

The Story of the Bible, Part 2

**“The King Has Come in Humility and Love:
The Message of Jesus”**

--CEFC 9/17/17

“One Solitary Life”

“Here is a man who was born in an obscure village,
the child of a peasant woman.

He grew up in another village.

He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty,
and then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.
He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office.
He never had a family. He never went to college.

He never put his foot inside a big city.
He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born.
He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness.
He had no credentials but himself. . . .

“While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him.
His friends ran away.

One of them denied him.
He was turned over to his enemies.
He went through the mockery of a trial.
He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves.

While he was dying
his executioners gambled for the only piece of property he had on earth—his coat.
When he was dead,
he was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

“Almost twenty long centuries have come and gone,
and today he is the centerpiece of the human race
and the leader of the column of progress.
I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched,
all the navies that ever [sailed],
all the parliaments that ever sat
and all the kings that ever reigned,
put together,
have not affected the life of man upon this earth
as powerfully as has that **One Solitary Life.**”

I don't know who wrote that, but I think it speaks the truth.

This Jesus of Nazareth--he is simply incomparable.
Though he lived and died nearly two thousand years ago,
Jesus continues to be a figure who shapes the lives
of countless millions of people.

So who was this man?

As you might imagine,
 the pictures of Jesus that emerge from scholarly research are all over the map--
 for some, Jesus is a *Jewish magician*,
 conjuring up all kinds of tricks to deceive his audience;
 for others he is a *political revolutionary*,
 stirring up unrest among the Palestinian peasants;
 others picture him as the *moral philosopher*, the itinerant rabbi,
 teaching people how to get along with one another;
 still others see him as an *apocalyptic prophet*,
 calling down the judgment of God
 upon the religious corruption of his day.

Scholars grasp for scraps of evidence from anywhere they can find it
 in hopes of supporting their views,
 but in our very brief look at this man Jesus this morning,
 I want to confine our vision to what emerges
 from the earliest accounts of his life
 found in the four Gospels,
 for our interest in these three weeks
 is to understand the Grand Story--
 the story of God's working in history as it is set forth in the Bible.

And we will see that for the biblical writers,
 supported by the words of Jesus himself,
 he is not just one actor among many in this story—
 he has the lead role,
 he is the central character—
 the whole story revolves around him.

Listen to way he himself puts it:

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;
 I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them"** (Matt. 5:17).

**"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me
 in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms"** (Lk 24:44).

**"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,
 he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures
 concerning himself"** (Lk. 24:27).
 the **"Scriptures testify about me"** (John 5:39).

This is why the author of the Letter to the Hebrews begins with these words:

**"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets
 at many times and in various ways,
 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son"** (Heb. 1:1,2).

The coming of Jesus is the culmination, the fulfillment, the climactic point
 of God's action in human history.

But before we focus on him,
let's review quickly from last week where we are in the biblical drama.

The first act—what we call the Old Testament—
begins with God—

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).

God is the Creator of all things—

And his creation was good.

And at the culmination of his creative work

was the creation of human beings, male and female, as his image in the world.

We were made to live in relationship with him

and to rule over his creation under his loving authority.

But the story takes a tragic turn—

Adam and Eve refuse to allow God to be God in their lives—

they decide for themselves what is good and right,

they fail to trust in the gracious God who loved them,

and they disobey the good God who had created them.

The result is the judgment of death—

Immediately there was spiritual death,

as they are cast from the garden

as a demonstration of their alienation from God,

and ultimately there was physical death—

a death that destroys the relationships they have with one another.

All of humanity was corrupted by that first sin.

But God was merciful.

He implemented a plan of redemption—a covenant of grace—

to restore what had been lost.

He called a man named Abraham to whom he gave a promise of blessing—

a promise that he would bless him and make of him a great nation

and through that nation all nations would be blessed.

Abraham believed that promise—

and the story of redemption began to unfold.

Through Abraham's offspring, God raised up the nation of Israel,

whom the Lord dealt with as his own son—

he revealed his holy law to them,

and he charged them with living faithfully before him

as a light to the nations.

But time and again, they fail—

He sends his prophets to encourage them and to warn them.

But their necks are stiff and their hearts are hard.

They worship the pagan gods of their neighbors;

they neglect the poor, the fatherless and the widow.

they disgrace the name of the Lord their God.

