

THE KINGDOM STORY

A Public Faith Curriculum
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The Kingdom Story

Purpose

The Kingdom Story presents the four chapters of the gospel - *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption* and final *Restoration* - as a framework for understanding and engaging the world we live in. Using the Kingdom Story we will learn to analyze the events of our lives and develop our skills of interpretation.

Article Overview

Introduction	<i>A Framework For Thinking Christianly</i>
Chapter 1	<i>Creation</i> - What the world was meant to be
Chapter 2	<i>Fall</i> - Sin's cosmic effect
Chapter 3	<i>Redemption</i> - Making all things right
Chapter 4	<i>Restoration</i> - The hope we have
Conclusion	

Introduction

We live in the midst of a never-ending stream of events and activities. A multitude of ideas compete for our hearts and minds. Voices from the Internet, media, friends and co-workers are legion, contending for our attention and allegiance.

With demands coming from every sector of your life, how do you make sense of your daily experiences, let alone the events in the greater world around you? Do you have a coherent framework that helps you make decisions and come to an understanding about relationships, work, ethics and the meaning of life?

When the gospel touches all of life cohesively, from praying or riding a bike to working at the office, it becomes such a framework. Unfortunately, our spiritual lives often become disconnected from the rest of our lives so that even though the gospel creates a love for Jesus and ethical behavior it is irrelevant to the world around us.

In this article we will set out a biblical framework through which all of life can be analyzed and understood. It can help bring meaning and clarity to business, medicine and architecture as easily as it does to personal growth, morality and devotional life.

The Bible, rather than a collection of unrelated stories is a cohesive narrative that forms the chapters of our gospel framework. In this article we will refer to this framework synonymously as either the Kingdom Story or the gospel.

The Kingdom Story is the story of God's reign in the world from its ***Creation***; through the rebellion that comes into the world through the ***Fall***; to ***Redemption***; and finally to the summation of all things at the final ***Restoration***, when his rule in the world is fully restored.

The first chapter of the Kingdom Story explains the ***Creation*** of all things and helps us understand God's original purpose for humankind and the world we live in. Beauty, goodness, truth and love are just some of the wonderful things that came into the world at its creation. In this first chapter, everything was as it *ought* to be.

But the Kingdom Story doesn't end with creation. The human race tragically makes a choice, which introduces corruption to all that was originally created good. Both the animate and inanimate parts of the created order become distorted because of sin. This part of the story, called the ***Fall***, explains why things are not always what they ought to be - why love can be selfish, why beauty can be used to degrade and why we often experience shame and frustration instead of dignity and satisfaction. In the second chapter of our story the kingdom is in rebellion and sin begins to reign. This chapter represents what *is* often true in the world.

If the story ended here the human race would be utterly without hope. Fortunately there is a way that leads us forward, not back to creation *as it was*, but ahead to creation *as it was meant to become*. The way forward is through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. The only antidote for the fall and the corrupting influence of sin is his **Redemption**.

The word redemption means to recover ownership through payment, or to buy back. The idea is that redemption involves rescuing and setting free through paying a ransom.

The Cross makes redemption possible, but it was not the beginning of the redemptive process. In his love, God did not wait to begin redeeming humankind; his redemption began in the garden, immediately after the fall of humanity. Redemption is woven into the fabric of human history right from the start. And God continues to expand his kingdom through redemption as we, his people, enter into his restorative work. The third chapter of the story, **Redemption** gives hope and represents what *can* be.

This Story has no end; but world history, as we know it now, will someday be complete. At that time there will be a total **Restoration** of God's rule in creation and a new or renewed heaven and earth will be installed. Os Guinness sums up the prospects of the gospel as "a world in which evil and suffering are gone, justice and peace are restored, and the very last tear is wiped away."¹ This last chapter of the story represents what someday *will* be.

The Kingdom Story as a framework to analyze life in this world

C.S. Lewis once told the story of standing outside and looking into a dark tool shed. There was a hole in the roof of the shed through which a small beam of light was shining. He was surprised that as he looked *at* the light it did nothing to illuminate the shed. But when he climbed up on a table and looked down *with* the light he could see everything in the shed clearly. Lewis compared the beam of light with the gospel. We need to look *at* the gospel but we also need to know how to look *with* the light of the gospel in order to understand the world we live in. The following is a framework, which will help us look *with* the light of the gospel at anything and everything in the world.

