

Session Five: The Story of the Gospel - Restoration

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Preacher: Bryan Hart

[0 : 00] Hi, welcome back to Gospel Growth. Again, I'm Brian Hart.

We have been talking about the big story of the gospel, and we traced it through the major acts that we see in the Bible.

There's the act one, the story of creation, how God makes everything and he makes it good and with purpose and with meaning. And really as a gift of grace and love. But then the second act is something called the fall, which is the word we use to describe the consequences of human rebellion and the turning away from God.

And it's not just something Adam and Eve did once. It's something that we do every day. And then the third act is the story of redemption, which is really the bulk of the Bible. It's God fixing what we're breaking with our lives and our sin and our rebelliousness.

And we saw how that act of redemption culminated in the life of Jesus and specifically in his death and then in his resurrection and how he has ascended to the Father and has given us the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 08] And he's made a way for us to be reconciled to God and has a plan to fix everything. But right now, so we're on the other side of the crucifixion and the other side of the resurrection.

Yet we look around and everything isn't yet fixed. Things are still broken and messed up. And it's easy to wonder what's wrong if Jesus is reigning on his throne and if we have the Holy Spirit, why are things still so wrong?

Well, the answer to that is that Jesus has started his work of fixing and redeeming the universe, but it has not yet been finished. We're still awaiting the final act of the redemptive story, the final act of the big gospel story.

And that act is called restoration or it's also called by some the consummation of all things or perhaps even glorification. You see, redemption has been accomplished, but the story is not yet finished.

This final act is yet to happen, yet to come. And so our ultimate hope is still forward looking. We actually live between act three and act four.

[2 : 17] We live in between redemption and final restoration. There's an amazing passage about this in Romans 8. Paul says, for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved.

Paul says that all of creation is groaning. And he gives the example of childbirth, which is a kind of a crazy metaphor to use. But Paul says it's sort of like the perfect world that we're all dreaming of and waiting for is like a baby.

And it's coming out. And all of the broken, weary creation is groaning and screaming in anguish, trying to push it out. We know the baby is coming.

[3 : 45] We know it, but it's not yet here. But when it comes, what an amazing day it's going to be. It's going to make all of the pain worth it. Paul says the glory that's going to be revealed to us is going to make the sufferings of this present moment seem like small stuff.

Now, that's easy to say. Some of us are going through big stuff. There's all kinds of pain that people experience. Some of you watching right now, I'm sure, are going through terrible things.

Cancer, illness, miscarriage, death of friends and loved ones. Paul says these things are painful. And so we groan because of them while we wait for the redemption of our bodies.

But it is not a futile hope like, I sure hope it happens. No, Paul says in this hope we were saved. The resurrection is the hope that we're saved into.

Christ's resurrection body overturning the greatest tragedy of them all shows us that our future is in him. We're actually going to get new bodies.

[4 : 55] The dead will rise. The blind will see. The lame will dance. If the brutal crucifixion could give way to glory, then all our sufferings certainly can give way to glory.

Just like that woman in labor. The pain will end. And one day there will be nothing but joy. And not just for us. This will actually be true for all of creation.

As one theologian put it, The total work of Christ is nothing less than to redeem this entire creation from the effects of sin. That purpose will not be accomplished until God has ushered in the new earth.

Until paradise lost has become paradise regained. We need to realize that God will not be satisfied until the entire universe has been purged from all the results of man's fall.

So as Christians, we're living in the present age, but we're waiting for the future age, the one to come. We live in the present kingdom, waiting for the future kingdom. We live in what some theologians have called the already and the not yet.

[5 : 58] We are already redeemed, but not yet fully renewed. We are already saved, but not yet fully healed and restored. Christ has conquered.

He is our king. But when we look around the world, We see that there are still many things that need to come under his lordship and his rule and his reign. And that's because his reign is not yet complete.

That's why Jesus taught us to pray. Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Then the theologian and scholar N.T. Wright says this, Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

That remains one of the most powerful and revolutionary sentences we can ever say. As I see it, the prayer was powerfully answered at the first Easter and will finally be answered fully when heaven and earth are joined in the new Jerusalem.

We have seen the beginning of the kingdom breaking in at the first Easter at Jesus's resurrection. Things have permanently changed because of that, but they aren't finished changing.

[7 : 01] The story isn't over. A great picture for this would be, you know, the time between election and inauguration. When a president wins an election, there's a period between which he is declared the winner or the victor.

There's a period of time between that moment and when he actually takes office. And that is kind of an in-between time. And that's maybe a way of understanding the moment that we're in right now.

Another way of understanding this would actually be one from Romans where Paul was talking about we are awaiting our adoption. I know of families who adopted children from overseas. There's a moment in which the adoption is approved and everything has gone through, but the child still has to wait for his or her new parents to make the trip and fetch them and retrieve them and take them home.

There's a bit of an in-between. We've been chosen by God. No one can undo what he's done, but we're waiting for him to return for that moment where we're actually going to get to live in the fullness of our adoption.

And so we're meant to live right now in light of the day that's coming. It wouldn't make sense for that adopted child to think that because their new parents hadn't arrived yet that, oh, that they're all on their own.

[8 : 13] No, that child should live in great hope. You've got parents who are coming for you and it should affect how they live and it should affect their temperament. It should affect all kinds of things.