So the Lord sends the Babylonians as his instrument of punishment—

they besiege their capitol city of Jerusalem,
 they burn their sacred temple to the ground,
 and they take the people into exile to Babylon.
 All seems lost—God's redemptive plan seems at an end.

But in the despair of exile, God sent his prophets with a message of hope.
 He would restore his people.

He would judge their enemies,
 and bring the people back to their land.

The holy temple would be rebuilt, and his glory would once again fill that place.
 He would make with them a new covenant,

in which he would forgive their sin,
 he would pour out his Spirit,
 and he would write his law on their hearts.

He would send a deliverer, a Messiah (in Hebrew) or a Christ (in Greek),
 to bring this about.

After 70 years, the Jews did return to their land,
 but they were subject to the rule of the Persians and then the Romans.
 and they did rebuild the temple,
 but it was a pale reflection of the glory of the temple in Solomon's day.

They had returned,
 but not as they had hoped—
 they still awaited the promise of the glorious rule of God—his kingdom--
 to come into the world.

They were looking for the Lord to make good on his promise.

But how that would come about was not what they expected. //

For 400 years, the prophets were silent in Israel.
 Then God does a new thing

When you turn to the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus
 the very first thing you notice
 is the way that the Gospel writers, the “evangelists” as they are called,
 seek to connect their story of Jesus with what has gone before.

Matthew, in fact, begins with, of all things, a genealogy--
 tracing the lineage of Jesus back to Abraham, through the line of King David.
 He wants us to know that the whole history of Israel
 in converging on this one man.

And as Matthew records the story of Jesus’ birth and infancy
 he is careful to show how these events flow out of the promises of God in the past.

For example, it was in Bethlehem that he was born,
 and it was in Bethlehem that the prophet Micah had said centuries before

would be the birthplace of that great future ruler of Israel.

All this happened, Matthew tells us,
to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophets.

Then all four Gospel writers highlight the ministry of a man named John.
He came preaching a baptism of repentance—a turning from sin--
to prepare God's people for the coming of the Lord—
and the Gospels cite the very words of the prophets to describe his mission.

Jesus comes to be baptized by John, identifying himself with a sinful Israel,
and the Spirit of God in the form of a dove descends upon him,
and a voice from heaven declares, "**This is my Son, whom I love;**
with you I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11).

Jesus is then led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil,
and to be tested by God.
But where Israel in the desert years before had failed to trust God,
Jesus remains true to his heavenly Father—
and proves to be the faithful Son of God.

And when Jesus begins his public ministry,
this note of fulfillment continues--

For what is the first thing Jesus says when he first begins preaching?
Mark tells us,
**"Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.
'The time has come,' Jesus said.
'The kingdom of God is near.
Repent and believe the good news!"** (1:14,15)

"The Kingdom of God has drawn near"--
when we think of the words of Jesus, it is this theme that dominates.

The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven--
that is what the prophets looked forward to--
it was the reestablishment of the rule of God in the lives of his people.
It was the reestablishment of God's righteousness and justice in a corrupt world;
it was the fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of God's people.

This is what Jesus announced--
the good news that this kingdom was now drawing near.

As we heard earlier in our first Bible reading,
at the beginning of Luke's gospel,
Jesus read from the words of the prophet Isaiah looking forward to the time

when one anointed by God would preach
 good news to the poor,
 freedom for the prisoners,
 recovery of sight for the blind--
 proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor (Like 4:18,19).
"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus said.
 This Scripture speaks about me, he was saying.
 I am doing just what the prophet talked about.

The kingdom of God has drawn near.

So much of what Jesus taught concerned this kingdom--
He spoke of the immense value, the worth, of the kingdom--
 Matt. 13:44-46 **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.
 When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went
 and sold all he had and bought that field."**

Jesus spoke of the mysterious growth of the kingdom--
 Matt. 13:31,32 **"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,
 which a man took and planted in his field.
 Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows,
 it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree,
 so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches."**

But most of all he talked about the distinctive values of the kingdom--
 for in the kingdom of God the values of this world are turned on their head.
 Matt. 5:3 **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

Matt. 23:11,12 **"The greatest among you will be your servant.
 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled,
 and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.
 The last shall be first and the first shall be last."**

Rather than power or wealth or fame--
 a humble love is the supreme value of this kingdom.
**"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'
 But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"** (Mt. 5:44f.)

Jesus offers us a view of life
 very different from the life the world offers.
 Jesus gives us a vision of life under the loving rule of God.

