



Sermon Discussions - The Wonderful Work of God

We are starting a new series which is an overview of the Bible's storyline. This is one of the most helpful things for Christians to know, both in understanding and applying the Bible (given this year's reading plan), but more in knowing God and seeing our own lives as part of God's story and what he is doing. Here are the sermons going through the OT:

1. Creation & Fall
2. The promise to Abraham
3. Exodus
4. The Law
5. The covenant with David
6. Solomon's reign - the high point
7. Decline & Exile
8. The Prophetic hope

After this we will have three sermons leading up to Good Friday and Easter, then after Easter a few weeks in the New Testament to finish the story.

Studies

Because this is such foundational knowledge for Christians, we want to make sure we engage with it in CG. But we felt the normal questions we used for e.g. James are not that helpful to engage with a series like this. They work well for passage-based sermons but not for more theological, slightly thematic ones like this. So I'll be writing normal studies with questions for this series, with guidance and answers.

Just to say, the point of an overview is to drive us to Jesus. That is why God gave us the Old Testament - to prepare us for and drive us to Jesus. This means two things.

- The material is more focussed on our head and heart, rather than on our will. I.e. don't expect to come away with things to do. Rather, people should be really feeling the greatness of God, the horror of sin, the longing for hope, the unbelievable surprise of grace etc. Often the question is just "How do you feel?" God could have sent Jesus in Genesis 4, but instead he wants us to take our time.
- We're doing the Bible's storyline. Stories are not complete until the end. So some studies will feel a bit frustrating, as you're left with tension that will not get resolved until next week. That's OK! God tells a story for a reason. He wants us to feel the tension, as this is what drives us to Jesus. So don't go to the New



Testament too quickly and so neuter what God wants to say to us. Let him set the agenda.

A few more practical tips for leading:

- They are sermon discussions in that it is related to the content that was preached last week. So do get people to listen to those.
- The passages referred to are often long. The sermons are slightly thematic in that they cover multiple passages often. So don't start the meeting by e.g. reading out all of Genesis 1-3. Choose relevant passages, or better yet, ask people to read it in advance so you have more time for discussion.
- As usual there will be a flow to the study. They are not independent questions. So be familiar with how the study flows and what is important. Be prepared to move on to the next question to keep to time, so you don't get stuck.
- Focus on the Big Picture, not the details. Don't get sidetracked. There are so many things to talk about in each passage. How does Genesis 1 fit with modern science? That's not the point. What does it mean that "your desire will be for (or against) your husband" (Gen 3:16)? It's complicated - but the point is there are consequences in their relationship. Etc... Don't lose the wood for the trees.
- All this means you need to be a strong leader. Don't just let the discussion flow. If it is going off track, get people back to the question you asked. *(It might mean you want to let only more experienced people lead. Previous studies you could get away with just reading out the next question on the list - but not here!)*

Help

If you like to be better prepared, here are two suggestions

- Vaughan Roberts' *God's Big Picture* is a great book, easy to read, covering the same material. Our sermons don't exactly fit his chapters (e.g. he covers Genesis 1-3 in two chapters) but it is very similar. Watch it for free in 10-minute videos on <https://godsbigpicture.co.uk/>
- Niels has study notes from a bible overview of his old church in London, St Helen's Bishopsgate. These are also feeding into this series. Relevant ones will be in this [Drive](#). They are not for on the website, so share this only with those leading. This is for a year-long course (27 bible studies!) so sometimes will refer back to passages we haven't covered, but the detailed notes really help. Please



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read them as notes on the passage. They are not essential - the questions have some guidance - but very highly recommended..

Praying for an amazing time feeling the gospel more deeply! Any questions let me know.



Week 1 - Genesis 1-3 - Creation & Fall

Sermon Outline

1. God's Good Creation
 - a. God is the author of everything that exists
 - b. God is the ruler of everything that exists
 - c. Humanity has a special place in creation
 - d. The purpose is relationship
2. Mankind's Terrible Rebellion
 - a. They doubt God's Word and authority
 - b. They want to take God's place
3. Sin's Tragic Consequences
 - a. Death enters the world
 - b. Sin takes root in our hearts
 - c. Mankind's relationship with God is broken
4. The Wonderful Work of God
 - a. *The Bible ends with a restored world - that is the storyline*
 - b. *There are glimmers of hope already in Genesis 3.*

Relevant God's Big Picture videos on [Genesis 1-2](#) and [Genesis 3](#).

Passage probably best read in sections for each question (creation, sin, consequences)

Questions

Creation - Genesis 1-2 (sermon readings: Gen 1:1-2, 1:31-2:10, 2:15-18, 2:24-25)

1. What things do we learn about God from Genesis 1-2? And about humanity and our relationship with God? What struck you especially?

These chapters give us an awesome picture of God. In 1:1-2:3 his power in just speaking everything into being. He is the only one acting in these chapters, it's all from him. His kingship as he commands and directs. His generosity as everything is good and in order. And then in ch.2 the intimacy as he doesn't speak but like a craftsman forms the man from the dust, breathes into him... his generosity and grace in giving such a lavish garden and abundant provision, and Adam didn't do anything for it, it was all undeserved. And for us the privilege of being in the image of God, given stewardship over the whole world, made for a relationship with him...



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2. How would Adam & Eve have felt about God and their relationship with him, walking around the garden? Do we feel the same, and if not why not?

