve - chose to believe the lie of the serpent. They doubted God's heart, mistrusted his intentions, and pulled themselves out from under his loving care. Hoping they would find joy and freedom in autonomy, they instead found spiritual death and exile. In great and holy grief, God sent his people out of the place he made for them, and thus began the outward spiral of a kingdom of sin, pain, and death.

The surprise of the early chapters of Genesis is *not* God's description of humanity: "The LORD saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It doesn't require much looking around to see that by separating themselves from God humanity quickly plummeted out of control. Like a deadly poison, the lie of the garden seeped into their hearts and darkened every aspect of their understanding. Humanity had corrupted themselves.

The true surprise of the early chapters of Genesis is the response of God to this infectious wickedness: "And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." God, because he is good and just, hated the wickedness that was corrupting his creation. He despised it, and he was deeply grieved. This is the character of the God of the Bible. He is not a cranky God who gets frustrated when humans can't obey his laws. He is like a Father who loves his kids so much that he hates their sin and folly all the more. He is like a Husband whose wife has become a prostitute, and who he longs to redeem and heal and be reconciled to.

From that point on, God begins to act in a way to save his creation. He is not content to let them alone to destroy themselves. He is fully intent on rescue.

God Steps Into the Story

Last week, we looked at the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - and saw that they were early eye witness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. The writers are trying to convey not just what Jesus did but how they came to understand what Jesus did. They are writing history, but they are also helping us know how to understand that history. All of the Gospel writers go to great lengths to show that what has happened in history in Jesus of Nazareth is the climax of the story that began all the way back in Genesis. Jesus is the new and better Adam, the one who passes the test in the Garden, crushing the serpents lie and opening the way to fellowship with God again.

In his life and ministry, Jesus is announcing and enacting God's kingdom. This "kingdom" is the world the way God intended it to be, and Jesus is humanity the way God intended it to be. In his teaching, preaching, and miracles, Jesus is showing the world what God is about to do to finally put an end to the problem of sin described in the early chapters of Genesis. As he performs this ministry, Jesus also gathers followers, calling a people to re-arrange their lives around him and become "fishers of men." These men-fishers would become the new humanity through Jesus, the first to enter into God's kingdom.

A Surprising Death

For these early followers of Jesus, all of this added up to one thing: Jesus was the Messiah. All through the Old Testament, God worked with his people, Israel, to bring about the great rescue plan. God chose Abraham and his descendants as a vessel - a servant - through which he would eventually restore the whole creation. Unfortunately, Israel came to interpret that differently: God was rescuing them to the exclusion of the rest of the world. Israel believed themselves to be God's chosen people (which they were), but added their own interpretation: we are the top dogs, chosen to be on top of the world, with our king as God's king. The Messiah's job was to put them on top again!

For the disciples, this was Jesus' ministry. Jesus was the king, and they - because he had chosen them - were destined to be on the top when Jesus became king! They'd sit at his right and left hands when he overthrew Rome and established Israel as the great kingdom again!

And then the unthinkable happened: Jesus was captured by the religious leaders, turned over to the political leaders, and - swiftly and quietly - put to death. Jesus was destroyed by all the disciples hoped he would conquer.

A Story In Search of an Ending

In Luke 24, Dr. Luke recounts the story of a couple of bewildered disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus a few days after Jesus' crucifixion. As they walked, they discussed the recent events, trying to put it all together in a way that made sense. As they talked, they were suddenly joined by a stranger. Luke tells us it was Jesus, but the two disciples don't recognize him. As they recount the events to this stranger, it is clear they could make no sense of Jesus' death: "But we had hoped he was the one to redeem Israel." The death of Jesus had thoroughly dashed their hopes. Adding to their sorrow was a confusing piece of the puzzle: some of the women of their group went to the tomb and found it empty and the body gone.

At this point the stranger speaks up: "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" N.T. Wright says it well: "The response of the stranger is to tell the Story - differently." Jesus opens the Scriptures and takes these two disciples on a whirlwind tour of the Story, from Genesis to the Prophets, showing the *necessity* of the Messiah's death and resurrection. Jesus *had* to die and then enter into his glory. The death of Jesus was no hope dashing conspiracy; it was the climax of the Story!

The Messiah, as the new Adam and the Servant of Israel, had to take on the full weight of creation's rebellion. It was the only way God could destroy sin without destroying the people that he loved. "On the cross he drew the full force not only of that despoiling [of creation], but of his own proper, judicial, punitive rejection of it, on to himself. Read in this way, the multiple strands of idolatry, sin, evil, wickedness, oppression, violence, judgment and all the rest throughout the Old Testament come rushing together and do their worst to Jesus. He takes their full force, and does so because that was God's purpose all along." All along, this has been God's purpose: to destroy sin and rescue his creation by putting himself in our place and taking the punishment we deserve.

Revealed in a Meal

As the travelers reach their destination, Jesus joins them for dinner. He quietly assumes the role of host, and as he breaks bread before them, the disciples suddenly recognize him - its Jesus! The disciples remark about how their "hearts burned" within them while Jesus showed them the True Story. Now, with hearts full of faith, they run to tell the Story to their friends - the True Story of the World! In Jesus' death and resurrection, God has redeemed the world!