The same is true for us. We live best when we know where we're at in the story and when we know our role in the story. We're people of the resurrection proclaiming the power of the coming king and his ambassadors.

We have hope that goes beyond the brokenness of this world. In fact, it doesn't actually matter how bad things get out there. It can't take away our hope for what's coming. We know it's coming.

The resurrection of Jesus has proved what God is capable of. And so we live for that day. When we see areas of brokenness, we actually try to bring in the presence of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to be the hands and feet of God in the world until he comes so that people can get a sense of what's coming.

So we can give people little foretastes of this future world that's coming. And that day is coming as surely as the sun will rise. In Revelation 21, John has a vision and he says this.

[9 : 23] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. Can you imagine there will be a day where crying and pain and loss and sorrow, those will all be called the former things.

And he who is seated on the throne said, Behold, I'm making all things new. God will make this world his home again, just as he did in Genesis 1 with the garden so long ago.

The curse will be gone and forgotten. There will be no more hiding from God behind bushes. There will be no more shame. There will be no more blaming others. There will be no more violence. We will find our fullest and truest joy in God as we have.

[10 : 32] That was the way it was meant to be from the beginning. In fact, Revelation really does suggest he's going to take us back to something that will be like the garden, but even better. Revelation 22 says, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, brightest crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city.

Also on either side of the river, the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We live in light of that story. We live in light of the renewal of all things. That day that's coming that John, he just had a glimpse of it, but that's what we're waiting for.

It's what we were made for. Literally, that's what we're made for. The undoing of the curse. It's everything sad coming untrue. It's being taken back into something like the garden, with perfect, harmonious relationships with not only God, but also with one another and with all of creation.

[11 : 47] You know, in the cartoons, when people picture heaven, it's oftentimes a very sanitized, ethereal, strange place. People with halos and harps.

In fact, there's a far side cartoon in which someone's floating around in heaven, and they say, I wish I brought a magazine. I wish I brought a magazine. Why? Because the place is boring. And I remember as a kid thinking, I hope I have a really fun life, because when I go to heaven, it sounds like there won't be any fun up there.

We're all just going to be sitting around like one prolonged church service. I didn't really enjoy church as a kid. So everything about it just seemed boring. Man, that is not what the Bible shows us.

The Bible doesn't say anything that we're going to be like floating around as spirits. The Bible says the world's going to be remade. You're going to be put back into a body with arms and legs.

You're going to be able to run and do all the kinds of things that you used to do. You're going to be able to hug, and you're getting everything back. Everything. You're not just getting your body back. You're getting your friends back. You're getting your family back, your loved ones, and you're going to live in a real embodied world with them.

[12 : 52] Where you're going to do things that you love to do now, you're going to get to sing and dance and laugh and play and create and build and love. And all the things that you like to do. You know, for me, this has become such an important part of my daily experience to realize that when I don't get to do the things that I want to do, when I have to say no to things because I'm living for Jesus, and I have dreams that go unfulfilled, I have to remind myself one day all these dreams are getting fulfilled.

You know, like right now, my wife and I, we love to travel. We don't get to travel as much as we like, but one day we will. We actually will spend an infinite eternity exploring God's good creation.

I mean, what do you love to do? You know, one day you're going to get to do that, all those things and more. Do you love to surf? I don't know if there will be surfing in heaven, but if there isn't, it will only be because there's something better.

I was describing this to a group of children one time, and I said, I think that heaven will be something like this. Imagine getting to build something like building with Legos, but building with Legos with God.

I don't know that we're going to be playing with Legos in heaven, but I think it's going to be better. You're going to get everything you've ever wanted, and everything that you may even feel like you've lost, you're going to get it all back.

[14 : 11] Ray Ortlund says this, Revelation 21 shows us how big the gospel really is. It's as big as the universe. Redemption is as big as creation. How can it be otherwise? The Bible story starts here. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and it ends here.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. That is a story of redemption. It's about you and me and the world and Jesus and him dying on the cross for our sins so we can be with him.

And yet, in some sense, it's about even more. It's a story of a good creator who created a perfect world, and it went wrong, but he stepped in and was willing to do whatever it took, to include the giving of his own life, to restore it back to what it was supposed to have been from the very beginning.

Is this a story that you're a part of? Is this your story? And if you're a Christian, does this future restoration, are you living for this? Or is it just like a footnote?

It's like something in the back of your head that you know will one day happen, and you're trying to just have as much fun until Jesus returns and puts an end to this life. The Bible says we're supposed to eagerly wait for that day.

[15 : 19] Do you daydream about it? Do you long for it? Otherwise, how do you handle disappointment? What do you do when life doesn't go the way that you want it to? Do you remember every day that one day, you're going to get everything you've ever wanted?

You're going to get it all, and you're going to get it with the presence of the living God. If you're a Christian, this is your story. The final renewal of the world is coming, even as the world around us groans in childbirth.

And until then, we're to be the people in this age who pray, Father, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. As you gather in groups, I encourage you to think about this and be honest.

Do you long for this day? Do you eagerly wait for it? Do you have an imagination that's caught up with what is coming for you? And if you don't, why don't you? What would it be like for you to long for that day even more?