



Stepping into God's Story – Episode Seven – A New People

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BIG IDEA – We are God's people, filled with the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses, making disciples of all nations.

scripture focus - Matthew 13:31-32 He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."

Like a mustard tree seed. The kingdom of heaven did in fact start VERY SMALL, imperceivable by almost everyone at the time. Why do we de-value small things, [small beginnings](#)? In startups, making the pitch for Series-A "angel investors, the "shark-tank-like" group looks not just for the next big idea but want to know if the company can pull off "hockey-stick" growth. They want it to take off fast and make them lots of money quickly. **Jesus started with just a dozen guys, then it grew after his death to 120, then within a few days exploded into 3000 people.**

Christ's arrival on this earth was a minor and unnoticed event to the vast majority of humanity.

It was not broadcast on FOX or CNN. There were no marketing plans and no campaign offices set up to let people know that a new leader was arriving.

On the night of Christ's birth, no one even provided Joseph and Mary a room. So Jesus was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for livestock.

After His birth, He grew up in a backwoods town in Galilee, far from the influence and affluence of the Roman Empire.

When Jesus was 30 years old, He began teaching publicly and performing miracles. He invited 12 disciples to live with Him and follow Him. These 12 disciples they were normal guys, uneducated, not from the religious elite, they were rough around the edges, and impulsive.

After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended back to heaven, about 120 people gathered together in prayer in Jerusalem waiting for direction from the Holy Spirit on what to do next.

The kingdom of heaven started small. But then it exploded to 3000 on the day of Pentecost. By the year 250, the number of believers had risen to more than a million. After that, sociologists recognize that Christianity grew at a rate of approximately 40% per decade.

The Kingdom of God is the already, but not yet ready.

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit, and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of **intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ** and their response to His grace.

In this grand saga of Stepping into God's Story, we now come to a point where we ask who are we as the Church? We are the people of God and we are in His story. We learn three things about our new identity:

We are a new people.
We have new power.
We are on a holy mission.

Acts 1:6-8 "So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" He said to them, "**It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"

Jesus' disciples will receive the **Spirit empowerment** to do what God wants done.

It happened on the day of ([Shavuot](#)) Pentecost, celebrating 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits.

Shavuot: The Feast of Weeks: The Birthday of Judaism and the Birthday of the Church.

Doesn't it remind us of Exodus 19 when **God comes in smoke and fire? Exodus 19 :17-18 NLT** Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. **All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke**

because the Lord had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently.

God visited the people of Israel bringing the law and launching the nation. God again, visited both Jews and Gentiles bringing the Spirit and launching the Church.

Another parallel – after Moses came down from Mount Sinai, the people had built a golden calf, and worshipped it. As God told Moses to do, he commanded the Levites to kill the people involved, Exodus 32:28 records that, “The Levites obeyed Moses’ command, and about 3,000 people died that day.” In Acts, after the Spirit of God fell on the crowd and Peter spoke explaining what took place, basically giving a history of God’s story, Luke records that **“Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.”** In Exodus, the people were cursed and **immediately judged for their actions.** In Acts, the people **heard the gospel and were immediately moved to repent and believe** and found life!

1. We are a new people.

The Christian faith is radically exclusive and radically inclusive.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia concerning their faith and their behavior. He was warning them not to go back to their previous life and previous behaviors. Paul wrote **13 letters** to the churches – almost 50% of the New Testament writings and 62% of the letters written.

Galatians 3:27-29 For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. **There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.** And **if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise.**

As human beings, all of us work to JUSTIFY ourselves in some way or another. We do it:

- **Before other people trying to prove our worth of existence**
- **To ourselves, justifying our behaviors.**
- **Before God to prove ourselves worthy.**
- **We still try to cover ourselves, our shame our nakedness.**

Yet, as believers, as followers of Jesus, Paul says “we are clothed (**enduo: I put on**), covered with Christ.” We **put on** the righteousness of Jesus.

