



The
TRUE
STORY
of the
WORLD

WE ALL LIVE IN A STORY

Whether we realize it or not it is true. Every person is living in a story. For a lot of us, it is a story that we have tried to write on our own. A triumph of human progress over the encroaching darkness of chaos, the absence of knowledge, but we know better. We see the darkness all around us in tragedy, disaster, and heartbreak. It comes in death, and betrayal, and loss. For all our ingenuity what we often find is that we simply haven't arrived where we think that we ought so, humanity presses on. What if the story we have been writing isn't the true story of the world though? What if there is something actually better? A story not written by someone who is flawed. A story that actually has a final, complete, and perfect happy ending. A story that has a hero who actually is able to overcome the darkness.

Well, this is that story. It's not the story of the world's making, but God's, and it starts at the beginning of all things.

ACT 1 – CREATION

In the beginning there was no time, there was no space, there was no matter, there was nothing that we know today, there was only God. God perfectly satisfied in Himself. Content in Himself. One God in community with himself. In the beginning was only God.

God, out of his sheer love for Himself created the heavens and the earth to share who he is, so God spoke and created all the heavens and the earth to reflect his good, right, and beautiful nature. His creation would display all the satisfaction, all the contentment, and all the beauty that God had in himself.

So, in the first three days he created the symmetry of light and darkness. He created a separation between the heavens above and the earth below. He also created the land and the sea. There it was: Light and dark, heaven and earth, land and sea, all places that God would fill with the good, right, and beautiful reflections of His character. And so, he did, in days four, five and six he filled each with wonders and beauty beyond comprehension. He spoke vegetation, plants, and fruit trees into existence. Beautiful displays of his good character, all wonderful elements of his



creation that provide for creatures yet to be created. All of this was good, right, and beautiful.

Then he spoke galaxies, stars, nebula, black holes into existence. Things with wonder and beauty beyond our comprehension. Beauty, color, complexity, and scale hidden deep in the sky. Even still, He wasn't done filling his creation with wonders and beauty.

He spoke living creatures into existence. Every kind of fish, animal, insect, and bird. Thousands upon thousands, millions of creatures with all sorts of beauty and diversity, everything you could imagine and more. All of these things would display the good, beautiful, and right character of the God who created them. Now His creation was good, but it was not yet very good.

God determined to make a creature that would display his image and his character like nothing else he had yet created. God, on the sixth day wanted something more than a creature that revealed the good, right, and beautiful nature of God. God wanted a creature created in His very image and likeness who would not just be in a relationship with God but would continue His work. God wanted a creature who would continue to spread His image across the entire globe and in a way similar to God Himself, this creature would create more good, right, and beautiful.

So God created man and woman, both out of what he had already created and out of the very Spirit of God. Now man and woman would spread the good, right, and beautiful image and likeness of God through all creation. Not only would they spread God's image, but they would work and keep, they would cultivate God's creation to show more and more of the good, right, and beautiful character of the God who created them.

Man and woman, the exclamation point of God's creation. The only creatures made with the Spirit of God, and the only creatures who could spread God's image and likeness through the world, and the only creature tasked to cultivate, work and keep, God's creation to bring about more and more of the good, right, and beautiful out of the things that God spoke into existence.

After six days of creation, God set aside a special day, the 7th day for man and woman to enjoy the presence of God in a special garden called Eden. This garden was special because it was where the God of heaven met with his creatures on



earth; this is where the good, right, and beautiful God came down to enjoy what he had created, and especially to walk with Adam and Eve, the creatures who were made for relationship with Him. This garden was also special because it held two special trees. As Adam and Eve worked the garden and spread the image of God across the entire world, one tree was a reward that included an even greater experience of the good, right, and beautiful God. Another tree would lead to something much different.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does this story tell you about God?
- What does this story tell you about God's Creation?
- What does this story tell you about men and women?

