

**“This Is Life”**: Life of the Ages  
11.11.18  
1 John 5:11-21



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

*“What do you think about when you heard the word, ‘gospel’? How would you define/describe it to another?”*

*“In your own formation, was the gospel primarily about personal salvation or was it more collective in its scope?”*

*“How do you think that the gospel shows up in stories like Adam and Eve hiding from God in the garden? Abram and Sarai being promised a child? The story of the wayward son (Luke 15)?”*

*“Why is an approach to the gospel which addresses our own personal sins, but fails to encourage or empower us to experience real-life-transformation simply not a robust gospel?”*

*“What are the limits to a gospel that only addresses life after death? What are the limits of a gospel which only speaks to our present reality without hope for something new... something better?”*

*“What claims is the gospel making on your life, currently? How does it seem to be interrupting the status-quo [challenging your version of reality and calling into question who or what you are trusting for life? What response is the gospel presently evoking in you?”*

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### **Teaching Notes...**

I said at the outset of these considerations...

**In order for this series of reflections to become ‘transformative’, you have to be willing to consider the possibility that your current approach to life might actually be limiting your possibilities, and you must be unwilling to settle for anything less than life with an eternal quality to it.**

John has consistently returned to a number of questions and themes:

*“When does life begin? Are there signs of life? What’s love got to do with it? How are others experiencing Jesus as a result of my experience of Jesus?”*

John seems to suggest that there is life “as we know it” and a life as we should be experiencing it. He suggests that there’s the kind of heart-beating, cell-dividing life that all **human being** experience and there’s a **way of being human** that many fail to realize. He called it “eternal life” (*Gr. zoe*) *the absolute fullness of life, real and genuine, belonging uniquely to God that he shares with us.*

The Bible is not so much a set of disconnected stories, each including a tidy set of principles for how to conduct yourself. It is not simply a “*Best of*” God. It is a ‘meta-narrative’--- a ‘single story’ which encompasses all the other stories.

When we factor out God, we are diminished and our souls get smaller. Instead of a legacy where we are the unique, image-bearing reflection of a good, Creator-God, we become simply the product of our own limited imaginations. We get reduced to biology-- - **sperm and eggs**--- which doesn’t make for as good a story! It’s not as “glorious”.

Admittedly, the biblical narrative is often like a foreign film we are watching, with subtitles, and we have just turned it on when the lead characters are either laughing or weeping in response to what is a pivotal moment in the plot. We can’t “restart”.

### **The gospel is God’s way of explaining the story.**

In ancient Roman literature, the equivalent was a Greek term which meant “a good announcement,”; “good news”. In the vernacular, it would be best translated, “*Breaking News*”.

The gospel tells us why we are dissatisfied, why we struggle with relationships, why we have war and racism and sex-trafficking. The gospel shows the rugged determination of God to recover and restore all that was lost due to deception and defiance.

It’s the solidarity that we all enjoy: the wide-ranging consequences of sin in our lives and our inestimable worth.

If the gospel is “good news”, then it assumes “bad news”. Some problem that needs resolution. The problem: “sin”. “Original sin” (human depravity): it’s the one completely verifiable doctrine. Sin is offered in the biblical narrative as “systemic”. It is “communal”.

It affects all of our relationships. Who we are in light of who we were meant to be (Romans 3:23).

It's not simply a "code-violation" that demands some form of punitive action, but a relational breach that requires a reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-20).

The solution must involve some means of restoring the relationship. The challenge is, we live in a "solutions-oriented" culture. Our posture is to gather together a "consortium", review the data and potential fatal flaws, and provide an upgrade.

Paul offers (2) distinct approaches in Romans 12: **Conformity and Transformation**. Conformity is humanity's attempt at making broken/dysfunctional people "better". Transformation is about making "dead people alive"; "old things, new".