Applying the previous question. I think they would have felt so incredibly privileged. Without them doing anything God had made them for a wonderful relationship with him - the infinite, all-powerful, gracious and generous Creator. They were in his image in a beautiful garden filled with every possible blessing. They would be in awe of God, humble, grateful... and so should we if we understand creation.

The Fall - Genesis 3:1-6

3. Can you explain in your own words why eating the fruit was so serious? What was the real sin behind just breaking a command?

The fruit wasn't in itself anything special. And it was more than breaking a command. As we heard on Sunday, the question is why they took it, on two levels.

- *They doubt God - his word, authority, goodness etc. The serpent lies about God, that they won't die, and that God is not good but keeps the best things for himself. Their eating shows they no longer trust God.*
- *Worse, they are taking God's place. The serpent says they will be like God if they eat it, and that is why God doesn't want them to have it. He wants to keep his place, his authority. So if they take it, they don't need God anymore. It is really a rejection of him, taking his place. And hence a huge sin.*

(NB People may wonder about "knowing good and evil", what that means. This has the sense of "deciding" what is good and evil, making the rules. E.g. in Genesis 1 "God saw that it was good". This doesn't mean God made something blindly, and surprisingly it turned out rather well. No, God declared it good, and later all creation was very good. But this same phrase is used in 3:6 of Eve. She "saw that the tree was good (for food)". She decided it was a good thing to eat. I.e. she ignores God, thinks she knows better than him and decides on the rules. The confusing thing is that the "knowing good and evil" was already the act of taking the fruit, rather than as we often think, the result of eating the fruit. Hope this helps.)

4. How do you feel about their sin in light of what we've seen about God in chapters 1-2? How does it make you feel about your own sin?

The reason these chapters are together is that we should see sin in light of creation. Breaking a command and rebelling is wrong. But it is especially unbelievable that



anyone would want to reject the God of Genesis 1-2. Someone of such power, and such love and generosity and grace. Believing the serpent rather than the God who made you and gave you everything, thinking you don't need him, is perverse. And again, we should feel the same when we sin - thinking we know better than God, that he doesn't love us, so we are justified in doing what he says is not good for us....

The Consequences - Genesis 3:7-24

5. What were the consequences of Adam & Eve's sin? How do we see those in the world today?

There's a few, but they fall under three headings generally.

- *Adam & Eve's relationship is broken. They blame each other and will be fighting according to v16.*
- *Their relationship with creation is broken. The world is now full of pain, work is hard, and one day creation will win and they will die. (v.16-19)*
- *Most of all their relationship with God is broken. They hide from him in shame and later are cast out of the garden. They can't be with him anymore, and there is hostility between them. (v8, 22-24)*

Very much life now - broken relationships with others, suffering and death, and we can't be with God. That is why life is so hard these days.

6. Tomorrow you will be confronted with the curse lying on this world. How would you normally respond? How should you instead feel after these chapters?

We often feel angry or frustrated when things go wrong in life - our computer breaks down, we fall out with people, we get the flu... but clearly we shouldn't complain. We have rejected this wonderful gracious God who gives us every blessing. No wonder we have nothing left. And it should make us pretty hopeless...

7. We see in Revelation 21-22 that it will all end well. How does that make you feel? What glimmers of hope do we see already here?

There's little glimmers of hope. 3:15 - someone will beat the serpent and so deal with the source of sin and make things right. 3:21 - God covers their nakedness with



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animal skins - i.e. through an animal dying in their place. But the overall mood is sorrow for sin, so leave this question for the last few minutes before you finish.



Week 2 - Genesis 12 & 15 - Abraham

Sermon Outline

1. Promise
2. Covenant
3. Faith

There is a *God's Big Picture* video on [Genesis 12](#), though the St Helen's notes are much closer to what was taught in the sermon. Passage read was Genesis 12:1-9, 15:1-18. The big point is God's promise to restore his kingdom (God's people in God's place under God's rule, experiencing his blessing) and his absolute commitment to doing so, and hence Abraham's response of faith..

Questions

Genesis 12:1-9

1. Why is this passage so significant in the Bible's storyline? What does it show about God, coming at this point in the story?

Many people see this just as focussed on Abraham, highlighting his obedient faith. Yet the main significance is God's promise. Abraham's descendants will be God's people and live with God in the land God will give them. In context it is clearly a restoration of what was lost in Genesis 3: a new people, in a new land, experiencing God's blessing. Particularly as it will lead to blessing for the whole world it is a reversal of the consequences of the Fall.

Given the sin and mess of the previous chapters, it shows God's amazing grace, that he will certainly bless these people who have rejected him.

2. How do you usually think of God in the Old Testament? How do you feel about this 'gospel' coming already in ch.12 of the Bible?

People often think the OT God is angry and vengeful, and then Jesus is loving. But this passage is good news of amazing grace, real gospel (Galatians 3:13), and so early on in the Bible. It should make us read the OT differently.



Genesis 15:1-18

3. In what ways does God reassure Abraham and us this promise will not fail? Which one do you find the most striking?

There are a few ways that were mentioned in the sermon.

- *Just the fact that it's a covenant - not just any promise.*
- *The ceremony of passing between the parts, showing God's commitment ("if I don't keep this covenant, you can cut me in two")*
- *The fact that it's just the LORD passing between the parts. It depends only on him, not on Abraham.*

All of this should be so reassuring that this promise will definitely happen.