This is the radical exclusivity of Christianity. It's not that believers are better people. It's not that followers of Jesus are perfect. It is that we are wearing the righteousness, the perfection of Christ! People say, **“well, I don't believe that**

Jesus is the only way to God." I understand that. Somehow, inherently we all have this bent to do it our way. I want to choose what is true for **me**, good for **me**, right for **me**, so of course I should be able to choose my own god or no god at all! Because it's all about me - I am the center of the universe! Well, I am not. You are not. **How has that worked out for you so far?**

Jesus says, "here, **wear my** virtue, my morality, my honesty, my decency, my blamelessness," and be made right before God. **Our crummy, sin-stained, trauma-torn clothes won't cut it!**

The Christian faith is also radically inclusive.

The new people include all kinds of people, all from different backgrounds. Paul writes, **there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male, and female, since you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

Every single background, ethnicity, socio economic class, and both genders!

Acts 2:6, When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and **they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers.** And asked, "**Aren't these people are all from Galilee?**" Acts 2:9-11 list a summary of the language groupings present that day. "Here we are—**Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs.** "**And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!**"

The Christian faith is radically exclusive and radically inclusive at the same time.

2. We have new power.
God's Spirit has moved into our lives.

When we believe, when we follow Jesus, the Spirit of God moves into our lives. God no longer has written His law, His ways, His wishes on tablets of stone, reflecting the hearts of those who do not trust him. No, today God, through the Holy Spirit, has placed His desires in our hearts so that we may truly know Him, love and obey Him.

Again, Paul writing to the Churches, describes our new life in Christ as a new building – using Old Testament language a new Temple where God used to visit from time to time.

Ephesians 2:19-22 So, then, you are **no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him **you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.**

Are lives are built on Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives. We are the temple, the tabernacle. God's Spirit lives within us. Never alone, never without His presence.

Timeline → Tabernacle to the Temple. God's presence moves from the Tabernacle to the Temple, then Jesus becomes the one who moves in and dwells with us – God with us. Then **now**, we are the dwelling place of God!

And since the Holy Spirit now lives within the believer's heart, it doesn't just mean we are never alone, never far from God. It doesn't just mean that we have God's desires embedded and working in our lives. It also means we have God's power to live right and to do right!

Many denominations want to explain away the Spirit empowerment that clearly happened in Acts 2 as limited to the New Testament times, or only with Apostles still alive. Some, believe that Acts 2 was purely a way to get the attention of non-believers and as a way to "kick-start" the launch of the Church. I do not believe that.

I believe exactly what Peter told the crowd that day when they were curious about what they saw and heard.

Peter said, it is simply a fulfillment of God's promise to what will happen in the last days (which we are still in). 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike— and they will prophesy. Acts 2:17-18

Because many heard the Word of God and it "pierced their hearts." They wanted what Peter spoke about. They asked, "what should we do?" Peter told them, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

In the notes today, you will find a link to what I believe, what Candlewood Church believes about the infilling or the baptism in the Holy Spirit. You've got to read the whole book of Acts and understand it in the context of why God has

chosen to live in our hearts when we believe, but also why God wants this second baptism, this second experience for all believers.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

- **Acts 8:12-17** [[KJV](#)/[NIV](#)]
- **Acts 10:44-46** [[KJV](#)/[NIV](#)]
- **Acts 11:14-16** [[KJV](#)/[NIV](#)]
- **Acts 15:7-9** [[KJV](#)/[NIV](#)]

I believe that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit wants us to continue **to BE a disciple and MAKE a disciple** – be one, make one.

To truly do all the things Jesus said we should do as believers, we need the same power and authority in which Jesus had! To accomplish the mission of God we absolutely need the power of the Spirit of God to make it happen. **If for once second, we think we can speak with authority, heal the sick, kick out demons and see God supernaturally use us to save and restore a broken world without the power of the Spirit – WE ARE TRULY CRAZY!**

We have new power, and we should be using it every day!

3. We are on a holy mission.

People are going to be rescued from every tribe, tongue, and nation. There is no greater mission than to take the gospel to other people – starting with our family, neighbors and friends (where we work, live and play) but also taking that message of hope to every spot on the planet. The promise to Abraham was that every person will be blessed, made happy from every single people group.

Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

[Sri Lanka](#) is officially a Buddhist country, while Sri Lankans practice a variety of religions. As of the 2012 census, 70.2% of Sri Lankans were Buddhists, 12.6% were Hindus, 9.7% were Muslims (mainly Sunni), 7.4% were Christians (mostly Catholics).

Sri Lanka is still a dangerous place to be a Christian! It's even a dangerous place to be a Sunni Muslim.

[State.gov](https://www.state.gov) - At the end of 2022, approximately 70 Muslims, including 25 who were indicted on various charges and whose court cases were ongoing, remained in custody in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks that targeted Christian churches and luxury hotels, killing 268 persons, including 46 foreign citizens, and injuring more than 500. Religious rights groups reported instances in which police continued to prohibit, impede, or attempt to close Christian and Muslim places of worship, citing government regulations.

We are a new creation. We are now a Spirit empowered creation. We have a Holy Spirit inspired mission.

NOTES

Scriptures

Acts 1:6-8 "So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" He said to them, "**It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"

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Week 7 Teaching Outline

A New People

The people of God live in an "already-but-not-yet" kingdom.

Apostles wrote letters to churches—people like you and me.

Most letters start with belief and move to behavior.

Who are we as the Church? Three things about our new identity:

1. We are a new people.

The Christian faith is radically exclusive and radically inclusive.

2. We have new power.

God's Spirit has moved into our lives.

3. We are on a holy mission.

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There is no greater mission than to take the gospel to other people.

Personal Study

Our Session 6 teaching focused on Jesus, the King who has come to serve and save. We discussed how His kingdom is not like an earthly kingdom but is totally turned upside down. We also reinforced the truth that all of Scripture points to Jesus. The story is about Him. In your personal study this week, you'll examine an account of Jesus making that point Himself. You'll also learn more about Jesus' kingdom and who is fit for it.

WHERE WE'VE BEEN: JESUS

A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man, enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal kingdom and secures salvation for His people.

WHERE WE'RE HEADED: A NEW PEOPLE

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

DAY ONE: The First Easter Sermon

Fittingly, Jesus was the first to preach an Easter sermon. Not only did He conquer the grave, but He also pursued people immediately after doing so to ensure they understood the reality of His resurrection. His first message was heard by two guys who were walking the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus. As Jesus began walking along with them, He asked what they were talking about. One of the men, Cleopas, responded with a hint of sarcasm: “Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn’t know ...?” (Luke 24:18). They then shared the news that the Jesus of Nazareth, who had performed miracles, wowed crowds, and spoken with incredible authority had been crucified. They were deeply disappointed because they had hoped Jesus was the one to rescue Israel. They were also troubled by reports that angels were declaring Jesus was alive. It was a lot to process and take in. Jesus rebuked them for their weak faith.

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Wasn’t it necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted for them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures.
Luke 24:25-27

Jesus then showed them how all the Scripture points to Him. They didn’t recognize Him until after he had blessed, broken, and given them bread. Jesus then disappeared. The two men hurried back to Jerusalem to find the disciples. As they were sharing how Jesus found them on the road and preached His own Easter sermon, Jesus appeared to the whole group. He told them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He also said to them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
Luke 24:44-47

For the Jews, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms was their entire Bible. Therefore, Jesus was essentially saying, “All that you have read and studied points to Me!” In the Law, God gave His people commands and set up a priest and sacrificial system because of man’s inability to keep the commands. In the Prophets, God spoke through men to call His people to truth, justice, and faithfulness. In Psalms, God’s people celebrated the rule of God. Many of the psalms were written by David, the king who, though deeply flawed, united the people and ruled them skillfully. Because Jesus is the point of all the Scripture, we see that He is the perfect Priest, the perfect Prophet, and the perfect King.

JESUS IS THE PERFECT PRIEST (THE LAW).

While priests in the Old Testament needed to offer sacrifices every single day, Jesus offered Himself for our sins “once for all” (Heb. 7:27). On the cross He yelled

out, "It is finished" (John 19:30) because the full payment for our sins was paid, and the wrath of God was quenched. Other priests offered animals as sacrifices, but Christ offered Himself as the pure and perfect sacrifice—the sacrifice to end all other sacrifices.