ACT 2 – REBELLION

In this garden, in this paradise, there was someone who snuck in to defile and destroy the relationship between God and the creatures who are made in His image, Adam and Eve. This creature, the serpent, wanted nothing more than God's image to be destroyed, and for God's plan to spread his good, right, and beautiful image across the entire world to be stopped. So, the Serpent went to Adam and Eve in order to discredit the good, right, and beautiful God who created them.

The Serpent told them that they could achieve a great reward without God, and that God was not good, right, and beautiful, in fact, God was withholding from them, God was the problem.

Eve believed the Serpent and rejected God's plan to work and keep the Garden and to spread his image throughout the entire world. Adam also, with Eve, rejected God's plan, so they both listened to the Serpent and ate from the one special tree in the garden that God warned Adam not to eat from. This tree would separate Adam and Eve from the good, right, and beautiful God, so listening to the Serpent and eating from that tree Adam and Eve rejected the good, right, and beautiful plan of God because in that moment they rejected God.

They did not believe that all the beautiful things created around them showed them the beauty of God. They did not believe the paradise of the garden and all the things



God had provided showed them the good of God. They even rejected the reality that they were made in the very image of the right and true God.

So, in eating from the tree God had warned them of, Adam and Eve rebelled against everything God had put on display to show them that he was good, right, and beautiful. They rejected their Creator.

As soon as they ate, listening to the Serpent, they immediately knew what they had done and were ashamed. They went and hid from God. They knew they had committed treason, they rebelled, they rejecting all that was good, right, and beautiful and allowed for God's special Garden to be defiled by the Serpent. Now because of their separation from God, the creator of all life, they would surely die! And now God's very special creatures, man and woman, creatures who were made in God's very image and likeness, these creatures rejected God and so rejected God's plan for them to spread his good, right, and beautiful character throughout the entire world. What was once the exclamation mark of God's creation became the stain on what was very good, so Adam and Eve ran and hid from God while the Serpent smiled at what he had broken.

Question for Reflection:

- How do you think God felt about what had happened?

God, being a good, right, and beautiful God would not be deterred. He pursued Adam and Eve. He spoke kindly to Adam and Eve, and he even gave them an opportunity to admit that they had failed. They didn't. They blamed each other, and they blamed God. "It was the women you gave me!" said Adam. *God, you are at fault for what I did! You are the problem.*

God could not ignore the rebellion, the lies, and the brokenness that Adam, Eve, and the Serpent caused, so he punished them with a curse for what they had done. Adam would no longer work in the beautiful garden; he would work difficult ground that he would return to in his death. Eve would still be able to create others made in God's image, but now this process would be very painful. Even the relationship between Adam and Eve would be broken because of their rebellion against God. The Serpent would also be cursed, but his curse had something different.

The Serpent would have his head crushed by someone the women would create. There would be a man who would be harmed by the Serpent but would destroy the Serpent. This curse had something else in it, this curse had a glimmer of hope in what seemed like an impossible situation, but that's for another part of the story.



Because Adam and Eve allowed God's special Garden to be defiled, because they allowed the Serpent in and rebelled against God's good plan to spread his image throughout the whole world through Adam and Eve, because of this God cast everyone out of the Garden. Now, when Adam and Eve looked up to Eden, there was a flaming sword guarding the entrance to the Garden. No one could enter into the special presence of God unless they passed through the flaming sword.

Even as God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden, he still loved his special creatures made in his image and likeness, so he clothed them to cover their shame. He clothed them, so they would not have to hide. He killed animals for them to provide this clothing. Even while Adam and Eve rejected God, he was still providing, he was still good, right, and beautiful.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does the rebellion tell you about God?
- What does the rebellion tell you about Adam and Eve?

ACT 3 – PROMISE

The effects of the rebellion and God's pronouncement were immediate. Adam and Eve were cast from the Garden and in pain Eve created two more men in the image and likeness of God, but already these offspring were at war. True to the promise God gave in the curse, one son, Cain, followed the serpent and killed her other son, Abel. The willful separation from God and the curse had devastating consequences on the world.