If people are curious about the animals cut in half: Jeremiah 34 is helpful, especially 34:18-19. It talks about people who made a covenant by cutting a calf in two and passing between the parts. Then they broke the covenant, and God says he will punish them by making them like that calf. The word for cutting in two only appears in Genesis 15 and Jeremiah 34 (and Song of Songs 2:7, referring to a cleft in the mountains) so the two passages are strongly linked.

4. How does God's commitment here make you feel? How does it make you want to respond?

The passage should really touch our hearts, that God would be so committed to making things right, and that he will do it all without us. Humble, grateful, feeling in awe, love... and we want to respond in worship and trust.

5. How did Abraham respond? How does this passage help us see what faith really is and why it is the response God is looking for?

Faith leading to action. We all know the NT highlights Abraham's faith (e.g. Romans 4, Galatians 3, Hebrews 11) and how it showed itself in action (James 2 last year). Abraham trusted the promise, and that enabled him to obey. Good to see that for Abraham it was not intellectual acknowledgement that God exists, but a personal trust in what God said that actually changed his life.

It is the right response because it is the opposite of sin. That is disobedience flowing out of doubting God, rather than obedience flowing out of taking God at his word.



Or to put it another way, faith acknowledges God as God, trusting him to do what we can't, rather than taking his place and thinking we can do it ourselves.

6. If God alone will fulfil this promise, does Abraham still need to respond? How would you explain this apparent contradiction in your own words?

The big emphasis has been that God alone will fulfil this covenant without our involvement, and we see that when Abraham's sin and failure to trust God does not nullify God's covenant. But then it seems strange that Abraham is still supposed to respond, as are we. But these two are not contradictory. God will restore the kingdom all by himself, but Abraham needs to respond so that he will share in that restored kingdom. (Like taking an international flight: I have absolutely no part to play in flying the plane, it does not depend on my behaviour. But if I want to get to my destination I do need to make sure I've boarded the plane. I can't just stay on the ground)

This is of course exactly the gospel, humanly speaking. Jesus has done everything for our salvation, but I do need to respond to Jesus and put my trust in him, to be "in Christ", in order to benefit from his salvation.

7. What are you facing in life at the moment that this passage speaks to? What would it look like for you to respond with faith like Abraham?

Bringing it down to life now. Maybe we face difficulties, and we need to remember that God will make everything right. Or we are doubting God's power and goodness and we need to trust. But hopefully this passage will speak powerfully into our daily lives.



Week 4 - Exodus 19-20 - The Law

Sermon Outline

1. **A privileged relationship with God.** God has rescued Israel from Egypt and is now entering a covenant with them. It's like a marriage and amazingly privileged.
2. **Requiring God at the centre.** However, it is a two-way covenant. Israel can only enjoy this if they are under God's rule, by obeying his law, effectively putting God at the centre of all of life. It is good but not optional, as God is teaching us.
3. **Because this is reality.** God gives them a great vision of who he is, as the holy and awesome Creator. And if that is who God is and what the world is like, it is just reality that he should be at the centre of everything. So if we want to go back to how things should be, like in the Garden of Eden, that doesn't just mean an end to pain in suffering but also putting God at the centre again.

There is a *God's Big Picture* video on everything from Genesis 12 to the end of Leviticus, so, covering the [Exodus and the Law](#), though again the St Helen's notes are much closer to what was taught in the sermon. Passage read was Exodus 19:1-20, 20:18-21. Sadly the sermon is not online. Hopefully you have heard it, and the notes will help.

Questions

1. How do you feel about obeying God as part of the Christian life? And maybe when explaining the gospel to others?

Sets up the issue that this moment in the Bible's story addresses. God requires obedience as we will see, but we often don't think about that, or think kind of spoils the good news of the gospel. So maybe share how people feel about it.

2. Think about Israel's experience of the Exodus and the relationship God is promising here. What things make this so amazing? How should you feel?

This is what Israel is entering: an amazing privileged relationship with the great God who rescued them. They will be his special people with a special role, he is committed to them like a husband, they know him like no one else through what they just experienced and now still as God reveals himself, he will live in their midst in the tabernacle, he will bless them in every way with peace and prosperity, etc. Incredible that this unworthy people receive this relationship. They should feel so privileged and thankful.



3. How is God going to bless the world through Israel (if needed read Deut 4:5-8)? How is this different from what you thought life under the Law would be like?

Israel will be a kingdom of priests (19:6). They will be God's special nation among all the other nations and as such an intermediary between God and the nations. According to Deuteronomy 4:5-8, it is particularly through the law and the beautiful society it produces when people keep it that other nations will want to know the true God.

The surprise is that most of us think life under the Law would be a horrendous burden. Instead, God says it should make Israel a beautiful and attractive place that everyone in their right mind should want to be part of - like the church today that is a showcase of the beautiful community the gospel produces.

4. But God introduces something new - this is a two-way, conditional covenant requiring obedience, putting God at the Centre. Why is that important?

19:5 says "if you will indeed obey" and from all the laws and consequences for disobedience it is clear that this is serious and necessary. What it means is that Israel can only enjoy God's blessing when they are under God's rule. You can't have one without the other, and rejecting God's rule means losing God's blessing, just like with Adam & Eve. They go together, and God wants to emphasise that.

5. The sermon explained God should be at the centre "Because this is reality". What does this mean, from God's appearance on Mt Sinai in Exodus 19?

