

Part 6: Jesus in the Gospels – God in the Flesh

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We've been working through the storyline of the whole Bible here at Sovereign Hope with the goal that we might read and worship God better on account of it. We've seen that the whole Bible is one story—a story of God redeeming a broken people through the work of Jesus Christ and we've seen that he does it by recreating a perfect people, in a perfect place, in God's perfect presence.

So far we have successfully completed our walk through of the Old Testament, and today we begin what is called, the New Testament. The Old Testament outlines the history of God's redemptive program to save his people prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament outlines God's redemptive program to save his people during and after the birth of Jesus Christ.

Normally, in any sermon I preach I write an introduction which helps us know where we are going and why this is important for us today. But as we begin to look at the four accounts of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the New Testament my only introduction is this: These books are the world's greatest introduction.

What is contained in the historical accounts and theological reflection on the life and death of Jesus Christ is an ending. It is the ending of an old age, the ending of the law according to the flesh, but more than that it is a beginning point. It introduces not the end of our life, or the end of our story, but an introduction into the next stage—the stage of grace, glory and growth according to the Holy Spirit on account of the work of Jesus Christ and for the glory of God the Father.

Whatever you might think about the historicity of the story of Jesus Christ, it is not the final question on the exam of life, but instead it is the next first step to the rest of your life. The story of Jesus is the continuation of God's storied plan to redeem his people. Therefore these gospel accounts we see today are in fact the most important chapters. But they are not the end. In fact, in many ways they are just the beginning of what it looks like for you and I to participate in the story of God's glory as well.

As we have done so far in our survey we are going to **Survey the Story**, **Study the Story**, and **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

Here's why I want to urge you to pay attention to this today. Because as we will see, to affirm the gospel—the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God—is not merely to affirm a truth statement. It's to affirm the story we've been tracking the whole time—the story that makes sense of human history, the story that makes sense of the significance and work of Jesus Christ, the story that if affirmed also sweeps up the whole of your life as well.

If what we see in these four books is true, then we cannot merely affirm it if we believe it. But instead we are swept up inside of it and pulled along on the redemptive process along with it.

This is where we begin today as we **Survey the Story**.

Today we are looking at what are called, "The Gospels." These are not four different gospels. What is meant by "the gospels" in the plural is that they are four accounts of the life of Jesus, and it is the life of Jesus which is "the gospel," the good news. These books are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Matthew and John were two of Jesus' twelve apostles, Mark and Luke were close followers and disciples of Jesus' disciples.

The goal of all four of these writers was not simply to tell you the gospel, but to show it to you. Yes, they have moments of deep truth statements—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"—but more importantly they want to show you why and how this is true.

Wouldn't you want to know that? Wouldn't you want to know why the airplane you're about to fly on is safe? Why the doctor about to perform your surgery is capable? Then why wouldn't you want to know why the gospel is true? Christianity is not the religion of blind faith. It's the religion of informed faith, reasoned faith, witnessed faith. That is exactly how John opens one of his letters when he says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life...this we proclaim also to you!" (1 John 1:1,3).

What we have been tracking since page one of the Bible was God's perfect creation, the perfect peace and harmony of humanity and God. That was God's people, in God's presence in God's place. That's what sin destroyed and what the story of scripture shows that God himself was going to redeem despite a sinful people.

All of the gospel writers fit the events of the life of Jesus in the middle of this storyline.

Matthew opens with a genealogy that reads like this: **Matthew 1:1**. He roots the birth of Jesus in the line of David, in the promise of Abraham.

John goes even further back. Remember the first words in the Bible: **Genesis 1:1**. Now look at how John opens his gospel: **John 1:1-5**. As John goes on in verse 14 to show that this "Word" was Jesus Christ we see a primary theme emerge: In the works of Jesus Christ, a new genesis is happening, a new creation, the long awaited re-creation of God's people, in God's place, in God's presence.

