

SESSION 8: MOVING TO A GOD-CENTERED NARRATIVE

Welcome to Session 8 of our series. Our previous sessions could be called the foundational sessions, and in them we looked at a number of key things.

We looked at Genesis 1 and 2, and the seeds of God's creation project. We looked at the blueprint of Man being created perfect but not complete, and that his adoption into the royal family of God was always going to be a journey. We dove into the concept of rest and its true meaning of governance, and also into how God's glory is the completion of his creation project, as well as the glory of his presence expressed in and through man.

We also looked at how this world is just a shadow of God's future world, which always was to be his better, real and eternal world. God's grand blueprint is realized in Revelation 21 and 22—the full, eternal blossoming of the those seeds sown in Genesis 1 and 2.

Of huge importance to us has to be the realization that the 'human project' of qualifying Man for adoption to royal status—to be God's heir—is at the very heart of God's 'creation project,' and therefore the Story of the Bible. The 'fall' (Man falling into sin and spiritual disintegration) added a whole new layer of difficulty to God's human project and, as a result, a 'rescue operation' was introduced. This becomes a major undertaking and Biblical theme.

We have to be careful however, not to allow the 'rescue operation' to dominate and determine the main Biblical theme, because it is not! Qualifying Man for adoption to royal status, is! We will see that God in his sovereignty, his divine creativity and infinite wisdom, has merged these two themes together: the rescue of Man with Man's qualification to royal status!

This, I believe, is what Paul saw when writing his long letter to the Romans.

Paul expounds in chapter 8 the outcome of God's masterful rescue operation, in both redeeming Man from sin and sin's consequences, and at the very same time, qualifying Man for royal status. This brings to completion his 'creation project' by referencing terms that would be familiar by now, such as adoption to sonship (verse 15), heir of God (verse 17), the revealing or manifestation of the sons of God, referring to resurrection (verse 21), which will bring about 'new creation' (verses 19 and 21).

He then goes on to say in verse 24, “For this hope we are saved!” Hallelujah! So, you see, our ‘hope’ is not heaven, it is resurrection and new creation—the full realization of God’s creation project!

Salvation, my friends, is far, far, far more than God just dealing with the sin issue and the consequences of the ‘fall’ – as wonderful as this is. It is more than just a ‘rescue operation.’ It is about bringing Man (bringing us) to completion, in readiness to rule as part of the royal family as God’s heir, entering his rest and governing, presiding together with God over God’s new world, forever and forever!

So understanding salvation correctly is imperative! A wrong or incomplete understanding of SALVATION is tragic.

And just how tragic? Well, to illustrate: Let’s say we begin a journey to circumnavigate the globe, and we begin by moving in a trajectory that is set just one degree off. By the time we return to our original starting point, we will discover that we will have journeyed a massive 700 kilometers off course.

This, I believe, is what we have done with the Story of the Bible, particularly over more recent times. As a result, we have gotten woefully off track, with the Bible story becoming somewhat distorted and misrepresented.

For example, there was a time in history when we began to think of the Bible story as being primarily about us: about our redemption, about Man being rescued from sin and hell, and about being guaranteed a place in heaven where we could be with Jesus forever.

This one-sided and misdirected narrative could perhaps be illustrated by the maiden voyage of the ill-fated ship, the Titanic. In 1912, the Titanic—which at the time was the largest passenger ship ever to be built—was on its maiden voyage from England to the USA.

Late one night, it hit an iceberg and began to sink. Books have been written and movies have been made of the attempts to save the lives of the passengers on board, but very little has been said as to why such a large ship was built in the first place, as well as who the people were who were on board, and why they were on board.

Where were they going and why? We have become fixated on the drama surrounding the rescue operation and have lost the significance of the ship and its passengers in the process. We’ve focused on the WHAT – what happen when it hit the iceberg, and we’ve lost the important focus on the WHY – why the Titanic was built in the first place.

The Bible Story has suffered the same fate. Following the fall, people needed rescuing, for sure, but this does not therefore do away with the centrality of God’s ‘creation project,’ explained in Genesis 1 and 2: why God created a physical world and Man in the first place. All this we attempted to provide some understanding of in the first seven sessions.

A God-centered narrative, however, stands in contrast to this Man-centered narrative, and all the sad Man-centered tangents this narrative leads us along. The true narrative says that the Bible Story is a story about God, about his before-the-world-began purpose, and how he is working this purpose out and bringing it to completion!

The Bible story involves our rescue. It involves dealing with the sin issue in the lives of people. But this is just part of the story. It is not the story itself. It is not the central narrative upon which all other Biblical themes find their significance and true meaning.

God's 'before-the-world-began' purpose is the main Bible narrative and central theme; all other themes must find their significance in the context of this 'God theme.'

If we start with God, we will remain on course. If we start with Man, we begin to go astray, and it just gets worse as we continue along this Man-centered narrative. Sadly, a cursory glance of Christianity in our world today bears compelling testimony to this erroneous trajectory.

It was this God-centered narrative that triggered Paul's outburst of praise in the book of Romans. Having explained the story of creation, sin, redemption and transformation in chapters 1 to 7, the fulfillment of God's end vision in chapter 8, and his explanation of Israel's role in chapters 9-11, Paul then bursts out in unrestrained praise to God at the conclusion to chapter 11 and says:

"Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." (Ro 11:33-36)

For Paul, God's end vision was not a few saved souls existing in a bodiless state in heaven singing songs for all eternity. No, God's kingdom will come. His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven (as Jesus taught his disciples to pray). God's glory will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. Man will come to adoption, to sonship, to be God's heir, to enter his rest to govern together with him over a renewed and glorified creation.

So, back to our previous important statement. God in his sovereignty, in his creative genius and infinite wisdom has merged these two themes together of Man's redemption together with God's quest to qualify Man for adoption to royal status!

God has woven the 'rescue operation' and his 'human project' into one, thus bringing to completion his creation project. This one amazing, stunning, God-inspired plan is what we will now begin to explore in our next and forthcoming sessions.