God comes down on Mt Sinai and Israel gets to 'meet' him. He is awesome and holy, set apart from everything else as the Creator. If this is who God really is, if this is the one who made the world, who is greater than the world, no wonder that he should be at the centre of our lives. You can't ignore the Creator and pretend he doesn't matter. We are his image bearers. He is the centre of the universe so he should be the centre of our lives. It is just reality.

There are all kinds of reasons why we might want to live God's way. It is good, it is the best way to live, it is a good witness, we love God and want to please him, and so on. All good reasons! Yet underneath all that, this is just the reality of God and the world and humanity.



These days people wonder, why should I live God's way? Who is God that it gives him the right to tell me what to do? Well, he is the Creator. It is not arbitrary or just power. He made you, he made the world, and it is designed to run his way.

6. When you think of "God making the world right", what kind of things do you usually think of? How does this passage challenge us?

We often don't think of this as making the world right. We think of the suffering and pain and oppression in the world as what is really wrong with the world, and we want God to fix it. But the main thing that's wrong with the world is sin - billions of people ignoring their Creator. That is the fundamental problem that needs to be fixed.

To put it in the language we have been using, with the cause of the Fall (sin) and the consequences (the curse), we usually think only of the consequences, probably because they most impact us personally. Yet the world will only be perfect when God addresses sin, the cause of the Fall. If we only think of our problems, they are indeed things that are wrong, but we could perhaps seek to become more God-centred.

7. What would it look like if we truly knew God as he is, both on the level of actions but also in our hearts and our motivations?

Certainly on the level of actions we will be living lives of love, following God's way. But I think it is good to dig deeper - where is God on our priority list? What are the reasons we want to do what is right - for God, or for other people, or for ourselves... - good to consider.

8. As we read on in the Bible, how can we know God like this? So what should we be praying for?

Ultimately we can only know God this deeply and live for him if God changes us. The history of Israel shows that an external law cannot change us (and even pretty soon after ch.19 the Israelites made a golden calf). That is why in the NT God again came down as a new Mt Sinai on the Day of Pentecost. As the Spirit dwells in our hearts he is changing us from the inside, and so we should seek him in prayer to make the reality of God real in our hearts, by his grace.



Week 5 - 2 Samuel 7:1-17 - David

Week 5 we look at the last of God's great OT covenants: God's promise to David in 2 Sam 7:10-16 that one of his descendants will be God's Son and will bring a permanent fulfilment of God's promises. Israel will be safe forever. They will have peace forever. The kingdom of Israel will last forever. God will dwell permanently with them. All in all it implies that this king will deal with the problem of sin that has hindered fulfilment so far.

Sermon Outline

1. **God's Kingdom is built... by God, not man.** The passage starts with David's plan to build a house for God, in a way trying to further God's plan to dwell with his people. But God says no - he is the one taking the initiative, not people.
2. **... and is undefeatable.** These promises are permanent. "No more" and "forever" are the repeated words. Once the Son of David comes this kingdom will last forever and nothing can end it, and that should give us great hope.

There is a [God's Big Picture video](#) on Numbers-2 Chronicles, so covering this sermon and the next two (Solomon, Exile). There are also again notes from St Helen's in the drive.

Questions

1. To set the context, what has been the general pattern for God's people from entering the land until the time of David? How would the Israelites have felt?

Important context. Before the monarchy came the period of the judges. It had a general cycle of God's people turning away from God, being oppressed in judgement, crying out, being rescued by a judge, ruled by him, until the judge died and Israel turned away from God again (Judges 2:11-19). It was very much up and down all the time, never reaching fulfilment, never peace, and the reason was sin, under the Law of Moses which brought punishment when people sin.

Hence, God's people must have despaired. They keep on sinning and never have rest as a result, and are looking for a permanent solution.

2. How do we feel similar to Israel in our lives?

Our lives can be very similar. As we still live as sinners in this broken world, life is up and down, unstable, never a lasting peace. And we might despair similarly.



3. What is God promising for Israel in v10-11a? How would this grace sound to them at this point in history?

In a way it's not too remarkable. God promises the Israelites will dwell in their own land and have peace. A fulfilment of what he promised Abraham. However, we should note the sound of permanence. They will be disturbed no more, they will be afflicted no more, crucially not like formerly under the judges. So no more ups and downs, but a permanent fulfilment. and given that that was due to sin, this implies a solution to sin will be found.

4. What is the big new element in this promise that suggests HOW God will bring about the fulfilment of his promises?

The new element is the promise of a king. God will raise up one of David's offspring and he will be the key. HIS kingdom will last forever, God will never remove his steadfast covenant love from HIM and HE will build God's house, so make God's dwelling with his people permanent. So this king will be the one to bring the fulfilment, and in a way it is implied that he must be the one to solve the problem of sin which currently prevents fulfilment. From here on, the Bible's search is about this king, the Son of David. And for us likewise - the king from David's line will be the one who will fulfil everything, and so in him we should trust.

5. What roles does a king have that make him the solution to the fulfilment of God's promises, particularly by addressing sin? How do we see that in the Bible?

More technical question but for the Bible's storyline good to see. A king is not just a random solution but one that makes sense - the three R's: Rescue, Rule, Represent.

