

THE KINGDOM OF GOD – PART TWO

The Arrival of God's Kingdom on Earth through the Work and Person of Jesus

- A. In the prior talk, we began our summary of the story of humanity found in the pages of the Bible. Now, I do want to stop here and acknowledge that this story may sound strange to many people today. In fact, people today often feel that these types of stories are very much old fashioned, superstitious, religious. They often think that to be enlightened means to be skeptical of all such stories. And we don't anymore need a religious story, they would say, because we, today, have science. And science explains the way that things are.
- a. What people often fail to realize, however, is that science only explains a very tiny part of reality. "How does the physical world operate?" That is why science can only answer a select few how type of questions. Such as, "how does one cell divide into two cells?"
 - b. But science cannot answer any why questions. For instance, science cannot answer "Why should we make art?" "Why is stealing wrong?" "Why is there something, rather than nothing?" And so on. The very limited domain of science is the reason that we need a story of the world, of ourselves, in order to wrestle with the most important questions of life. "Does my life have a purpose, a goal, a meaning? What is it?" "Is my family, or is my job more important?" "What is the meaning of human history?" "Is democracy better than a totalitarian state?" "Should we use nuclear weapons?" and so on.
 - i. The reason that science alone is not enough for us to live by, is that without a story that explains what things mean, our existence, and the world we find ourselves in, is just sitting there as a brute fact, with no meaning. In which case we are left without any answer to all of these vitally important why questions.
 1. But is it possible to live in this way? Without assigning any meaning to things? Without addressing any why questions? Obviously, no, it is not. Which is why, if you look around, you will notice that no one does live this way. Instead, we find that everyone, everywhere must navigate these why questions as they go through life.
 2. So, even though many people do not understand and cannot articulate the story that explains their own view of the world, it is there, operating within their mind. Often it is a product of the numerous voices floating about in the culture in which they live, and the way they were brought up.
 - a. This is the framework determining how they think. It is the filter through which they perceive reality, and make the everyday judgments and decisions of life.
 - ii. Now, the most common story that non-religious folks in the modern world live by is what we could call, "the Nothing Story". It is terribly boring. It goes like this: No one made the universe. It's just there. Everything is really just random bunches of physical stuff floating around in otherwise empty space. No one is guiding or overseeing any of it. Human life and

consciousness are improbable accidents, soon to be forever snuffed out. History is not going anywhere in particular.

1. And so, as a result, things mean whatever you want them to. Life is whatever you choose to make it. You are whatever you chose to be. We can see the dehumanizing Nothing Myth at work in the tragic and heartbreaking example of the Caucasian British man who made headlines recently and epitomizes so much of our times. He feels he was born in the wrong body, and now identifies as Korean. He has undergone multiple surgeries in order to attempt to look ethnically Korean.
 2. If you look around, you will find people doing this same thing in less dramatic ways all around you. This is the way life is lived today. Writing our own stories. Flailing around like an astronaut who has become untethered from their ship. Just floating in space, with nothing to push off of.
- c. On the other hand, as the master storyteller, J.R.R. Tolkien pointed out, the wisdom of the Bible is that it contains such a story. And not just any story, but the True Story. The story that we find in the Bible is the great overall story of the world into which all little stories fit properly and find their real context and meaning. And if you will just try it out in your own life, you will find that this story is key that fits every lock. As C.S. Lewis said “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it but because by it, I see everything else.”
- i. Now, this type of talk also tends to immediately make people feel very uncomfortable. The idea of a universal truth. Because, it is often noted that the Biblical story is simply one story among many for people to choose from. After all, there are many other stories that various cultures and religions have told about the world and humanity in order to explain the meaning of life and of human history.
 - ii. And insisting on the truth of a singular, overriding explanation, such as we find in the Bible, is felt to be disrespectful and oppressive. Because it does not allow for a diversity of opinions.
 1. But what is often overlooked is that the different stories people have contradict each other, and so cannot all be true. For example, when a person dies, they might be reincarnated. On the other hand, re-birth might not occur. Instead, that person might move on to an afterlife. However, both of these things cannot occur. Both stories cannot be correct.
 2. And also, while many people today insist on broad-mindedness, they often do not appreciate that disagreeing with religious folks is actually an equally close-minded thing to do. Because in objecting to a religion’s truth claims, they are, in fact, pointing out the error of those religious people, and therefore staking their own claim to truth.
 - a. This is why in order to deal with the religious tensions in our world, the solution is not to pretend that we all believe the same thing or that no one is wrong. In fact, what is required to truly heal this broken world and its hostilities is the widespread

adoption and practice of a religion of unconditional love, forgiveness, and humble service. Which is exactly what we find in the life and teaching of Christ.