But with the curse, God also gave a promise. Eve would not be deterred even by the murder of her son. She knew the promise that one of her sons would crush the Serpent, so she worshiped God when he appointed her another son like he promised. She called him Seth meaning "appointed". Her faith in what God promised was strong, and through Seth and his offspring that glimmer of hope was kept and the details of this promise would grow.

But the devastation of the rebellion continued to grow as well. Men and women all over the globe quickly spiraled into following the Serpent. Rejecting God, otherwise known as "sin", became the norm as death and destruction spread. From the very



core of those creatures made in God's image, God's special creatures only desired to rebel and reject God. God grieved the downward spiral and destruction that was being caused in His creation. Everywhere the good, right, and beautiful nature of God was being destroyed and defiled. God had no choice but to destroy these humans who continued to reject Him and His plan for His Creation. So he brought a worldwide flood to destroy all of humanity, but God in His love rescued one of the offspring of Eve, Noah along with his family. God did this in order to stay true to his promise to Adam and Eve and so that the Serpent could not escape God's promise to destroy him.

Destroying the Serpent was one thing, but with men and women rejecting God, how would God continue his plan for his special creatures to spread the good, right, and beautiful character of God over the entire world? How could God restore the relationship with His creatures who only wanted to rebel? These answers would come as God revealed more of his promise through time, but with Noah God made the promise to not flood his whole creation again. God also gave good laws to keep the death and destruction from spreading like before, but none of this seemed to fix the rebellion or restore what God had intended from the beginning.

After many generations passed, God pursued another family who was rebelling, like he pursued Adam and Eve when they hid. God came down and walked with Abraham and Sarah. God's presence finally began to bring new details of the promise that would bring hope to a world stuck in rebellion. God promised Abraham and Sarah that from them would come an entire nation. More than that, God promised that one from the lineage of Eve through Abraham and Sarah would do even more than crush the head of the Serpent. God promised that their nation-offspring would bless the entire world bringing the good, right, and beautiful to all those around them. God's promise to Abraham and Sarah started to sound more and more like what God had intended from the beginning.

Like God had promised, the families that came from Abraham and Sarah grew into an entire nation. This nation was called Israel. But there was a problem, this entire nation was trapped as slaves to an evil King, an evil king that, like the Serpent, only wanted to destroy God's relationship with those who were made in his image. This King hated the promised nation of Israel. This King hated the idea of Israel spreading the good, right, and beautiful across the entire world.



It seemed like, once again, the Serpent was smiling because the promise that God made to Abraham and Sarah, that their nation-offspring would bring the good, right, and beautiful to the entire world was not going to happen. At the same time, even the nation of Israel, the people that came from Abraham and Sarah continued to rebel and reject the plan of God. Israel, like Adam and Eve before them, seemed to be rejecting God and listening to the Serpent. After hundreds of years of slavery, suffering, and rebellion it seemed like all hope was lost. The details of God's promise grew, but nothing seemed to change.

Questions for Reflection:

- What have we learned about God's promises?
- What do these promise details teach us about God? About sin and rebellion?

Just when all seemed lost, God "appointed" one to crush the head of the evil King who was enslaving Israel. God brought Moses, an appointed child in the lineage of Eve and Sarah to rescue Israel from their rebellion and crush the head of the evil King and those who followed them. Finally, hope for rescue from everything that was broken in the world burst through in ways that had never happened before. God came down and used His power to rescue the very people who were rebelling against him. God came down and did something very special with his people. Through Moses, this appointed one, God joined himself to Israel with a Covenant to restore what was broken from the beginning. This covenant was an undeserved agreement made by God in order to restore what was broken and see Israel spread the good, right, and beautiful character of God to the entire world. It would seem God's plan for His creation was beginning to take shape.

This covenant was very important because it did two things. Not only did it provide a way to restore the relationship that was broken with God and those made in his image, but it also gave the people good rules or direction so they could spread the good, right, and beautiful again throughout the world. Finally, through Moses, this one appointed by God, God's plan to spread his beautiful character through people made in his image, finally this plan would begin to take place! The rebellion would be undone, and God would be present again with his people in his special place, just like the garden. The Serpent must be worried because finally one would come for his head.

