

The Bible start by teaching clearly that man does not exist by accident. Man was created. Man has significance. Man has purpose. This purpose flows from our very creation and identity as God's image bearers. Genesis 1:26-27 records God's creation of mankind saying:

*“**26** Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. **27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (ESV)*

God did not create man and leave him to find purpose on his own. In fact, right after creation, the very first words God speaks to humanity are recorded in Genesis 1:28-31:

*“**28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (ESV)*

Humans were created by God to act as His image bearers by ruling over His creation. This simply means that as sons and daughters of God we are called to take care of creation as God's servants and stewards.

We also learn in the biblical creation account that man was created for community. Genesis chapter two records the creation of man and woman. After creating man, God says in 2:18:

"The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" (ESV)

Having declared this truth, God proceeded to create Eve to be Adam's companion. The result? Adam declares in Genesis 2: 23-25:

***23** Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” **24** Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (ESV)*

What a beautiful picture of the intimate relationship enjoyed by the first humans -- they were so true, so transparent, so trusting that in their absolute nakedness; physical, emotional, and spiritual they felt no shame. Mankind's ability to enjoy powerful, intimate relationships with other humans is a capacity derived from God's creation of men and women in His own image. This simply means that just as God exists in relationship, men and women will exist in relationship. This capacity allows man to exist in intimate relationship with God as well as with the rest of humanity.

The importance of this significance is hard to overestimate. When Jesus was asked what the greatest of all commandments was, he replied saying in Mark 12:29-30:

"Jesus said, 'The first in importance is, 'Listen Israel: The Lord your God is one; so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.' And here is the second: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' There is no other commandment that ranks with these.'" (The Message)

What Jesus is saying is that the most fundamental aspect of being human is to live in a loving relationship with God and with mankind. This is the essence of what it means to be truly human.

The beauty of the Bible's message up to this point is that it confirms all that our hearts long to believe about life and reality. Every heart yearns to know and be known – to love and be loved. We are all desperate to have a place and find meaning in our lives. The good news of the Bible is that this is exactly what we created for -- to live in relationships and to rule in God's authority.

The message of the Bible also confirms something else that we know to be true about life and reality -- something is very, very wrong. One doesn't have to live very long before experiencing the stark realities of pain and suffering in the world. Every human heart that has ever lived on this earth longs for significance and substance and yet in various ways finds they are unable to experience these things in the way that they know they should.

The Bible tells us that this is the result of sin. There are many misunderstandings about what sin is today. I think the simplest definition of sin is that it is "***a violation of the way things are supposed to be.***" The Bible records the entrance of sin into the world of humanity in Genesis 3:1-7:

¹ *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"* ² *And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,"* ³ *but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'* ⁴ *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."* ⁵ *For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* ⁶ *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* ⁷ *Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (ESV)*

Sin brought ruin to humanity. Man was created to live in relationship with God and man. These vital relationships were ruined by the choice to disobey God's word. Man was created to rule

over the earth and its creatures and instead was led by a creature to disobey God. ***Their relationships and rule were ruined by sin.***

When Adam and Eve were forced to face God over their willful choice to violate the way things are supposed to be, that is, sin, there were serious consequences to their action. Genesis 3:16-19 contains the account of man's consequences for sin:

16 *To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."* **17** *And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; **18** thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. **19** By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."* (ESV)

Notice again that the consequences of sin destroyed both the rule and relationships of life that man was created to enjoy.

The true tragedy of the Bible's message is not that Adam and Eve suffered the consequences of their sin, but that all humanity suffers from it as well. The ultimate consequence of sin is death -- it is the ultimate ruin of the life man was created for. This was exactly the consequence God had warned about in Genesis 2:16-17:

16 *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* (ESV)

That is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve; they experienced relational death and rule death. They no longer lived in peace with God, with each other, and with the world in which they lived. They experienced spiritual death -- that is, separation from God that eventually resulted in their physical deaths. This is the exact same death that every human being on the planet experiences. Romans 3:10-12 says:

"There's nobody living right, not even one, nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for God. They've all taken the wrong turn; they've all wandered down blind alleys. No one's living right; I can't find a single one." (The Message)

As Romans 6:23 simply says:

23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (ESV)

This is the "good news", the gospel of the Bible! The good news is that there is a cure for our condition and hope for our helplessness. The Bible tells us that God has provided a Savior to rescue us from the sin that has destroyed our relationship and rule. This Savior was promised by

God from the very beginning. Right before announcing the consequences of Sin to Adam and Eve God says in Genesis 3:14-15 to the serpent (the Devil):

14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (ESV)

God promises an offspring of the woman that will crush the head of Satan and end the conflict initiated in the garden by the serpent. The rest of the scriptures contain the story of how God brought about this offspring.

This offspring is Jesus Christ! When Jesus came he announced in Matthew 4:17:

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (ESV)

He is simply saying: "Reconsider how you're living your lives because the Kingdom of the heavens is available to you." When Jesus came, He was sent by God to offer a new way of living. Instead of living in the sinful nature that had been passed down from Adam, Christ offered forgiveness and restoration. He said of Himself in Luke 19:10:

10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (ESV)

Just how did Jesus do this? He died for our sins. When Jesus was crucified God punished Him for the sins of mankind as a sacrifice for mankind. Listen to this important passage from scripture that speak about this glorious truth. **Romans 3:23-26** says:

"Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity He puts us in right standing with Himself. A pure gift. He got us out the mess we're in and restored us to where He always wanted us to be. And He did it by means of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in Him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public - to set the world in the clear with Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's now - this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in His rightness." (The Message)

The obvious question that needs to be answered is, "If Christ came to be Savior, what must a person do to be saved?" The answer is found in **Ephesians 2:4-10**:

"It's a wonder God didn't lose His temper and do away with the whole lot of us. Instead, immense in mercy and with an incredible love, he embraced us. He took our sin-dead lives and made us alive in Christ. He did all this on His own, with no help from us! Then he picked us up and set us down in highest heaven in company with Jesus, our Messiah. Now God has us where He wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his

work. All we do is trust Him enough to let Him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish!! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the mankind and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work He has gotten ready for us to do, the work we had better be doing." (The Message)

It's really that simple and that beautiful. Salvation comes to us by faith, itself a gift from God, out of his glorious, generous grace! And that is just the beginning of the good news! Having restored us in our relationship and rule God invites us through Jesus to join Him in the work He is doing – the very work He always intended for us!

After His resurrection Jesus charged His disciples to continue on in His work in Matthew 28:18-20:

***18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (ESV)*

The work of Jesus continues to this day through His disciples – His church brings the good news of Jesus in word and in demonstration just as Jesus did. Whatever we do as His followers it must include bringing restoration to relationship and the rule of the Kingdom of God. The Irreducible Core of the Christian life then is learning to "Love God", "Love Others" and to "Make Disciples" of Jesus who will join Jesus in His work.