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## AN EMMAUS CONVERSATION

Luke 24:13-27

Would you open your bibles to Luke 24? I am excited to be with you today. My family and I have been members of Riverside for several years now, and it's wonderful that as One Hope we get to partner with Riverside. I am hoping that this morning is less eventful than the last time I preached. The last time I preached here there was an explosion in the back, behind the stage. The smell of gas surrounded me, so I tried to explain God's word while wondering if we were all going to go up in flames. Adam said that while I was preaching he went in the back and that he walked in the door and the room was filled with smoke. He realized he was either in the presence of the Shekinah or we were all going up in flames – one of the two. But – so far, so good, right? We are already starting off strong.

Luke 24:13. We are going to read from verse 13 through verse 27. The point of emphasis is going to be on the last few verses, but I want you to have the context. The setting is the resurrection of Jesus.

*That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (that's a long walk), and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*

Lord, I pray for us today, because we need your spirit to guide us back into this story. In the busyness of our lives, we

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are losing the thread, sometimes. We are forgetting that we are part of a story that spans millennia, and that you are doing something amazing. We are privatizing our faith. We are turning something into a personal belief system, about how we can be happy and raise healthy kids and go to heaven when we die. Father, what you are doing is so much bigger than that. Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Don't let us be kept from recognizing what you are doing in our world and how, by your spirit, we can join you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

You know, I have had a burden growing in my heart for the last few months about this topic, which is a very bad thing, because it means that I have a seven or eight week sermon series and you know that's not going to happen. We only have a little while here to talk. So I'm going to make a lot of bold claims today, and I'm probably not going to prove them all to you, but if I can raise some questions in your mind, if I can unsettle you just a little bit, if I can move you away from the text so that it comes back into focus a little better, then I am going to be so excited. Then I will turn it over to our pastoral team to finish the game. In other words, I'll stir up trouble then I will walk away.

You know, we read things in the gospels, and honestly, we just pass them by. We see Jesus walk up and curse a fig tree and we think, "That's a little random." We see him go into the temple and he's driving out money changers. What's that all about? He tells these parables. There was this vineyard and the owner wasn't getting the produce from the tenants, and they are wicked tenants and he's going to.....and we are wondering what are we even talking about? "I am the good shepherd. I am going to separate sheep from goats." We think, "Is this just because he's talking to shepherds?"

In my opinion, we read the entire Bible in the same way. This is how it works. We read Genesis and we think, "Okay, this is pretty cool." We get to Exodus and we think, "Okay, I'm still sort of with you." By the time we are at Leviticus, we are kind of lost. Then we pick it back up with Saul (bad), David (good), Solomon (mmm, not sure). And then the kingdom of Israel divides and we are lost again. When we get to the end of the Old Testament we have lost hundreds of years. We have completely lost the thread of the story. Then we are exposed to the four gospels, and the four gospels are interested in having an incredibly provocative conversation with the Prophets, but we don't know the Prophets because they are a little too hard to understand. You know – wheels and flames and people cutting off hair and we don't know what to do.

So then we think, "Alright, I don't really understand the gospels." We read the parable of the unforgiving servant and we understand, "Okay – we should be forgiving." We are losing so much. And we kind of know it. Jesus is telling us to cut off arms and pluck out eyes, so we decide, "Let me just go to Paul. Let me go to Paul because Paul seems pretty safe. He is telling me how I can be saved. I like that. And I'll spice it up with a little Psalms, which is pretty poetry, and a proverb. I get the Proverbs." And that's our bible reading. It's like: Paul, and a little Psalms and a touch of Proverbs. But there is this grand story that we have been invited into and we have kind of lost it. So what

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ends up happening then is that our Christianity gets thinner and thinner and thinner. Then it starts to break.

This year, almost 3.5 million people in the United States will leave the church. Last year, 3.5 million people left the church. The year before that, 3.5 million people left the church. In seven years, we have lost 7% of the church. We lose 1% every year. One percent of Americans just bow out. What's going on? I want to talk about that today.