We cannot understand the birth of Jesus or the work of Jesus if we don't understand the problems and promises of the Old Testament: that sin is our greatest enemy separating us from God, and God's promise to reclaim a sinful people is our only hope to be restored.

Often times you'll hear some fancy scholar in a classroom or on social media try to make the case that Christianity is merely the Romanized, or modernized, version of Judaism. Jesus might have been a good moral teacher, but the idea that he was establishing a new religion was historical invention.

But consider how Jesus, in his own words saw himself. **Matthew 26:55-56**. Consider also Jesus' words to the Pharisees in **John 5:39, 46-47**. Or his words to his disciples in **Luke 22:37**.

Jesus saw himself as the fulfillment and continuation of the Old Testament scriptures. If this was how Jesus understood himself, do you think it's helpful for us to understand that as well?

It's only when we do this that we can actually endeavor to discover our main point today as we see **Jesus in the Gospels: God in the Flesh.**

There continues to be both a narrative progression and a theological progression in these books. When it comes to the narrative progression we see: ***The promise maker becomes the promise keeper.***

In the Old Testament we saw God make all sorts of promises to his people who failed to keep them, but in Jesus, the God who made the promise took on flesh and fulfilled the promise. In so doing we get glimpses again into what the Kingdom of God is like. In the miracles of Jesus, we see what life would have been like if sin never crept into the story, if God's perfect people always dwelt in God's perfect presence! Wherever Jesus is, there's Eden!

Theologically speaking what we see in the gospels is ***The triumph of the Triune God.*** In the gospels God most clearly reveals what was hinted at in the Old Testament: That our God is three persons in one God: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And in these books the whole effort of the Trinity succeeds to accomplish salvation for all who hope in Jesus Christ.

So in brief, before we move on, what is the survey of the gospels? I will summarize it in six points.

First, it's the story of Jesus' ***Virgin Birth (Is. 7:14)***. In the womb of Mary, the eternally existing Son of God was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit, through the power of the Father. That is to say by the Trinitarian work of God, the eternal Son took on flesh and was born fully God, and fully man by Mary.

Second, it's the story of Jesus' ***Perfect Obedience (Gen. 2:16-17)***. Being fully man, Jesus was placed under the weight of the law and its blessing and curses that Israel wrestled with in the Old Testament. But unlike Israel, Jesus perfectly kept the law and was always faithful to his Father. This was because needed a sinless sacrifice in order for the next point of the story to advance.

That is the story of Jesus' ***Substitutionary Death (Lev. 16:34)***. As we saw already in Luke 22, Jesus was numbered among the transgressors as a fulfillment of scripture. Because he was fully God and fully man, he could die sacrificially in our place. Because Jesus was human his perfect life really counted as righteous according to the law, but because Jesus was also divine his perfect life combined with his substitutionary death meant that he could pay the punishment of God's wrath for all who have his righteousness by faith.

But it's also the story of Jesus' ***Physical Resurrection (Ps. 16:10)***. Because he was fully man, he died substitutionally for sinners, but because he was fully God, death couldn't hold him down. He was raised to life by the glory of the Father. Showing that for all who are saved by God, death itself is defeated.

But then in a twist his disciples didn't expect, it's also the story of Jesus' ***Victorious Ascension (2 Sam. 7:13)***. Having made atonement and defeated death, Jesus ascended back into heaven and in so doing introduced a new age of history as we await his second coming when he will finally establish his kingdom forever.

But lastly, he's doing all of this while preaching and preparing a ***Born Again People (Ezk. 36:26)***. Jesus lived all this out while calling people to himself and preparing them to follow him.

That in a nutshell is the story of the gospels. But now let's talk about how we **Study the Story.**

While the gospel's themselves act as almost a literary fulfillment of the Old Testament (almost every genre of the Old Testament is represented in them) they are on the whole narratives. One thing that you will need to be prepared for as you read these books is that some of the events are presented in different order. For instance John records the cleansing of the temple in the early part of Jesus' ministry, other gospels record it later. Some gospels include some events that others don't.