JESUS IS THE PERFECT PROPHET (THE PROPHETS).

The prophets confronted people in their sin and called the people to repentance. Jesus likewise called people to repentance but also called them to Himself. "Repent" and "Come to Me" were messages He heralded. Jesus is full of both truth and grace. He is also the Prophet to whom all other prophets pointed.

JESUS IS THE PERFECT KING (THE PSALMS).

Every other king, even the good ones, fell woefully short of God's greatness and grace. He stands alone as the King of kings. King David wrote of the Faithful One who would not see decay in Psalm 16:

*Therefore my heart is glad
and my spirit rejoices;
my body also rests securely.
For you will not abandon me to Sheol;
you will not allow your faithful one to see decay.*

Psalm 16:9-10

Clearly David was not speaking of himself because David's body did see decay. But King Jesus' body never did. Not only did He preach His own Easter sermon, He rose from the grave before He did! He is the King who rules and reigns forever.

Jesus is your perfect Priest, Prophet, and King.

Q: What does it mean for you that Jesus is your Priest?

Q: What does it mean for you that Jesus is your Prophet?

Q: What does it mean for you that Jesus is your King?

DAY TWO: The Kingdom & the Birds of the Sky

As we talked about in our group session, Jesus announced the good news of His kingdom. He is the King who rules and reigns forever, and we are invited into His kingdom! Jesus also taught about the kingdom of heaven through parables. In

Matthew 13, He offered six parables about His kingdom. Let's look at one of those parables today:

He presented another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It's the smallest of all the seeds, but when grown, it's taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches."

Matthew 13:31-32

When Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a tiny mustard seed, perhaps the crowd understood that the kingdom of heaven on this earth would start small. And it did. For the most part, Christ's arrival on this earth was a minor and unnoticed event to the vast majority of humanity. It was not broadcast on FOX or CNN. There were no marketing plans and no campaign offices set up to let people know that a new leader was arriving. On the night of Christ's birth, no one even provided Joseph and Mary a room. So Jesus was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for livestock.

After His birth, He grew up in a backwoods town in Galilee, far from the influence and affluence of the Roman Empire. When Jesus was around 30, He began teaching publicly and performing miracles. He invited 12 disciples to live with Him and follow Him. These 12 disciples were normal guys, uneducated, not from the religious elite, rough around the edges, and impulsive. After Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended back to heaven, about 120 people gathered together in prayer in Jerusalem waiting for direction from the Holy Spirit on what to do next. The kingdom of heaven started small.

But Jesus assured His disciples the kingdom would not stay small. It would grow and become like a tree. In Israel, the mustard plant would grow to be as tall as 15 feet high. It was a garden plant, but the largest garden plant; so large that some would refer to it as a tree. Like the mustard plant, the kingdom of heaven in this world has grown very large. The rule of God has expanded to people all over the globe. The kingdom is still expanding and will continue to expand, including people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Even as you are doing this study, there are millions of other men, women, and children around the world studying the Bible. Some do so in secret because it is illegal to be a Christian and their lives are in constant danger. Some are meeting under trees in remote villages because they have no space under roof. But today in many different languages and dialects, Christ is being praised and glorified and the kingdom of heaven is expanding.

What Jesus said would happen has happened and continues to happen.

But that is not all Jesus was saying in this parable. The kingdom grows to a large tree “so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches” (v.32). What does this mean?

This phrase took the listeners back to several Old Testament passages describing earthly kingdoms that were so powerful and fruitful that people outside of those kingdoms benefited from them. When Israel was in Babylonian captivity under Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel interpreted the ruler’s dream. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he saw the following:

***The tree grew large and strong;
its top reached to the sky,
and it was visible to the ends of the earth.
Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit was abundant, and on it was food for all.
Wild animals found shelter under it,
the birds of the air lived in its branches,
and every creature was fed from it.***
Daniel 4:11-12

Daniel told the king of Babylon, “That tree is you” (Dan. 4:22). The Babylonian kingdom was so fruitful that the culture, education, architecture, and philosophy of other nations was impacted by its influence. The crowd also knew of the Assyrian kingdom. When the Assyrian kingdom was prospering, the “birds of the sky nested in its branches” (Ezek. 31:6). Both Babylonian and Assyrian kingdoms impacted outsiders.