After this covenant was made by God with Moses and Israel, another one was appointed to lead the people and destroy those who were with the Serpent. His



name was David. Like the evil King Moses destroyed, David destroyed another powerful leader named Goliath. Goliath was also with the Serpent and hated Israel and God's covenant with Israel, but David crushed his head with a stone. When Goliath died, David and Israel began to spread the good, right, and beautiful more and more. Enemies were falling, God was present with his people in the new special place, like the Garden, but called the promise land. Because of this appointed one, David, and this covenant with God, it would seem that the promise made to Adam and Eve and Abraham and Sarah was beginning to come true. God was restoring what was broken from the very beginning.

However, the effects of the rebellion ran deep. Both men God appointed and made a covenant with, David and Moses, also rebelled against God. Moses disobeyed, and David did the unspeakable. He raped a woman and murdered her husband. Because of the rebellion of the leaders, the people of Israel split, fought each other, and completely disregarded the covenant God had made with them. They ignored the way to restore the relationship with God and again rejected the plan to bring the good, right, and beautiful to the entire world. Because of this, God, like with Adam and Eve, took them out of the special promised land. They could no longer be in God's presence because they had again rejected God, his covenant, and his plan for the world.

God's promise to crush the head of the Serpent, to rescue his people from their rebellion, and to spread his kingdom of good, right, and beautiful throughout the entire world remained just that, a promise and not a reality.

Israel eventually saw that they had rejected God and knowing he was a good, right, and beautiful God asked for mercy and forgiveness. They again remembered the covenant and went back to the special promised land, but something was different. Israel had no appointed leader to crush the Serpent's head or the leaders who were with him. They had no presence of God, it seemed as if the relationship was forever broken. But some, like Eve, trusted in the promise even if they did not see it happen, and for another 400 years God was silent, and the Serpent was smiling.

Questions for Reflection:

- God has made some wonderful promises, why does it seem like they've failed?
- What does this teach us about the effects of the rebellion?
- What would it look like for God's promises to be fulfilled?



ACT 4 - REDEMPTION

400 years. The last 400 years for Israel had been marked by silence from God. In addition to the silence, Israel spent those years ruled by other nations and other kings. The Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and, at this point in the story, they are living in the shadow of the Roman Empire. It seemed that the appointed one that would come to rescue them, now called the Messiah, was nowhere to be found.

After all this silence the people became more and more divided on how God would rescue them, how God would fulfill his promises and what that appointed Messiah would look like. The Pharisees were a group bent on perfecting the rules in the covenant God had given them. They would fix things through the covenant God made with Israel. The Sadducees, another group in Israel, worked with the kings and rulers of the day and seemed to be more focused on rescue through political means. The Sadducees had their own idea of what the rescue and the Messiah would look like. Zealots, a third group, would fight to destroy the evil rulers who they believed were aligned with the Serpent. Another group, the Essenes, hid away in the mountains waiting for God to act. All this division around God's rescue and his Messiah seemed only to make matters worse, but God was still on mission. He was waiting for the right time to rescue His people and bring His appointed Messiah to crush the Serpent.

One night in a small insignificant town called Nazareth, the silence was finally broken. An angel from God came to a young woman named Mary. Like Eve and Sarah before her, she would have a special appointed Son, but this Son would be different than all the other Sons that had come before. The Angel told Mary that even though she was a virgin, the Holy Spirit would create this Son in her and he would be named Jesus meaning "God rescues." This special son would finally fulfill the promises made to Adam and Eve; Abraham and Sarah; Moses and David. This special Son, Jesus, would finally be the King who would crush the Serpent and accomplish God's mission for His Creation. Jesus was the Messiah who would finally bring all the promises to reality. He was the one who would spread the good, right, and beautiful across the world.

