



THE LOGIC GOSPEL

What Jesus is selling

Roland Niemetschek

Introduction

If you identify as a Christian the gospel is most likely a familiar subject. It quite possibly brings to mind a set of ideas or even scriptures that you associate with it. That same familiarity may also lead you to assume that the gospel is a widely agreed upon and commonly held message across the Christian world. While we might allow for a degree of variability around the edges, many find it easy to believe that the core gospel message is essentially uniformly understood within the Christian community.

But even a moderate effort to search out the actual content of the gospel will reveal that that is not the case. There exists an ongoing and wide-ranging discussion as to what this good news of Jesus actually is. There is much agreement about many of the facts that pertain to Jesus' personhood and accomplishments. But there is much less agreement about how those facts are to be viewed and what the central message that arises out of them is. One evidence that such a lack of commonality with respect to the message of the gospel exists is its easily observable and conspicuous absence.

Most Christian churches, teaching institutions, and charitable organizations have generated statements of faith that can be viewed on their respective websites. Typically they lay out their specific beliefs on a variety of specific subjects such as God, Jesus, heaven, hell, salvation, etc. Yet while it is common to find such belief statements regarding individual concepts it is very uncommon, in fact very rare, to find a statement as to what the gospel is as a whole. Isn't that odd? The gospel is Jesus' central message yet it is difficult to find an actual presentation of it. Most likely there are a number of reasons for this being so. And it is not unreasonable to think that one of those reasons is the reality that the gospel is not as monolithic within the Christianity community as one might assume.

With that in view, this piece has been developed to present the gospel in a way that goes beyond *information* about who Jesus is and what he did and seeks to convey the *impact* of his life and mission. How did what he did change the world then? And how is his mission still resonating today? In other words, why is his good news really good news for us right here and right now? And how can it be integrated into our daily personal experience so that it brings meaning and value to our lives? For as we gain that understanding we will be enabled to advance on the path of fulfillment our Heavenly Father desires for us.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Why follow Jesus? What was Jesus selling?

Jesus Christ arrived on the scene about two thousand years ago and history shows that he began to change the world. Through his life and teachings he started a movement that has endured intense persecution and has survived every enemy that has arrayed itself against it. He is widely acknowledged as the most influential person ever to have lived and his impact continues to be felt today.

But he did not rise to prominence via the avenues typically associated with great historical figures. He did not come from a privileged family or have any of its advantages. He never amassed an army or established a political empire. He didn't write great literature, create memorable art or compose inspiring music. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place of his birth. His public life lasted only about three years, most of which he spent with a group of only twelve ordinary men. And one of those betrayed him and caused him to die a criminal's death.

Yet despite his humble beginnings and lacking the accomplishments we would normally associate with a successful life, Jesus is the defining figure in the world's largest religion today. Hundreds of versions of Christianity across the globe and history all claim Jesus as their central inspiration. How did that happen? And why does his appeal endure? What is the common thread that runs through these differing expressions?

Jesus' central mission and message is often referred to as the gospel, which simply means good news. If we want to understand how Jesus went from being an itinerant preacher who seemed to come to a bad end to being the best known and most admired person in human history we need to understand what the essence of this good news is.

But our understanding of this good news must go beyond a simple list of facts about who Jesus is or what he did. While these facts, such as his virgin birth, his claim of being the Son of God, his death and resurrection, etc., are all important and true they do not constitute the central message of what we call the gospel. These facts can be compared to individual dots of information which, while true in and of themselves, must be understood in the larger context of the picture that is drawn when these dots are connected. It is the image that emerges as we connect these dots that will reveal the essence of the gospel.

Similarly, individual facts can be compared to individual puzzle pieces. While each one is significant and necessary, the purpose of each piece is to contribute to a finished image whose impact exceeds that of any individual one. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts and the gospel is greater and more meaningful than the sum total of the individual facts that contribute to it. It is important to have the right puzzle pieces to begin with. But it is then equally important that the pieces be assembled in the correct way in order to arrive at the image that the designer of the puzzle intended.

If simply accepting a set of isolated facts about Jesus is all that is necessary to be counted a Christian we would find ourselves in strange company. It is perhaps helpful to remember that even our spiritual enemy believes and accepts the bare facts of Jesus' personhood and accomplishment. Scripture tells us that the demons believe and shudder. They accept the *facts* about Jesus but they are terrified of the combined *effect* of those facts, the gospel, and with good reason. They do not embrace the picture that is drawn when those dots are connected, when those puzzle pieces come together as designed. The facts are important, but it is the resulting effect of those facts that comprise the gospel.

