

God's Plan in the Gospels

God's Plan in Scripture

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Our annual theme has been Planning to Grow and the past several weeks we have been thinking particularly about God's Plan in Scripture and in many ways this has been a tag line for a study in the plot line of the Bible. And there's a sense in which the plot line of the Bible can be described in one word and that word is? Jesus. So, when you're asked, "What is the Bible about" by a person who doesn't really understand anything about the Bible you can say, "Well, there's a sense in which the entire Bible is about one person and that is Jesus." But if you had some additional time, then you're able to say that the plot line can also be summarized in three words and that is creation, that God made the world; and fall, that man chose to reject the counsel that God had given him and sin and death entered the world as a result; and then redemption, that God has made provisions and covenants so that human beings could have a right relationship with him.

And throughout the Old Testament, here's what we saw: from the calling of Abraham back in Genesis 12 to Isaac and Jacob, we see the establishment of God's people based on God's redemption but over and over again we also see that people break God's covenant again and again and again. A few weeks after the Exodus from Egypt, where God establishes them as a nation, the nation breaks that covenant with God. To the time of the Judges, God's people break his covenant. To the times of the Kings and the Prophets, God's people again break his covenant. To the people who return even from exile as Pastor Aucoin was talking about last week, they continue to break the covenants.

Well, let me press the pause bottom on that for just a second and say all this is on page 1 of the notes that are on the website. You probably could get them right now if you wanted. And here's just a suggestion to you: parents, what I just covered would be a fantastic milkshake question. Now, you might think, "Well, wait a minute." I realize that not all of you are as addicted to milkshakes and ice cream as I am, I get that, but if you spend any time at the Green household on Sunday afternoon, you're probably going to hear the kids asking, "Dad, what is the milkshake question today?" And the design behind that is: 1. to ask them an age-appropriate question based on the study of the Word of God that particular morning to see if they were active listeners. And the hope is that they'll get the answers right because what does that mean? It means I get a milkshake. The milkshake question for them is for me.

Here's a good one: Would you please explain the plot line of the Bible beginning with the Old Testament. And what I just covered on page 1 would satisfy that particular answer. Well, what about singles? For those of you who are single out there and someone asks you for a date, you say, "Well, you know I'd really like to go out with you but before I can commit I need to figure out whether I'm going to be wasting my time or not. Can you please explain the plot line of the Bible beginning with the Old Testament?" And if the answer to that is, "Yes," then, "Yes, I'd be happy to go on a date with you." If not, "Then go learn it and then come ask me." Boy man groups, ladies' Bible studies, wouldn't this be a great accountability question? Have you been active listeners so that you know the plot line of the Bible?

Enough of the commercial. Back to the flow. The end of the Old Testament is somewhat discouraging because we're asking the question: When is all this going to be set right? I mean, when is the promised one who will crush the head of the serpent going to come? When will the prophet like Moses come? When will the servant of Isaiah appear? When will the one come who is going to take away the sin of the world? When are these things going to occur? And the answer to that is: in the person of Jesus. And all that is going to happen because Jesus, here is the primary message, the thing I want you to learn, Jesus is awesome. No, you can't just say awesome in some lame kind of fashion. You've got to put some heart into it. Jesus is like awesome!

Brent was tapping into his feminine side last week by talking about the Disney Princesses and the cute blond from Kansas who we still don't know who she is. Let me tap into that Disney theme just a touch and remind you of one of my favorite Disney characters of all time, it's in the movie Bolt but it's not Bolt that is so exciting. It's a little hamster named Rhino and Rhino is so cool because Rhino knows how to say, "Awesome." Check this out, "Someone who no matter what the odds, will do what's right. They need a hero to tell them that sometimes the impossible can become possible if you're awesome!" Now, if he can be so excited about Bolt being awesome, certainly we can be excited about Jesus being awesome. Amen to that?

Our task this morning is actually to think about God's plan in the Gospels. The Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And as you read through the Gospels there are a few things that you'll notice right away. One of them is that all four Gospels spend their time and attention talking about Jesus. They are all about Jesus in one form or another. And they even include some of the same stories: the feeding of the 5,000, for example, occurs in every single one of the Gospels. And it's especially true that Matthew, Mark and Luke share so much of the same information that you hear it three different times.

That kind of leads to the second point that all the Gospels are selective in what they include. Even if you put them all together, what you have is about 50 days of Jesus' life because the reality is, that 25% of all Gospel material is about Jesus' final week. So, they don't tell us everything that Jesus said or everything that Jesus did. They tell us, instead, what God wanted us to know.