Finally, the appointed Messiah was coming! This was amazing news and it had to be announced to the world. People had to be prepared for what was going to happen. The night Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of King David, a choir of warrior angels appeared to a group of Shepherds. There they were in the field as the sky



peeled back and reality as they knew it changed around them. Suddenly Angels where everywhere around them announcing the majesty, character, and wonder of this child, Jesus, who was born. For the Shepherds in the field, it was like all of reality announced that the birth of this child was good, right, and beautiful.

Sometime later, a man named John the Baptist was preaching to prepare the people of Israel for the Messiah who was now here. God had come to rescue His people. John was warning the people to turn from rejecting God and to trust what God was doing through His Messiah. He spoke of the Messiah as the Savior King that Israel had been waiting for. Like what had happened in the past, those who turned from their sin and believed what John said about their rescue passed through the water in a ritual called baptism. One day, Jesus came to the river where John was teaching. He asked John to baptize him even though Jesus had never rejected anything God had said. Jesus had done no sin. This astonished John, but he did baptize Jesus, and when he did, the Spirit came down from Heaven and God spoke to all who were there: "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." God was preparing His people for what Jesus would do.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does the name Jesus ("God Rescues") tell us about God?
- It could also mean "God is salvation" or "God Saves"
- Based on last week's story and the details of the promises, what do you think everyone thought Jesus was coming to do? (groups below for reference)
 - Pharisee – Law and Covenant
 - Sadducees – Political, upper class
 - Zealots – Fighting those aligned with the Serpent
 - Essenes – Hiding and waiting

Immediately after his baptism, Jesus was taken out to battle the Serpent. This battle would not take place in a beautiful garden. This battle would take place in the dessert while Jesus was hungry, thirsty, and suffering. The Serpent would again, like with Adam and Eve, tempt God's appointed King to reject God and His plan and listen to the Serpent instead. The Serpent would lie, tempt, and discredit God to his special Son Jesus. But this time, the Serpent lost the battle. This time, Jesus rejected the lies of the Serpent and crushed him by accepting the good, right, and beautiful character of God and His Word. The Serpent had lost. Jesus had won. The Serpent was devastated and losing his grip on the world God had created, so now Jesus



would begin His mission to spread the good, right, and beautiful throughout the whole world.

Jesus started by gathering 12 men around him as disciples. Jesus and his disciples travelled the countryside together as Jesus taught the people about his Kingdom and the mission of God to restore what the Serpent had broken. Jesus taught with authority that His kingdom would be made up of people who were completely different from the world around them. They would not be spreading the good, right, and beautiful by force, but through humility, meekness, and even suffering.

He told the people that the rules and covenant given to Moses were good but were aimed at changing the rebellion *inside* those who were made in the image and likeness of God. These were not just rules to change the behavior of one nation, Israel, these rules were designed to show them their need for God to rescue them and change what was wrong on the inside. Jesus taught them that the good, right, and beautiful started by reversing the rebellion that was deep in the heart of every person. Evil and sin came out of God's special creatures because there was evil and sin inside them, that needed to be changed in order for God to accomplish his mission. That change would be so radical that Jesus called it a new birth. That change would be like a completely new creation!

A lot of what Jesus said about God's mission was hard for people to hear, but he continued teaching through stories called parables. These parables would explain what living in His Kingdom is like. His Kingdom would be like yeast in dough. Even a small amount of the Kingdom's presence can change much. His kingdom would be like the seed of a tree, small at first, but with enough time would grow to offer shelter for many. Jesus was asked when His Kingdom would come. He explained that it wasn't obvious or grand, but that it has already come. It came with him; it is wherever his presence goes. His Kingdom was sounding more and more like God's mission but happening in a way that no one expected.

