

Part 5: The “In Between”

Victory Life Church — Sunday, April 2, 2023

Introduction

The Emancipation Proclamation¹

On January 1, 1863, when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, it set the slaves in all the southern states free. That **news** had to be taken and **proclaimed** in every city, town, and farm in the South. Heralds (“evangelists”) were sent out who proclaimed to the citizens, especially slaves, that **something had happened**, and this event would change their lives forever, a brand **new future** of possibility opens up to them. They declared to them that because of what someone else had done, they were set free! The **present moment** is now **transformed** for them, what had been bondage and slavery (backstory), is now one of freedom. However, there was **a space between** the Emancipation Proclamation and how freedom for the slaves would be fully realized. This announcement of the Emancipation was *scandalous* to those who were slave owners or who had allied with the Confederate states, and caused a *tension* within the present moment between those who received the news as **true** and lived in *that reality*, and those who *denied* or *rebelled* against the news, **resisting this new reality** of freedom for those who have been enslaved.

In January 1865, Congress sent to the state legislatures for ratification would become the Thirteenth Amendment², banning slavery in all U.S. states and territories. The amendment was ratified by the legislatures of enough states by December 6, 1865, and proclaimed 12 days later on December 18, 1865.

This is a “gospel” story of good news about an event that has happened, a backstory to understand the event, and new future, and a transformed present.

Recap

What qualifies as “news”³?

- An **Announcement** of an **event** that has happened
- A larger context (**Backstory**) within which this makes sense
- A sudden unveiling of the **New Future** that lies ahead
- A **Transformation of the Present moment**, sitting between the event that *has* happened and the further event that therefore *will* happen

The Gospel is the full Story of Jesus (His life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension): God has vindicated Jesus (of Nazareth) as Israel’s Messianic King by raising Him from the dead⁴ and promoted Him to the highest authority in heaven and earth. And because Jesus is King of the world, everyone is called to believe in Him, trust in Him, and follow Him in order to live right now in the reality of the Kingdom of God as He did.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (ESV) *“Now I would remind you, brothers, of **the gospel** I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you **as of first importance** what I also received: that **Christ died for our sins in accordance with***

*the Scriptures, that he was **buried**, that he was **raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures**, and that he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he **appeared** also to me.”*

When I choose to submit to, follow, and obey Jesus, His story becomes my story. I am connected to him in baptism to his death, burial, and resurrection. His victory becomes my victory.

Colossians 1:13-14 (ESV) He has **delivered** us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have **redemption**, the forgiveness of sins.

All of humanity is slave to sin and idolatry, under the dominion of dark powers, and are unable to get ourselves out and unable to fulfill our vocation of being God’s image-bearers. Christ Jesus is the ultimate victor over sin, death, and the devil. He died “for our sins” as the Passover Lamb⁵ in order that we might be delivered from the domain of darkness, and transferred into the reality of the Kingdom of God, redeemed as a new humanity who can now fulfill the vocation bearing God’s image of goodness and glory.

The “good news” is an announcement about **something that has happened**. But it also implies good news about **something that would shortly happen** as well.

The Good News of the Future

1 Corinthians 15:12-13, 14-19, 20-26, 27-28 (ESV)⁶ Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have **fallen asleep**. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also **the resurrection of the dead**. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his **coming** those who **belong to Christ**. Then comes **the end**, when he delivers **the kingdom** to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must **reign** until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last **enemy** to be **destroyed** is **death**. ²⁷For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, **that God may be all in all**.

The good news of the future event that will take place is that Jesus is coming back⁷, and when that happens, death will be destroyed. ***You can think of it this way: what God the Father did for Jesus on Easter morning, He will do for those who belong to Christ and all of the cosmos.*** The story of the Bible ends by describing this future day when Jesus comes back and Death itself, as well as the devil, is destroyed once and for all, and the restoration of the goodness of the Garden of Eden here on Earth.⁸

The good news of what will shortly happen in the future, the resurrection and destruction of all enemies, the greatest of which is death, will then transform how we understand and live in the present moment. The space between the good news of what has happened (the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus as Lord and Messiah) and the good news of what will happen (the resurrection, final victory over and destruction of death) creates an “in-between.” We live in the in-between.

Living in the “In-Between”

The “Gospel” of Augustus:

Remember the example from the beginning of this series that set the framing for how we understand “gospel” in a first century Roman context: After 13 long years of chaos, civil war, and bloodshed (approximately 44 BC to 31 BC), Augustus, had finally won the decisive victory brought peace to the Roman empire.⁹ In the wake of his victory, Augustus sent out “evangelists” or preachers all over the empire to spread his “gospel” (good news, *euangelion*): “Augustus has defeated the rebels, he has unified the empire, he is the son of god, not just a man; he is our Lord and Savior, he has come to rescue and deliver us, and to usher in a worldwide era of peace and justice.” If you were a friend of the Caesar family, or an ally of Augustus, and you had been living in Rome during the civil war, you would be anxiously waiting for news from the front line. If Augustus wins, the news of his victory would be good news for you; if Antony won, it would be bad news for you.

When the “good news” is announced, it is an announcement about **something that has happened**. But it also implies good news about **something that will shortly happen** as well.

It took approximately 2 years for Augustus come back to Rome, and during those years, Rome was poised between the news about **what had happened** (his victory) and the expectation of **what would soon happen** (his return in triumph). This is what “news” does: **it creates a new period of time** “in-between.”

It took approximately 3 years for the Emancipation Proclamation to become enshrined law in the Thirteenth Amendment, and during those years, the United States, citizens and former slaves alike, were poised between the news about **what had happened** (The Emancipation Proclamation) and the expectation of **what would soon happen** (the Thirteenth Amendment). This is what “news” does: **it creates a new period of time** “in-between.”