Here's the other thing about these particular Gospels: they all write with a purpose in mind. They're all writing about the same person and so there's a lot of agreement but in the same token, there are also four distinct purposes that are slightly different and it's these purposes that we're going to talk about to show why Jesus is so awesome.

Here's the first one: Jesus is awesome because he is the fulfillment of Scriptural promises of a coming King. I'd like you to turn your Bibles to Matthew 1:1. That is on page 1 of the back section of the Bible in the chair in front of you. I'm arguing that Matthew's primary concern, not that he doesn't have other concerns, but that his primary concern is to demonstrate that Jesus is the King. He's the King. Here's how he does it, Matthew 1 beginning in verse 1, "The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham." You see, one of the things he starts off right from the very beginning is to explain that Jesus is royalty. He is in the line of Abraham and in the line of David. In a subtle fashion, Matthew sets up the reality that the promise of blessing to Abraham is going to be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And in a subtle fashion, Matthew explains that it is Jesus who is going to be the one who sits on David's throne forever. So, the covenants made to Abraham and to David, both of which have been talked about in our series over the past several weeks, are going to be fulfilled and made complete in the person and work of Christ.

Jesus is going to be the King that they never had. He's going to be altogether righteous and he is going to be perfect and, therefore, can sit on that throne forever. And just in case we miss the subtlety of chapter 1:1 it begins to be more explicit in chapter 2:1. I'd like you to turn there and I'm going to read a few verses of this, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?'" Do you see the irony of that? They ask the King where the king's been born. And so, not surprisingly, it says, "For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born." They figured it out. They were like, "There is a promise of a coming King," and Matthew takes us right back to Micah 5 in order to demonstrate that Jesus is this promised King. They were figuring out, the secularists were figuring it out. Herod the king even knew that there was going to be a promised ruler who was going to come and he would shepherd his people Israel and Matthew chooses to tell us about that in order to highlight the significance of Jesus as the King. Now, do you remember this? There was a little sign that they hung on Jesus' cross right above his head, do you remember what it said? King of the Jews. Matthew highlights that. In order to illustrate time and time again that Jesus really is the promised coming King.

He was also born of a virgin, Matthew highlights this. In chapter 1:23, "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." To this Old Testament quotation that's designed to bring a link between Isaiah and now Jesus. This promise that was given in Isaiah 7:14 now has some sort of relation to the birth of Jesus himself. All of the births were different than Jesus' for Jesus was conceived in a

different fashion. So, he's not simply human, he's also divine. He was able to live a sinless life to be the perfect King, something no one else could do.

If you just keep reading, Matthew continues to pour on the Old Testament passages because then it talks about Jesus' return from Egypt. You remember that God appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "Hey, Herod is coming after Jesus. You need to take your family to Egypt." And that's exactly what he does and in verse 15 of chapter 2, Jesus "remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet," which is Hosea, "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON." In other words, there is going to be something that was going to happen and as a result of that, this is somehow related back to Jesus.

It's also seen in the mission of John the Baptist. Again, we're just beginning to read the Book of Matthew and we see this Old Testament theme coming up again and again and again. In chapter 3:1, it says, "Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, 'THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" In other words, we're going back again to Old Testament promise in order for us to see the significance of the one promised, that is Jesus the Messiah.

As we pan through not just the rest of Matthew, here's what we find: that Jesus brings sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and freedom to those who are captive. Again, that was promised in the Old Testament. One of the signs of Messiah was going to be that he could do these things. You'll know Messiah shows up when he gives healing, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf and he releases captives. And what do you find in the Gospel of Matthew? All three of those things in order to demonstrate that this is the promised King, the promised Messiah. Just as we've been talking about time and time again, here he is.

Even in his final week. Jesus is put to death in fulfillment of the Scriptures. And reading in the crucifixion narrative in chapters 26-28 brings our mind back to Isaiah 53 where it pleased the Lord to crush him. Even Judas' betrayal itself has links back to the Old Testament.

So, why is Jesus so awesome? Here's Matthew's answer to that: because Jesus is the King. Because he's the King. So, here's one of the questions that each of us has to wrestle with now: Do I live as if Jesus really is the King? Here's just a few ideas to think about. Young people: Do you treat your parents with the kind of respect and understanding that you get that Jesus is the King? So, that means you happily keep your room clean; you happily take out the trash; you use your summer to do something productive other than just playing games all day every day. It even impacts the choice of friends and the people that you allow to influence you because you understand that Jesus is the King and the last thing you want is to be influenced by a group of idiots.