But if we want to understand the message of Jesus,
 listening to his words is only part of the process.
 Equally important is observing his actions.
 For what he does reveals just as much as what he says.

Jesus spoke of the coming of the kingdom,

and in his powerful ministry of healing and casting out demonic powers
 Jesus demonstrated the present reality of that kingdom
 in his own life and ministry.

Luke 11:20 **“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God,
 then the kingdom of God has come to you.”**

Even his power over the forces of nature in calming a storm,
 or multiplying a few loaves and fishes to feed a crowd of five thousand
 demonstrate a rule over this created world
 like that first given to Adam and Eve in the garden.

But it was not just power that his actions revealed;
 they also revealed love—God's love.
 He taught that God in his grace was reaching out to the poor,
 to the outcast, to the marginal members of society,
 and Jesus himself ate with the hated tax-gatherers
 and the despised prostitutes.

He touched lepers and healed them.
 He took children,
 people that everybody else seemed too busy or important for,
 he took children in his arms, and blessed them,
 saying, **“the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”** (Matt. 19:14).

Jesus' own actions revealed the action of God himself.

And then there was **Jesus' own action of prayer**--
 where he revealed his own relationship with God--
 His disciples heard him pray, and they recorded the very word of address he used--
 it was Abba--the word for "father"
 usually used in the intimacy of a family.
 Never had they heard anyone address God in quite this way.

For never had they seen anyone live in quite this way--
 his was a life of intimate love and joyous submission
 to the will of his Father in heaven.

He said, **“I do nothing on my own
 but speak just what the Father has taught me.
 The one who sent me is with me;
 he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him”** (John 8:28,29).

In Jesus the Son, God was demonstrating how human beings were created to live
 in a relationship of loving obedience to their Father in heaven.
 In Jesus the Son, God the Father was revealing himself in love,
 and in judgment--
 judgment of a people who should have been a light to the world, but weren't.

For there are other acts through which Jesus communicated his divine message--

When he cursed a fig tree that was without fruit,
 he was signaling the judgment of God upon a people
 who were called to bear fruit for God, but had not.

In cleansing the temple,
 casting out the money changers and animal sellers,
 he was signaling that same judgment of God
 upon a religious establishment that corrupted the worship of God.

And when he entered Jerusalem for the last time,
 riding on the back of a donkey,
 he signaled the arrival of a humble king, coming to assume the throne.

It was a provocative act, a mysterious act--
 and it created quite a stir.
 Matthew writes, "**the whole city was stirred and asked,**
 '**Who is this man?'**" (21:10)

"Who is this man?"--
 The people heard his words;
 they observed his actions--
 and they were inevitably left wondering just who this man was.

For both his words and his actions pointed inexorably to his **person**.

And this is perhaps the most interesting thing about Jesus of Nazareth.
 This is what has kept people writing about him two thousand years after his birth.

It is who he **is**, more than what he **said** or what he **did**
 that is most important of all.
 And this is what, in the end, was, and continues to be, most controversial about him.

As one writer has observed, this is normally not the case--
 normally, the controversy surrounding a man
 revolves around his ideas or what he did--

Karl Marx was a controversial figure--
 but it was his economic theories and his political ideas
 that were the source of that controversy.

Sigmund Freud was a controversial figure--
 but it was his eccentric and sometimes bizarre ideas about mental illness
 and the human psyche that precipitated that controversy.

But with Jesus it was different--
 many of his ideas are universally applauded--
 his ethic of love is embraced by all.

"Turn the other cheek . . ."
 "Go the extra mile . . ."
 "Give to the poor . . ."

--these have provided moral inspiration
 for Christians and non-Christians alike.
 And if Christians had been content to speak of Jesus as a great teacher,
 or a divinely inspired prophet of God
 there would have been no controversy about him at all.¹

But they never have.

For the picture of Jesus given to us from the very beginning
 is one in which all the normal categories do not quite fit.

The only category that was sufficient to describe him was that of divinity itself.
 He was God come in the flesh.

Jesus speaks as more than a mere man--
 all other great religious teachers point away from themselves
 and direct their hearers' attention to God.
 They know themselves to be messengers of someone greater.

But Jesus says, "I am the bread of life"--

to nourish you souls;

Jesus says, "I am the light of the world."--

to give you spiritual light;

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd."--

to guide you and to protect you;

Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheepfold"--

to guard your going out and coming in.

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."--

not even death can overcome me;

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

**"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.
 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
 streams of living water will flow from within him."**

All the prophets of the Old Testament said, "Thus says the Lord;"
 Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you."