What is the gospel? I just want to point out some obvious things. Jesus walks with these two disciples for seven miles. He takes a seven mile walk to explain to them the gospel. Here is my question to you: Could you fill up a seven mile walk explaining to someone the gospel? It's a couple hours, right? Let's assume we're not speed walking. This is a long walk. Why would it take the greatest teacher who ever lived two hours to explain the gospel? Why would he need to start with Moses and the Prophets? By the way, in the bible when it says, "And beginning with Moses" it means "beginning with Genesis," because Moses is the author of Genesis. It's not the life of Moses, it's all the way at the beginning. Beginning with the very first chapter of Genesis all the way through Malachi, he explains to these two disciples all of this stuff. Hours of conversation concerning himself, yet I don't think that we think about the gospel that way.

Let me give you another example from Mark 1:14. "Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God..." Ready? He's about to say what the gospel of God is in very tight form. Here it is: "The time is fulfilled..." What does that mean? "The time is fulfilled." That sounds like there was some sort of waiting going on. It sounds like there is a story already happening here. "The kingdom of God is at hand..." -- kingdom. What's going on? I thought you were going to tell me how to go to heaven. "...Repent and believe in the gospel." Again, Luke 24:27: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

Here is what I want to suggest to you. Our gospel is getting thinner. I have two word pictures for you. My wife and I have four kids: 14, 12, 7, and 5, and we are trying to get them to eat healthy food, so we have a negotiation. We have gummy vitamins, and they love them. They will ask for them every day. My wife has fresh steamed broccoli and big green salads. They are excited about the gummy vitamins. We are excited about raw vegetables. They are not so excited about the raw vegetables. They could do without them. They drown them in ranch sauce. We are like, "What are you doing here? Come on."

I'm 40. I was born in 1974, so I think that puts me about in the middle of the group. Some of you think, "Man, he's really young." Others think, "Holy cow, he's old." So that's good. As a kid, I remember the big move for the low fat diet. It was a really big thing, right? "Fat is bad." I remember my youth pastor telling us that fat is bad. He was like Adam. He was a really healthy guy and exercised a lot, great physique. "Fat's bad, fat's bad." As a country, we declared war on fat. Amazing, right? Do you know what happened since then? The obesity rate tripled. Somewhere

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along the way we got something wrong.

What I want to suggest to you is that, as leaders of the Church, as ministers of the gospel, we are trying to figure out how to help people on-ramp into the Church, into the kingdom, into the gospel. We are trying to figure out how to condense something that is really thick and really big. Here's the danger: Sometimes people take that condensed version, they take that gummy vitamin, and they think they can live on it. But they can't. You can't live on that. You are going to have to go actually get some beef and some chicken and some vegetables. You are going to have to eat an actual diet. You can't survive on granola bars, even if they are by SnackWell's, even if they are low fat. You can't live on gummy vitamins. At some point, you have to actually get raw, real food. Our gospel is getting thinner because we keep condensing it.

I'm a fan of the four spiritual laws: God loves you and has a great plan for your life, there is a problem with sin.... I'm a fan of Evangelism Explosion with their two diagnostic questions: If you die today, do you think you would go to heaven? If you stood before God and he says, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" what would you answer? Those are great ways to start. They are terrible ways to finish. If that's where your Christian theology ends, you will have a great deal of trouble surviving.

Is this really the gospel? I want to provoke you with some questions. What did Jesus mean, "...the time is fulfilled?" What time are we talking about? What is fulfilled? That sounds like there has been something we are waiting for. There is some sort of expectation going on. What is the story? What did Jesus mean when he said "the kingdom of God is at hand?" We don't talk a lot about kingdom. Is there supposed to be a kingdom? Did I not get the memo? Do we have a king? Do I live in a monarchy? Why would Jesus need to start with Moses and the Prophets to explain the gospel in a two hour walk?

Our gospel is getting thin at a time of crushing cultural weight. We are becoming a minority perspective not only here in the U.S., but in urban centers around the world. At the very time when our gospel is getting condensed, when we have tried to figure out the leanest sort of gospel that we can present to someone, the easiest to understand, the most formulated, is the very time when social forces are putting crushing weight on it. We need a *much thicker* gospel to withstand the weight that is going to be placed on it; the weight of other religions, the weight of secularism, the weight of other agendas, the weight of legal persecution. Whatever it may be, we better come up with a gospel that is much thicker, because if you have a thin gospel it will snap under the weight that society will apply.

It is difficult for us to understand the four gospels. You would think the natural place to go to understand the gospel would be the four gospels, right? This is Mark's presentation of "the gospel." This is John's presentation of "the gospel." But we go to the four gospels and we don't understand what we are reading, because they are interacting with this long story and it's a story that we don't know very well. Without even realizing it, without even meaning to,

we start avoiding it.

