

“Long Story Short - New Creation”

Scripture: Galatians 4:4-6; Romans 8:19-23; Revelation 21:3-5a

Graphics: puzzle, heaven, New Creation

Big Truth: The Bible tell us the grand story of God’s redemptive plan for the world. Though Creation, the Fall, Israel, Jesus, the Church, and New Creation, the Bible is sufficient for our salvation. Every person who comes to Panama UMC is called to love God, self, others and the entire creation because God created the universe complete, purposeful, from and for community.

Focus phrase: We live in the land between Jesus’ first and second coming, with peaceful anticipation and Kingdom urgency.

1. Introduction

- A. I heard a report on the radio this week that online streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime have significantly increased their customer base during this COVID-19. More than 30% households added a streaming service in the last 90 days.
- B. Binge-watching shows on those streaming services has become almost a national pastime! If you’ve done any binge-watching, or have favorite shows you watch, you know that you have to wait until the **last episode of the season** for the storyline in that season to be completed...and THEN you have to wait until the **end of the series** for the WHOLE STORY to be wrapped up. The ending REALLY MATTERS!
- C. We’re in the **final episode** of the **final season** in our six-part look at the grand story of the most purchased and most read book of all of human history, **the Bible**. And the ending really matters!
- D. Let me quickly review our journey through the Bible’s narrative.
 - i. We began with **Creation**. The eternal Triune God of the Universe overflows love and creates a perfect and purposeful world in which plants, animals, oceans, stars, and everything else exists! And, in a grand climax to the Creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, God made humans...first Adam and then Eve. It’s been said that, “God split the first Adam and made Eve!” I like that!
 - ii. But the tension in the story arises when Adam and Eve choose their own way in The Fall. God-created animals to live by instinct - birds fly and fish swim - but **only humans** made in the image of God have the capacity to **choose**. The innocence and intimacy they were meant to enjoy with God, themselves, each other, and the creation was **damaged** by their selfish, foolish choice and pride. We learned in that episode of the drama that **their fall is our falling**. Their story is our story, too. We are Adam and Eve.

- iii. But God didn't give up on his creation. God's strategy to fix the problem of the fall was to establish a people, **Israel**, whom he would bless and who would be a blessing to the world. We spent time with Abraham and Sarah, who were given this amazing assignment. God gave his people a **destiny**. - reminding them over and over again that He made them to be blessed and be a blessing. But they and we choose **disobedience**. The fall keeps happening. But God doesn't give up on them or us. Full of grace and mercy, God moves in mighty acts of **deliverance** for his people. Over and over again, this is the story of God's imperfect people: destiny, disobedience and deliverance. One of the greatest gifts of the Old Testament is that Israel's story is our story too!
- iv. Throughout the 39 books of the Old Testament, God promises that a Rescuer called "Messiah" would come and fix what sin had done to God's good creation. Part 4 of the biblical narrative is **Jesus**. We call this Jesus' first advent or **first coming**. The four biographies of Jesus, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe Jesus' **scandalous birth, challenging ministry, offensive death and restoring resurrection**. Paul writes about the first coming of Jesus in Galatians 4:4-6 (NRSV): *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"*
- v. When the time was just right, God moved into our zip code. Planet earth was invaded by God but he didn't come as a king born to royalty in a palace in Jerusalem, but as a baby born to an unwed mother and carpenter father in a manger in Bethlehem. Jesus was a **different kind of king** who began a **love revolution** that ultimately cost him his life. Religion and government conspired together to silence the rebel by killing him as a criminal's cross on a garbage heap. But Jesus would not and could not stay dead. On the third day, our glorious king rose from the dead defeating sin, death, hell and grave. The movement of Jesus had begun.
- vi. Even then, the story was not over. Jesus didn't come only to die and rise from the dead, but return to heaven and send the Holy Spirit to establish a people. You see, God's strategy for fixing the sin problem on planet earth was the same as it was way back with Abraham and Sarah; **to raise up a people**. Thus, Jesus birthed a movement of people, the Church, **the ekklesia of God**, the gathered people of God, who would live **grounded in their identity and soaring in their influence**. Yet, we have to acknowledge that the people of God are much like the people of Israel. Sadly, we get stuck in the destiny, disobedience and deliverance cycle even with the gift of the Holy Spirit and Christian community.