They said that the word of God will never pass away;
 says, "My words will never pass away."

He had the audacity to require absolute allegiance to himself--

**"Anyone who love his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.
 Whoever finds his life will lose it,
 but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 10:37,39).**

In fact, he says at one point,

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

¹This illustration was used by Clements in his sermon on John 1:1-18.

No wonder we read in Matthew's gospel:

**"the crowds were amazed at his teaching,
because he taught as one who had authority,
and not as their teachers of the law."**

(Matt. 7:28)

Jesus taught with great authority,

and he made outrageous claims about himself,

but at the same time he spoke of his own **humility--**

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,

for I am gentle and humble in heart," (Matt. 11:29)

He can make statements like that and somehow we believe him.

John makes this paradox explicit

when he tells the story of the time Jesus washed his disciples' feet--

"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power,

and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing,

and wrapped a towel around his waist.

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet,

drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." (John 13:3-5)

Jesus' humility was the humility of God the Son

submitting his own will to that of God the Father,

and pouring himself out in love for us.

And that divine humility,

which is another way of speaking of that divine love,

is found supremely in the way Jesus' life came to an end,

in his death on a cross.

You can't begin to come to grips with the story of Jesus

and the meaning of his life,

until you appreciate the meaning of his **death**.

The gospel writers all make his death the focal point of their accounts.

As the story unfolds,

that death is alluded to,

it is foreshadowed,

it is even predicted by Jesus himself.

When Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God,

Jesus first began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem

and suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders there,

and be put to death,

but on the third day be raised to life.

Peter, and the other followers of Jesus, couldn't believe that this would happen.
 It was inconceivable to them that their beloved leader--
 God's chosen one to deliver Israel and establish God's kingdom--
 it seemed impossible that God's own Son could die.

But Jesus approached this death, this violent and cruel death,
 as his divinely ordained destiny.
 He describes it as the very reason he was sent by his Father in heaven./

As Jesus' ministry unfolded, conflict with the Jewish leaders became more intense--
 they saw him as a threat,
 they envied his popularity,
 they were afraid of his influence;
 they thought he was undermining their own authority.
 So they determined that he must go.

His entire ministry reached a climax
 when Jesus came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast.
 One of his disciples, Judas, had already agreed to betray him
 before Jesus gathered his disciples to eat the Passover meal together with him
 on what was to be his last night with them.

The Passover commemorates the time in Israel's history
 when God delivered them from Egypt.
 A lamb is eaten to remember the lamb that was sacrificed in each Israelite household
 on the night before Moses led the people out the bonds of slavery in Egypt,
 On that night, the blood of that lamb was put on the doorposts of the house,
 and when the Angel of God came by that night
 bringing the punishment of death,
 the angel would "pass over" the households marked with the blood.

Now Jesus took the symbols of that Passover meal
 and gave them a new meaning.
 As he distributed bread to his disciples,
 he said, "**This is my body which is broken for you--take it and eat.**"
 And when he passed the cup of wine,
 he said, "**This is the new covenant in my blood
 poured out for the forgiveness of sins.
 Drink from it, all of you.**"

Here Jesus recalls the language of the prophets
 who looked for God to enact a **new covenant** with his people--
 a new relationship in which he would forgive their sins
 and give them a new heart to love him.
 This, Jesus said, is what he was about to do through his death.

He was pointing his disciples to the fact that when he died on that cross,
 it would not be for his own sin, for he was innocent;
 he would die for their sin.

This was what was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years before
 when he predicted a “suffering servant of God” to come--
 Isa. 53:4-6 **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
 yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.
 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
 and by his wounds we are healed.
 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
 each of us has turned to his own way;
 and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

Later that night Jesus was arrested,
 he was brought before the Jewish high court
 and was convicted of blasphemy--
 claiming divine status for himself.
 He was handed over to the Roman governor
 who, after having him flogged and beaten,
 handed him over to be nailed to a cross along with two bandits
 in a shameful death.

His disciples scattered in despair and disillusionment,
 and his opponents assumed that he had been decisively defeated.

It seemed that all was lost--
 the promise of the coming of God’s kingdom,
 the hope of a new relationship with God,
 It had all come to nothing--
 for Jesus had been killed.//

If that’s how it all ended, there would be no Christian church,
 for there would be no Christians.
 Jesus would have been just another false Messiah--
 who did a few unusual things,
 who gathered a following for a while,
 but when he was killed,
 his movement was relegated to the dust bin of history.

