

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

Finding your Place in God's Story: The Covenant of Grace and Everyday Life - This class will take you step by step through the covenants of the Bible and help you understand the over-arching plot of scripture through the lens of God's Covenant of Grace. We will explore the aspect of God's covenant through its various administrations throughout the Old and New testaments and answer the question:

What does each sub-plot mean for our lives today?

What role do we play in God's story of redemption?

How does a promise made so many centuries ago to Noah, Abraham and David have an impact on my life?

The objective of this class is: to equip you with the confidence to read and understand scripture and find your place in the continuing story of God's redemptive grace.

Since this class has one main objective, "...to instill confidence in the participant's ability to read and understand scripture and to find your place in the continuing story of God's redemptive grace", we have endeavored to show each week the ways in which the covenant or sub-plot being discussed relates to the broader story line of scripture. We have also striven to connect the course material with real-world living so that application is made with what is disclosed to us in scripture (redemptive, historical revelation) and our everyday lives. This final class underscores the latter aspect of our main objective more so than the former. This week we will explore the New Covenant realized. We will examine the covenantal realities accompanying the New Testament relationship between God and his people. We will explore the characteristics of the covenant that are being fulfilled within the context of the church (the New Testament covenant community) as well as the covenantal characteristics yet to be realized. We will ask the on-going question of our time, "What time is it?" Our response will be biblically enlightened and culturally relevant. It should be becoming ever clearer that the Bible is not a story about us (even if God's covenant community is one of the primary characters). The main character, however, is God himself. A Trinitarian God is the main character of the Bible. To have any other view of scripture is to entertain an idolatrous hermeneutic that will lead to misguided theology.

- 1) *New Covenant Realities (Generally)* – With the ascension of Christ and an eschatological promise to return and dwell among his people forever, the apostles and early believers were instructed to wait in the upper room until Pentecost. Pentecost was also known as the Feast of Ingathering or the Feast of Weeks. On this day while in prayer, the Helper promised by Christ in John 16:4-15 was poured forth on the small gathering. From this point forward the covenantal blessings ascribed to the coming of the Kingdom of God were realized in a truer, deeper sense than under old covenant administrations.
- 2) *The Age Between* – As has been said often before, the church is currently sandwiched between the "already" and "not yet" administration of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a term that was used on occasion by the apocalyptic prophets (Daniel and Ezekiel) and is used frequently throughout the New Testament to describe life under the dominion of the promised king - the Messiah. The characteristics of the Kingdom are a combination of all the blessings announced covenantally throughout scripture. The world in which we live remains subject to the curse of the fall, but Christ is in the process of redeeming all things. This includes culture, society, individuals as well as institutions. All creative acts and designs of mankind as well as mankind and the rest of the created order are under the influence of Christ's redemptive work.

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The apostle Peter describes this age between well in **Acts 3:18-21**, *“But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.”* Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, puts things well when he states, *“...Christ has already restored all things by his death; but the effect does not yet fully appear; because that restoring is yet in the course, and so, consequently, our redemption, forasmuch as we do yet groan under the burden of servitude. For the Kingdom of Christ is only begun, and the perfection thereof is deferred until the last day, so those things which are ascribed thereto, do now appear only in part.”*¹

- 3) *The New Covenant Realities (Specifically)* – So, if Christ is currently restoring/redeeming all things through his covenant community, what does this mean for you as an individual living in Hixson, Tennessee in the early part of the twenty-first century? The Creation mandate was given during the covenant of creation and called for the creation and development of culture and civilization (Genesis 1:28). As is the case with all of the covenants of scripture, the terms of the covenant were not invalidated when broken by man, rather the mandate is inevitably carried out tainted thoroughly by the curse of sin with occasional, resplendent glimpses of God’s common grace. In other words, cities are still built (and destroyed by those who built them). Culture is still being created (though ravaged by the fall and left broken). Man cannot do otherwise than fulfil the purpose for which he was created; however, he leaves destruction and depravity in his wake. For this reason, Paul states even creation groans (Romans 8:19-24). Redemption is all conclusive. Christ is seeking to expand his Kingdom (the dominion of his historical, redemptive work) into all of life. For this reason we are not to run from culture, but embrace it. Embrace it with the light of the gospel and thereby create culture that is redeemed and reflects the glory of God the Creator. In this sense culture becomes what it was originally intended to be. Likewise, society, marriage, vocation, and all human relationships. The hub of this “new humanity”; matrix for this redemption and grace-centered restoration of all things is none other than God’s covenant community: the church. According to the apostle Paul, *“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant...”* (**2 Corinthians 2:4-6a**).
- 4) *What time is it?* To answer this question we must identify the context of where and when we live in history. We must seek to engage all of reality with the truth of the story of redemption.
- 5) *The Consummation of All Things* – What is the end of the story? The story ends the way it begins – in a garden. In **Revelation 22:1-5** we see a beautiful depiction of God welling with us and being our God, *“Then the angel showed me the river of water of life bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 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.”*

¹ John Calvin’s Commentary on Acts. Pg. 153