

I Beginning in Christ: How does Jesus save us?

Aim: To understand the framework of the Bible, why salvation is necessary and how it was accomplished.

1. The Drama of Salvation

I suppose that most of you are relatively new to reading the Bible. Hopefully, this nurtures your faith and your joy in Jesus. But some of you might find it quite challenging to read the Bible and to understand it. I hope this course will encourage you and be of some help in this.

Today I want to look at the great story of the Bible, or, the drama of Salvation. You might find that when read individual books of the Bible you don't really know what's going on. Tonight I want to show you the big picture.

When we read the Bible from Genesis through to Revelation, we see that there is a great story that runs through every page of the bible. This story/drama has four stages: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation/ Re-creation. I want to spend this evening by looking at each of these stages through key texts. This will help us get a fuller picture of how and why Jesus saves us.

Another Disclaimer: We don't have time to go into many of the details of these texts. I will point out what is important for now.

1.1. Creation:

In Genesis 1 we read that God created the universe and every living being by speaking them into existence. This creation was deemed by God to be very good and man was the pinnacle of his creation:

Genesis 1:26-31: ²⁶ Then God said, “**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷ So **God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** [...] ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, **it was very good.** And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Creation was very good. God was pleased with his work.

What I want to point out is how God has created man after his image. When the first readers of genesis read this, they will have thought of a statue that resembles their king. They may have looked similar to these:

Kings would often erect statues of themselves in different places throughout their kingdom. That's how they would legitimize their kingship. Even though they couldn't always physically be there, there were these statues to remind the people of who their king was. In that sense, God created Adam and Eve as living statues, as representatives.

God created all humans after his image. When God created Adam and Eve, he made them his

kingly representatives on earth. And when he told them to multiply, he intended for all humans to share in this position. Mankind was created with the imprint of God on them.

Colossians 1:15 helps us understand this further: ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

This is talking about Jesus. He **is** the image of God. We were created **after**, or **according to** this image. That means we were made to resemble Jesus. He is the perfect expression of everything that God is, because is the Son of God. We were created to be a reflection of him.

By imprinting his likeness on us, God made us to share his life and glory with us. As these representatives of the king, we were meant to live in close fellowship with him. That means, we were made by God to live in communion with God and to resemble him to the rest of creation.

So being created after the image of God means at least two things:

1 Communion with God in a relationship with him. 2 Resembling and representing Jesus.

1.2. Fall:

But tragically the first humans did not trust God but believed the lies of the snake and rebelled against God. That is what the bible calls “sin”. In Genesis 3 we are introduced to two trees in the garden: The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve are allowed to eat of any tree, including the tree of life, but not of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 3:1-7: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “**Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’**” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “**You will not surely die.** ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, **and you will be like God**, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a **delight to the eyes**, and that **the tree was to be desired to make one wise**, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then **the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.** And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

- The snake twists the word of God: God forbade them to eat of the one tree of knowledge of good and evil. But he expressly allowed them to eat off any other tree.
- The snake promises that when they eat of the tree, they will be like God.
- And so Eve finds that what the tree offers is what she desires. And she and Adam eat of the tree.
- There a few things going on here: Adam and Eve don’t trust God to provide them with what they need. Instead, they take for themselves what they deem right.⁴
- So, the problem is their disobedience, not their knowledge of good and evil.
- They believe the lies of the snake who twists God’s word. Had they trusted God, they would have recognized that the snake is evil and God is good.
- There were two ways to handle this tree: By trusting God, or by rebelling against

him.

- Instead of humbly trusting God to be all they need, they want to become like God.
- Ironically, they were created after the image of God, so they resembled him. But through their sin, this was ruined.

What follows, is that they both hide from God, because they were ashamed of what they did. The relationship with God that they were created to live in was broken. God finds them, and pronounces judgement over the snake, the woman and the man.

Further, Adam and Eve are driven out of the garden: They cannot be in the presence of God anymore and cannot fulfil their divine calling as image bearers. They must die. That means the image of God in which they were created is broken, or fractured, though not utterly destroyed.