- *God's people need rescue from the consequences of sin, and kings are the agent: they rescue the Israelites from their enemies by leading the army. We see that in Judges and also as David defeats the Philistines etc.*
- *Moreover, God's people need to be led in obeying God's rule - when there was no leader, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). We see that with the judges, who after rescuing Israel make sure people worship God, and so the land has peace until the judge dies. And in the same way David rescues Israel from the Philistines and then leads the people in worship and devotion and rules with justice & righteousness. Next week*



Solomon is the ultimate example of a ruling king (when he was young, at least).

- *The king represents the people. The relational promise “I will be their God, they will be my people” becomes “I will be to him a father, he will be to me a son.” So the promise of blessing and relationship is now focussed on the king. Not everyone in Israel may be godly, but if the king is godly and has a close relationship with God, he will be blessed, and the people in his kingdom are blessed through him, despite their own sin. So it is a representative function, like a national football team winning on behalf of those who are not good at football themselves.*

6. How does Jesus fulfil all these? How does that make you appreciate and love him more as your king?

Jesus does all these of course.

- *He rescues us from the consequences of sin (judgment) by taking our punishment on the cross.*
- *He rules us as our king, he is at work in our life to make us grow in godliness and so helps us obey God. Hopefully we can see this now as a good king, he doesn't rule us for his own benefit but for our benefit as he helps us live under God's rule, in line with reality like last week.*
- *And he represents us in that he earns God's blessing through his perfect life and sacrificial death, and shares his righteousness and victory with us who don't deserve it.*

And of course he does this perfectly and permanently, unlike human kings. We will see this more in week 8 when we look at the prophets and their promises of a far greater divine king, like Isaiah 9:2-7 (from Christmas) and 11:1-16. In all, Jesus is far greater and more wonderful than we could ever imagine.

7. How does this promise of permanent, undefeatable fulfilment speak to what is going on in your life right now? How will it affect our lives if we believe this?

Going back to the fleeting peace we have here and the up-and-down nature of life in a broken world from question 2. It is so wonderful that we have a king who takes care of everything, who deals with our sin in so many ways so that we can one day



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have unchanging peace in his everlasting kingdom. It gives us hope and peace in life now that will help us keep trusting and keep following our king whatever happens.



Week 6 - 1 Kings 3-10 - Solomon

Sermon Outline

1. **Promises Made.** Recap of God's promise to David which we saw last week and is the background to Solomon's reign.
2. **Promises Fulfilled.** The reign of Solomon was a great fulfilment of many of God's promises to Abraham, Moses and David and shows concretely what God is doing.
3. **Promises Foreshadowed.** The reign of Solomon points forward to the reign of Jesus and everything we have in him.

There is a [God's Big Picture video](#) on Numbers-2 Chronicles, so covering last week, this week and next). There are also again notes from St Helen's, though they cover not just the reign of Solomon but also his turning away and most of the consequences that follow. But we're separating the good & the bad, covering Solomon's fall next week, 25th.

Passages read on Sunday were 1 Kings 4:20-34 and 10:1-13, though many other passages in chapters 3 and 8 were referred to as well.

Questions

1. How does this week connect to last week's passage (2 Sam 7:1-17)? What does it suggest about how we should read it?

Last week we looked at God's covenant with David: one of his sons/ descendants would be king, he would build the temple and bring a kingdom of peace, with a real sense of permanence. All God's promises would be fulfilled through him.

Today we see the reign of David's Son, the obvious recipient of this promise (1 Kings 8:17-20). So we should read it as the fulfilment of that promise, the reign of God's king, or at least a picture of its fulfilment.

2. Think over all the promises God made to Abraham, Moses and David. In what ways are they fulfilled during Solomon's reign?

According to 1 Kings 8:56, God fulfilled so many promises

- Son of David ruling (2 Sam 7:12)
- God's presence - building the temple (2 Sam 7:13, 1 Kgs 5-8)
- Inhabiting the promised land (Gen 15:18, 1 Kgs 4:21)



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- Blessing, peace (Gen 12:2, 2 Sam 7:10, 1 Kgs 4:24-25)
- Great nation (Gen 12:2, 1 Kgs 4:20)
- Nations blessed (Gen 12:3, Ex 19:6, 1 Kgs 10:13)
- Return to Eden (1 Kgs 4:33, 10:21)

It is such testimony to God's faithfulness and should be really encouraging.

3. How do you feel about God's faithfulness on display here? Especially, given this was real and not just a story? How does it speak to you?

We should be humble and grateful for his faithfulness. God doesn't just say he is faithful, he shows it by his actions, and so we can have a firm confidence in the future kingdom of Jesus. This should be a big application.

4. What did the Israelites do to receive this blessing? What aspect of the gospel does this highlight? How do these chapters encourage you?

When we hear the gospel we mainly think of Jesus dying for our sins. But equally important is that Jesus is perfectly righteous and earns God's blessing and shares it with us. We are not the king, but we belong to him and so share in his blessing.

That makes these chapters so wonderful. We are unable to build this ourselves, unable to live the perfect life that merits this. So this glorious kingdom is a gift of grace to sinners like us, which is wonderful.

5. Before Sunday, what did you think heaven / the new creation would be like? What impact was it having on your day-to-day life?

These chapters give us a glimpse of Jesus' kingdom. But our own ideas are usually very different, e.g. sitting on a cloud with a harp in a white dress, or an eternal worship service. And that is not very exciting and worth living for.

I'm sure most of us would say we don't believe that kind of thing, but know it will be wonderful. Yet we still hardly think or talk about it. Why not?