Here is the third challenge that we face. When we come to the bible, you and I, we come with a set of questions that we would love the bible to answer. I'm married and I want to know how to have a good marriage. I've got kids and I want to know how to raise healthy, flourishing kids. I want God's direction for my life. I want joy. I want happiness. I want peace. I want to prosper. I want God to bless me. I want to have eternal life. So I come to the bible with all those questions. Please answer my questions. But what if I'm forcing my questions on the bible? What if the bible invites me to ask different sorts of questions? What if the bible was actually written to address those questions rather than the ones I think are most important, and I'm missing everything that the bible wants to say to me because I am expecting it to answer the questions that I bring to it rather than allowing it to answer the questions that it brings to me. Are you ready to repent and believe? Do you see that the time is fulfilled? Have you recognized the lordship of Jesus Christ? Are you ready to be part of the kingdom? Do you see it breaking forth among you? Is it breaking forth in your family? All the hope of Israel. Israel? What's going on? Yeah – it's a big story. So, I want us to eat some raw food today. I want to share with you that the gospel is about far more than, "How do I get saved?" Or, "How do I go heaven?" It just is.

Here's the first point I want to make for you. Did you ever realize that this world is God's temple? That's what makes it special. In the entire universe, what makes the earth special? If I were an atheist, I would ask, "Why do you think we're so special? Out of the billions and billions of solar systems, we are one dinky, little planet, and you say, 'Oh, the whole God of the universe is excited about us!' What even makes us special?" Genesis 1 and 2 answers that. Genesis 1 says that God came. He established this world to be his temple. You say, "I don't remember reading that in Genesis 1." I completely agree. Guess what? Genesis 1 never says, "God made the world a temple." But let me ask you a question. If I started off and said to you, "Once upon a time..." do you recognize what genre I am in? I am going to tell you a fairy tale, right? "A guy walks into a bar..." I'm telling you a joke! Sorry for the bar reference. It was just the quickest one I could come up with. In the same way, the original readers of Genesis 1 understood that the structure of the poem that they were looking at in Genesis 1 was a temple dedication poem. It was as obvious to them as if I said to you, "Once upon a time."

Every temple needs two things. You need priests and you need an image of the god who the temple is dedicated to. You know what Genesis 1 says? Genesis 1:27 says, "God made us in his image." You know what our job is? To be priests in his temple, and beyond that: to be kings, to rule under his authority, to exercise his just dominion, to protect our world, to protect his temple, to care for each other, to love each other – that's our job. That theme will be picked up all throughout the New Testament as people like Peter say, "You are a holy priesthood, a royal nation." Absolutely, from the beginning, this world is God's temple. If you don't get that, you start to miss everything that's going on in the Old Testament. You don't really understand why Jesus is going to be referred to as our high priest.

We are a priesthood. From the beginning, from Adam and Eve, we are a priesthood. When our representatives rebelled against God, it didn't just mean that two people had to leave a garden. It meant that God's temple lost its priests. It meant God's image could no longer be perfectly represented to the rest of creation. Scripture is stark in its language about how broken the world became and how evil humanity became capable of being. When you see something like this, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," that's some pretty strong language. And from Romans: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God." This is the combination of some psalms that Paul puts together just to say, "It's bad." When our parents fell, great was the fall – so great that only God could do something about it. It was beyond our capability of addressing. And every time that we try to do it apart from God, we make it worse. We make it worse in our personal life. We make it worse in our family life. We make it worse in our nation, in our world.

I am going to try to give you my version of a short articulation of the gospel. This is my "I don't have two hours so we are going to try to condense it a little bit:"

**God chose to raise up a family through whom he would begin to heal and redeem the world, a chosen people who would worship him faithfully, who would reestablish a just society, and live as a sacrifice for the world. Once again, God would be our king. His glory would fill this global temple. And God would be reunited with his people like a husband to his long lost bride.**

We are going to unpack that just a little bit in the Old Testament. Remember when the religious leaders come to Jesus and they ask, "What's the greatest commandment?" What does Jesus say? He doesn't miss a beat. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like unto the first: Love your neighbor as yourself." Do you ever wonder where those things came from? Do you ever look them up? It's interesting. I'm going to show them to you quickly. You don't have to raise a hand or anything. True confessions? No, we don't have to do that. I'm just going to show you.