You also choose your choice of music carefully because you recognize that music has a significant influence in people's lives and so, you want to have the kind of music that's going to encourage you to believe that Jesus really is the King.

What about college students? What about you guys? Well, do you recognize here you are home for the summer, do you recognize that somebody like your parents may have paid for a portion or all of your school? So, you are just so thrilled with thankfulness to your parents and you're saying, "I can't believe they worked all these years in order to be in a position to help me deal with this." And so, there's just gratitude. Is gratitude flowing out to your folks?

Husbands, wives: Does Jesus being King make a difference in the way you treat your spouse? Maybe before that word comes out of your mouth, do you think and wait, "Before I say this, has it run through the grid of Jesus as the King?"

What about parents? Boy, if you're a parent, does Jesus being the King impact the way you treat your children? Does it influence the way you train them? Does it influence the way that you prepare them for life? You need to see Jesus is the King like right now when you're little so that you can recognize how significant his Kingship really is when you're big, too.

Matthew says, "Here's one of the points I wanted to make, particularly in my Gospel: Jesus is the King."

The second Gospel, that is the Book of Mark is concerned that Jesus is the King, is concerned that he is Messiah, the Son of God, but its emphasis is actually in a different place and that is in the suffering servant aspect. So, Mark would say, "Jesus is awesome because he's the suffering servant come to ransom you and I." It's possible to divide the Book of Mark really into two sections: chapter 1:1 all the way to chapter 8:30 is one section of the Book of Mark which essentially answers this question, Who is Jesus? And here's how it sums it up: "Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, 'Who do people say that I am?' They told Him, saying, 'John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets.' And He continued by questioning them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.'" You are the Christ. So now, we've got this identity issue satisfied. It's finally here. Jesus is the Christ.

So, now what? And here's what Mark does: he brings suffering to the forefront. In fact, there's a little chart, this could be some good reading time, you could probably create a couple of milkshake questions out of this if you wanted to. Here's what it does: from Mark 8:31 all the way to the end of 52, there's a clear structure to that Mark highlights. And here's how it begins: he starts off by giving a prediction to his disciples of his coming death. He talks about his suffering, his death, and the fact that he's going to rise three days later and that causes the disciples to have a reaction to that. And then, notice what I want you to see on the discipleship lessons, notice the first one in each of these sections.

The first one is all about, in chapter 8:34-38, them denying themselves and taking up their cross and following Jesus. In other words, it's an issue of servanthood. Then the text takes us back to chapter 9:30 where there's, yet again, another prediction and the prediction is I'm going to suffer, I'm going to die and then I'm going to rise again. Then the disciples have a response to that and then the first thing out of the block, the first lesson on discipleship after that is, "Hey, you know what, if you want to be the greatest then here's what the greatest is: the greatest is a servant." That kind of sounds like the first lesson they got, isn't it?

Let's see the pattern go on: in chapter 10:32-34, we actually find yet another prediction of Jesus' death and suffering and resurrection. But the disciples at this point are like, "Alright, fine. If you're going to die and you're going to go to heaven, can we, like, have the best seats in the house? I mean, can we have, like, the right and the left? Does that work for you? I mean, if that's what's going to happen, if that's the game plan, can we just have the best seats in the house?" And what does he teach them again? Servanthood.

So, Mark particularly draws out attention to the suffering servant element of Jesus. No other Gospel organizes itself like this. And so, for these three chapters, right after Jesus' identity has been established, he talks about his suffering. And then he communicates to his disciples, "Look, here's the result of that. If I'm going to suffer, if I'm going to be the Suffering Servant, then it's your job to follow in my footsteps and to be a servant right along with me."

Mark's emphasis is a little different. In fact, beginning in chapter 11, Mark then launches us into the final week where Jesus does, in fact, suffer; where Jesus does die; and where Jesus rises again. All of that particular area, in fact, these servanthood passages culminate with this text: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." That's what Mark is particularly interested in, drawing our attention to the suffering servant aspect of Jesus.

Let's think about some implications to that. I appreciate what Titus did this morning by helping us think through the elements of our song service and part of that is to put our focus and attention on, Do we appreciate Christ for all he's done? I think Mark asked that very same question. If Jesus really is the Suffering Servant, then do I appreciate that? Do I see the significance of that on my own heart in my own life? Am I thankful for what Jesus has done? And do we discipline our minds to think about that reality? Do we spend our mental energy on that?