6. Jesus' kingdom will be like this but a million times better. How do these chapters make you feel? How does it speak to what you are struggling with right now?



It's a great picture of paradise. Not sitting on a cloud but joy, peace, God's presence, blessing, safety... No more stress, trapped in a difficult job, misery, accidents, disasters, sin, injustice, poverty... All of us will have struggles right now that will be fully answered there.

7. How do these chapters give you confidence in the future? How will we live differently if we really believe this?

It should give us so much confidence. God's faithfulness that we have seen. The reality that God really did this in history. Seeing more what it will be like, God showing his plan... (and if we are worried about sin, we will hear on 3 March that God will deal with that too)

It should be life-changing. We can press on, we can not lose hope, we can rejoice in difficulties, we can serve, we can sacrifice... We will share about it and encourage people with it... And if we don't, do we really believe this? Worth thinking about together.



Week 7 - 1 Kgs 11, 2 Kgs 17, 2 Chrs 36 - Decline & Exile

Sermon Outline

The first part of the sermon sketched Israel's history after the high point of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 11 onwards). The following are notable moments

- Solomon's wives turn his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11)
- The kingdom splits into north (Israel) and south (Judah) in (922 BC, 1 Kings 12)
- After 200 years of terrible kings, the northern kingdom (Israel) is exiled by Assyria and never seen again (722 BC, 2 Kings 17)
- Judah has some good kings but generally is also terrible. They are exiled by Babylon in two stages (597 BC, 2 Kings 24 and 586BC, 2 Kings 25)

Judah does come back from Babylon when the Persians take over (539 BC) but is never again what it was.

This leads to a number of lessons we can learn:

1. **The Lord of History.** All the historical events we read about - kingdoms splitting, conquest, exile - are God's doing. He is active in history in salvation and judgment.
2. **The Deceitfulness of Idols.** Israel's decline is a long story of idolatry, starting with Solomon himself. We should beware of trusting anything other than God.
3. **The Destiny of Human Kingdoms.** Israel's downfall was inevitable. It relied on human beings, and they are sinful and face judgment. So every human kingdom will fall ultimately before God's kingdom
4. **The God who is Faithful to his Promises.** The judgment in these passages is not surprising, it is God's faithfulness to his promise to curse sin, as he made clear in the law. But if God was faithful in judgment, he will also one day be faithful in salvation.

There is a [God's Big Picture video](#) on Numbers-2 Chronicles, so covering the last two weeks and this one. The St Helen's notes from last week on Solomon and the decline also cover this week.

Passages read on Sunday were 1 Kings 11:1-8, 2 Kings 17:6-18 and 2 Chronicles 36:15-21.

The introduction is an optional quiz of names & events that Christians should know for fruitful bible reading. It is in the Google Drive as "OT names events.pdf". Then we first come to terms with the exile (questions 2-3), then look at the pervasiveness of sin (questions 4-5) and then God's character (q.6-7)



Questions

1. Quiz: put the names and events on the cards in order, to help us remember the history of the Old Testament. (Cursive cards optional, were not in the sermons)

When you read any book, you should be aware of its context. As we finish these 7 weeks on the history of the OT (not having covered the return from exile in 539 BC), maybe as a fun exercise start with reviewing the names and events we mentioned on Sundays, so people have a handle on the Bible's history. It's not that knowing God is about facts, yet to read the OT fruitfully you should know the basic storyline and how the main people and events fit in with this. I have included a few cursive names that have not been mentioned, you can do it as a bonus round. Here is the order

Abraham
Moses - The Law
(Conquest)
Judges
David
Solomon - Temple Dedicated
Split of Kingdom
(Elijah)
Assyrian exile - Samaria - (Hezekiah)
Babylonian exile - Jerusalem
(Daniel)
(Return)
(Ezra)

Not sure whether to do it individually or in a few groups.

2. Think of Solomon and everything he had. What does it show that his heart still turned away from the Lord? How should we respond to that?

After the glories of last week, this is the big shock, that Solomon would turn from the Lord. He really is a new Adam - he had everything, and threw it away by listening to his wives rather than to God. It shows idols and our hearts are really deceptive. No matter how old we are, how long we have walked with God, we can still turn away.

For us it does mean fleeing sin and idols, being on our guard, and never being complacent about our faith.



3. How would the Jews have felt in exile, given the heights they have come from? What questions would they have? When do we have similar questions?

Taking in how the people felt. The biggest shock was the exile of course - the temple burnt, city destroyed, royal family murdered, people killed or taken away, after a horrific 3-year siege. Psalm 137 is good to read, or maybe Lamentations 5 (or the whole book, but ch.5 is short). But it is not just the exile. Israel was so close to God's promises and then over 400 years everything fell apart. It should give a sense of hopelessness and despair, and should raise questions like why this happened, whether God still loves them or not, and whether his promises will ever be fulfilled. And sometimes we go through hardship that we have similar questions.

4. From Israel receiving the law to the exile to Babylon is about 860 years. Why did they never fully reach God's promises? What does it show about human nature?

Simple: sin. Israel came very close but ultimately never reached total fulfilment due to sin. Whether it was the golden calf, rebellion in the wilderness, the time of the judges, Solomon's turning and then hundreds of years of terrible kings and idolatry... until sin is dealt with, the kingdom can never fully be restored.