The ought, is, can and will framework. The four chapters of the gospel - *Creation, Fall, Redemption* and *Restoration* - correspond with *ought, is, can* and *will* in our framework.

1. Creation. God created and it was good. Before the Fall, everything, in the world and its inhabitants, was as it **ought** to be.

2. The Fall. Sin and corruption entered the created order as a result of the Fall and the world is no longer perfect. The Fall represents what the world **is** now.

3. Redemption. Sin, however, is not the only thing at work in the world today. There is an additional dynamic working within the fallen world.

Through Christ's redemption we have the hope of being restored to God's original intent. Redemption is what can be.

4. Restoration. And on one day in the future, Christ will complete the work of redemption and the world will be completely restored under his kingship. **Restoration** is what will be.

In considering the four chapters of the gospel you may want to ask yourself if you have given enough thought to the first and fourth chapters, *Creation* and *Restoration*. What difference do the first and last chapters of our story make? It is in these chapters of the drama that we find context for our story. We find out what God's intent for His creation was and still is.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand what things can be (*Redemption*) if you do not understand what they were intended to be (*Creation and Restoration*). Only the *Creation* and *Restoration* chapters of the story give these clues.

New Life as Kingdom Citizens

As a result of the gospel we have new life in Christ, no longer living in rebellion to the King. Dallas Willard, author of *The Divine Conspiracy*, calls it, "an eternal kind of life now."² Willard goes on to explain that the good news of the Kingdom of God being at hand, means that "The kingdom is *present in action* and *available* with and through the person of Jesus. That is Jesus' gospel." We gain forgiveness through Jesus' work on the cross but we gain so much more. We also gain new life that flows from the very life of Christ, a new life that is to be lived in his kingdom or under his rule or authority. Colossians 1:13-14 describes our transfer like this, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

To have a clear and compelling vision for our new life we need to understand God's original plan and design for the human race. Equipped with this understanding we can then ask, "How Lord, do I fit into your plan? How can I live skillfully in your kingdom today?"

The Kingdom Story will bring clarity and build reference points to help you begin to see your work, your call and your ministry as integral to your life. This story will hopefully become the lens through which you view and make sense of every aspect of your life.

As you read this article, consider and answer these two questions: 1) Why does this story best explain all of life? And 2) How can you use this story to help others make sense of their lives?

Introduction Summary Points:

- The gospel has four chapters: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration.
- The gospel is the history of God's redemptive work from Creation through the Fall and Redemption to Restoration.
- The four chapters give context to your life as they show God's intentions for his universe.

Chapter 1 - Creation, The way things ought to be

Read: Genesis 1 and 2

There are clues in the first few chapters of Genesis and in the last few chapters of Revelation that help us understand a fuller picture of what God wants our new life to encompass.

In Genesis 1 and 2, we find humankind in right relationship with God, with nature, and with each other. Not only this, we find humankind employed in meaningful work as God issues the first human job description. (Genesis 1:28)

God created and it was good. He created humankind in his own image and it was very good. As image bearers of God we are sub-creators, made to rule, to work and to worship, continuing the creative process.

In Genesis 2:15, Adam is told to cultivate the land. When we cultivate we are building culture. Speaking of Adam, The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament³ states:

In paradise he was to dress (colere) the garden; for the earth was meant to be tended and cultivated by man, so that without human culture, plants and even the different varieties of corn degenerate and grow wild. Cultivation therefore preserved the divine plantation ... from running wild through natural degeneracy. As nature was created for man, it was his vocation not only to ennoble it by his work, to make it subservient to himself, but also to raise it into the sphere of the spirit and further its glorification.

One of Adam's responsibilities as an image bearer was to develop and care for the garden. But his work was to extend beyond the garden to the whole world. Adam and his race were designed to cultivate the world and make it worthy of God's special presence. This is culture-making. Consider the first human job description, to subdue and rule (Genesis 1:28). Creation was not meant to be stagnant. God gave us a perfect beginning in that it was *undefiled* not in that it was *complete*. In Genesis we see that we were intended to develop creation, but to what end? What was God's universe meant to become?