And so it is with the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven influences people outside of the kingdom. If you live under the rule of God, people at your work and in your neighborhood benefit from your influence. As you walk with integrity, work hard, love and forgive people, and bring your best to your craft, you bless and influence others. You are a part of a people that blesses all other peoples. And as we influence the world around us, we are commanded to invite others into His kingdom. We are commanded to make disciples, urging others to receive His forgiveness and to live with Jesus as their King.

While the Babylonian, Assyrian, and other kingdoms rose and fell, the kingdom of heaven will never end. Our King eternally reigns!

Q: How have you seen your church influence people outside the kingdom of heaven?

Q: How are you and your family doing that? Be specific.

DAY THREE: Kingdom Man: A Pharisee or a Tax Collector

The people who are fit for the kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated, are not the strong, the proud, or other type people you might expect. To enter His kingdom, we must become humble like children. To enter His kingdom, we must embrace our weakness and fragility and realize how desperately we need Him. Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector. One was qualified for His kingdom and the other was not. Jesus shocked the crowd when He revealed who was justified and right with God.

Pharisees were religious and devout individuals. The word Pharisee means "the separated ones," stemming from their desire to live separate and distinct lives, lives that were holy and pure. They fasted twice a week. They tithed. They prayed regularly. They were serious about their faith. Mothers wanted their children to be Pharisees.

Tax collectors were polar opposite of the Pharisees. They were known as traitors because they worked for Rome, the foreign invaders who occupied the land. They were also seen as thieves, hiking up rates to line their own pockets. They were despised. So when Jesus wanted to make a point to the religious people about not trusting in their own works, He told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

We often think about humanity in terms of good people and bad people. Some would think that if a story's main characters are a Pharisee and a tax collector, this story is going to be about a good, religious man and a bad, sinful one. But Jesus looks at humanity in different terms. We are all bad, all of us. There is no one righteous, no not one. He views us in terms of humble and proud.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

The Pharisee celebrated his own goodness. Even though he addressed God, he really prayed to himself about himself. He listed all the things that he was not. "I am so glad I am not greedy. I am not unrighteous. I am not an adulterer like other people I know. And I am not like this tax collector who steals money from others. He then listed some of the things he did. I fast. I give. And look at me right now, I am praying." Yet for all that activity, this Pharisee never really encountered the Lord. Because when we encounter the Lord, we declare how great He is, not how great we are.

The Pharisee looked down on others because of his pride in all he was doing for God. Anytime we think we are righteous in our own goodness, we will immediately look down on others. We will consider ourselves a special kind of

Christian, at a level to which others have not arrived. But we can't bring our spiritual résumé to Christ in pride. If we attempt to stand before Him in our own goodness, we insult Him, saying we believe His death was in vain.

The tax collector's prayer was very different from the Pharisee's. The tax collector mourned his own sinfulness. He would not even look up to heaven. He prayed, "Turn Your wrath from me" (v. 13). The language here is powerful. When he begged God for mercy, he used the word *hilaskomai*, which is translated propitiation. It is a powerful word that is used several times in the New Testament. It is the same word used to describe the mercy seat on top of the ark of covenant.

Remember that the scene for Jesus' parable is the temple. Inside the temple was the Most Holy Place where the high priest would enter once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people. Before entering, the high priest would take a goat and sacrifice it on the altar in the outer court of the temple. He would take the blood from the goat and bring it into the Most Holy Place, then sprinkle it on the seat of propitiation, also called the mercy seat, which served as the lid of the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark of the covenant were the Ten Commandments, the commandments that bring condemnation because we are unable to live up to them. The blood being sprinkled on the seat of propitiation signified that God's wrath was being appeased. It was turned from His people and placed instead on the goat that was sacrificed. The goat received the punishment instead of the people.

