

## 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.

Last week we saw that the New Covenant was introduced through the first Advent of Christ. His birth announced to the covenant community the coming fulfilment of the seed of Abraham and root and offspring of David. Prior to his birth, the angel told Joseph that he (Jesus) would save his people from their sins. This statement – confirmed and exhibited in the life and teachings of Christ as well as his death and resurrection, addressed the missing yet crucial barrier to the fulfillment of the mission of God as attested to by the singular story of scripture. This mission is simply that God might live among us and be our God and that we might be His people. Details of the New Covenant are further demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These details are explored below.

- 1) *The New Covenant and the Life of Christ* – It cannot be overly stressed that Christ was born under the terms of the covenants previously explored, particularly the Mosaic covenant. This covenant is singled out in scripture, not because of its superiority, but because it more than any other covenant fully discloses how we are to live, the terms of which were agreed to in blood by the covenant community. Christ is the only man who obeyed the law (terms of the covenant) perfectly. Though he was tempted, he did not sin. He remained untainted by original sin (imputed from Adam to every descendent of the human race) having been born of a virgin in supernatural fashion. Thus, the incarnation made possible a second Adam, a second federal head from whom a new generation of people would descend, not naturally but supernaturally. To say that Christ merely fulfilled the law is not quite strong enough. Since he is our federal head, he fulfilled the law for all of those who belong to him, all whose sins have been atoned by his sacrificial death. For this reason, his righteousness is superlative. It is only after his superlative righteousness is imputed to us that we are declared righteous in the sight of God.

In addition to being lived perfectly according to the will and pleasure of God, the life of Christ exhibits the New Covenant because of its reversal of the curse of sin. According to the Apostle Peter in **Acts 10:38**, “...*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*” This verse beautifully summarizes the power and effectiveness of the life of Christ in exhibiting the New Covenant. Let’s take a moment and parse this verse carefully.

- A. *God anointed Jesus...* in the Old Testament, there were two offices set apart through the act of anointing (usually with oil). They were the same offices instituted by the covenants or the office of priest and king. This anointing was a symbolic “setting apart” ceremony in which an individual was assigned a specific function vital to life in the covenant

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

community. The priests in the Mosaic covenant would have been anointed by the High Priest. The High Priest would have been anointed by Moses or the former High Priest. The king would have been anointed by the prophet. However, Christ is here declared to have been anointed by God himself solidifying his divine role in which there was no need for a human mediator.

- B. *With the Holy Spirit and with power...* Members of the Old Testament community would have been anointed with oil. The Holy Spirit may (and often did) come upon an individual set apart for a specific task (such as Samson, David and Ezekiel), but it is not until the New Testament and New Covenant realities that we witness the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Christ in particular is the anointed one; he is the federal head and by his perfect obedience to the law of God and by virtue of his divinity he is able to secure for all in him a fuller work of the Holy Spirit than what had been experienced up until his advent.
  - C. *He went about doing good...* Failure to break the commands of God is not enough, Christ went about doing good. This is a comprehensive description and should not be interpreted simply as doing good things, but as doing all things well. In other words, it is true that Christ did many good deeds, but it is also true that whatever Christ did, he did well (even turning water into wine).
  - D. *And healing all who were oppressed of the devil...* Here we see the unprecedented real-world reversal of the curse of sin. In the life of Christ the impacts of the fall began to be rolled backward as sickness, suffering and even death fled from his commands. This is why there was no excuse for the Jewish leaders not believing in him – his actions declared to all Israel that the kingdom of God had broken in upon them and the King was in their midst. Here too, we see the extent of salvation – as far as the curse is found.
  - E. *For God was with Him...* The incarnation is a physical embodiment of the covenantal mission of God. God was with Christ reconciling the world unto himself (2 Corinthians 5:19).
- 2) *The New Covenant and the Death of Christ* – The life of Christ exhibited to all mankind the way life should have been lived prior to the fall. For a brief moment of time, so long as the bridegroom was among them, the covenant community saw the redemptive qualities prophesied by the Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel being realized before their very eyes. However, they still did not understand. They still believed that the coming Messiah would overthrow Rome and establish the eternal reign of God on earth through Christ's physical installment on the throne of his father David. This remained a misunderstanding even after Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:7-8). They lacked an appreciation for the grievous gulf separating man and God, a gulf that only the sacrificial death of a perfect lamb could erase. Christ used the night of Passover to offer insight into why he really came. Yes, he came to reverse sin, but not simply its effects. He came to reverse sin itself by bearing the isolation and shame of it in a very self-maledictory manner on the cross.

On the night of Passover when all Jewry would be reliving the moment that God in his grace and mercy in faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham redeemed their forefather from slavery and death, Christ makes the following statement: *"Now when they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take eat; this is my body." And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matthew 26:26-28). Christ was here making a powerful statement. The New Covenant would be sealed in blood as well as all those which preceded it. His blood. This seal would be the essence of which all the former blood shed was only a shadow. His death would be the basis of atonement

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

for his elect, and the very means by which all the elect among his covenant community both Old Testament as well as New Testament would have their sins forgiven and peace with God. In a very mysterious sense, you might say that God in Christ was bearing the curse of the broken covenant – a break which did not occur with Abraham and the self-maledictory oath of which God was the covenanting party – but a covenant broken by the first Adam and the sin of the fall. Thus, the death of Christ, with a far stretch reached back all the way to Eden and set right what had been devastated in God's good creation.

- 3) *The New Covenant and the Resurrection of Christ* – The resurrection of Christ was possible because Christ has triumphed over all the results of the fall as far as the curse is found. Christ willingly submitted himself to death. Christ was sinless, and therefore did not deserve death since death was a result of the fall. Likewise, original sin was not imputed to him, so no reason existed under which his death might have been justified. By willingly submitting to death he conquered the last enemy of mankind and the final curse of the fall – death itself. Christ rose again for our justification (Romans 4:25). This means his atoning death on the cross was not enough in itself to justify us in the sight of God, we need a living and eternal high priest who bore the curse of our sins in his own body yet ever lives to make atonement for us. Therefore, the resurrection was a necessity not just as a demonstration of the extent of redemption (the curse of sin is reversed even in death), but also as completion of our justification.

The resurrection of Christ also communicates the extent of Christ's plan of redemption. Remember the false dichotomy which has crept into Christian theology which sees all the elements of the physical world as bad and the spiritual world as good? Under the auspices of this un-biblical worldview the resurrection would have been optional. However, complete redemption of all the created order has always been and remains the redemptive intent of God. So, the New Covenant exhibits for us the ways things were meant to be and will become once again. For this reason, the apostle John in describing the consummation exclaims, "*Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more...*" (Revelation 21:3-4a).

- 4) *What does this mean for me?* How does the New Covenant realities exhibited through the life, death and resurrection of Christ change the way we live our lives? If Christ bore our sins in his own body on the cross so that we might have his righteousness, how should this influence how we interact with others who have wronged us? What does it mean for you that you have a living mediator with God who literally bore the punishment for your sins? How does this impact your view of righteousness and godly living? In what ways might you show this reality in your sphere of influence (school, work or home) this week?