- vii. But God isn't DONE yet! Jesus told us, and we read throughout the New Testament that God's not done with us! We finally get to the **last episode in the last season**. This episode is called **New Creation**. If you read the four biographies of Jesus, the biography of the Holy Spirit at work in and through the people of God (the Book of Acts), the 22 letters written to churches and individuals and then the last book of the Bible, especially read the Book of Revelation, you see that **God is still not done with this planet**.
- viii. We'll take a few minutes to unpack what this New Creation will be and then ask, "As Pentecost people who follow Jesus, what impact does this New Creation have on us now?" Maybe more importantly, "How do we live in this land "in-between" in full view of the New Creation coming?"

E. Let's pray and find out... **PRAY!**

2. Scripture

- A. In this last episode of the last season in God's long story of the Bible, there's a promise of **remaking and restoring the Creation**. Creation began in a garden and the New Creation ends in a garden city. In the book of Revelation, John described what he saw and heard as he stood on tippy toe and in the Spirit and peered into the future. The promise of Revelation 21:3-5a (NRSV): *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'"*
- B. This, my friends, is the **end of the story**. It's not God destroying the earth. God redeems it. He fixes it! He restores it! The end times is not about God burning up the place. He fixes it. Puts it back to its factory settings. He makes all things new. Our relationship with God, ourselves, each other, and the creation will be fixed once and for all. No more tears or sorrow, or death or crying or pain.
- C. It's not us sitting on clouds up in the sky twiddling our thumbs for eternity. It's our world - right here - being made fully new, everything in its place, every person focused on Jesus, and so much that we can't know until Jesus gets here.
- D. Right now, in our nation and world, this news - this vision - is the MOST hope we could EVER have...hope for a world that isn't broken any longer!
- E. It's coming...but is not yet here! For those of us who follow Jesus now, though, we live "in between" Jesus' first coming and his second coming. He promised to come back...but we aren't there yet. This is what theologians call **"the already and not yet"** nature of God's kingdom. It's "already" come in

Jesus the first time at his birth, but it's "not yet" God's fully realized Kingdom until Jesus comes back a second time.

3. Application

- A. The Apostle Paul gives us a vision of this land in between in Romans 8:19-2:
"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."
- B. So, in full view of the New Creation, in this land in-between Jesus' first and second, as Holy-Spirit-filled people who are following Jesus and making disciples for Jesus, the Bible calls us to do two things:
- C. First, we are called to live in **peaceful anticipation** of the New Creation.
- i. The Bible's sense of peace is not what we might think as we look at the world around us. Peace is not just the absence of violence. Peace is not just the absence of conflict.
 - ii. The Hebrew word for peace is **shalom**. The shalom of God is totality or completeness, success, fulfillment, wholeness, harmony, security and well being. It's being in right relationship with God and with others, because of God's love and grace. As we live now, we are called to be people of shalom.
 - iii. Anticipation is probably more familiar to us. When we wait for something great, like Christmas morning or a trip to the beach, we anticipate it. We're ready for it.
 - iv. Ultimately, the greatest thing to ever happen in all of creation is going to happen when Jesus returns...God will make all things new.
 - v. For followers of Jesus, who are in right relationship with God because of faith in Jesus, **peaceful anticipation** of this New Creation gives us confidence, humility, and hopeful joy! We KNOW the end of the story, and that causes us to filled with JOY now!
 - vi. And it's all based in Romans 8:11 which gives us THIS promise, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."

