



Part 4: What has God done to restore us?

Quick Review:

Our overarching theme: **Redemption**

- The broken relationship between God and humanity being restored

We've asked 3 of our 5 questions:

1. What is humanity?
 - a. God's children, created in his image and likeness, made to live in his presence and free to make moral decisions. And now, we are personally and universally in need of God's restoration.
2. How did the relationship go bad?
 - a. Adam & Eve began a cycle of rejecting God to pridefully pursue knowledge apart from their loving Father
3. Why would God want to restore us?
 - a. The OT rolls out in seasons of God's Preservation, Promises, Provision, Israel's Prostitution, and God's agents, the Prophets: 5 P's
 - b. OT history reveals a God of mercy and patient love as Israel remained locked in a cycle of:
 - Apostasy, Oppression, Distress & Deliverance

4th Question: So, how did God restore the broken relationship?

He sent his Son, Jesus.

Discussion Question:

What words or phrases would you use to describe Jesus, based on your exposure?

Reading: John 1:14 & Philippians 2:5-8

The Older Son...

We pick up our story at Luke 15: 25. This rebellious younger son returns home to his Father, humbled by his shame. The father joyfully receives him back and throws an epic party. Meanwhile, the man's older son hears what is going on and is furious. He refused

to join the celebration, citing his constant devotion to the tasks of being a dutiful son that has never been rewarded. For all his efforts, his father had not offered to help him throw a party with his friends. And yet here he was celebrating this ungrateful, prostitute-loving, money-squandering son of his! The father went out to his angry eldest where he was sulking and pleaded with him to celebrate the return of his brother. "My son," he said, "You are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate your brother's return. He was dead, but is now alive!"

Discussion Question:

Can we compare and contrast the older son in the parable to Jesus? How so?

Fresh Facts: The New Testament World

1. 400 years separated the time of the last prophet, Malachi, and the birth of Jesus. We call this the "intertestamental period." The Israelites were oppressed during 320 years of this period. Their short-lived freedom came to an end when Rome took over in 63 BC.
 2. Greek had become a universal language in the world, with the conquests of Alexander the Great. The Jewish scriptures were translated into Greek in 250 BC (The LXX or Septuagint). Most Jews outside Israel could only speak Greek.
 3. A second temple in Jerusalem had been started by Herod in 20 BC, which gave the Jews a lot of hope for their Messiah to come.
 4. The Diaspora, or dispersion, of Israel had spread Jews all over the known world and they relied on the Greek LXX to maintain their faith.
 5. Cut off from the temple, the synagogue had become the main center for religious life during the Diaspora.
 6. The Law became king. Because of their current situation, Jews shifted their focus away from nationhood to the Law, and on personal righteousness instead of ceremonies.
 7. There were 3 groups of religious leaders in Judaism at the time:
 - **Sadducees:** Rich aristocrats who controlled the temple and rejected all of the OT except the first 5 books, including the prophets. They had close dealings with the pagan rulers of their time.
 - **Pharisees:** They reinterpreted the law to create a new system of righteous living before God in a world that had changed so much. They had a lot of political sway with the people.
 - **Essenes:** These were separatist groups who rejected all other forms of Judaism and were awaiting an "end-times" war and multiple Messiahs.
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Jesus, the Way and the Word

God's timing in sending his Son could not have been more perfect. Israel was struggling to define what it meant to be the people of God. Rome was ruling the world as an example of human empire and kingdom. One language was available to communicate God's truth to the whole world. God's old covenant people were in every corner of the world, a powerful incentive to take the new covenant message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Jesus came onto the scene to show us at least two important things:

1. Salvation isn't what you think it is.
 2. Being God's people isn't what you think it is.
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Salvation

Romans 5:6-10

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

The enemy was not Rome or Babylon. The enemy was (and is) us.

The salvation needed then and now is not from the oppression of outside forces or kingdoms, but the influence of a heart that is turned against God and our best interests, which are eternal and not temporal.

Jesus justifies.

Salvation is an undeserved gift that can't be earned. This reconciliation or restoration of our relationship to God is all God's doing. While we were powerless in ourselves to keep a strict law commanded by God, Jesus was perfect for us – even in his willing self-sacrifice once and for all. Being forgiven is not a reward for our good behavior. It's a party thrown because Jesus brought us back from the spiritual separation and death we deserved.

So as the Word, Jesus' life, death and resurrection clearly tells us that God is for us. As the Way, he makes God's love operative in our lives. Without him, there is no way back to the Father (John 14:6).

Christian salvation simply means we believe (faith) what Jesus told us to be true - We need him.

God's people

Hebrews 1:1-3

¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Jesus is the demonstration and representation of what God cares about.

God cares more about our consciences than our countries. He cares more about our ethics than our ethnicities. He cares more about our tempers than our temples. And believe it or not, he cares more about your neighbor than your nation.

- God has spoken through Jesus teaching that people matter more than religion (Luke 14:1-6).
- He has spoken through Jesus leadership, that real influence and authority are based in selflessness and servanthood (John 13:2-9).
- Jesus has shown that the way to real glory and power is walked hand in hand with humility (Philippians 2:5-8).
- Jesus life and teaching demonstrate that God's people are and always have been completely reliant on Him. That's why we don't chase after wealth or pursue power and fame as a means to define our personhood. Being children of God defines human life lived well.
- Jesus' countless miracles announce the good news that we are not the sum of our circumstances, nor is God unable to deal with the pain, sin and suffering that have resulted from our separation from Him.

Jesus tells us that God's people are as different in the world as light is from darkness (Matthew 5:14).

Conclusion: So how do we respond?

The life of a Christian is best described as thankful, not religious. When we know what Jesus has done for us and for others, we are compelled to make it the core of our lives. This is a process that God, by his Spirit (next session!) helps to bring along.

Discussion Question:

How would you describe your faith in this Jesus to other people?

Read & reflect:

The Gospel of John – twice! Hebrews 8:8 and following, Jeremiah 31:31-34

Next lesson: "What now?"

Jesus came. He changed everything by fulfilling what God always intended. Like the best brother we could ever imagine, he traveled to our distant country, stood by the pigpen and told us how much our Father loves us and wants us to come home. To be family again. To belong where we belong. Now we're carrying that message to the whole world, but we're not doing it on our own steam. God is with us. And the Church (you and me) is a powerful agent of grace & truth in the world.