Jesus not only taught of the Kingdom and the change that needs to happen inside all the creatures made in the image and likeness of God, but he also went about healing, restoring, and making right what had been broken in the creation around him. Everywhere he went there were signs and wonders, miracles, that followed. He healed the sick, made the lame walk, the blind see, the mute speak, and he even raised the dead. On more than one occasion he multiplied food to feed the thousands who were learning from him. When he and the disciples were caught in a



storm on the Sea of Galilee, he simply spoke, and the wind and waves obeyed. Jesus, in ways never before seen, was beginning to restore and cultivate the good, right, and beautiful back into the creation that was broken. God's mission was beginning to take shape everywhere Jesus went. The Serpent was on the run, breaking down from his defeat, and Jesus was the King making right everything around Him, fulfilling all the promises of God.

This was amazing, but the Serpent wasn't done fighting. And he knew that not all the people loved Jesus, in fact, very few truly did. Israel's religious leaders were not pleased with His methods or His claims to be the one to fulfill all the promises. So, together, they began to plan to get Him out of the way.

Questions for Reflection:

- What have we learned about Jesus so far?
- Think back to what happened in Act 2 & 3. How is Jesus fulfilling the promise?
- Why do you think Jesus' words and actions displeased many?

It had been three years since Jesus and his disciples had started their journey. Together they traveled to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. This feast was one of the important pictures from Moses of the promise of God. The people of the city welcomed Jesus with praise! All this excitement came from all the expectations the different groups of people had of what the Messiah would do. Some kind of wonderful rescue would happen, they could imagine it, and they praised Jesus for it. Because of the rebellion and what was broken deep inside of every creature made in the image and likeness of God, they had their own idea of how God would accomplish His rescue.

During this special Passover celebration, Jesus and His disciples met in the upper room of a house, in secret, to share the special Passover meal together. There, Jesus again told his disciples of His coming death. This was a shock, and his disciples still could not accept it. In the meal he used the bread and wine to represent a new covenant. A new covenant that would come through the death and suffering not of animals like in the past, but of the Messiah himself. Even the disciples could not accept that this was the way for God to accomplish his plan. Worse than their confusion, one of the disciples, Judas, would betray Jesus and reveal his secret location to the leaders who, with the wounded Serpent, wanted to destroy Jesus.



That night they went to a garden called Gethsemane so that Jesus could pray. Jesus knew what he was going to do. Jesus knew he was going to take the punishment that all God's creatures deserve. Jesus knew that the good, right, and beautiful God had to punish his creatures for the rebellion, and Jesus knew that He would take that punishment. This would begin to restore what the Serpent broke in the Garden. This would finally change what was wrong deep in the hearts of the creatures made in the image and likeness of God. Jesus would take the punishment, so that others could be in the presence of God, accomplishing the mission of God. This inward change needed to happen in order to spread the good, right, and beautiful across the entire world.

This punishment from God would be torment beyond anything imaginable, but as he prayed for help, the others fell asleep. At the same time Judas led the Romans and Jewish leaders who hated Jesus right to their location, so Jesus was arrested and taken away to a secret and illegal trial. That morning he was brought before the Roman leader Pilate to receive His punishment, but Pilate thought Him to be innocent. The Jews disagreed. The same crowds who had welcomed Jesus with praise now cried out for his death. Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted, so they yelled and screamed to have Jesus die, cursed on a cross. Afraid the people would riot, Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Jesus was beaten, whipped, mocked, his clothes taken and divided amongst the Roman soldiers, forced to carry his own instrument of death up the hill where he would die. When the disciples learned what happened, they hid, afraid they would be next. The one they believed to be the King God spoke of, the one who would fix all of creation and bring God's presence back was now hanging on a cross, breathing his last breath.

Jesus, knowing he was accomplishing the mission of God and seeking to save those who rebelled, said "It is finished". At that moment, darkness filled the sky, the earth shook, and nearby in the temple the curtain that kept men and women from the holy presence of God was finally torn. Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, was dead.

Later, they brought his body down from the cross and the few who stayed by His side prepared him for burial, placed him in a tomb, and a great stone was rolled over the entrance. For the disciples, it seemed in that moment that all hope had been lost. They still could not understand how God fulfilled His promise and accomplished his mission.