The fact that this is such a persistent theme over so long shows that it is not an occasional slip-up. The Israelites weren't just particularly bad. It is universal. As human beings we just cannot be good enough for God. We can never inherit God's blessing by our own righteousness. This is what the NT says the law does - it highlights sin and leads us to Christ (Romans 7, Galatians 3).

5. How does Israel's failure challenge how we view ourselves? What impact should this have on our lives and our expectations?

On a basic level, reflecting on this should just show how sinful we are. If anyone in your CG is not yet a Christian and thinks they can please God by themselves, look at Israel. They tried for 860 years and couldn't. So it should lead to humility, contrition and desperate faith in Jesus. Confession should be a normal part of life. And whatever happens in life, it is better than we deserve, and we can be content with what God assigns to us. After all, we're just so sinful through and through.



6. The decline and exile are God's judgment on sin. How do we feel about this? Judah's exile was 400 years after Solomon - what does that show about God?

The other side. Seeing the horrific destruction and knowing God did this can be tough for people. We may struggle with what God ultimately did. But if we remember that it took 400 years after Solomon before Jerusalem was destroyed, shows God did not fly off the handle. He has been patient and merciful with Israel, not wanting anyone to perish. How can a holy God bear with so much idolatry for centuries... We often focus mainly on God's anger and holiness in these chapters forgetting how much grace and mercy there is.

7. Why should Israel not have been surprised by God's judgement on their sin? What does it show about God that is an encouragement for us?

God had promised Israel in the Law that his blessing was conditional on their obedience, and if they reject him they will suffer his curse. So it should have been no surprise to Israel that after rejecting God they suffer the consequences. They should have remembered their covenant.

The encouragement is that God is not losing his temper here. He is in full control and just faithful to his promise - in this case his promise of judgement. But the fact that he is faithful throws us back to God's other covenants, with Abraham and with David, that he will make things right. If God is faithful in judgement he will also be faithful in salvation.



Week 9 - Already & Not Yet - Acts 1:1-11

The coming few weeks will be slightly more theological sermons. Rather than going through the storyline of the New Testament after the resurrection, we will look at specific New Testament topics that arise out of the Old Testament, such as the people of God in the NT, the place of the Mosaic Law for Christians, and this week, understanding the two comings of Christ.

Sermon Outline

The big surprise in the NT is that Jesus comes twice. He came, died and rose, but then went away again and will come a second time. His first coming brought things like atonement, the New Covenant, the giving of the Spirit etc, his second coming will bring the new creation, resurrection bodies and the final destruction of all evil.

The easiest way to understand the two is in terms of the *cause* and *consequences* of the Fall. The cause is our broken relationship with God, and Jesus' first coming is all about that. The consequences is the curse, this broken and fallen world, and that will be his second coming. So our relationship with God is restored - we are forgiven, justified, adopted, in a new covenant, we have new hearts by the Spirit, we are set free from sin and Satan - but we still await the physical renewal of the world and ourselves.

People often wonder why, and the key answer is mission. The complete transformation of the world is held back to give people a chance to respond to the gospel. If the final judgement and new creation were already done, it would be too late. A beautiful verse is 2 Peter 3:9 - Jesus isn't here yet because he is patient, wanting more people to be saved. So let's be active in sharing the gospel and taking it to all nations.

Sermon Outline

There is a [God's Big Picture video](#) on the "Proclaimed Kingdom" between Jesus' first and second comings, which you may find helpful.

We read Acts 1:1-11 in the service, and then touched on 2 Peter 3:9 and 3:12. You could read all of 2 Peter 3:1-13 but that may raise more questions - the sermon was not an exposition but rather tackled a theological topic.

Questions

1. How would you 'advertise' the Christian life to someone who is not yet a Christian? What blessings do we have now?



Getting the idea of the now & not yet on the table, by thinking of what we have now as Christians, and by implication what we do not yet have.

2. Think about all God's promises in the OT, and together make two lists - one with promises *already* fulfilled, one with promises not yet fulfilled.

This list is not exhaustive but includes what was mentioned on Sunday:

Already: king, atonement, new covenant, Spirit, new hearts, nations coming in, Satan disarmed/cast out

Not yet: new creation, resurrection bodies, perfect health/prosperity/peace, enemies/oppression gone, no more sinful nature, Satan completely gone etc

The first list is mainly spiritual, restoring our broken relationship with God. The second list is much more physical, restoring this broken, cursed world.

3. Compare the two lists. How do you feel about what Jesus already achieved? Which list do you think is more important, and why?

We should feel really excited about the spiritual blessings we already have. We may think it's small but actually being back in relationship with God should be huge.

And importantly, the first list is key to the second list. The first list is related to sin, the second list the curse, and they relate as cause and effect. Sin was always the problem in the Bible, so if sin is dealt with, we know the curse will be dealt with too. One is a prerequisite for the other.

4. Think about the not yet list. How does it make you feel about life now? Why is it important to be clear on the timing of God's promises?

Although we have great spiritual blessings, physically not much has changed. We should be clear that life now will still be hard, despite our new relationship with God. If we don't know that, we will be disappointed, as we may expect too much in life now.



5. Try to explain clearly why mission requires that the second coming is delayed. What would be the problem otherwise?

The second part of the sermon: the delay is so that mission can take place. Once Jesus brings the final judgement and the new creation, it will be too late. Everyone in opposition to God will be gone. So there would be no further chance for people to repent and be saved. Hence God separates cause and effect. He first deals with sin - so people can turn back - and then the curse.