In those in-between years of waiting, the Romans, especially those who had been allied to his enemies on the wrong side of the civil war, had to decide how they will relate to this new reality. The United States citizens, especially the southern slave owners and the supporters of the Confederate side of the Civil War, had to decide how they would relate to this new reality: will they resist it, ignore it, or will they align their lives with it.

You could say they all had to decide whether or not they would "repent and believe the gospel." To repent is to change your mind, your worldview, the way you think. To believe would be to align your life in accordance with this new reality: the reality of Augustus as the new emperor of Rome, or the reality of the slaves being freed.

The Gospel Jesus preached is (Mark 1:15): "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; **repent**, and **believe** the gospel."

The Gospel the Apostles preached is: God has vindicated Jesus (of Nazareth) as Israel's Messianic King by raising Him from the dead and promoted Him to the highest authority in heaven and earth. And because Jesus is King of the world, everyone is called to **repent** of their sin and rebellion and **believe** in Him, trust in Him, and follow Him in order to live right now in the reality of the Kingdom of God as He did.

The Gospel, however, includes a future event:

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 (ESV) Then comes **the end**, when he delivers **the kingdom** to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must **reign** until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last **enemy** to be **destroyed** is **death**.

Revelation 11:15 (ESV) Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The **kingdom of the world** has become **the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ**, and he shall reign forever and ever."

We stand in between the victory of Jesus over sin, death, and the devil in the cross and the resurrection and the final victory in resurrection and new creation. The present reality is that Jesus is King of the World, and the future reality is that all the kingdoms of this world, including our kingdoms, will be summed up¹⁰ into His Kingdom. We live in the tension of the "in-between." We choose right now how we will relate to this reality: will we ignore it, scoff at it, rebel against it, or will we heed Jesus' admonition — "repent and believe."

If the veil would open up between heaven and earth,¹¹ and we saw unhindered the reality of the Kingdom of God, what would we see, and how would we respond?

Revelation 4:1-2, 6b, 8-11 (ESV) After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a **throne** stood in heaven, with **one seated on the throne**.... ..And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: ... And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to **him** who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. **They cast their crowns** before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you,

our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

Those who hear the Gospel, and the Spirit draws us to Jesus, repent of our sin and idolatry and rebellion, and believe in Jesus, put our trust in Him, will respond by submitting to Him as Lord.

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow**, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and **every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the glory of God the Father.

There will come a day, where EVERY KNEE will bow, everyone in all of creation, human and spirit alike; and all will acknowledge that Jesus the Messiah is Lord of all creation. We, who put our trust in Jesus now, anticipate this time in the end by willfully offering our lives in service of the King. This is what it means to live in the “in-between,” we honor Jesus as the present King of the universe, not just the future King, by giving Him our whole lives as a sacrificial offering. This is our real worship.

Romans 12:1 (ESV) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as **a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Conclusion

We live and pray in such a way to be the answer to Jesus’ prayer He taught us:

Matthew 6:9-10 (ESV) “Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **Your kingdom come**, your will be done, **on earth** as it is in heaven.”

“The good news is that *the one true God has now taken charge of the world, in and through Jesus and His death and resurrection*. The ancient hopes have indeed been fulfilled, but in a way nobody imagined. God’s plan to put the world right has finally been launched... The ancient sickness that had crippled the whole world, and humans with it, has been cured at last, so that new life can rise up in its place. Life has come to life and is pouring out like a mighty river into the world, in the form of a new power, the power of love. The good news was, and is, that all this *has* happened in and through Jesus; that one day it *will* happen, completely and utterly, to all creation; *and that we humans, every single one of us, whoever we are, can be caught up in that transformation here and now*. This is the Christian gospel. Do not allow yourself to be fobbed off with anything less.”¹² ~ N.T. Wright

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emancipation_Proclamation

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution

³ N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News*, pg. 23

⁴ “The early Christians regarded Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as God’s vindication of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel.” Chris Kugler, [“Messiah.”](#) ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁵ John 1:29, John the Baptist proclaims that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”

⁶ Some scholars believe the “gospel” that Paul is articulating here, beginning in verse 3, goes all the way down to verse 28. In the very least, the context the Apostle Paul puts the gospel in is the full scope of what Jesus has done in his death, burial, resurrection, and appearances in light of the future end, when “God shall be all in all.”

⁷ The most common word used for Christ Jesus’ return is “coming” or in Greek, “parousia” used in 1 Corinthians 15:23; but used also in 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2:8; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3:4, 12; 1 John 2:28. A second word frequently used is “appearing” (Greek: *epiphaneia*); see — 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13. And a version of that word is “appears” (Greek: *phaneroo*); see — Colossians 3:4; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 John 2:28, 3:2. And one more bonus word “appear” (Greek: *optanoma*); used in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 to refer to how Jesus “appeared” to them after the resurrection, but in Hebrews 9:28 refers to His future “appearing.”

⁸ Revelation 21 and 22, the Garden is now a Garden-City, and “death shall be no more.”

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_Actium

¹⁰ This is a phrase (“sum up” or “unite”) used by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:9-10 to communicate God’s “Master Plan.” See also Colossians 1:20 where he uses the phrase “to reconcile all things in heaven and earth.”

¹¹ There are Biblical examples of the veil being opened and humans seeing into the heavens of the Lord. Most of the time, the event is so dramatic, they are completely overwhelmed. Examples include: Isaiah in a vision in Isaiah 6:1-7; Ezekiel by the river Chebar in Ezekiel 1:1-28; Daniel 10:1-9; John on the island of Patmos — Revelation 1:10-17.

¹² N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News*, pg. 55