- iii. So, we cannot live without a story. And neither can we merely shrug our shoulders and say one story is as good as another. Instead, we must do the hard work of comparing these stories, holding them up against reality, and seeing which of them can stand up to real scrutiny and examination.
 - 1. After all, Christianity was never offered up as a useful fiction. Instead, it is grounded in fact, in the historical events of the real world, was the continued insistence of the earliest Christians. For instance, *2 Peter 1:16, For we did not follow cunningly devised tales...but we were eyewitnesses of [Jesus's] majesty.* And if you are unfamiliar with the evidence and argument undergirding Christian faith, reasonablefaith.com contains the work of William Lane Craig, and is an excellent starting point.
- d. That is why one of the things we are trying to accomplish in this curriculum is to integrate the Biblical story into the real world in which we, today, live. And bridging the several thousand-year gap between the writing of the Bible and our world today needs to be done thoughtfully, carefully. Often, sadly, it is not.
 - i. For instance, one point of tension that might have arisen in your mind so far along in our story we have been telling is that the initial chapters of the book of Genesis have at times been taken by Christians to be literalistic description of the earliest happenings in our world. But scientific textbooks describe the beginning of things very differently than that.
 - ii. Actually, on more careful examination of these chapters, there are various signs in the text itself that parts of it were never meant to be taken literally. We do not have time to delve into all that. But, for now, we can simply observe that these texts have been explored by thoughtful Jewish and Christian scholars over these thousands of years, and often were not taken by them literalistically as a scientific and biological account of human origins.
 - 1. This is why many thoughtful Christians do not find a conflict between the early chapters of Genesis and mainstream, contemporary science. After all, the book of Genesis is not scientific writing. Instead, the early chapters of Genesis were written to tell us something much more profound. Why we are here, and how we should live.
- B. Let's get back to that, to our story. Last week, we discussed the Kingdom of God and its interactions with humanity throughout the history of our World, and we made it through the Old Testament. We will continue on through the New Testament today.
 - a. And at the start of the New Testament, we find that what has been called "the furious longing of God" for the healing and restoring of His good creation and of His precious human children on full display. And it drives Him to do the unthinkable. At the lowest point of the failure of the people of Israel, in a breath-stopping move that no one had anticipated, the Author of the human story enters the story, as a participant Himself, subject to its limitations. Not as a magnificent king coming in royal power and reclaim what is His. Instead, as a nobody from the sticks. One of the three Persons of God *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in*

the likeness of men. Philippians 2: 7-8. Extreme humility. God went all the way you can go. He could not have started any higher than where He started, and He could not have ended any lower. The person who spun out the innumerable black holes, stars, and galaxies that span the universe? He got down on His knees and washed His human creation's stinky, muddy feet. He patiently endured being spit on by them. The whatever-it-takes humility of God, revealed in the person and life of Jesus, is the most shocking thing in Bible. *I am gentle and humble in heart Matthew 11:29.* When He finally came down, and showed Himself to us, that is how God described himself. He came down here and did the horrible things that needed to be done, that no one else would do. The magnitude of His love for us is, and forever will be, beyond all comprehension.