In Jesus' story, the tax collector understands this truth. He is outside the temple, hearing the sacrifices being made and saying, "God, let those sacrifices bear the punishment for my sin. I know that because You are holy, You can't just forget my sin. It has to be punished. Please God, turn Your wrath for my sin away from me."

The tax collector mourned his own sinfulness, and he went home justified.

The word justified means he went home in complete right standing with God. The tax collector did not merely go home with his sins forgotten; he went home right with God. He went home with the perfection of God applied to His life. He went home as if he had never stolen, never lied, never cheated, always done the right thing, always treated people the right way, always been loving and gracious. He went home as if he had obeyed at all times every one of the commandments that were sealed in the ark of the covenant. He went home right with God not because he, in his own merit, actually lived those commandments but because God had justified Him.

Those who are justified realize they are weak before God, in need of His mercy and grace, and call out to Him in faith. Others who are like the Pharisee are prideful and full of themselves. In reality, they are people who are empty.

Q: Do you identify more with the Pharisee or the tax collector? Why?

DAY FOUR: Miracle of Bread

The miracles Jesus performed proved He is the eternal King. When John the Baptist sent people to ask Jesus if He was the One, Jesus sent word back that the sick are healed, the dead raised, and the blind receive sight. The miracles supported His claims to deity. The only miracle recorded in all four Gospel accounts is the miracle of Jesus feeding 5,000 men (when you include the women and children, the crowd would have been much larger).

Read John 6:1-14 and John 6:22-35.

Jesus made several famous “I AM” statements in the Gospel of John. His declaration “I am the bread of life” was the first (v. 35).

When Jesus declared to be “I AM,” He was declaring to be God. As we learned earlier, long before Jesus walked the earth, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush, calling him to lead God’s people out of Egyptian slavery to freedom. When Moses asked God what His name was, God replied, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). So when Jesus referred to Himself as I AM, He was declaring to be the One who spoke to Moses from the bush, the One who is from the beginning, the One who is God.

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus shocked and infuriated the crowd by saying, “Before Abraham, I am” (John 8:58). He was declaring His eternal nature—that He was before Abraham, and that He has always been. The crowd attempted to stone Him to death because they viewed His statement as blasphemy, and the punishment for blasphemy was stoning. Jesus was either guilty of blasphemy, or He is indeed God.

Of course, anyone can claim to be God. You may have a crazy uncle who talks a big game at the annual family gathering or a cousin who is always story-topping you with some tale about something great he pulled off. Anyone can claim anything.

But Jesus did much more than just claim to be God. He backed it up.

When Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life," He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:25). When Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world," He put light into a blind man's eyes (John 9:5). And before Jesus declared "I am the bread of life," He fed 5,000 men with two fish and five bread loaves (John 6:35). No one but Jesus can pull that off.

The crowd knew the story of Moses and the "bread from heaven." After their ancestors were freed from Egypt, they wandered in the desert before entering the promised land. During that time, God fed His people by providing manna from heaven.

Jesus told the crowd that in Him, God was now giving them the true bread from heaven. Jesus is better. He is the eternal bread from heaven, the One who came to sustain us and satisfy our souls. When we receive Him, when we feast on Him, we are never hungry again (John 6:35). Your job, your friends or family, your career goals, your dream house or boat cannot and will not quench you. Only Jesus can. Only He is the Bread of life.

How is your life different when Jesus is the One who sustains and satisfies you?

Q: What's your biggest hindrance in allowing Jesus to do that?

Group Questions

Discussion Guide

1. Share a quick summary of highlights from Weeks 1–6. Why is this week an important point in redemptive history and the unfolding story of God?
2. What does it mean that Jesus' kingdom is "already, but not yet"? Explain.
3. How does understanding the kingdom is "already, but not yet" help you deal with the difficulties of life?
4. How would you explain the great exchange?
5. What does it mean to be clothed in Christ's righteousness?

Read the following scripture aloud.

17 He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So, then, you are no longer foreigners and

strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:17–22

6. What does it mean for Jesus to be your cornerstone? Is He? Why or why not? Does everything in your life revolve around Jesus? Explain.