Questions for Reflection:

- Put yourself in the shoes of the disciples.
- What would you have been feeling in this moment?
- What would you have thought about the last three years?

Three days later it was Sunday morning and some of the women who followed Jesus came down to Jesus' tomb. To their shock the stone had been rolled away and the tomb emptied. Suddenly, two angels appeared to them as they had that night to Mary. They told them not to be surprised and that Jesus was alive! Filled with excitement they ran back to where the other disciples were staying to share the good news! The disciples couldn't believe what they were hearing. Later, Jesus Himself appeared to them and showed them the holes where the nails had held him on the cross, he was truly alive! And He spent many days after His resurrection explaining these things to his disciples and how all of God's story had been pointing to this moment all along.

So, finally, with the risen and alive Son of God, even death had no sting. It was clear, all of the power and influence of the Serpent could not stand against the power of the appointed Messiah that had come to change those who rebelled and continue to accomplish God's mission to spread the good, right, and beautiful throughout all creation. Jesus has power over all. There is nothing outside the control of the King who crushed the head of the Serpent and passed through the flaming sword of God's judgment. Jesus is the only good, the only right, and only beautiful person, who is worthy to continue the mission of God.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does the resurrection of Jesus teach us about him?
- How does this give us hope?
- What is the significance of the curtain in the temple tearing?



ACT 5 - KINGDOM

It had been 40 days since Jesus had risen from the grave. In that time, he had made many appearances to people all over, teaching and showing them that he really was alive. Jesus called a crowd to gather around him one last time before he went to sit on the heavenly throne with His Father. He gave them a great commission to continue the mission of spreading God's image across the globe. Jesus is now spreading His Kingdom. He told them to tell everyone about who he is and what he had done for them and to baptize these new disciples into his family. They would, like him, have the power to spread the good, right, and beautiful across the entire world. He reminded them that no matter what, he would always be with them on this mission. Jesus then ascended into Heaven taking a seat on his throne and sharing his good gifts with those who were baptized into his family.

Sometime later many of Jesus' followers, including the original disciples, were gathered in Jerusalem. Suddenly, while they prayed a great sound and gust of wind filled the room they were in. God's Spirit filled them like He filled Jesus, and they began speaking languages they had never spoken before! They ran out into the street to share what had taken place. Some people were amazed to hear them speaking in their language, while some mocked them saying they were drunk.

Jesus' disciple, named Peter, began to preach to the crowd that was gathering. He explained to them that this was all a part of God's story unfolding before them. He explained how Jesus was the one God had promised them so long ago and if they would repent of their sin and rebellion, be baptized into His family, they would find forgiveness! They too could be a part of the Kingdom. Not only that, but this wasn't just for Israel, it was for everyone! Peter was telling *the true story*! That day, 3000 people believed the good news of the true story taught by Peter. God's presence began to grow more and more as more people joined His family!

These disciples of Jesus were all in for God's mission. They were devoted to being formed by Jesus' teaching and God's story. They prayed, shared meals, worshipped, and honored Jesus' life and death together. They were generous with everything they had and made sure no one around them was in need. They were a family called the Church. A people all over the world enjoying life with God, spreading His image everywhere they went. So, the kingdom that Jesus started was growing!



Not everyone was so enthusiastic about the Church. Many people of Israel still did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah that God had promised them. One man in particular, named Paul, strongly opposed the Church. Paul was aligned with the dying Serpent and made it his job to harm the Church and keep the disciples from spreading the Kingdom, but God was on mission to change the rebellious hearts of those who listened to the Serpent. One day as Paul traveled to Damascus, Jesus confronted him and completely transformed him. Paul was now a part of God's Kingdom; this is the power Jesus has now that he is on his throne. Paul would go on to do many wonderful things for the kingdom of God. He and others went all over teaching about Jesus, living out His mission, and starting new church families wherever they went. Paul wrote many letters to these churches when they faced difficult times or needed correcting and reminders of God's power. And all the time the Spirit continued to work through the people as they tried to faithfully live out God's mission, proclaiming that His kingdom had finally come in Jesus. In this Kingdom, God's presence with humanity is restored and the good, right, and beautiful could be spread across the entire globe.