Humankind was meant to develop the world under God's rule so that it reflects and glorifies him and so that we can fully enjoy God and his universe. We were designed to be paradise-makers, bringing the same kind of order to the world that existed in the garden. The means to that end was to be through exercising proper dominion that is always and only in submission to God. Dallas Willard explains that,

... we are made to "have dominion" within an appropriate domain of reality. This is the core of the likeness or image of God in us and is the basis of the destiny for which we were formed. We are, all of us, never-ceasing spiritual beings with unique eternal calling to count for good in God's great universe ... God shaped us for this task by framing our nature to function in a conscious, personal relationship of interactive responsibility with him. We are meant to exercise our "rule" only in union with God, as he acts with us. He intended to be our constant companion or coworker in the creative enterprise of life on earth. That is what his love for us means in practical terms.⁴

It is important to note that cell phones, high-rise buildings, newspapers, et al. are not a result of the fall. We were not meant to live in a garden forever. We were meant to develop the earth. Unfortunately, many areas of our world reflect the nature of fallen humanity instead of the nature and character of God. As a result, God is not given his proper glory and he becomes obscured from the human race. Have we as believers abdicated the responsibility of developing the world through technology, architecture, education, journalism, etc. to non-believers? And if so, why have we done this and what difference has it made?

Consider the mandate given in Genesis 1:28. It gives us a picture of what God originally intended for us. *God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and **subdue** it. **Rule** over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary describes God's intention for Adam and the human race in this way:

He was to be God's responsible representative and steward on the earth, to work out his Creator's will and fulfill the divine purpose. World dominion was to be granted to this new creature (cf. Psalm 8:5-7). He was commissioned to subdue (*kabash*, "tread upon") the earth, and to follow God's plan in filling it with people. This sublime creature, with his unbelievable privileges and heavy responsibilities, was to live and move in kingly fashion.⁵

This first human job description, to have dominion, was given to Adam but it was intended for the entire human race. All of God's image-bearers are to be his responsible stewards on earth with unbelievable privileges and heavy

responsibilities! This is meaningful work. This is what we were created for. This was the sequel to being created in his image.

What does this mean for us today? Do you believe that as God's steward you have great privileges, and that your work is a means of working out your Creator's will and fulfilling the divine purpose? And to what end? What should be the effect of the human race on creation? The Barnes notes puts it like this:

He (Adam and his race) is therefore authorized, by the word of the Creator, to exercise his power in subduing the earth and ruling over the animal kingdom. ... The subduing and ruling refer not to the mere supply of his natural needs, for which provision is made in the following verse, but to the accomplishment of his various purposes of science and beneficence, whether towards the inferior animals or his own race. It is the part of intellectual and moral reason to employ power for the ends of general no less than personal good. The sway of man ought to be beneficent.⁶

The human race is given a divine decree to exercise dominion over all the earth. It is not, however, a cruel authority; "the sway of man ought to be beneficent."

Adam could not fulfill the command to develop the earth alone, it was meant for all image-bearers and so for all of Adam's race. This mandate or decree, given before the fall, indicates God's original intent for the world and for all of humankind. In the next chapter of the story, the *Fall*, we will look at how sin has affected this mandate and God's intentions.

Creation Summary Points:

- God created and it was good.
- Humankind was created perfectly in the image of God.
- Genesis 1:28-30 gives the first human job description: to subdue and rule.
- The world was perfect at creation meaning *undefiled* but not meaning *complete*.
- God intended for his image bearers to cultivate creation and develop it.

Chapter 2 - The Fall, The way it is

Read: Genesis 3

Consider the havoc that has been rendered by the fall. The first thing we notice in the Genesis account is the corruption of the relationship between humanity and God. Shamelessness has been replaced by shame and fear. Genesis 3:9-10 records: *But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

The state of human relationships has also been corrupted by the fall. In Genesis 3: 12 and 13 we see that instead of trust there is blame. *The man said, "The woman you put here with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

Genesis 3:16 demonstrates the corruption of the marriage relationship. *To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

To further illustrate the corruption that enters human relationships consider the first major post-garden narrative in Genesis 4, when Cain kills Abel.