The human condition:

All descendants of Adam and Eve are born into this broken world. In a sense, sin is like a sickness that we are all born with.

Illustration: Sometimes newborn babies are born with addictions to drugs or alcohol because their mothers were addicted to certain substances during the pregnancy. So the baby can't help itself but crave a substance that is destructive. And imagine this baby grows up untreated.

It will be damaged. And it will continue to crave the substance and thus steals, gets into shady business, hurts others, and continues on this way of death until he dies.

This is true for all humanity. When Adam and Eve sinned, a break happened in creation. Though we are still God's creatures, we are no longer who we were meant to be. We are all **victims** of this broken world. Other people sin against us and hurt us. But we are also **sinner**s who contribute to this brokenness. We desire that which is evil, and we act against the will of God who wants us to live.

A biblical term for this would be "transgression": It means to cross a line that you are not allowed to.

There is a passage in **Romans 3:10-20** where all of humanity is accused:

None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." 13 "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." 14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." 15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 in their paths are ruin and misery, 17 and the way of peace they have not known." 18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes." And then in verse 23 it says: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This is painfully true of us all. The concept of falling short of the glory of God is closely linked to us being created after the image of God and this image being broken and ruined by sin. We were created to be in communion with God and to resemble/to reflect God's glory to the world. Instead, we are ruined by sin and have eyes only for our own pathetic "glory".

Summarize:

Humanity is separated from God because the first humans rebelled against him, and we continue to do so. In our sinful state we are **estranged** from **God**, from **others**, from **ourselves**, from God's **creation**. We are hopeless, guilty, lost, helpless. We live as **dead people** in misery who love the darkness and deserve eternal punishment.¹ This might not feel right to you. And to be fair, most or all non-christians probably don't see themselves as "dead people in misery who love the darkness and deserve eternal punishment". In fact, they think of themselves as being okay.

To assume that humans are good and some bad things happen and then to go on and simply make the best of it is more appealing to us than seeing ourselves as sinners.

But this doesn't do justice to our greatest problems: We are cut off from life. From true life. Humanity is enslaved to sin. That entails our conscience, our thinking and our will. Sure, we have all kinds of substitutes, and we might feel alive and fulfilled. But the truth is something else.

We cannot save ourselves. Without a saviour we all die in our sin.

We need **saving** from the power of sin and from the just judgement of God.

- To be rescued from a situation where one is not able to help himself. Think of a dead person in a coffin. That person has no way of helping himself.

We need **redemption** from our enslavement to sin, and our guilt before God. We cannot pay the ransom or the debt we have before God.

- When you hear the word "ransom" you might think of a hostage situation, but that is not how it was used in ancient times. It's more like you are owned by someone. Think of a slave market where people come to buy slaves for their houses or fields. To be redeemed or ransomed would mean that someone pays the price for you and frees you. Or imagine someone who has a huge amount of debt. Then another pays the full amount and thus ransoms the debtor.

- To be released or freed from captivity by someone else who pays the price.

We need **forgiveness** of our guilt, because we have transgressed the commandments of God and destroyed our relationship with him.

- To be forgiven means that God no longer accounts our guilt to us but regards it as having been dealt with. Thus we stand forgiven before God, as if we never had sinned.

We need **reconciliation**, because we are estranged from God by our rebellion and unbelief.

- When we are reconciled, our relationship with God is healed. We are no longer estranged from God but become his adopted children and belong to his family.

We need to be made **alive**, because we are dead in our sin.

1.3. Redemption:

The good news is that there is a saviour.

When God judged the snake, he also made a promise to mankind (**Gen 3:15**): I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise (crush) your head, and you shall bruise (crush) his heel.

Immediately after the Fall, God begins to reveal his plan of redemption: There will be a descendant of the woman who will crush the snake's head, and the snake will bite his heel. There will be one who will defeat Evil, Satan and Sin.