Questions for Reflection:

- What does this story tell us about the Spirit and power of King Jesus?
- What does this story tell us about the Church?

Ever since Jesus rose from the dead, ever since he took his seat at God's right hand, this Kingdom that Jesus began with his original followers has grown from twelve timid and cowering disciples to a global family, all working to spread the Kingdom that Jesus began, all united together in the same Spirit. God's presence now dwells with His Church as they spread the good, right, and beautiful of his Kingdom.

At the same time, even though the Serpent has been crushed and is dying, he's still fighting with every last breath. While God's people do enjoy God's actual presence, they are still in the presence of sin in this world; the lingering effects of the Serpent are still very real, and the Serpent is using that to fight back in every way he can. We see the good, right, and beautiful of God's Kingdom, but we still see the destruction of the rebellion around us. God's Kingdom is already here, but not yet completed. Jesus is still at work, as King, bringing the full reality of his Kingdom.

Yet, while the effects of the Serpent are still seen, experienced, and suffered in every facet of life, Jesus is still with His people in His already-come Kingdom. God has fulfilled his promise in Jesus through this Kingdom, yet there is yet a final promise to



come: a promise where the Serpent and all of his work are finally no more, a promise where there is *only* good, *only* right, and *only* beautiful, a promise of God's presence being *everywhere* with *everyone* for all of *eternity*. This promise is the promise of a New Creation.

Even today we get a glimpse of this New Creation promise. The resurrection body of Jesus is the beginning of what will someday be reality for all who are in God's family. Now, the people of God, who are a part of His body are born again, like Jesus said, they are a New Creation. This is why we have the power, today, to spread the good, right, and beautiful throughout the entire world. This is what the Spirit does, like in the beginning of the story, he is The Creator. Even though the Spirit was and is with the church, there is still brokenness that needs healing. There is still evil that needs to be punished. There is still a tension between the Kingdom being brought by the Church and the reality of what is broken in the world.

This is where we sit in the story, even as we wait for the rest of the New Creation.

Question for Reflection:

- Do you feel the tensions from the story being incomplete?

ACT 6 – NEW CREATION

Many years after Jesus had ascended and the Church had begun, John, the youngest of Jesus' original disciples was now an old man, was given a vision. Jesus appeared to him in this vision, like he had in prophets of the past. He reminded John that His story was still being written, God's mission was still unfolding. Jesus told him that God will again create. God will again intervene. God will bring a New Creation, completing His mission and making right everything that was ever made wrong.

He reminds John that through His resurrection, we have been given a glimpse of what will come in the New Creation. His resurrection is the first element of this creation to pass through the flaming sword of judgment and end up on the other side perfect. Good. Right. Beautiful. Like the body of Jesus, someday in the future, creation itself will pass through the flaming sword of judgment. The Serpent and all those who follow him will be punished for their rebellion and rejection of God. The offspring of Eve, the Messiah, and all those who trusted in him and the Promise of



God concerning him, will be brought out on the other side resurrected, eternal, perfect, and again pure and undefiled.

All things, both in heaven and on earth, will be restored. There will be no more sickness, pain, or suffering. Every tear will be wiped away. There will only be what is good, right, and beautiful. And do you want to know the best part? God will dwell with his people. The people of God will dwell with God in perfect unity. The creation of God will again be very good, except this time, now that the Serpent's head is crushed, what God creates new will never again be threatened. The New Creation, in all its majesty and splendor, will be a forever and ever reality. Jesus, the King and beginning of this New Creation, has ensured that God's original mission would continue for all eternity.

What God revealed to John, John shared with the church, and the Church has continued to eagerly await Jesus' return ever since.

Questions for Reflection:

- What in this part of the story reminds you of the beginning of the story?
- How is it better?
- Now that we have heard the story of God how should we respond? Where do we go from here?
- Remember that this is OUR story too.

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