Finally, the state of the earth is also affected by the fall. Genesis 3:17-19: *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it', Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

And so corruption, frustration and death enter the world. The human race no longer lives willingly under God's kingship. We are dead in sin. The Kingdom of God has always existed and will never end but his kingdom is in rebellion. Dallas Willard documents the character of the kingdom as follows: "that kingdom has existed from the moment of creation and will never end (Psalm 145:13; Daniel 7:14). It cannot be "shaken" (Hebrews 12:27f.) and is totally good. It has never been in trouble and never will be."⁷

It is important to note that although the relationship between humanity and God are corrupted by the fall, the mandate to subdue and rule has not been rescinded, in fact it was reissued after the flood (Genesis 9:1-7). Our primary job description, given in Genesis 1:28, remains in place. However, now there are opposing forces at work in the world. We live and work in a world that has been corrupted by sin and the Lord must become King in a new way.

God created with a purpose and he was not surprised by the fall of humanity nor was he distracted from his purpose. To say that God must abandon his original intent for the human race or the created order because of sin is absurd. God knew that we would fall before he created us and planned before the creation of the world to make provision for our fall. The question that remains is how will he move us forward to what creation was meant to become?

The Fall Summary Points:

- The entire cosmos, both animate and inanimate, was affected by the fall.
- Though perfectly created, humankind became thoroughly corrupted, meaning corruption touches every area of life - this does not mean that God's image is erased. Some parts remain intact.

- God's plan for human involvement in developing the created order was not rescinded after the fall.
- God was neither surprised by the fall nor forced to abandon his intentions for humankind and creation.

Chapter 3 - Redemption, The way things can be

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the fulcrum on which *all* of history turns. Salvation is unintelligible apart from Christ. Moreover, every redemptive act in the Old Testament looks forward to Christ. However, God did not wait until the advent of Jesus Christ to begin saving humanity. God's redemptive activity began right there with Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:21 says: "The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them," setting in place a process of redemption that would one day be fulfilled in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Adam and Eve weren't saved because God made animal skins for them, they were saved by looking forward to the Son of the woman who would one day crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). God's covering them with garments must have communicated to them mercy, grace, and kindness to sinners – mercy, grace, and kindness that cover us *only* as we are united with Christ by faith.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection are the central and pivotal events concerning our salvation but they are not the first, nor will they be the last. God is acting out his salvation within the scope (from the beginning to the end) and the confines (within the sequential time) of history, progressively revealing his salvation.

And so, beginning with Adam, God began to reveal himself. Then came Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and David. God established the system of sacrifice and atonement; he groomed and disciplined Israel; he sent his prophets. Then came Jesus Christ. As history has progressed, so has God's revelation of himself and his saving work. Consider Galatians 3:7-9, *Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

Hebrews, Chapter 11 recounts a long history of those who believed and waited for God's promise in faith. The chapter concludes with verses 39 and 40, *These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

What we have recorded in the Bible is the story of God's active work to redeem his creation. From Adam to you and beyond, God is at work redeeming his creation. In Jesus Christ we have the ultimate act of redemption. He stepped into history and as a result the Kingdom of God is made readily available to humankind. We have access to a new kind of life

within his kingdom. The kingdom is not new but because of his life, death and resurrection (continued life) the kingdom is present even now.

Dallas Willard explains the call to “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), “This is a call for us to reconsider how we have been approaching our life, in light of the fact that we now, in the presence of Jesus, have the option of living within the surrounding movements of God’s eternal purposes, of taking our life into his life.”⁸

God will redeem all of creation, everything that was corrupted and lost at the fall. This means that God’s redemptive activity is not for the souls of men alone. It is for the cosmos, the earth, the land and sea, the animal kingdom. It is for art and industry; it is for work and for rest. The New Testament makes this clear.