- C. But let's now look more specifically at the work of Jesus. Why did Jesus need to come to Earth? How did Jesus help get God's grand intention for humanity back on track?
- a. Well, if we start out at the beginning in the gospels, we will read that Jesus's first order of business is traveling around far and wide, and making an announcement. Here is the announcement.
 - b. *"The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the gospel!" Mark 1:15*
 - c. Dallas Willard is so helpful with understanding this announcement:
 - i. **The time has come.** It has arrived. No more waiting, folks.
 - ii. **The Kingdom of God**
 - iii. **Has come near.** This verb tense, in the original language, communicates the present result of a past action. Jesus was saying that the Kingdom of God has now become present.
 - iv. **Repent** – Now, when we hear the word repent, we tend to think that we are supposed to say we are sorry, or cry, or feel bad about our actions. But the biblical word translated repent is the word *metanoia* in the original Greek text. And *metanoia* means something quite different than crying or saying you are sorry. *Metanoia* means to reconsider. To think something over again. Biblically, to repent means to change your mind, and therefore the course of action that you are taking. For example, when you are driving, your wife could tell you "Hey! Metanoia, you just missed our turn!" Sometimes, actually, she does have to tell me that! On the road, and elsewhere, helping me with my blindspots and oversights is no small feat, I can assure you. And we need to acknowledge the people who do that for us. So, I wanted to take a moment and do that. This community, and this curriculum, are what they are because of her contributions to my life. Thank you, Nadi.
 - v. But the point here is that Jesus tells the Jews of His day to repent and believe what? The **gospel**. Now, as N.T. Wright points out, the Greek word for *gospel* does not mean "good advice." It means good news.
 - d. So...what exciting new thing, actually, was the historical Jesus announcing way back in the first century? What was Jesus's gospel? That God's Kingdom had come.

- i. “*The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*” Means: The time is now here. At long last, the good and rightful King has returned to set everything right. To rule and reign. In light of this good news, reconsider your strategy for life. Hope on board this new opportunity to be a part of the wonderful thing that God is now doing on Earth.
- e. That was the announcement. But the arrival of the Kingdom of God was not just some announcement that Jesus made, as though He were merely a herald. Instead, facilitating the arrival of God’s Kingdom was the central point of Jesus’s entire ministry.
 - i. That is why if you page through your gospels and you will notice that Jesus’s teachings and parables are largely about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, like a treasure, like a farmer, a fisherman, like yeast. He spent His time teaching and showing people what its arrival meant, how to enter the Kingdom. He warned them what would keep them out. He explained to them that He was the Kingdom bringer.
 - ii. Even after his death, after His resurrection...what do we find Him teaching about, you guessed it! The same old thing, the Kingdom of God. *After his resurrection, Jesus appeared to [his disciples] over a period of forty days and spoke about **the kingdom of God**. Acts 1:3*
 - iii. The arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven was the gospel that Jesus’s followers spread as well. At the end of the book of Acts, after his many missionary journeys and adventures, when Paul is finally forced to sit still, in a prison, in Rome, and the local Jewish leaders come to hear him out, what does he say to them? *He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about **the kingdom of God**, Acts 28:23*
 - 1. *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed **the kingdom of God** and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (verses 30 and 31)*
- f. To recap, Jesus taught that He was reinstating the Kingdom of God in human history. He declared that this was the long-awaited day of reckoning of for the powers of Darkness, who had invaded human history. The reunification of Heaven and Earth under the banner of God had begun.
 - i. That is why the *first chapter of John’s gospel* says that the Divine Person of Jesus *became flesh and tabernacled* among us. Remember the tabernacle? And the temple? The singular white-hot meeting point of Heaven and Earth? John’s point was that Jesus was the new Heaven-Earth meeting point.
 - ii. That is why Jesus told the Jews *Something greater than the temple is here. Matthew 12:6*
 - iii. *And destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days. John 2:19*, He said of the physical temple.
- g. And unlike Israel, Jesus would not fail in his role as God’s partner in reintroducing the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth. Instead, Jesus would act as the true Israel that had

been needed all along. God's Kingdom would invade the World and grow from this tiny point. This little beachhead. This one obedient person. This time, said Jesus, *the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18*. The defensive gates of Hell would not hold against the offensive pressure of Christ or His follower's work in this world.