Worship him faithfully, right? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That comes from Deuteronomy and it is called The Shema. It is what an Israelite prayed *at minimum* three times a day: when you get up, in the mid-day, and in the evening, three times a day.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. This is always going to be before you. Don't forget it for a moment. – Deuteronomy 6*

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“And the second commandment is like unto the first: Love your neighbor as yourself.” What’s that about? Is that telling me that if Stefan and I are friends, then I need to be good to him? Yeah, for sure, but it’s much more than that. I want to show you the passage where that actually is stated, because maybe you have never read it.

*When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for (the foreigner) the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.*

*You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.*

*You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.*

*You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.*

*You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. – Leviticus 19*

When Jesus says that, “Love your neighbor as yourself” – the second great commandment – he is not just referring to our interpersonal relationships. He is saying, “What I demand of you is two things: That you would love God completely, and that you would establish righteousness in your land.” You would have good laws. You would have good personal relationships. You would have good family relationships. Righteousness would pervade our society. We have these battles in the church. Some people want to preach the gospel and other people want to care for the poor. From the beginning, these two ideas have been entirely and completely married in the gospel. Yes, you want to preach the good news?! Amen! You want to serve the poor? You want to establish righteousness in our society?! Amen! This is the gospel – these two ideas together. Why? Why is it these two ideas together? Because they are anticipating the age to come. We are going to talk about that in a little bit.

Do I believe that we are going to establish righteousness in the U.S.? No, but I think we can bring forth the first fruits.

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I don't think we are going to get the whole harvest, but I think we can bring forth first fruits in my life, first fruits in my family's life, first fruits in our church. We can start to anticipate a work that only God could do in healing everything. We can't do that, and he doesn't intend us to. But by his spirit dwelling in us and among us, he does expect that we are going to start bringing forth the first fruits of it as part of the gospel.

So God established a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let's talk about that just a little bit. In Genesis 12, God chooses a man who is going to be the head of the family. His name is Abram. He doesn't have any kids. He is almost 100 years old. He says, "Through you I am going to bless all of the nations. I am going to bless you and through your life, through your family, I am going to bless the world." This is the idea: God is going to raise up a family and through this family he is going to begin to redeem and heal the world. What's interesting is that in Genesis 15, even as God is sharing that with Abraham, he says, "But, listen: This redemption is always going to be accompanied by suffering." The Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain." We still don't have a kid. This is being told to Abraham before the first kid has been born. "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and they will be servants there (in other words 'slaves'), and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions." God was going to use four hundred years of slavery to establish his people.

You probably remember the story. Abraham has Isaac, Isaac has Jacob, and Jacob gets his name changed to Israel. That's where we get that word from, if you ever wondered, "Who is Israel?" That's Jacob – same guy, two different names. And one of Israel's sons goes down into Egypt. His brothers sell him into slavery: Joseph. Joseph is raised up. A famine comes and wipes everything out, so his brothers end up coming to Egypt for grain. They end up moving there once Joseph reveals himself. He says, "Come down. Bring the families. Bring Daddy. Bring him home. I'm a ruler here. I'll give you the best land." And he does. But a new king arises who doesn't know Joseph and he turns all of the Israelites into slaves. So God raises up Moses and we have the first profound, epic deliverance in the history of the world, called the Exodus. And God by his might walks them out of Egypt and judges the Egyptians and sets his people free.

That concept of Exodus will re-echo over and over and over again throughout the scriptures. If you don't realize it, you are hearing Exodus language. Can I just tell you? You don't know it, maybe, but you sang Exodus language this morning. "I know the one who goes before me. I know the one who stands behind." That's Exodus language. That phrase is referring over and over again, wherever the writer got it (he may have gotten it from the psalms, he may have gotten it from the Old Testament or from the prophets), but that language is of a fire column and a smoke pillar in front of and behind the Israelites as they walk out of Egypt. Every time you come across that language, it is God's people saying, "Deliver us. Bring about your righteousness. Set us free." That theme will continue. It re-echoes all the way through to Paul! Paul talks about it. Paul talks about how there is one who will go before us and behind us.