The bible tells us of how God begins this story of redemption through the story of Abraham, Moses, and the kings and prophets of the people of Israel. All of these stories culminate into the person of Jesus. Every promise that God has made is fulfilled in Jesus.

So, who is Jesus?

This next bit can be pretty difficult to understand, but please bear with me because Jesus is overwhelmingly beautiful. If this is too complicated or you feel out of your depth, then welcome to the club. Don't despair. No one can grasp God or fully understand who he is.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God the Father. That means, he is the second person in the Trinity. The Trinity is the one true God in three Persons: The Father, the Son and the Spirit.

We will speak some more about the Trinity another time. The point for now is: Jesus is fully God. Let's look at a bible passage that shows us more about Jesus:

John 3:16-17: ¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. This text essentially says that Jesus was sent into the world by God the Father to give us eternal life and save us from condemnation. That is, from the judgement of God over us because of our sin.

- Jesus is the Son of God. There is no one like him. As the Son of God he can give us eternal life.
- The fact that the Father sent the Son into the world shows that Jesus condescended or lowered himself. He became a true human like you and me, he shared our sufferings, he knows our sorrows and died a human death.
- But he also remained true God and so was able to save us.

So, he is one person with two natures: Truly God and truly man.

And that's precisely the saviour we need. He is unique. No one is like him. We need God to solve our problem with sin. Remember, all of humanity is enslaved to sin and we cannot save ourselves.

We need one who is **sinless** to redeem us from sin and death, to forgive us our guilt and to reconcile us to himself. Only God can do that.

Yet our saviour must be human because it is humanity that has sinned against God. Only a human can pay the debt of mankind.

Jesus fulfils these demands: As the perfect and sinless human he can suffer in our place. As true God he is powerful enough to carry our sin and buy our redemption. He can sympathize with our weakness and deal with our guilt.

Jesus has become everything that we are except for sin, so he can save us completely.

And here is another very important thing about Jesus:

Colossians 1:15: **15** He is the image of the invisible God.

As the unique son of God, he is **the image** of God. Jesus is the one who is the full and perfect expression of the Father. He is in perfect community with the Father, he resembles his character perfectly and fulfils the Father's will perfectly.

This means that Adam was created by God to be like Jesus. Adam and Eve failed to be that because of their unbelief. So, because of who Jesus is he can save us and restore the image of God in us because **he is the image of God**. This is possible because of his union with us. And we'll talk about that next week.⁹

How does Jesus save us?

Do you remember what we read about the human condition in Romans 3? We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Right after this devastating statement the sentence continues gloriously:

Rom 3:24-28: **24** and are **justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** **25** whom God put forward as a **propitiation** by his blood, **to be received by faith.** This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he **might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** **27** Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.**

Lets unpack this:

- Jesus was nailed to a cross, he died the death of a criminal even though he was innocent.
- He did not stay dead, but he rose to life on the third day. And again: Because he had no sin himself, he could pay for ours. Because he is God, he blotted out our guilt. His resurrection is proof that he succeeded. Had he stayed dead, there would be no gospel. But because he has risen, we can receive forgiveness.
- That means he was victorious. Sin and death are defeated.

“Justified by his grace as a gift”: Because humanity is sinful and rebels against God, we are guilty and deserving of punishment. When Jesus died in our place, he bore that punishment for us. Because of this we can be justified, that means, declared righteous not by our own merit, but by grace. As a free gift of God.

The word “grace” means to receive the love and forgiveness of God undeserving. We deserve death and damnation. By grace we are given life in Jesus instead.

You have nothing to bring God except the sin that condemns you. God freely gives you his grace because through Jesus he has dealt with your sin.

“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”: God put Jesus forth as a **“propitiation”**. That means, he sent Jesus to die instead of us. God’s righteousness requires that sinners die. Jesus bore that just punishment for us.

In the Old Testament, the people of God had to bring animal sacrifices to make up for their sins against God.

So, whenever someone transgressed God’s commandments or came into contact with something that was considered “unclean” they had to bring sacrifices to be cleansed so they wouldn’t have to die and could be in the presence of God again.