- i. Now the Jews, and even Jesus's disciples, were horribly confused on this point. This idea of a slow, person-by-person advance of the Kingdom of God in human history. Because they were expecting a single, definitive, instantaneous reckoning by God. An immediate throwing down of all opposition. Wrath, judgment, destruction. That is why His disciples keep asking Jesus at different points in His career, "are you going to do establish your Kingdom now?" Or asking Him things like "*Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy those people?*" *Luke 9:54*
- ii. And the crowds were also terribly confused. At one point, they even tried to make Him a king by force. *John 6:15*
- iii. And so, as Jesus's Kingdom work progressed, were all these growing tensions between the expectation and the reality of their Messiah. And people started to wonder... "Jesus, are you against the whole Jewish project? What about God confronting evil and setting the world right through the people of Israel?"
 1. Jesus had to make it quite clear that despite His radically different understanding of the completion of the Jewish story, that what He was doing was still very much a part of their story.
 2. "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*"
 3. "*For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5*"
 4. He taught them that He hadn't come to start something new. He came to finish something. He was finishing the project God started way back at the beginning. Bringing about God's grand intention for humanity. The Jewish people were a part of that project then, and were still a part of it now. The Law was a part of it then, and is a part of it now. Christ came to fill in what was missing, to add to it, not to take things away.
 - a. That is why, in His own life, Jesus kept the Law, He lived by it.
 - b. Jesus taught that their Scriptures, their Law, the way that God had showed them, was good and right. Rather than doing away with the Law, He insisted that people keep the Law. He showed them how to.

- i. Now as far as the superficial aspects of the law, the ethnic and ritual parts, the sacrifices and ritual uncleanness, and so on, the New Testament is quite clear that these, all along, had been intended for temporary use only. They were just *a shadow of things to come*, as *Hebrews (10:1)* puts it. And those shadows are no longer helpful for us to cling to, now that the solid Reality is here.
 - c. But the New Testament is also clear that Jesus did not do away with the heart of the law, the moral and spiritual instruction given to the humanity in the Old Testament. On the contrary, once we are in Christ, we can at last enter into the blessing of living the type of life that is described and commanded there.
 - d. *Psalm 119. All your commands are trustworthy....Your law is my delight....let no sin rule over me...Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.* That was the life that Jesus lived, the life He invites us into.
 - e. “Let it never be forgotten that what the law demands of us, the gospel really produces in us,” said Charles Spurgeon
 - iv. But the disciple’s question was a good one. Why not an instantaneous reckoning? Why instead, this slow advance of the Kingdom of God? Well, what the disciples and the crowds had not considered was that an instantaneous reckoning with the powers of darkness would involve their own destruction, and the destruction of humanity generally. Remember that humanity had fallen into the Kingdom of Darkness. Had the Kingdom of Darkness been dealt with in an immediate way at that point, humanity itself would have been lost.
 - 1. God can, without any great effort whatsoever on His part, just step in this very moment and end evil and suffering definitely. But God has a better plan.
 - 2. God is instead in the very tricky, but successful and ongoing business, of plucking people, one by one, out of the Kingdom of Darkness and translating them into the Kingdom of God. And He must do this with people whose wills are initially set against it. And He has to do it without violating their wills. It is a very tricky task indeed. But Jesus was up to the task. And it would involve, centrally, a cross. The beating heart and epicenter of Jesus’s rescue mission of humanity was the cross.

(END OF AUDIO SEGMENT ONE)

(START OF AUDIO SEGMENT TWO)

- h. We can see this because as the events leading up to His crucifixion begin to unfold, Jesus begins to carefully teach His disciples what the significance of His violent and

brutal death will be. And there are three main types of things Jesus taught about His death.

- i. The first we are all very familiar with. Which is the forgiveness of our sin. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21* The terrible price for our sin and rebellion was paid. As far as the extent of the cost, and what that was really like for Jesus, we don't know. Because the New Testament says nothing about the actual state of spiritual reality that Christ encountered on the cross, other than in the briefest and most severe language.
 1. For instance, as Jesus approaches His fate, Jesus tells His disciples, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Matthew 26:38*
 2. Or, His famous, *"my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46*
 3. Thank you, Lord, for Who and What you are, and the horrific price you paid, is all we can say.
- ii. But what is often missed when the cross is discussed, and the really exciting thing, is that the New Testament always treats our forgiveness as one part of a larger reality that occurred at the cross.
 1. This is so important because the forgiveness of our sins alone, would not do us much good, would it? What if God just waved His hand and said, alright that's done, everyone is all forgiven now...and just left us like that? Then Satan would maintain his rule over God's creation, over us. We would be forgiven of sin, but still enslaved to it. Still greedy, lazy, angry, selfish and all the rest. Jesus doesn't want to leave us alienated from each other, bored, tired, sad, lonely, or confused. He knew that we needed to be freed from all of this and into the wonderful life that God intended for us.
- iii. In fact, our being freed from the power of darkness is the second thing that Jesus taught His disciples that His cross was going to be about. And in describing the overthrow of evil, and in describing the activity of God as He puts things to the way they should be, Jesus uses the language that the Bible often uses for this. He describes it as judgment.
 1. This can be confusing for us because judgment is a word that we today have an opposite feeling about, versus the Scriptural and Jewish feeling. We have a negative feeling. To us, it sounds frightening. However, the Jews had a positive feeling about judgment. It was looked forward to. Rejoiced about. Biblically, the judgment of God means His setting things right. Ousting the wicked and rescuing the good things and people that were being trampled by oppressive abusers.
 2. For instance, *Psalm 96* is about judgment. Here is how it concludes. *[God] will judge the peoples with equity.*