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The Prophets talk about how our God is going to come back for us in our exile. He will be before us and he will be behind us, our front guard and our rear guard. It's all Exodus language just re-echoing throughout the bible.

Here's the amazing thing. They leave with Moses and before the sun has even set on Egypt, Moses is up on a mountain and they are bowing down to a calf. God made a family to redeem the world, but he kept trying to figure out how to redeem that family from the world. Moses comes down after God tells him that the people down there are out of control. Aaron's like, "Well, you know, they just gave me the gold and I threw it in the fire and this calf jumped out." He's lying. Clearly he is lying since the chapter before says he used a hammer and he's carving this beautiful little calf made of gold earrings and necklaces. "It leaped out of the fire."

Here is the amazing thing. By the time that we get to the book of Deuteronomy...Genesis, Exodus (the big Exodus event), Leviticus (the law), Numbers (some cool stories are in there by the way. If you think it's just numbers, it's not. My favorite story in the bible is in numbers. You should check it out.)...Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy means "the second giving of the law." I want you to see this. Moses is talking to them in Deuteronomy 4, so we haven't even gotten to the Shema. In Deuteronomy 4 he is telling them, "What other nation has ever had their god deliver them like this from another people?! This is unprecedented in the history of the world. No other people has ever seen their god show up and – boom! – deliver them!" Then he tells them, "By the way, I can already tell you that once you've been in the land for a little while, you are going to start worshipping idols. And when you do (verse 27):

*...the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there you will seek the Lord your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

Before we get to the judges, before we get to Saul or King David, or Solomon, or the division of the temple, and Jeroboam, and Rehoboam, and ten tribes to the north and two to the south, and all that other stuff that you may or may not even know what I'm talking about, before we get to any of that, here is Moses. They are still on the wrong side of the Jordan and Moses is telling them, "Yeah, in about six hundred years, God is going to just wipe you out." And they live with that. I don't know what that feels like. I'll show you that they live with it.

So, you have Saul, the first king of Israel, and he reigns for 40 years. Then you have David, who is anointed while he is still a boy, while Saul is still king, and David reigns for 40 years. And David says, "I want to build a temple for God." He talks to the prophet and the prophet says, "Yeah, do everything that is in your heart." Then God says, "No, no, no – stop. Stop." 2 Samuel, chapter 7, "You want to build a house for me? No. I'm going to build your house. And your descendant is going to sit on the throne forever." "Lord, who am I that you would say that to me?" It blows David's mind. So he has a son, but this isn't the son that the promise is referring to, because Solomon is so-so.

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Solomon reigns for 40 years and he builds the temple. David does all the plans, gets all the resources, but God had forbidden him because he was a man of blood, a man of war, he had forbidden him from building the temple. So according to 1 Chronicles, he leaves everything with Solomon and Solomon builds it. In the prayer of dedication we are just getting ready to open the new church.

By the way, the temple was more than that – the Jews understood that the temple was where heaven and earth met, and God had a physical residence on the planet. I think it would be a very cool thing if God lived in Coconut Creek. That's where our family is. I think it would be cool to drive by and see the Shekinah just sort of glowing out, and smoke. I think I would take a certain comfort from that. There is a certain earthiness about it that just grounds you. The place where heaven and earth met, the temple, the center of all Israelite identity until the exile when it was destroyed and God abandoned them and wrote a certificate of divorce and left. In his prayer (it's a beautiful prayer – he's the wisest cat in history, right? – so this prayer is amazing) the very last thing Solomon says is:

*If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, 'We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,' if they repent with all their mind and with all their heart in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you, and grant them compassion in the sight of those who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them... 1 Kings 8*

We haven't even gotten to a divided kingdom and Solomon is saying, "Lord, I know you are going to send us into captivity. We are without hope." At the very pinnacle, the very pinnacle of Israel's history, they are preeminent in the region, they are the superpower, and they have a temple that is unimaginably wealthy, at that very moment, at the point of dedicating the temple, the very moment when they should be celebrating how God has established them, here is Solomon saying, "Lord, I know what you said through Moses. I know you are going to scatter us. Please, please just bring us home afterward."