But that’s not what happened--
 Those frightened disciples who saw Jesus nailed to a cross and laid in a tomb,
 were soon declaring publicly in Jerusalem
 that that tomb was empty and that this Jesus was the Lord of life.

Peter proclaimed in Jerusalem only weeks after Jesus' crucifixion:
**“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
 God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”** (Acts 2:36).

They spoke with such great power

that thousands believed them.
And the message spread throughout the world.

So what happened?
What made that possible?

Only one thing can explain it--
As we're told in the Gospels--
Jesus did not stay in the tomb--
he was resurrected from the dead.

This, of course, is what many see as the most astounding Christian claim of them all--
that this end-of-the-world event had taken place within history--
this was a resurrection from the dead--
not just a resuscitation of someone who had died--
who would then die again--
this was a resurrection to a new form of life--
to a glorified, heavenly form of life.

This is what finally makes Jesus completely unique--
different from any other who ever came before or after.
This is what transformed those first timid disciples
into the bold witnesses that they became,
many of whom died as martyrs for this message.
They proclaimed the simple truth that this Jesus was now alive
and was Lord over all
and that he would one day return as the judge of all.

It is the message of Easter--
in all its supernatural wonder.
And it is only the message of Easter--
that makes sense of the life and message of this man Jesus.

Every reconstruction of his life and message that leaves this out
is, frankly, implausible.
It just doesn't account for the evidence.

This Jesus is now alive,
and because he is alive, his words to those who heard him in the first century
are words that come to us as well.

The **invitation** he gave to them also comes to us--
Matt. 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am gentle and humble in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls."

Come, follow me, he says,

for I am the way, the truth, and the life.
Come, follow me, he says,
and you will discover the living water that quenches your deepest thirst.
Come, follow me, he says,
and you enter into the kingdom of God--
that sphere of life where God reigns as loving Father.

For in coming to Jesus,
he invites us to share in his own relationship with God--
to know his love, and grace, and mercy and forgiveness.

This is the invitation that comes to us, today--
from this Jesus, risen from the grave
and now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

But just as his invitation comes to us,
so does his **warning**--
the warning he gave to the religious of his day,
who thought that mere religious ritual would make them right with God.

Jesus calls for a response--
merely to hear his words is not enough--
"Believe in me," he says.
"Trust me with your life," he says.
"Come, follow me," he says.
" Believe that it was for your sins that I died."

Matt. 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine
and puts them into practice
is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
The rain came down, the streams rose,
and the winds blew and beat against that house;
yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.
But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice
is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house,
and it fell with a great crash."

The message of Jesus--
Will you believe it?
Will you trust your life to him?

Why not?
What would keep you from responding to the invitation of Jesus this morning?
He is the way—
all other ways lead to a dead end.
He is the truth—
all other pictures of reality are ultimately illusions.

He is the life—

life now, life lived as it was meant to be lived before God;
and life beyond the grave—a life that death cannot extinguish.

This message of Jesus demands our response.

Turn to him and find life.

Prayer—

Hymn # 228 Rejoice the Lord Is King

Benediction

The Story of the Bible
Part II, 9/17/17

**“The King Has Come in Humility and Love:
The Message of Jesus”**

Even after two thousand years, Jesus of Nazareth still holds the interest of our world. Books continue to be written about him and his support is sought in all segments of society. But what does the Bible say about him? What was his message? Why does it matter?

I. His *Words*:

"The Kingdom of God has drawn near" (Mark 1:5)

II. His *Actions*:

**“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God,
then the kingdom of God has come to you.” (Luke 11:20)**

III. His *Person*:

**"Anyone who has seen me
has seen the Father" (John 14:9)**

IV. His *Death*:

**"he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;" (Isa. 53:5)**

V. His *Resurrection*:

**“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).**

His Invitation and His Warning

Discussion Questions:

**“The King Has Come in Humility and Love:
The Message of Jesus”**

- What in the Old Testament prepares us to understand the ministry of Jesus?
- How does Jesus "fulfill" the message of the Old Testament?
- What did Jesus mean by "the Kingdom of God"? How did he describe it?
- What is most distinctive about the teaching of Jesus?
- What do his actions say about who he is?
- What makes Jesus so controversial?
- Why is his death so important?
- Why should we believe that he rose from the dead? Why is this important?
- What response does Jesus require of us?