All of these sacrifices pointed forward to the death of Jesus. They were like shadows of the real thing. Jesus brought himself as the ultimate and perfect sacrifice and paid with his blood to release us from our guilt.

Because of who Jesus is (true God and true man) he was able to die in our place and carry the punishment of God for us. There was a debt that so great that it had to be paid in blood. We have to die. Jesus died in our place. By paying this price he has redeemed us. He bought us with his own blood.

“one is justified by faith apart from works of the law”:

How can we receive this gift of grace? By faith in Jesus. That means, to trust Jesus wholeheartedly and to trust that he has done all that I could never have done. It is to look away from yourself and turn around to fix your eyes on Jesus.

I have broken the law of God. I was born sick and addicted to evil. I have done so much evil. I have declared myself to be king many times. I have no righteousness. The glory I was created for I exchanged for my own perverted version of glory.

How can we stand clean and righteous before God the judge of sinners? By putting our faith in Jesus. By trusting, accepting and surrendering to Jesus and to recognize and trust that he has dealt with our sin and we may therefore be forgiven. By faith in Jesus all my guilt is washed away, and I am declared by God to be righteous. This is not my own righteousness. It is the perfect righteousness of Jesus given to me.

Illustration:

Think of a beggar that asks for alms on the street. A good hearted and wealthy man walks up to him, stops, and gives him more money than he would ever need. All this beggar does is reach out his empty hands to receive that gift.

We are that beggar. Now, to be justified by faith in Christ means to look up at Jesus and open our hands to receive his gift that he graciously gives us.

Made alive with Christ:

But justification is not the only thing that Christ has accomplished for us. Remember, our fallenness has multiple dimensions. Being guilty is one of them. But we are also estranged from God and dead in sin.

In Ephesians 2 we are told how God has solved this through Jesus' death and resurrection:

Eph 2:4-8: "4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [...]."

Dead people are made alive by their faith in Jesus because God has raised his Son from the dead. He is victorious over sin and death. Therefore, those who receive the grace of God are made alive. That means we are restored. This broken image of God we still carry as dead people is being restored by Jesus.

Just as a teaser for next week: This text also wonderfully expresses our union with Christ. By our faith in Jesus, we are raised with him. That means, Jesus shares his resurrection life with us.

Similarly, when God is going to show us the infinite riches of his grace, this happens in Christ, that is: We receive this grace by being in Christ. At the core of our salvation stands the truth that Jesus joins us to himself. Like a Man who marries a woman and shares everything with her that he has. But more on this next week.

Summary:

So far we have seen that God has created all things. He created humans in his own image for them to be kingly representatives and to share in his life and glory. This creation was very good.

But humanity has believed the lie of the snake and rebelled against God. Because of that creation is broken. Humanity is cast out of the presence of God and doomed to die. We inherit sin, which means we are victims of the sins of others but also doers of sin. We are corrupted beings and the image of God we were made in, is broken. We no longer resemble God in the sense we were meant to.

But God in his love and mercy came after us. He sent his Son Jesus to become like us and die in our place. By faith in Jesus we are forgiven our guilt, we are saved from the judgement of God, we are redeemed from the enslavement to sin, we are reconciled to God and made alive.

God accomplished redemption through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Friends, we are saved by grace and nothing but grace. It is all God's gift out of love and mercy.

It says in **Romans 6:23**: For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1.4. Consummation/ Recreation:

The last point I want to speak about is Consummation or Recreation. Our wonderful redemption in Jesus is not the end of the story. As you will have noticed in your own lives after you became Christians, you still sin. You're still a broken mess and this world is still a broken creation.

But God makes all things new. With Jesus becoming like us and by redeeming us through his death and resurrection, the new creation has come into the old. While we are still broken, we are being restored in our union with Christ.

2 Cor 5:17-21: ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [...]. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- Because of what Jesus has accomplished this reality is now unshakeably realized. If you believe in Jesus, you are forgiven and you are reconciled and you are part of the new creation!
- This theme of new creation is again intertwined with the theme of the image of God. By being in Jesus through faith, God restores the image of God in us that was broken through sin.