Israel did fail to be God's nation for the world. They were carried off into exile, and they were in exile for hundreds of years. In fact, even as they started returning from exile, and you remember some of the books, right? You've got Nehemiah, and he comes and starts rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem. You've got Ezra, and they lay the foundation for the temple, and it's a great day. The young men are cheering, "Yay! We're rebuilding!" And the old

men are just standing there crying because they remember the glory of the former temple. The bible says that the sounds of the cheers and the sounds of the sobs couldn't be distinguished. It just all became this loud sound.

Eventually they rebuild the temple. They come back. It doesn't take them seven years, it takes them hundreds of years. That's why the angel Gabriel goes to Daniel in chapter 9 and says it is seven weeks – it's 490 years. That's why Josephus will write and say they are always having these revolts. The Israelites are always revolting in the first century because they had this old prophecy that God is going to bring them home and show back up in 500 years. They are living in this story. So they rebuild this temple and you know what? In Ezekiel 10, God leaves his temple. The glory of the Lord departs. It's gone. Step by step. Ezekiel watches it in a vision. He sees it leaving. So they come back and they rebuild the temple. And you know what? He doesn't show back up. There is not a single writer who ever makes the claim, "The glory of the Lord returned to the house of God, to the temple we built." God...never...comes...back.

Oh, and the freedom? The exile? All of the promises? "I'm going to deliver you." "I'm going to establish you." "I'm going to give you peace from all your enemies." "I'm going to do a new work among you." The whole prophetic cannon: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea – all of them, all of the promises, hundreds of promises – and Israel is still waiting on God to return to them.

When you come to the gospels, what you have to understand is that in the gospels all of the promises of God are being fulfilled. When you read the four gospels, what you are reading is a pictorial imaging of the promises of God in the prophetic cannon from Isaiah to Malachi being fulfilled in rapid succession. But if you don't know those books because they are weird and they creep you out and you just skip to Paul, you can't even see it. It's unbelievable! The authors of the four gospels are saying that in Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's God was returning to be with his people, fulfill his promises, and restore creation.

I want to give you a few examples of how Jesus fulfills the story of Israel. John the Baptists' disciples come to Jesus. John is in prison and he is about to be beheaded. John's disciples come to Jesus and they ask, "Listen, are you the one, or should we look for another?" This is what Jesus says to them, and I want to show you the two different readings that you can bring to a passage in the gospels. "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." The first time I read that, I thought he was just saying, "Look, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. I am doing miracles! What do you want?" What I didn't realize the first time I read it is that in Isaiah 35, God said, "When I come and set you free from exile, this is what it will look like:

*They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God...Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and*

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*the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy...And the ransomed of the Lord will finally return home to me and I to them.*

Jesus makes this little saying and I was like, “Oh, okay, yeah – he’s doing miracles. Cool. Next page.” I missed it.

Let me give you a second example. I don’t know if you ever noticed this, but Israel was supposed to be faithful, the faithful family through whom God was going to redeem the world. And Israel is not faithful. They are worshipping idols at every turn. God comes to them and he is like, “Look, I’ve looked at the justice of your society and it’s terrible. You are exploiting each other. You are killing each other. You are devouring each other. You are worshipping idols behind closed doors.” Ezekiel had a vision and he saw in the temple that they had carved out a secret room behind one of the walls and they were inside the temple worshipping idols! He’s like, “It can’t get any worse than this! I mean, there are two things that I wanted, and I’m not getting either of them!” So what does Jesus do as the faithful Israelite? He comes back and he begins to retell the story of Israel.

Maybe you’ve noticed this in Matthew, maybe you haven’t. But the first thing that happens is that he goes down to Egypt. Herod wants to kill him, so his mom and dad take him and flee to Egypt. Why? Because “...out of Egypt I called my son.” – Hosea 11:1. God calls Jesus the true Israel, from Egypt, then he baptizes him. Much of the New Testament will refer to baptism as being the reenactment of the crossing of the Red Sea.

Then Jesus goes out into the wilderness. “Jesus, if you are the Son of God, turn these stones to turn into bread.” What was one of the main things that Israel complained about while they were in the wilderness? The food. “If you are the Son of God, hey – jump off.” It is written, “Don’t put the Lord your God to the test.” What was one of God’s accusations against Israel while they are in the wilderness? “They are always putting me to the test.”