Speaking about Jesus Christ and his redemptive activity Paul writes, *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over **all creation**. For by him **all things** were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things** were created by him and for him. He is before **all things**, and in him **all things** hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in **everything** he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **and through him to reconcile to himself all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* Colossians 1:15-20

Consider also Ephesians 1:7-9. Paul says that God’s plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in heaven and earth. These “*all things*” will not be destroyed but united in Christ.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:7-9)

And again, consider Paul’s words to the Romans: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* (Romans 8:18-21)

Since the fall, our dominion - the areas of life where we are to express the image of God by being sub-creators and cultivators - includes the work of redemption. This includes people and much more. We act redemptively when we proclaim the gospel to those who do not know Jesus. We also act redemptively when we feed the poor and visit orphans and widows. But there is even more involved in living redemptively than this, we act redemptively when we develop the world around us in ways that express

the nature of God. And we act redemptively when we bring all things in our control under his lordship so as to reflect his character and purpose.

Consider how many ways a judge or a lawyer might act redemptively. By exercising dominion through her work she might act to change laws that are unjust or unmerciful. She might also serve the poor by offering her services pro bono. This is not to say that all Christian lawyers are obligated to serve the poor in this way, this is just one way a person might live redemptively through her work. And of course she will want to explain the gospel to those she works with, her clients, friends, and family.

The world will never perfectly reflect God until the time of the final restoration, when Christ returns and all things are made new. But this does not lessen our responsibility to subdue and rule. Each person is responsible to bring those areas over which he or she has dominion under God's control. We want everything over which we have control to reflect the lordship of Christ. We are to cultivate what is ours to bring him honor and to make life a more fully human experience for those over whom we have dominion. There is an intrinsic value in doing this. But there are also instrumental benefits: As we exercise dominion in the manner that God intended, we honor Him and we build reference points within culture so that people can better understand his character.

This is Kingdom work. Willard writes, "The person of God himself and the action of his will are the organizing principles of his kingdom, but everything that obeys those principles, whether by nature or by choice, is *within* his kingdom."⁹ Living skillfully in God's kingdom means that we must make him Lord of our public experience as well as Lord of our private life.

WAIT A MINUTE! Has Jesus just decreased in some way? In the last few pages we have expanded the gospel to include creation and restoration and we have expanded redemption to include all of creation. Does this in anyway decrease Jesus Christ or diminish his work on the cross? By no means, in fact as the gospel is broadened and redemption is considered in its fullest sense the Cross grows in significance.

The gospel: Why does an expanded view of the gospel that includes creation and restoration make a difference?

By including both creation and restoration in our concept of the gospel we provide the context needed to understand God's purpose and actions in history, within the time and space of the world we live in. The gospel can no longer be "otherworldly" only. It is for this world. This context reveals God's world affirming view of the creation and makes it possible to understand redemption in its fullest sense, that God is redeeming all of creation and has been since the fall of humanity. Without this context, our faith is limited to our personal experience and has little to do with the created order in which we live.

Redemption: How does a broad view of redemption, which takes into account God's redeeming work for *both* humankind and the created order, shape how we live our new lives?

Redemption is only possible through the cross. It is personal but not confined in scope to the individual. Jesus is the firstborn over creation; he is the beginning of the *new creation*.. In Christ, the new creation has already begun. And as we are united to Christ, we too partake in a preliminary and partial (yet real!) way in the new creation. The restoration and renovation of all things is bound up inseparably with Christ, who is the firstborn from the dead and the beginning of the new creation. Christ has ushered in the beginning of the cosmic redemption that we will see consummated fully only on the final day.

A narrow view of redemption focuses only on the human soul and reduces salvation to simply the "forgiveness of sins." This results in a very individualized faith: I am forgiven and so I can go to heaven.

A more biblically faithful, and world affirming view of salvation is the "impartation of life." *Salvation results in new life*. Not simply regeneration, but with it, a whole new way of living. When we are united in Christ's life we are called to live differently in the world today. We live as agents of God on behalf of all creation. God has not given up on his created order. He is not saving us out of a corrupted creation but saving all of creation by restoring spiritual life to humanity. Forgiveness makes salvation possible but it is not the final objective. New life, united with Christ, is.