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;
 let the sea resound, and all that is in it.
 Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;
 let all the trees of the forest sing for joy
 Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,
 he comes to judge the earth.
 He will judge the world in righteousness
 and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

3. “Aren’t you in charge? Aren’t you a king? Don’t you see what’s happening down here? Do something, Help! We are suffering! Injustice and disorder overwhelm us!” Jesus taught that the cross has to do with God’s answer to these cries. Justice and the restoration of order and peace. The righting of wrongs, at long last.
4. And so, at the very end of His life, this very topic is what we find Jesus and Pilate talking about. *Are you a king?* Pilate asks. Yes, but *My kingdom is not of this World*, responds Jesus. Can you imagine questioning what you thought was a political revolutionary and getting an answer like that? And the terribly unsettling thing to Pilate is that what Jesus is saying sounds crazy, but Jesus doesn’t look crazy. Just the opposite. There is something about the way Jesus looks, about the way He talks, and the way He is looking at Pilate. It says Pilate became afraid. And so Pilate tries to get off the hook with Barabbas, but the crowd isn’t having that. And now the mob is getting more and more angry, impatient, dangerous. So, Pilate has Jesus flogged, and tries the mob again. He shows them a bloodied and humiliated prisoner in hopes of appeasing them. *Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.”* But they won’t hear it. And the flogging was not enough. They want Jesus killed. But Pilate is afraid to kill Jesus. Pilate turns back to Jesus, as he tries again and again, every which way, to find some way out of this. Pilate asks Jesus, *Where do you come from?* Silence. Jesus just is standing there, spit on His face, blood streaming down his body, looking at Pilate. Waiting. He gives no answer. Because Jesus had already told Him. Pilate was looking the King in the face. The King of the Kingdom of God, come down to Earth.
5. He had come at last to set things right and the great wrong that had to be dealt with, that lay behind all the other smaller wrongs, was Satan’s cruel grip on humanity’s hearts and minds. In John Chapter 8, we see Jesus teaching some recalcitrant people the hard truth that they were *slaves to sin. That they belonged to the devil.* Beyond mere forgiveness, humanity’s participation with and addiction to evil had to be addressed once and for all. A rescue of humanity was needed. And

Jesus told them in John 8 that He *came to set them free. To rescue them from the Devil and his lies and deliver them back to God.*

6. Now as the events leading up to cross begin, Jesus proclaims: *Now is the time for judgment on this World; now the prince of this World will be driven out. John 12:31*
 - a. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" 1 John 3:8.*
7. The cross was not the defeat of Jesus. It was the victory of Jesus... the definitive moment of victory of the Kingdom of God over the Kingdom of Darkness. On the cross, Jesus confronted and threw down the prince of this World.
8. That is why Colossians says, *having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15*
 - a. And the glorious truth of the New Testament is that the victory of the cross is a victory in which all who are in Christ participate.
9. Which is why 2 Corinthians says that *God was reconciling the World to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them (5:19)*
 - a. Shockingly, it wouldn't be a glorious military takeover, but instead a bloody humiliation on a cross of cruelty and malice that would facilitate the return of Heaven to Earth. Within Jesus's tortured body and soul, the long-awaited Heaven-Earth reunion finally began.
- iv. Which is why the day that Christ died changed everything. The Heaven-Earth connection pointed had been opened back up. And the activity of God would begin to flow through it. And this flow of God's activity into the world through Jesus's cross itself is the third kind of thing that Jesus taught His followers His cross was about.
 1. Consider the last supper... The bread and the wine, body and blood. What did Jesus teach them that this ritual meant? If you go through and read those passages you will see Jesus told them that the bread and the wine was about Him sharing His life with them. They were to receive His life. Participate in it.
 2. "The Christian gospel does not in the first-place offer men an intellectual creed or a moral code; it offers them life, the very life of God" professor William Barclay pointed out.
 - a. This is the Biblical offer of eternal life, that we often hear so much about. But we need to appreciate that eternal life is not simply life that goes on forever and ever. A lot of people in the state that they are in would not want their life to go on forever and ever, would they? And anyway, everyone has that already.