But we don't need to worry that because the events are recorded in a different order, or even different aspect are emphasized differently in different accounts, that they are not true. If you go look up biographies on Abraham Lincoln you'll find many. That's not to say that one is true and one is not, but instead the many make the whole more clear. Each emphasizes something in an attempt to highlight one thing or another.

The same can be true with where events are placed. The goal of the gospel writers was not simply a sterile chronology of events, but it was intended to teach us about the events. For example, if someone were to write an account of Sarah and my relationship, I imagine both would include a story of our engagement.

One might choose to emphasize the chronology of it and how I had planned things out. The other might choose to widen the chronology and instead begin the story of our engagement with a story about Sarah who at a young age got sick from mayonnaise and refused to eat it or even be around it. They might also fast forward to when we first began dating when Sarah and I decided to not kiss until we were engaged. The biographer might entirely skip past the engagement itself and fast forward moments later to me sitting down to eat a sandwich that had mayo on it. Finally able to kiss, I had made myself unkillable.

The Biblical authors, from different angles organize their stories not to reshape the narrative, but instead to emphasize the significance of the narrative.

John seeks to emphasize Jesus as fully God and fully man. Matthew highlights the ways in which Abraham's promise to the nations was being fulfilled in Jesus' ministry to the Gentiles. Mark highlights Jesus as Daniel's, "Son of Man." Luke shows the transformative power Jesus has over the life of his disciples.

But all of them continue to highlight the ways in which in Jesus, the people, the presence and the place of God is being recreated. In three of the gospels Jesus says that his ministry to his disciples was to help them know "the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10).

What the people of Israel wrestled to see in the Old Testament was how God was going to rebuild and replant his people, in his place, in his presence. And we see a similar problem in the New. When Jesus tells his disciples he was going die, they scoffed. They then went on to argue about who would be the greatest and Jesus rebuked them. They turned away children and Gentiles from Jesus because it didn't accord with what they thought the gospel would be.

I wonder how many of us need the same help the disciples and the Jews did. Perhaps one of the greatest needs we have is for Jesus to sit with us in the gospels and reveal to us, "the secrets of the Kingdom of heaven." In the gospels, Jesus is taking all of our hopes and longings and he's showing us how he is at the center of them, because he is at the center of God's story. We will always wrestle with who's the star and what the hope is, unless we see Jesus for who he really is.

Consider how Jesus talks about his people. What do you think makes a Christian a Christian? I can tell you how the Jews thought about it. They thought that as long as they were children of Abraham, as long as they went to the temple, they were God's people.

In John 8 the Pharisees boast to Jesus saying, "Abraham is our father." But look at how Jesus responded: **John 8:42**.

To be God's people is not to be born of Abraham, but to be born again out of a love for Jesus.

John says this again in **John 1:12-13**.

Jesus is recreating the people of God how? By calling them to faith in him. You belong to God not because of who you are or what you've done, or what church you go to, or because you read your Bible. Jesus makes us the people of God, but calling us to have faith in him as God's perfect person.

How is Jesus God's perfect person? Because Jesus is the presence of God in the flesh. If we want to get to God, we must come through the Son. Look at **John 14:6-7**.

How do we know Jesus can get us to the Father? Because to see Jesus is to see the Father, he is equal with him! This is why Jesus was murdered. Jesus wasn't murdered because he was a revolutionary. Jesus was murdered because "he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

Why is it important that Jesus is the full presence of God? Because being both fully man and fully God he was able to do what needed to be done: **John 1:29**. Also look at what happens in **Mark 2:5-7**.

Jesus being the presence of God is able to take away our sins by bearing them away in his flesh and bearing us to God in his righteousness. Jesus can forgive sins because as God he was the one sinned against!

And where then is God's place? Where do we go if we want the hope of restoration? Where do we go if you want to come and worship God? Where do we go to find the relief of Eden? For the majority of the Old Testament this place was the temple. It's where God dwelt, where sins were forgiven and where worship was offered.