Taken together, a broadened view of the gospel and a broadened view of redemption reconnects our faith (what we believe) and our works (what we do) by establishing the objective of our salvation as new life and living differently. This is vitally important for how we live in the world around us. Without a broadened view of redemption we have a disembodied faith, one that has little to do with the created order in which we live. When we focus on forgiveness only, we live our lives purely for the future hope of heaven and all else is irrelevant. When we focus on *Christ* as our life, we face a radical re-orientation that calls us to live life as he lived. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard explains:

This runs directly counter to the view of faith as an interior act of mind that secures forgiveness alone and has no necessary connection with the world of action in which normal human existence runs its course. But the New Testament knows nothing of such a purely mental "faith." The faith of the New Testament is a distinctive life force that originates in the impact of God's word upon the soul, as we see in Romans 10:17, and then exercises a determinating influence upon all aspects of our existence, including the body and its social and political environment.¹⁰

Christ is magnified when we broaden our view of the gospel and of redemption:

- When we take a broader view of the gospel we realize that God does not forsake the work of his hand. He hasn't abandoned his creation but had planned from the beginning to redeem his world and the people in it. Christ's life and death are essential to that plan.
- Christ's victory is complete. To accept a partial view of redemption (that only the souls of individuals are being redeemed) means that you must also accept a partial defeat, Christ's death was not sufficient to restore all that was lost by the fall of humankind.
- When redemption is seen in its fullest sense, personal salvation means the impartation of life. This reconnects our faith to the life we live in the world. When Jesus' death overshadows his life we see only part of what he came to do. We recognize the importance of forgiveness but are cut off from the life that allows holy living.
- When Jesus' death overshadows his life we do not give full credence to the life he lived and we are hindered in our ability to understand why that life is important. Willard says that when the cross was mistaken for the whole of the redemptive action of God, then, "Christ's life and teaching were therefore nonessential to the work of redemption and were regarded as just poignant decorations for his cross, since his only saving function was conceived to be that of a blood sacrifice to purchase our forgiveness."¹¹

Redemption Summary Points:

- God's plan of redemption has been progressively revealed.
- The cross grows in significance as our view of the gospel and redemption is expanded.
- God plans to redeem all things in heaven and on earth.
- We act redemptively when, through exercising our dominion we bring people, institutions and culture back under the reign of God.

Chapter 4 - Restoration, *The way things will be*

Read: Revelation 21:1-11

In the final chapter of our story, *Restoration*, all the plot lines in the biblical narrative are resolved. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary explains Revelation 21:1-2 like this:

We have now come to the final revelation given to us in Holy Scripture, a glorious climax to all that God has inspired men to write for the edification of his people throughout the ages. In this passage we move from time into eternity. Sin, death, and all the forces antagonistic to God are now forever put away.

This famous description, the equal of which cannot be found in any other literature of the ancient world, begins with John's stating that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. There are two Greek words translated new in the

New Testament, *neos* and the one used here, *kainos*, suggesting "fresh life rising from the decay and wreck of the old world" (*Swete*). Therefore, this passage does not teach that the heavens and earth are now brought into existence for the first time, but that they possess a new character.

As the Jerusalem of old was called "the Holy City," so is the new Jerusalem so designated; only this time the word truly describes the actual character of the abode of the redeemed. Holiness, the great attribute of God, has been the divinely set goal for God's people from the beginning. It is significant that our eternal abode is called a city, even in the Old Testament (Psalm 48:1,8; Hebrews 11:16).¹²

Through the process of redemption, all things will be brought once and for all back under God's reign. Sin will be done away with and we will live in the new creation as it was meant to become. We will no longer feel the groaning in our souls or in the world around us, and no part of the kingdom will be in rebellion towards God.

Let's look at some of the plot lines in the Bible that are resolved in the final chapter of our story.

1. Redemption is complete and God achieves his goal of holiness for his people.

The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are the climax of God's redeeming work, but not the final conclusion of his redeeming work. This is why the created order still groans and waits and why humankind still struggles with sin and death. God's redemptive activity will not be complete until Christ returns and all things are made new.

Ultimately, the final chapter of our story acknowledges the fact that redemption has taken place, but that it is not yet complete. While on this earth, we experience a tension between the "already" and the "not yet," between what is and what will be.

One example of this tension is sanctification. There is a sense in which we have already been sanctified, are presently being sanctified, and will on one heavenly day, be thoroughly and completely sanctified.