After all, whether or not they want anything to do with Christ, each human being will live forever.

- b. So, eternal life is not life without end. Instead, eternal life is life without bottom. Actually, eternal life is an entirely different kind of life than what we are used to. The kind of life we see all around us is finite, fragile, dependent on other things. But eternal life is what is chugging on in the background, powering the whole system of our universe moment by moment. Eternal life can perform such an unfathomably mammoth task without any difficulty at all because it has no bottom. It never exhausts itself. It can and does overcome anything. Eternal life is an endless source of power, and activity. Eternal life is the kind of life that God has. It is powerful enough that it spoke all things into existence. Eternal life is what we are invited to bring our lives into participation with, through the cross of Christ. The life, the activity, of the Trinity. It never began. It will never end.
 - c. *But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. John 4:14*
 - d. You either have eternal life at work as an active force in your own life, or you don't.
 - i. You know, we are each time shocked by these scandals which pop up time and time again in Christian ministries and churches. But there is nothing to be shocked about. They have always been there. They will always be there.
 - ii. Because there are plenty of people talking about Jesus. And they might talk very accurately and very beautifully of the things of God. And some of them carry titles such as theologian, pastor, priest, or best-selling author. But if they are not holding to the teaching of Christ, living as His disciples, then they don't know the truth, and they haven't been set free. They have not experienced the Reality that all those words they are using actually refers to. They have not reached out and touched it. They do not have the life of Christ, eternal life, at work in them.
3. On the cross Jesus poured out His bottomless life. It is now there. For the taking. A gift, freely offered. *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. John 10:18.* There is so much power in that eternal life, that as Jesus's life flowed out of Him and into willing people, things in the World and with humanity finally began to be set

right, whole and flourishing again. This flow of activity started a revolution that changed things, forever.

- i. The day of the crucifixion was, as NT Wright has said, the day the revolution began.
 1. The result of the cross was that God's original intention for creation was finally beginning to come to fruition. God again took up the rule of the earth, through obedient humanity acting on His behalf. Well, at first, through one obedient human, one true human, acting on His behalf. But the revolution that Christ started would rapidly spread. And Christ would now lead a new, spiritually-charged humanity in the establishment of a faithful administration of the rule of God on Earth. At long last, humanity would rise up again to its role of nobility, power, and authority. The cross was the beginning of the end of the reign of the evil ruler of this world.
 2. In fact, the whole idea of the rest of New Testament is that Christ has begun his reign on Earth. And we are invited to come under His reign. To act on His behalf. To join His army.
 - a. This is why the earliest confession of faith of the Christian Church was the simple declaration lifted from the New Testament: **Jesus is Lord.**
 3. And that is why Jesus informs His disciples after his resurrection: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:18.* King Jesus.
 - a. And did you catch that? Christ is in charge, not just down here on Earth, but also, all authority in Heaven has been given to Him.
 - b. The New Testament teaches that after His victory on the cross, Christ was resurrected, glorified, and ascended to Heaven, where He was given the rule of Heaven.
 - c. *[The Father] raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:20-23*
 4. Jesus has proved Himself faithful and true, and has therefore been given the reigns of the entire Heaven-Earth operation.
 - a. In fact, His rule is the very thing holding Heaven and Earth together.
- i. Even more amazingly, the revolution that Jesus started on the cross actually launched a change in the fabric of reality itself. Contrary to popular belief, we are not waiting for the New Creation. It has already begun! The Bible teaches that the resurrection

of Christ was the dawn of the long-awaited New Creation. That is why the Bible says that Jesus was the *firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18)*. Other bodies will soon follow. But starting with the most wonderful and valuable thing in the universe, Jesus Himself, the new age came. The raising up of His body, glorifying it, granting it immortality, was God's first act in remaking His World, new and beautiful again.

