

Gospel Continuity: The God of Mission

6-18-17

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“What story are you telling with your life? Is your faith ‘circumstantial’? Would you say you spend more time attempting to fit God into your story, or finding your place in his?”

“How would you answer the proposed questions?”

“Who are you?”

“Where are you?”

“Why are you here?”

“What happened?”

“What will happen?”

“In your job, in your marriage, in your relationships... how are you assessing what’s glorious ; what matters? Are your pursuits proving to be more frustrating or fulfilling? What is getting the best of you? Is it satisfying? Who’s getting what’s left?”

“Where would you recognize that God is already at work in your world. Where is there movement? How might you simply get into that rhythm and join God in what he is doing?”

“Where, and to whom, do you find yourself being faithfully present, intentionally and thoughtfully engaged, and stubbornly hopeful?”

Teaching Notes...

The Story says that the world functions best when humans are in right relationship with God and each other, and are lovingly ruling over (managing; stewarding) all that is rightfully his... but has been entrusted to us.

When we abuse our rule, the inevitable result is chaos and disorder. All of creation suffers when we abdicate our role; creation agonizes over our inhumanity.

So, when we ask about how God desires to rule/run the world, now the Kingdom has come (been made present and available) and now that Jesus is King, we should expect that it would involve a return to his original intentions: the collaboration of those committed to him and his lovingly-restorative purposes as **“identified with”** the world, but not **“identified by”** the world (*“in the world, but not of it”*, as Jesus would say. John 17)

We are convinced that the Story is all about “mission”: God’s love for all that he has created, his relentless determination to lovingly restore order, and his irrevocable commitment to partner with humanity in the process.

If we are ‘constructing’ our stories circumstantially, then life gets reduced to this random and often chaotic series of events. The story of God located within the Bible answers certain questions:

“Who are you?” God’s unique image-bearing creation. *“Icons”*... those who serve to represent the rule of the King in every corner of the earth. Those upon whom value and worth have been conferred, not acquired.

“Where are you?” In a place perfectly suited for “flourishing”. A place designed for “relationship” and “functionality” (wisdom), yet a place that’s obviously not what it was meant to be.

“Why are you here?” Blessing. By definition, the *“good that someone has declared”*, which is the *“reason for everything”*. To experience and express the tangible goodness of God through vital union with him, through selfless interaction with each other, and meaningful and loving care (stewardship) of all of God’s good creation. In a word, “shalom”: a place where everything relates properly and functions well.

“What happened?” Humanity called into the question the goodness and the good intentions of God which has had devastating effects on all of creation. It sent us all in the wrong direction: away from God and at odds with one another.

“What will happen?” God has promised that he will address all of the disorder and ruin inflicted upon his good creation, and will one day restore creation to all that it is ‘groaning’ to be (Romans 8); all that it was meant to be.

All of this is realized in the context of Epics and Epochs.

Epics: larger-than-life stories which stimulate our imaginative spirit: where justice wins out over injustice, where good conquers evil, where purpose and meaning arise from the chaos. Imagination is what is required if we are to embrace the gospel in its most robust form; to believe in its possibilities, even in the face of our present realities.

Epochs: seasons or eras (times) in which our epic stories are being told and incarnated.

Every week for the past (27) years, I have stared into the faces of people who are *“groaning”* (Romans 8). As I listen to their stories, it seems that there are those who are either realizing, **“the life they always imagined”** (living the dream), or those who **“could never have imagined such a life”** (would have never dreamt that this kind of life).

As I have suggested on a number of occasions, what they desire, even if they would never use such terminology to describe their assessments, is **“glory”** and **“righteousness”**.

“glory”- (Hebrew ‘kabod’) *‘weight, substance, honor, significance, splendor, reputation, recognition, reverence, richness’*.

“righteousness”- [variety of meanings, given the context] *‘innocent’, ‘right’, ‘ethical in character’, ‘conforming to a standard’, ‘just’*.

Everything that God does, he does for his own glory... which is for our good!

This unique God, when asked to introduce himself to Moses, in (25) words or less, responds this way: “Yahweh! The LORD! [*Jehovah*; the self-existent one]. The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected--- even children in the third and fourth generations” [Exodus 33]

It was to be this glory of God that lent perspective to our lives; to cause us to say, as the Psalmist, “*What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?*” (Psalm 8). It was to be this glory to which we were to defer in all matters of life and meaning and direction. It was meant to ‘orient us’; to ‘get the best’ of us.

There is a direct link between what we glory in and the rightly-ordered life.

We have a glory problem: we are mistaken about what’s “real” (true) so we end up assigning value to the wrong things, which produces a great deal of frustration and fatigue.

We have a righteousness problem: our lives aren’t right because we’ve ordered them around things which can never produce the significance that we desire.

Mission: characterizes all that God is up to in his world and all that he calls us to as collaborative partners.

Captured most succinctly in this statement by Jesus to his newly enlivened followers: “*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you...*” John 20

“*missio-dei*”: a Latin phrase which originally meant, “*the sending God*”. It was used to describe both God’s reconciling (“*to bring back to a former state of harmony*”) work in his world. Putting things back where they belong.

In this movement, God is both the subject and the verb.

We have the Father sending the Son, the Son sending the Spirit, and the Son and Spirit sending the followers of Jesus. There is, in this exchange, a “*sending impulse*”. He does not simply ‘have’ a mission, but a missional impulse. It is his very nature to “seek” and to “save” (Luke 15).

God sends his Spirit so that Jesus can continue to be with us, and that we can go and be Jesus with others.

It is anticipated that people will now see (be with) Jesus whether in Peter, or Paul, _____. Same life, different hair color. Same love and service, different facial expressions.

God’s mission is the narrative offered between the dilemma of creation in Genesis 3 and the end of the dilemma in the new creation of Revelation 22.

There are (4) unique chapters in the Bible: Genesis 1-2 [what the world was like before sin] and Revelation 21-22 [what the world will be like after judgment: the decisive ‘no’ to all that distorts and is ruinous and the decisive ‘yes’ to all that order and functionality]. They are unique in that...

- ... there is sin-graffiti distorting God’s creative work. It was all ‘good’,
- ... darkness is overwhelmed with light,
- ... there is no temple. God is, once more, “at home” with his people.

It says that none of these were meant to be ‘normative’ conditions for humanity. We were never meant to experience disorder, darkness, or distance.

We as Christians will always be identified by how well we function in the interlude. The dynamic tension between the “already” and the “not yet”.

There is, in this activity, a “**centrifugal**” (away from the center) and “**centripetal**” (toward the center) movement. As we move toward the ‘center’ (heart), we are naturally compelled outward.

If you are a recipient of the gospel--- a participant in the life of Christ and an adherent of his ways--- you are, unequivocally, a “sent” one. Nowhere in the Story are you encouraged or permitted to develop a ‘personal relationship’ with Jesus, independent of others who love and identify with him, or others who could benefit from the message.