Here's a little tip: did you know that you talk to you more than anybody else talks to you? Therefore, you have more influence on your thinking than anyone else does. And so, when you're irritated, what do you tell yourself? When you're frustrated, what do you tell yourself? When you're discouraged, what do you tell yourself? When you're embarrassed, what do you tell yourself? Well, here's what Mark, I think, would say we should tell ourselves: that Jesus is the Suffering Servant who gave his life as a ransom for you and me and because he's done that, therefore, I can approach this particular issue

with some humility. And maybe what I need to do is to evaluate my own heart more carefully. Maybe the reason I'm irritated, I'm frustrated or I'm embarrassed is because somebody is stepping on my pride and I need to let go of my pride and I need to humble myself.

Maybe that's not the case. Maybe the other person is just wrong and so I need to learn how to live in unity with someone who frustrates me because that's what a suffering servant does. By the way, were there any people who frustrated Jesus? I think we can answer "yes" to that question.

Here's a second kind of application point out of this suffering servant idea: do we act like the disciples who have to have the prime seats and ignore the cross that we're supposed to carry and miss the example that's been set by Jesus? It's interesting how when Jesus gives those lessons of discipleship, he goes back each time to talk about the first one, servanthood. Servanthood. Servanthood. Get the message? Servanthood.

So, we can ask, have we got that message yet? Have we seen that message? Is our calendar in a place if we looked at our calendar, we could see servanthood showing up on our calendar? Or is it one of those times where we say, "You know what, it's cool. I'm glad other people are doing it."

Why is Jesus awesome? Here's what Mark says: because he's the Suffering Servant.

That brings us to the writings of Luke and Luke says that Jesus is awesome because we can be confident in Jesus' story. Now, that sounds a little different than the other two points so let me explain. Luke decides to tell us why he wrote at the very beginning and here's what he says, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus," and here's why, "so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." See, he wanted the facts on the table. He wanted to organize the account in some particular fashion for the purpose of giving us confidence that we would know the exact truth about Jesus.

I liken it to this: have you ever heard a person tell a story that just didn't sound like it was completely on the level? I remember one day, we're in Young Couple's ABF and I know it's hard to get to know people at a worship service and so part of the reason that we have Adult Bible Fellowship is to get to know people and so we try to do that every week in some form or fashion and this particular week, here was the task: you had to write down something about yourself and then we put them in a hat and started drawing them and we tried to guess who it was. And here's what the person wrote down, "I tackled Adrian Peterson." Now, for you non-football fans, Adrian Peterson was a star running back at Oklahoma, he was one of the best running backs in the NFL. He's about 6'2", 220. So, everybody starts looking around the room going, "Who could've brought down Adrian Peterson? In fact, I think somebody's pulling our leg. Nobody did that, somebody's just

messing with us. That's what's going on so who would be the jokester in the class?" That's how some of us were beginning to think. It turned out that that's kind of true. It was on the level. There was a guy who played against Adrian Peterson when he was in high school. But he was 5'10", 160. So, we were wondering if the note should've said, "I got run over by Adrian Peterson." We still had doubts, we were questioning him and he finally came out with the whole truth, nothing but the truth. And here's what it was: "Actually me and six of my teammates tackled Adrian Peterson." We were like, "Ok, now I'm buying it. I get it now."

That's essentially what Luke does because, you see, Jesus lived up until about 33 AD but Luke doesn't write until the mid 60s so there's 30 years of all kinds of oral tradition being passed down from person to person to person to person. There's all sorts of stories out there some of which were true and there's all kinds of stories out there that are far-fetched, they're absolutely nothing close to the truth. You can actually read them today.

Here's what Luke does, he says, "You know what, there's a lot of stories about Jesus out there so here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to research it carefully so that you will know the exact truth about Jesus. So you don't have to question anymore, you can believe, you can have confidence."

I think the applications of this are profound. The first one is that some people really struggle with doubt. Some of you may not have experienced that, others of you know the pain and the challenge that comes from doubt. And the Gospel of Luke was written to reassure us of the truth, to reassure us that the things that we believe are right.

It also helps us organize our thoughts about Christ because it takes us through the steps that he walked and the people that he met and the opposition that he faced. Many people desire, especially Christians, want to go to Israel and they want to walk the steps of Jesus, they want to be there to hear or imagine hearing him teaching them on the hillside. If you don't have that opportunity, then you can do it in the pages of Luke. Grab your Bible and you hop on the internet so that you can get some pictures of Israel, there are 40 billion of them online. Then you can start doing this because here's the tour that Luke's going to take you on: you can picture his birth in Bethlehem; you can imagine him going to the Temple and seeing Joseph and Mary offer their sacrifice and hearing Jesus cry from the circumcision that was the sign that he was a part of the people of God; as John preached you could imagine Jesus walking up and the touching scene that ensues at his baptism; you can imagine walking in the wilderness with Jesus, feeling his thirst and agonizing with his hunger and you hear his answers to Satan himself; you follow him through Galilee and journey with him as he slowly but surely makes his way to Jerusalem; you're there for the excitement of the Triumphal Entry and you reel as the Romans begin the process of death; you marvel and you rejoice as you walk into the empty tomb; and you're captivated by Jesus as he shows you how all the Scripture points to him on the way to Emmaus.