- i. And the New Testament teaches that it is not only in Christ that the New Creation is launched in our world, it has also already been launched in us! *Anyone in Christ* is, as Paul says, *new creation 2 Corinthians 5:17*. To be clear, the physical renewal of our bodies, unlike Jesus's body, has not occurred. But God's new creation work of renewal has already begun deep inside of each of us. *Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16*.
- ii. Against all expectation, the new World had actually been launched from within inside of the old World. With the resurrection of Christ, the final chapter of human history, the New Age was started. *[The scriptures] were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come 1 Corinthians 10:11*.
- iii. We see this spelled out in John's gospel. It starts with old creation, echoing Genesis 1. But it ends with new creation.
 1. That is the meaning of that gospel being very careful to mention at two different points that the day of the resurrection was the first day of a new week.
- iv. And so, the last age has been initiated. But it has not reached full expression. Right now, the Old Creation and the New Creation overlap and interlock. We are living at an in-between time. At the dawn of a new reality breaking into the night of the old reality. *"The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining." 1 John 2:8* .
 1. And amazingly, we, Christ's church, are the entry point of the light of that new day, of new creation, in this dark and ruined world.
 - a. What was the entry point of God's activity on Earth in the Old Testament? We talked about that. It was the tabernacle, and then the Temple.
 - b. Next, Jesus became that meeting point.
 - c. And now, we, His Church, are the meeting point of Heaven and Earth, the entry point of God's activity on Earth.
 - i. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? 1 Corinthians 6:19*
 1. It is Jesus breathing His Spirit into willing human beings anywhere they are found, and that Spirit acting in and through Jesus's army, equipping them with the resources of the bottomless power of God, that is bringing about the restoration of all things, the setting right of

everything, expanding Christ's reign and rule on Earth.

- a. Hildegard von Bingen strikes this balance of God's action coming into the world through the activity of obedient humans so well. To paraphrase:
The marvels of God are not brought forth from one's self.
Instead, it is more like a sound that is produced by an instrument.
The instrument does not make the sound itself,
but through the touch of the Musician.
And then she says, so beautifully and simply:
I am, of course, the lyre and harp of God's kindness.
- ii. Accessing the power of God and using it to bring Heaven down to Earth is what Jesus did, and what He taught His disciples to do. *Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10*
- d. As NT Wright says of the new humanity in Christ, "We are that dangerous interface where Heaven and Earth meet, where present and future bump into one another"
 - i. At the end of Romans 13, Paul expresses this idea of us bridging the gap and standing in-between very clearly, when explaining to those Roman Christians why they should live a life of self-giving love. *And do this, **understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.***
 1. We are to behave as in the daytime, because that is the new reality that we are part of. Whereas, there are folks around who behave as in the nighttime, because they are a part of that old reality.
- v. We are to be "*behaving as in the daytime*" and bringing about new life, new justice, new help and new hope to all the alienation, loss, and pain around us.

1. We must understand that this, right now, is our war to fight. Yes, the job of setting all things right is going to be finally finished up perfectly and completely in the end by God Himself. And yet that doesn't let us right now off the hook, because that is then. But this is now. And the World is suffering, perishing, bored, lonely, lost right now. This is the time we have been given. It is up to us. God will not do this for us. He will do it with us, and through us. But He will not do it for us.
- j. As His Church marches along with Him, the best news of all the good news Christ had to share with us is that His advance of His Kingdom on the Earth will eventually conclude with a total triumph.
- i. *For [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 1 Corinthians 15: 25.*
 - ii. But the way this final triumph will occur is not entirely through the Church gradually advancing the Kingdom of God over the powers of darkness on Earth. Instead, at just the right time, Christ Himself will return to the Earth, in power, at an unexpected moment and finish the job all at once, as in *Matthew 24:42-44*.
 1. *Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*
 - iii. At that time, all holdouts, all competing kingdoms, both demonic and human, anyone and anything opposing God and His people, will be completely overthrown by Christ. They will no longer be able to corrupt and destroy God's people or His good World.
 - iv. The Kingdom of God will finally fully have come to Earth. The marriage of heaven and Earth will again be complete. And we will, as intended all along, be a fully restored and fully healed humanity administering and reigning over creation on God's behalf. At which point Christ will have at last completed His long and difficult rescue mission of humanity and God's good Creation. And He will then hand them back over to God the Father. *Then the end will come, when [Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 1 Corinthians 15: 24*
 1. And now, after such a long wait, God's rule will have fully returned to Earth. As the prophets predicted long ago, finally, *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. (Habakkuk 2:14)*
 2. Remember that Scripture we discussed at the beginning of the curriculum, *whatever you do, do it to the glory of God?* That is what everyone will be doing. Talking to the glory of God, sleeping to the glory of God, laughing to the glory of God, playing clarinet to the glory of God. They will be doing these things in an obedient and