**Conformity: Based on human effort. Fueled by guilt. Producing paranoia.**

**Transformation: Based on grace (divine intervention). Compelled by love. Resulting in joy.**

### **The gospel is both an announcement and an invitation.**

The gospel is the announcement that God has acted in Jesus to restore humans back to their humanness: to lovingly reconnect them with God and each other and to empower them to resume their positions as stewards of all that he calls good.

By the time we get to the resurrected Jesus, we're less afraid of God. Before the "revealing (revelation)", we had no reason to trust God. We had no inclination to love him.

No one in the ancient world even spoke that way. You attempted to decipher the gods; you purposed to appease the gods; you wanted the gods 'on your side, but no one ever talked about "loving" the gods.

By his own account, and the conclusions of others, Jesus was the "revealer" of God. "*If you have seen me...*" He is God 'with us', speaking, acting, eating, sleeping, playing, healing, saving. With the incarnation, Jesus reveals, most fully, both who God is (what he loves, what brings him pleasure, etc.) and who we were meant to be.

The gospel always interrupts the status-quo and demands a response. So, Jesus uses words like "**repent**", "**believe**", "**follow**".

**Repent:** go beyond the mind you have; consider another way. **Believe:** re-order your life trust another way. The word **follow** actively positions us on this "way".

**Whatever we want to say about the “gospel”, it has to be tethered to the Story and John sees the Story as fundamentally God’s passionate response to the devastation of all that he loves, in the person of Jesus.**

“**Salvation**” is the most comprehensive word that brings together all the aspects of God’s loving intentions and movements. It is not only a way of describing the self-initiated movement of God to rescue us, but a way of describing the consequence of right beliefs and a lifestyle which allows you to experience its benefits--- its blessing.

**The gospel...**

... is always connecting the deeper longings of our heart to our desire for God.

... refuses to offer people some “*moral regimen*” which allows them to applaud their good behavior but ignore their disorderly heart.

... first, disqualifies us, so that we are actually able to receive the message of our belovedness (John 15:16).

This is paradoxical, but it’s God’s way of eliminating any means of establishing our own value and worth and significance, apart from him.

... links our restoration to the pursuit of another’s healing and wholeness. We notice the pain of the world and are willing to meet people there rather than attempt to avoid/ignore them.

**Transformation is the process by which God turns our love around; re-directs our hearts and affections so that they are now pursuing the right things.**

The gospel says, “*You can’t follow Jesus and stay the same*” (Mathew 18:3).

**“How do you hear that? Is it a threat? An ultimatum? A hopeful invitation?”**

Transformation seeks to ‘displace’ us as the center of our own worlds; seeing ourselves as our own point-of-reference. This process our present faith is adequate to allow you to experience the vision you have of your life, presently.

► Because God has revealed himself as Creator, we can go to him to find out the truth about who we really are and what life was really meant to be. He can be counted on to freely make available all that is at his disposal in order to meet our needs. We could come to know that our God was not fickle, but his heart could be moved.

► We can come to know that this God does not “*love us if*”..., he just loves us. We can trust that he responds to us because he desires us (relationship with us) and not out of obligation.

► We could discover that even when the damage we experience in life is ‘self-inflicted’, our God is compassionate and forgiving. He is willing to come to our rescue at the risk of his own personal comfort and safety because he thinks we’re worth it.

▶ We could finally be convinced that the world functions best when humans are in right relationship with God, with each other and are lovingly ruling over (managing; stewarding) all that is rightfully his... all that he has entrusted to us.

▶ We, having ourselves been transformed, could become the agents of transformation: working, eating, loving, recreating, forgiving, serving, sacrificing... giving people a little taste of what's to come; making resurrection happen wherever we go!

● The biographers are all suggesting that what we are watching, in often encrypted ways, is God himself, with skin, meeting us at the place of our pain and ruin and suffering and actually taking it upon himself so that we might experience the life for which we were created.

Paul calls the gospel, "*the power of God for salvation...*" Romans 1:16. It is the limitless capacity of God to radically alter the human person by freeing them to live in another story: where forgiveness trumps our defiance, where reconciliation interrupts fractured relationships, where freedom conquers addiction, where grace overcomes condemnation.