I want to focus on Verse 17: When we become Christians, when we are in Christ, God makes us part of the new creation. Firstly, that means our redemption is the work of God. Secondly, this means that the most fundamental change has already happened. You have come from death to life, from the old to the new, from being guilty, dirty, estranged and lost to being forgiven, clean, reconciled and adopted into God's family.

Yes, you are not yet fully there. But **the old has passed away, behold, the new has come**. Because you are **in Christ**, you have new creation life. God is in the process of making us new.

However, we are still awaiting the full realization of this new creation. Or put differently, **the consummation of all things**.

Jesus teaches us that he will come again in glory. And when he comes, he will judge the living and the dead. There will be final judgement on those who have not believed in Christ and they will be thrown into hell, where they are cut off from the presence of God forever. For those who are in Christ, God will bring heaven to earth. He will fully realize his act of recreation:

Let's read a few verses from revelation, the last book of the Bible:

Revelation 21:1-5: 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. ² And I saw the holy city, **new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ 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.** ⁴ **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.” ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.

A lot could be said here. But as with the other texts, I just want to point out a few things:

- God is going to radically renew the universe. Heaven and earth will be made new.¹⁴
- The new Jerusalem is the heavenly city. “Old” Jerusalem is the city where the Israelites had built a temple for God to be present in. Remember, fallen humanity cannot have communion with God. The temple allowed for a mediated fellowship: It was a place of worship, where through sacrifices for sins people could receive forgiveness and live with God.
- When Jesus died and rose from the dead, the temple became obsolete because he fulfilled everything the temple stood for. He is the presence of God because he is God and has become man. And he has dealt with our sin so that through him, we can have communion with God.
- Now, when we read that the new Jerusalem **comes down**, this means that the reconciliation that Jesus accomplished for us will become real in the fullest sense: We will be in full and perfect communion with God and fully enjoy him in his presence forever.
- God will dwell with us humans. He will be present with us in his full glory and we will be his people forever. God will restore the glory that we ruined.
- And in this restored creation God himself will comfort us. He will wipe away our tears. He will heal us. There will be no more death, no more crying, no more pain. All will be made new.

Summary:

I hope you can see how God has begun the new creation through Jesus. He is presently bringing about the new creation by what he is doing in our lives and when Jesus comes again, it will be consummated.

We already belong to the new creation, but the new creation is not yet fully realized. The essential change has occurred: We were dead and now we are alive in Christ. In Christ God will also bring about the final and complete restoration of all things.

Application:

Seeing this grand story of the bible in Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation is helpful for the following reasons:

- It tells us the story of this world. God tells us where we come from, what we were made for, where we are going and why things are the way they are.¹⁵
- It shows us that Jesus Christ is the central figure in the history of the universe. Everything revolves around him.
- It shows us that our individual salvation is embedded in the recreation of the entire

universe. Your salvation in Christ is part of God's plan to restore all things.

- It shows us that it's really not about us, but about God glorifying himself in achieving his purpose for the world. He shows us that he is almighty and good through the creation and that he is perfectly just and holy through the judgement over sin. He shows us his mercy and love in our redemption and the fullness of his beauty and glory in the new creation.

End:

I want to end by listening to Jesus' words. He says:

28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

- Some of you may not be christians. You have not put your trust in Jesus. You have not experienced the forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation with the Father. Jesus calls you to himself. Come to him and find rest from the burdens of your ruined life. He is gentle and lowly: He will receive you in grace.

- Others here may be burdened by life and maybe you wonder about how anything that we spoke of today applies to your life. Here's the thing: The God who created everything, has redeemed you and is restoring this world. He is calling you to himself not because he wants anything from you. He wants to give you his divine rest. Jesus takes our burdens on himself and gives us what is his: Rest for our souls. He receives us in his gentle and lowly heart and restores in us the image of God.¹⁶