Colossians 3 captures this idea well. In verses 1-3 we are told that we have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ. By virtue of being united with Christ in his death and resurrection, we have *actually* died to sin and have been raised to newness of life (Romans 6:1-10). This isn't to say that we don't sin any longer, but it is to say that a definitive break with sin has occurred. We are no longer slaves to sin, suffering under its oppressive dominion. Sin no longer rules over us. We have a new Master, who enables us to walk in righteousness, whereas before our death to sin, it was impossible for us not to sin. Now, we are able in Christ to walk in obedience. There is a progressive aspect to sanctification, which is present even as we

still struggle with sin. This does not nullify the definitive aspect of sanctification.

Yet in verse 4, we are told that when Christ appears, then we will also appear with him in glory. So though we are *already* raised with Christ, we wait to be glorified. We are *not yet* glorified. Verse 10 gives us a clue of how we should move ahead. Paul tells us to put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. There is the *already*. Even now, we are being renewed. Take note of the phrase, "in the image of our Creator." In whose image were we originally created? Whose image is being renewed in us through redemption? Whose image will we, on one fine day, fully and rightfully reflect?

Look again at how The Wycliffe Bible Commentary describes our eternal state after full restoration has occurred, "Holiness, the great attribute of God, has been the divinely set goal for God's people from the beginning."

2. The brokenness of human relationships will be restored and God will take his longed-for place in the hearts of his people.

Earlier, we looked at how sin and corruption distorted human relationships immediately after the fall. (Genesis 3:9-16) Shame and fear entered Adam's and Eve's relationship with God. Blame replaced trust between Adam and Eve, demonstrating a kind of self-deception as well as a desire to deceive others.

In Revelation 19, God's people are described as his bride. God relates to us not only as king to subject or shepherd to sheep, but as husband to wife. The marriage relationship goes much further than any other relationship that we know. It is legally binding, completely intimate and affects every area of the couple's lives. It is based on trust and love. Both partners are more together than they are alone. There is a corporate element to this relationship as there is one bride made of many people, meaning that our relationships with each other will be healed and fully restored as well.

3. The groaning of creation will cease as it is renewed and restored on that final day. Compare Romans, Chapter 8 with Revelation, Chapter 21.

Romans 8:19-22: For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

Revelation 21:1-2: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary reminds us that "... this passage does not teach that the heavens and earth are now brought into existence for the first time, but that they possess a new character."

4. God's Kingdom has never been in danger, but it has been in rebellion.

At the time of restoration all of the created order will be fully restored under the kingship and rule of Christ. The Kingdom of God will once again be at peace.

Restoration Summary Points:

- In life we experience a tension between what already is and what is not yet. This is because redemption is not yet complete and final restoration has not yet come.
- At the final restoration sin and death will be done away with.
- At restoration we will see creation as it was meant to become.
- The Bible does not teach that the new heavens and earth will be brought into existence for the first time, but that the original heaven and earth will possess a new character.

Conclusion

Our story moves from an undefiled garden to corrupted cities, through redemption to a renewed, holy city. Just as God's original intent for us was holiness, his eternal abode for us is called a holy city. And so our lives and our history progress through the four chapters of the Kingdom Story, which we call the gospel.

Throughout this curriculum we will continue to explore how to use this gospel framework to analyze and interpret both personal and world events. Using *ought*, *is*, *can* and *will*, we can quickly identify which chapter of the gospel we are dealing with, connect the gospel to real issues in the world and know how to engage others in relevant conversations. The project included with this article will help you use the framework to analyze your vocation or work.

The Kingdom Story

¹ Christianity Today, *Os Guinness Looks Evil in the Eye*, Interview, christianitytoday.com, posted March 10, 2005.

² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 1998, HarperCollins, San Francisco, page 28.

³ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.

⁴ *The Divine Conspiracy*, pages 21 and 23.

⁵ The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press.

⁶ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft.

⁷ *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 25.

⁸ *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 15.

⁹ *The Divine Conspiracy*, p. 25.

¹⁰ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, paperback, 1991, HarperCollins, San Francisco, p. 41.

¹¹ *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, p. 36.

¹² The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press.