- vii. The New Creation will be AWESOME! Our bodies will be resurrected and we will be with Jesus. And we wait in peaceful anticipation for God's timing...ready for God to make his move.
- D. But there's also a sense that this time between, as we wait, calls us to live a life of **Kingdom urgency**.
- i. Our peaceful anticipation must lead to Kingdom urgency for the mission of Jesus through the Church. We aren't saved just so that we can enjoy the ride as we wait for Jesus, however confident and joyful we are.
 - ii. Jesus is pretty clear in his parables that the Kingdom of God is coming... and we have work to do now to pull as many people into the Kingdom with us as we possibly can in the time we have left.
 - iii. Jesus is also pretty clear that he expects his followers who have received the gift of God's unearned, undeserved grace to **multiply that grace** by giving it away to others through declaration and demonstration...through word and deed.
 - iv. Urgency comes when we think about some of those around us not making it to the New Creation joy with us and with Jesus!
 - v. Peter, one of the disciples who heard Jesus teaching this parable, decades later as an old man wrote about the second coming of Jesus. He doesn't focus on the urgency of doing kingdom work while waiting for Jesus return but rather the **kindness and patience of God "in between."** These words are powerful. 2 Peter 3:15a (in the NLT) says: "And remember, our Lord's patience gives people time to be saved."
 - vi. God, in his patience, is delaying his return so that more people can be saved. Remember the "big picture" of the Bible. Way back in the creation story, we learned that human beings were made in God's image and with God's breath. God made us with purpose and destiny to fulfill. So, God withholds his return because he wants more people in his kingdom NOW and FOR-EVER.
 - vii. The New Creation is not just a "sit around on our hands" and moan until Jesus returns. Our job as followers of Jesus is to **make heaven crash on earth now**. We do that by working together now to give every person in our community the opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus...by introducing people to Jesus and relieving suffering in his name...
- E. The New Creation is coming. It'll be AWESOME! We will either see it while we're living, or after we've moved into the spiritual realm, waiting for Jesus to return. We wait with peaceful anticipation and Kingdom urgency.

- F. THAT is the reason the New Creation is spelled out in this book (Bible)...to give us a glimpse - a promise - and moves us to live here now as we prepare to LIVE HERE then.
- G. And THAT is the reason it's the culmination of the story of God to US!

4. Conclusion

- A. I'm going to miss the series. I, for one, have learned a lot from my study and from all of you during our Bible studies. We have one more chance to join in on that discussion this Weds and Thurs.
- B. As we wrap this up, let's let Long Story Short author Joshua McNall have the last say: "The story starts in a garden. In the beginning, a pair of happy honeymooners are asked to care for God's good world. They are asked to do something with it - something constructive. But they fail. The Story starts with a garden. But the story ends with a city. Even so, it is not the kind of city in which smog and concrete cover green and growing things. It's a garden city, with rivers and minerals, light and leaves - and the tree of life. The story ends with God bringing order to chaos and building with his hands what we could not build alone. The story ends with a glimmering city coming down to rest on the earthen soil of a once-broken world. The plot line ends with a promise that in spite of all our faults and failures - our youthful indiscretions and our aged priggishness - the Creator God is making everything new. Revelation tells us this, and it ends with an announcement: 'Behold, our Lord is coming soon!' (Revelation 22:12). He is coming, and new creation is coming with him." (p172)
- C. Church, imagine with me a world in which everything will be made right. A world in which Jesus is the center of every adventure...every task we do.
- D. Imagine with me a world where we live out a true life of worship and community in Jesus. Where we are open and obedient to the Holy Spirit of Jesus... serving and sharing because Jesus is in our midst and we in His.
- E. Our current world groans in anticipation of that...sometimes violently with protests and riots...sometimes quietly with no words at all.
- F. Jesus is coming back! This Creation WILL be made New!
- G. Live in peaceful anticipation with hope! Live with Kingdom urgency in boldness as Pentecost people, on fire with the Holy Spirit.
- H. As WE change, the world changes. As the world changes, we get one step closer to the Day when Jesus comes and we escort him back to earth to live an everlasting life in Him.

- I. The long story of the Bible isn't so long when we look at the picture on the box of the puzzle. And every piece - every person in the Bible, every verse - is God's promise to US that the Day is coming.
- J. This is God's story. This is OUR story. Your story and mine.
- K. Let's DO THIS! Live for Jesus!
- L. Let's pray! LORD'S PRAYER