But look at this dialogue in **John 2:19-22**. Jesus is making the bold claim that he is now the temple of God! He is the place in which we meet God! That's why miracles followed Jesus everywhere he went, where the King was, the Kingdom was!

And here's where we encounter something shocking here. Look at what Jesus says in **John 14:23**.

Where is the place? If we love Jesus, he will come to us with God the Father, and he will make his home with us.

One thing is remarkably clear to us at the end of these books: Jesus matters. Jesus modeled and showed what God's perfect people, perfect place and perfect presence looked like because. He embodied it in his divine identity and he showed it in his human ministry.

But despite Jesus being the new temple look at what Jesus says in **John 14:2-3**. Wait a minute. So where is God's place? Is it here? Or is it yet to come?

Despite Jesus being God himself, some of his disciples see him transfigured on a mountain and they realize that in his life the full presence of Jesus is still veiled. But after he is resurrected he's seen in full glory, but then guess what happens? But what happens at the end? He leaves! He ascends into heaven!

Despite his promise to dwell with us, he leaves us!

But this is where I want to return again to my theme of the gospel as the introduction. One of the main things Jesus was doing in the gospels was preparing his disciples for life in the next stage. Jesus wasn't only preparing his disciples to believe in him, but to follow him! A stage he prepared them for with two promises. The first is that when he ascends he will pour out his Holy Spirit on his people. The second is that he is coming back again. Why is this important?

It's important because even as we read of the events of Jesus' life, we realize the story isn't over. Jesus has shown us that God has accomplished salvation, but also that God's not done with his saving program. There's still a future place Jesus is preparing, there's a future presence yet to come.

What we see in the gospels is the Jesus did everything required to save sinners and to restore us to God so that by his power and his work we might begin to live out the next stage of our story of redemption.

If you go online, you can search for lists of those who were posthumously pardoned. That is a list of people who convicted and sometimes executed for a crime, have been granted the verdict of innocent after they have died. The problem is that this pardon changes nothing, they are dead.

Unfortunately, I think for many of us in the western world we are content with a posthumous gospel. We want the verdict of innocence given to us in Jesus Christ, but then nothing changes. But if we understand the story of scripture, salvation itself is part of the story.

It's not merely the relief from the burden of sin, but a return to life in the Kingdom. When we come to believe in Jesus we are invited into a new life where Jesus is still working and the story is still moving. Look at how John puts this in the end of his gospel: **John 20:30-31**.

Why does the gospel come to us? So that we might have life. Life here. Life now. Life that looks at the age we are in in light of the story that saves us. We are swept up in the progress of redemption. We are not yet done. We will talk more about this next week, but the Holy Spirit is still restoring our hearts, the gospel is still working in our world, and there is a home yet to come which Jesus is laboring for even today.

The end of each gospel account is simply a beginning, each ends not simply with a confession but a commission!

This is the final point this morning: **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

John ends as Jesus implores Peter three times for the work ahead of him: If you love me, feed my sheep.

Mark ends with the promise that Jesus is going before them and will meet them again.

Matthew ends with the understated great commission: **Matthew 28:16-20**.

And Luke ends with Jesus' ascension into heaven where worship and great joy followed God's people back to Jerusalem.

Jesus is the end of all your fear. He's the end of damnation and the wrath of God. He's the end of faking it till you make it. He's the end of all the intellectual inconsistencies you fear. But for those who see him as the secret of the Kingdom, he's the beginning of all he will continue to do in your life.

You see Jesus is a savior worthy of our lives because Jesus is the only savior of our lives. He consumes them. We will always wrestle to find Jesus worthy of worship if he is merely an answer to a theology exam. We need a Jesus who speaks into our now, who makes sense of the days we are in and promises that this too has context and meaning in relationship to him.

This is the kind of savior Jesus is, we don't invite him into our story, he invites us into his. And when we do that, he promises to continue to carry us, work in us and comfort us until he comes to take us home again.