6. Read 2 Peter 3:9. Imagine if Jesus had come back before you were saved. How do you feel about his mercy in delaying his return?

We should be so relieved that Jesus didn't come back yet, so we could be saved. Knowing how he has been patient with us means we can hopefully be patient with others when we feel the brokenness of this world.

7. What does this all mean for God's priorities for what he is doing? How does our own life compare? What practical changes can we make to reflect God's priority?

This is the question. God is saving people, while delaying the full enjoyment of his world. Are our lives more focussed on ourselves and our enjoyment or is our priority to see more people saved?

Good to think what we can do be more aligned with God's mission. E.g. what are the priorities in our prayers? When we interact with colleagues, what is our focus? Etc.



Week 10 - The Church - Ephesians 2:11-22

Sermon Outline

The second NT sermon of our series is about the church, to understand its role and importance.

The big idea is that the church is where the kingdom of God is experienced and seen. The Spirit would come and transform the world, but at this time, before Jesus' return, the Spirit is active in the church, as God's people meet together with supernaturally transformed hearts. And so the church is really amazing and really important, as that is God's display of his glory in the world.

Of course, this is about the "invisible" church, made up of believers.

Questions

1. If you ask the average Christian why church is important, what would they say? How about you yourself?

Just an opener to get some OK but limited ideas on the table. E.g. worship is important, or Christians need to hear God's Word regularly to survive, we need to encourage each other etc. All of these are true, but limited.

2. Who is part of "the church" in Ephesians 2? In what sense do you 'join' the church when you come on Sunday?

In the passage it is very spiritual. People are brought near by Jesus, having access by the Spirit to the Father. Or in the language of the previous passage, 2:1-10, it is those made alive in Christ and seated with him in the heavenly places (2:5-6). So it is not about those attending a service but the people God has saved.

So Paul is not talking about local churches, but about the universal Church, the community of all believers throughout time and space. Nonetheless, this is seen in the local church, as you can see from the commands in Ephesians 4 about church life. When Christians meet together the church is made visible.



This means that when you are a Christian you are part of the church already, through Jesus. You don't have a choice in this whether I want to be part of the church or not. It comes with being a Christian. On the other hand, unbelievers who come Sunday don't become part of the church as a result, it is through Jesus.

3. What images are used of the church in Ephesians 2:19-22. What is amazing about each?

Three are used. Christians are called citizens (v19), which implies a nation or kingdom, making it a huge thing to be a Christian, with rights and responsibilities - though it wasn't mentioned Sunday. We are also members of a household (v19), a family, suggesting close relationships, love and commitment. And we are a temple/dwelling place (v21-22), i.e. God's presence here on earth, the place where people meet God, an incredible privilege. Especially for Gentiles who were always so far away from God in the OT.

4. Why is a church in theory the most special place on earth, in light of the Bible's storyline? Why is it unique?

As we've seen last week and this week, Jesus has not yet dealt with the curse, but he has already dealt with sin. Some of that is in heaven or spiritual, but the one place on earth where you can see that is in Christians, who have the Spirit and now live differently. And the church, as a community of Christians, is where this is amplified. It is the one unique place on earth where the Spirit has been poured out and therefore the one place where the world has supernaturally changed. In a way, it is the one place where the kingdom of God is - where Jesus rules in his people's hearts.

In a way the temple imagery fits with that. If people wanted to meet God in the OT, they'd go to the temple. Now the church is the temple - not the building, but the people - where people can meet with God.

5. Based on this, what purpose does God have for the church in the present age? How is it like Israel in the OT? How do you feel about this purpose?

God's purpose has to do with what the church is - the kingdom of God on earth. When believers come to church, they experience the kingdom of God - the new community where the Spirit works. It is also where believers can see what God is



doing in the world, it is where the gospel, the Spirit, is made visible in our life together. And that is what God wants - for people to see it and be drawn to it. God's plan has always been to build his kingdom on earth, so people are drawn to it. Israel would be such a place through the law (Deut. 4:6-8). But now that is the church, through the Spirit (who replaces the law).

It should be a great joy but also a privilege. Getting to share in God's kingdom when we come together is wonderful. It is also daunting to be on display in the world.

6. The church regularly doesn't live up to this lofty ideal. How have you felt this in your own life? How do we understand this in light of the present time?

The church often fails the community it should be, when leaders fail, or people just look out for themselves, and of course disasters like the crusades in the middle ages.

As explained last week, we have been changed yet we are sinners. So we should still expect a level of sin in the church. Moreover, not everyone coming to church is a Christian, and in the past when church leadership gave you considerable power, sadly it attracted people to leadership who were not Christians but pretended to be.

7. How should this view and purpose of the church shape our life and priorities? In terms of meeting together, and with whom? What is great about this?

As mentioned earlier, church is who you are as a Christian. We don't come because we enjoy it (though hopefully people do) but it is who we are. Like family dinners - you go because you are family. It should mean meeting together is a priority. It is how God wants to show his glory to the world. It is not an optional thing in case we have time for it. We go because God wants us to, not for what we get out of it.

It also extends to the people. Jesus builds the church. We don't choose who is part of our church and who we hang out with. We meet with the people Jesus has gathered. Like family dinners - you don't go there because you like the people, but because they are your family.

But this is glorious - the place where all Jesus' people are welcome and loved. It is exactly this gospel love, empowered by the Spirit and impossible without him, that shows God's glory to the world.