You see, Luke is your tour guide. He takes through the steps of Jesus and with a little internet picture and the Word of God, you can imagine going on your own little tour through the steps and life of Christ.

One more Gospel writer needs the opportunity to speak and that's John. John is slightly different, although close to some of the others. Jesus is awesome because he is the way, the truth and the life. My wording, of course, comes from John 14:6 but the purpose statement is actually in John 20. It says, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." You see, the whole Book of John is organized around this crucial concept. John is writing to deal with people who simply want to add Jesus to a list of the things that they already have going.

How many of you have seen those co-exist t-shirts. So, you know how they have all the religious symbols on them. On the one hand, the shirt is fine because we can live in a peaceful way with people who don't agree with us. So, just because someone is a Buddhist or a Hindu does not make them our enemy. In fact, we're commanded in the Word of God to love them. On the other hand, the shirt's value is not absolute for biblical Christianity is an exclusive religion. It is not that a person just adds Jesus to all the other things they have going and everything's all okay, for John, he teaches that devotion to Jesus is by very nature exclusive and it's a lack of devotion to other things.

So, like the other Gospel writers, John presents Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, as the one who is promised. John, like the other Gospel writers, presents Jesus as the Son of God but that information is all directed towards a particular goal: that the reader of John would believe that Jesus is exactly who he says he is and that by trusting in him the reader will have eternal life.

So, here's how he begins his book: he tells us about seven miracles. Jesus turned water in wine; Jesus healed a nobleman's son; Jesus healed a man at the Pool of Bethesda; Jesus fed the 5,000; Jesus walked on water; Jesus healed the blind man; and Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. And all of those things were recorded to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. But then John goes on to record a series of "I am" statements where Jesus says, "I am the Good Shepherd"; "I am the Bread of Life"; "I am the Light of the World"; "I am the resurrection and the life." And these show the significance that our satisfaction from our sin problem only comes through Christ. He is the only one that can bring light where there is darkness. He's the only one that can properly care for the sheep. He's the only one whose words sustain life. He's the only one with the power to raise people from the dead.

Here's the primary application point: that it's time to commit. It's time to commit. It's time to reach a decision. It's time to stop investigating and time to make a choice. Jesus offers freedom from our sin. He offers eternal life in heaven. He offers life in the here-and-now that is abundant. Jesus wants you to make a decision today and if you're here and you have never come to the place where you have trusted in Christ as your Lord and

Savior, John is saying, “Here’s the reason I wrote. I wrote so that you might believe and that by believing you would have eternal life, life in his name.”

You need a deliverer. If it’s one thing that we all should’ve gotten out of our study in the Old Testament, it’s no one is ever good enough for God. It’s not possible which is why we are in desperate need. We can never, ever earn our own way. We have to trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and the Scripture puts it this way, “If we confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved.”

If you’re a Christian already, then the Gospel of John applies to you in some of those same ways except in this particular fashion: it was designed that your belief would be growing. That your belief would be growing. That your faith would be growing. That you would have even more confidence and more confidence and more confidence in the person and work of Christ. So that you would love him more. You would be encouraged in him more. You would be strengthened in him more. There would be a growing belief in the person of Christ.

I’ve said a lot, so let me try to bring it all together. What I’m arguing here is here’s the message of the Gospels: Jesus is awesome! Because Matthew says, he’s the coming King; because Mark says, he’s the Suffering Servant who gave his life as a ransom for many; Luke says because his story is true and can be relied upon; and John says because he is the only path to eternal life in heaven. You see, the questions that we were leaving the Old Testament with: When will Messiah come? He’s here. When will the one come that is going to crush the head of the serpent? He’s here. When is the Moses-like prophet going to come? He’s here. When is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah going to come? He’s here. When is the one who is going to come who will actually give his life as a once-for-all sacrifice? He’s here.

So, that should engender in us to live as if Jesus is the King, to serve him with our whole heart and our whole life because he did that for us, to have confidence that he is the Christ, to appreciate what he has done for us and then to have a growing belief because Jesus is awesome!