7. Eric said the Holy Spirit has moved into our lives and now we can become more like Jesus. Are you more like Jesus today than you were last week? Last year? Why or why not? What does your answer reveal about being a disciple and making disciples?

Look up Matthew 28:18–20 and Acts 1:8. Read it aloud.

8. How are you currently carrying out Jesus' mission to reconcile people from every tribe, tongue, and nation? Honestly, what other "missions" in your life appear to be more important? How can Jesus' mission become the priority, even in your normal daily responsibilities and interests?

Look back over the personal study.

9. What was especially meaningful or helpful in understanding the story of God and your life with Christ?

- Day 1: The First Easter Sermon
- Day 2: The Kingdom & the Birds of the Sky
- Day 3: Kingdom Man: A Pharisee or a Tax Collector
- Day 4: Miracle of Bread
- Day 5: Reflection

10. How does the takeaway affect your view of Scripture? How will you respond to this part of the story?

We are God's people, filled with the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses, making disciples of all nations.

8-week overview

CREATION AND FALL

The self-sufficient and eternal God lovingly creates a perfect creation with humanity as His crowning work. Falling for Satan's temptation, humanity rebels and sin enters the world bringing death, pain, and strife. Instead of giving up on humanity, God promises that from the womb of a woman will come the One who will crush Satan's head.

PROMISE AND A PEOPLE

God pursues Abraham, a man from an idol-worshipping family who has no children with his wife and promises that he will be the father of many nations. God promises land to Abraham and assures him that all nations will be blessed through his offspring. God continues to be faithful to this family. He restates the promise to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob (who is renamed Israel). A famine strikes the promised land, so Jacob and the family move to Egypt where one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, is already there to provide for the family.

RESCUE AND LAW

The family becomes a nation while living in Egypt, but also becomes enslaved to the Egyptians. God raises up Moses to lead His people to freedom. During a tenth plague, God strikes dead the firstborn son of everyone living in Egypt, but "passes over" Israel as they put the blood of lambs on their doorposts. After miraculously rescuing His people, God gives His people the law. He also instructs them to build a tabernacle and offer sacrifices so He may dwell among them.

LAND AND KINGDOM

God brings His people, through their leader Joshua, into the promised land. When God's people worship the gods of the nation's surrounding them, God disciplines them through the attacks of surrounding nations. God raises up judges (or rulers) to rescue His people and call them to repentance. They beg for a king to be like other nations, and God gives them Saul. God raises up a new king, David, and promises that his kingdom will never end. The family that turned into a nation is now a kingdom. David's son, Solomon, builds a temple to replace the tabernacle.

EXILE AND RETURN

Solomon takes foreign wives and allows their foreign gods to clutter the land. His son continues the line of rulers, and the kingdom is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Prophets confront the people, but they persist in their idolatry. The Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom is carried away into Babylonian captivity. When they are freed, they return to a nation and kingdom far less glorious than before and are still unable to keep their promises.

JESUS

A descendant of Adam, Abraham, and David, Jesus is the One who crushes the head of Satan, will bless all nations, and reigns forever. Jesus, the God-Man,

enters humanity through the womb of a virgin, perfectly obeys the law that we could never obey, dies as the once-and-for-all sacrifice for our sins, and rises from the dead, conquering Satan, sin, and death. He inaugurates His eternal kingdom and secures salvation for His people.

A NEW PEOPLE

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit and His disciples turn the world upside down preaching the good news of Jesus. In the midst of intense persecution, the gospel spreads, and Gentiles and Jews form a new people. Churches are planted in cities, and apostles write letters encouraging and instructing the people in the grace of Christ and their response to His grace.

A BETTER BEGINNING

A time is coming where God's people—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation who have been rescued by Christ—will enjoy Him and His rule forever in perfect harmony. Satan will be crushed, the effects of sin will be reversed, and all things will be made new.

This first week will ease you into the story with just four scriptures setting the stage for our epic journey. Weeks 2–8 will dive deeper into each day's personal study. Ideally, you'll have time to read one passage of Scripture each day for four days leading up to the first group session, plus one day of personal reflection. If you don't have the full week or you didn't receive your book in advance, that's OK—read what you can before your first discussion begins.