joyful way that brings honor and glory to themselves, others, and to God as the rightful King of the universe. And everywhere you look, therefore, will be the glorious reign of God.

3. And so, Paul concludes his discussion of the last things in 1 Corinthians by assuring us, that in the end, *God will be all in all* (15:28).
- k. It all sounds so thrilling and magnificent, and as we conclude this talk, you might be asking, well what is God waiting for? Why not finish it all off now? The Bible teaches that God is delaying His final judgment *out of patience, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*² *Peter 3:9*. After all, people are leaving the Kingdom of Darkness and joining the Kingdom of God every day, all around the World. And His return would put a stop to this.
 - i. Well, if that is the reason for the delay, wouldn't He have to delay forever then? After all, He wouldn't want anyone to ever miss a chance, now or in the future.
 - ii. No, He is not going to delay forever. Because there would be several problems with taking that approach.
 1. The delay prolongs human misery. God hears the cries. "How long oh Lord? When will you come? Wont you stop the homelessness, the cancer, the violence, the pain?" Jesus knows that pain. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus.
 2. Also, during the delay, as additional people are born, live, and die, the number of the damned also grows, along with the number of the saved. This raises an extremely difficult question...Is it better for God to return quickly...in order to minimize the number of the damned? If He does so, this also decreases the number of the saved.
 - a. The result of an earlier return is that people who would freely come to know God and experience an eternity of pleasure and wonder have their very opportunity of such an existence vetoed by someone who willfully chooses a life of pain and loss for their existence.
 3. These things, and many others, that must be weighed in balance, are unfathomably complex, and well beyond the ability of the human mind. But they are not beyond the abilities of God's mind. All of the contingencies and complexities have been accounted for. It is all a part of His Divine Conspiracy.
 4. Until that day, we must patiently wait.
- D. Let's summarize this talk.
 - a. First, we first noted that to be a human is to live by a story, to find meaning in things. And that the Great Story told by the Bible is the true story into which all littler stories fit and find their proper context and meaning.
 - b. Second, we then continued our discussion of this story. In this talk, we discussed the role of Christ in God's Divine Conspiracy. We saw that His roll was to act as the true Israel, succeeding where they failed. In that way, Jesus would fulfill God's role for Israel on Earth. He would act as an obedient human in bringing the Kingdom of God, the justice of God, the goodness of God, to Earth.

- i. This would mean the long-awaited defeat of the evil powers that had taken over the rule of the Earth.
 - ii. The cross is not only our means of forgiveness, it is also the center point of Christ's victory, in that he poured out His eternal life there, and into willing humans, starting a revolution of the activity of God on planet Earth.
- c. Third, the resurrection of Christ was the beginning of the long-awaited New Creation. The final age has begun. We are to co-labor with the Spirit of Christ in advancing the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, during this in-between time of the overlapping of the old and new.
- d. Fourth, Christ Himself will return at an unexpected time and definitely establish the rule of God on Earth once and for all. At that time, as intended all along, we will be a fully restored and fully healed humanity administrating and reigning over creation on God's behalf. However, the current delay is necessary in order to give people time to *metanoia*.

Father,

Give us the grace, the courage, and the determination to advance your Kingdom here on Earth, in the time that you have given to each of us.

And thank you, Jesus, for your faithfulness, your wisdom, your love, your humility. For standing in the gap for us. For the price you paid. We owe everything to you.

Amen