Israel makes it to the Jordan. They are ready to cross. They haven’t been turned back yet. Two of them: “Let’s go in!” Ten of them: “Wow – we’ll die!” They pull back in unbelief. They are scared. They are scared of what it would mean to go forward in obedience to God. So that generation never enters the Promised Land. They wander the wilderness for 40 years until all those people are dead. Then the next generation comes in. Satan tempts them. Listen, I know and you know what’s coming: your death. Just worship me. Just worship me and I’ll give it to you anyway. You won’t have to go to the cross. “Get behind me, Satan. Worship the Lord your God and serve only him, even if it means my death.”

What happens after the wilderness? In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, he reinterprets the law. In this book he is reenacting the whole story of Israel, showing himself to be the true Israelite. Let me pick 12 new men to be the 12 new tribes. We call them the disciples.

Let me show you one final thing. Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man. That’s kind of a weird thing. I have never

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referred to myself as a son of man. Son of Man? Is that like, he's human? He's just emphasizing it? I'm human? I'm the Son of Man. If you read that, you're like, "Yeah, yeah – I've read that before." But when Jesus said it, when his hearers heard that, they didn't think, "That's a random thing to call yourself. That's kind of strange." No, they thought about Daniel 7, one of the most famous passages of the bible during the time when Jesus came and ministered. Here's what it says:

*I saw in the night visions,  
and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
there came one like a son of man,  
and he came to the Ancient of Days  
and was presented before him.  
And to him was given dominion  
and glory and a kingdom,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him;  
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
which shall not pass away,  
and his kingdom one  
that shall not be destroyed.*

When Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, he was saying something so profound and we are at risk of missing it. He is saying that he himself is the one to whom God will give an everlasting dominion. He is God's king for the world. Daniel says the son of man is even worshiped and served by the nations. So far from being a statement about Jesus' humanity, when he calls himself the "son of man" Jesus is making one of the strongest claims to divinity he could make in the first century. Stephen, at the end of his sermon in Acts 7, after proclaiming the gospel by beginning with Abraham and going all the way through the prophets, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." Son of Man.

Last thing and we are done. It's been long. I've thrown so much at you. You are amazing. I have only seen three people nod off. No, I haven't really. It's okay. I've seen a couple people fight though. I'm so proud of you all. Last thought: Is heaven really our hope? There's a lot about heaven. Heaven is for real! I promise you: Every day my

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daughter wants me to watch Heaven is for Real. I have not done it yet. Is this like true parental confessions? Our culture is enamored with heaven. Time Magazine had an issue dedicated to heaven. Heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven, heaven. Can I just tell you – heaven is not the emphasis of the bible. In fact, even the language that Jesus uses when he says, “I go to prepare a place for you.” Do I think we go to heaven? Yes, I think we go to heaven. Chad, are you orthodox? Yes, I’m orthodox. When you die, Jesus has prepared a temporary place for you in the presence of God. When he uses the language, he says, “I go to build a house for you.” It is a temporary house. It is the same word used for a temporary lodging place, what we would call a hotel. “I go to build or prepare a place for you to stay.”

Until when? How long will we be in heaven? Until the time is completely fulfilled. “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.” “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised (with bodies) imperishable...” This is our hope. This is why Jesus came back from the dead. Our hope is not sitting on clouds, God forbid, playing harps with little angels and cherubs floating around us. That is not our hope. That is a farce from the Middle Ages. Our firm hope is that the God that we serve will establish a new heavens and a new earth and we will be in it as new creations, with our perishable bodies clothed in immortality. And I will be me and you will be you, if I see you at the last day. And we will be there. And God will be with us. And here is how Revelation describes it. Sorry, I forgot I added Romans 8. I’ve got to do this – it’s just good. If you’ve never noticed Romans 8, you guys should read this.

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself (this is our planet, this is the ground, these are the trees, these are the rocks, this is the cosmos, this is the Milky Way, this is our solar system) 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.*

The whole cosmos is waiting for us to be revealed so that God will recreate all of it. The beauty of the resurrection is that some of what’s here now comes forward. I’m going to go forward. I’m going to be clothed in immortality, but I’m Chad. So there is a continuity between this age and the age to come, and it is part of what informs our vocation as Christians.

Finally, Revelation. Here it is:

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*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, 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. And he who was seated on the throne (that is the Lamb) said, "Behold, I am making all things new." "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." It is done! (It is finished.) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*

Brothers and sisters, this is our gospel. This is why we proclaim the good news, that the time is fulfilled, that the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe and become part of it. This is our gospel.