That is what this piece is about; to address the questions "what is the good news?", "what is the gospel?", "what is the picture that emerges when the dots are connected?", "what is the effect of the facts when the pieces are fit together?"

Or to put it in other terms, "what was Jesus selling that people have been buying ever since he made it available?" Why follow Jesus? What is the benefit of apprenticing ourselves to him? What is it that he did and taught that has caused millions of people to devote themselves to him, many to the extent of forfeiting their lives? What does he bring to the human experience that would generate such a response?

At the heart of the answer to these questions is the LOGIC, which stands for "Life of God in Christ". And if one were to summarize the good news, the gospel, it might look something like this:

Jesus began the redemption of humanity and all creation from its current dysfunction and by following him we can participate in that healing. We can be infused by God's divine life, empowering us to realize our true identities as unique and loving change agents for his emerging re-creation. We can live the "Life of God in Christ", we can live the LOGIC.

The intent of the following pages is to present the Biblical and conceptual foundation which undergirds and shapes this summary of the gospel. Hopefully they will be helpful in connecting the dots of the facts about Jesus and reveal the image of what the essence of this good news, this gospel is. What is that *effect of the facts* which has inspired such devotion over the centuries and continues to beckon us today? What is it that Jesus was, and still is, selling?

For discussion:

- 1) How does the reach of Jesus' influence compare with other historical figures?
- 2) Given the extent of Jesus' impact despite all the opposition and persecution that he and his followers have faced, what does that indicate about the nature of what he represents?
- 3) Do you believe the gospel is a commonly held and understood message across Christianity?
- 4) What is the difference between accepting a set of facts about Jesus as true and embracing the combined effects of those facts?
- 5) Why do most churches and Christian organizations specify their beliefs on a variety of topics but do not set out a definition of the gospel?

IMPAIRED NORMAL

Life is innately good yet afflicted by evil.

In order to appreciate the continuing appeal of what Jesus achieved and offers us we first need to understand the state of affairs that existed when he arrived. What was lacking in the human situation at the time that cried out for change? In other words, what was the problem?

It is often true that if we have been living in a certain way or environment for a significant period of time we can come to regard that way of life as normal and inevitable. If we have never experienced anything else it can also be easy to believe that something different is not even possible. Having never encountered anything other than what we are used to encountering the concept that it could be otherwise might strike us as unreasonable or unattainable. The power of familiarity and normality is such that to consider an alternative can be intimidating or frightening even if we have an intuitive sense that there is something not quite right about our “normal”.

Those who grow up in an abusive or unstable home can come to regard that as normal and become convinced that no one can really be trusted and that disappointment is inevitable. Many often then struggle as they carry that defective perception of what is normal into their own adult relationships, finding it difficult to trust themselves and others for fear of being hurt even though they have a sense their fear is holding them back.

Similarly, individuals who spend their formative years living under an oppressive political regime are often frightened and overwhelmed when they are liberated and granted the opportunity for a fuller life. And history shows that the adjustment to such an improved circumstance is often difficult and not always successful. Some choose to remain in or return to their oppressive situation rather than take advantage of their new freedoms simply because it is what they are used to and it appears to be the path of least resistance. Embracing a new normal is not always easy, even if it's for the better.

But if we want to grasp the scope of the change that Jesus accomplished and why it is good news for us today we need to begin by recognizing an existing reality that, while it is normal and familiar it is also distressing and undesirable.

Jesus understood, as have many seekers of truth throughout history, that our world, our lives and even our hearts do not exhibit a consistent sense of harmony and wholeness. Instead, our experience of life is dissonant and fractured. Our lives and our environment are conflicted. We see much beauty and goodness and glory in life. But we also see an undertow of darkness and dysfunction that mars our existence. We wish that the badness and evil would not exist but it does and it is very powerful.

And the source of this dichotomy, this pervasive conflictedness of life and nature, is that there is a malevolent power and personality that is shaping and distorting our experience of life. The Scriptures explain what we already sense.

*the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
(1 John 5:19)*

*For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of
childbirth together until now. (Romans 8:22)*

God created the universe in an original state of perfect goodness but He has allowed his creation to become subject to the power of evil so that we would have a clear understanding of what the opposite of His nature and reign is. This does not mean that God does not love us. Nor does it mean that He is absent or apathetic. He is still evident and active in creation and in our consciences. There is much good in our universe, including our hearts. But He is allowing the virus-like power of sin and evil to keep us and all creation from operating at full capacity.

When our computer gets infected by some sort of virus we notice that it slows down and operates less efficiently. The computer is still there as designed, but it is being prevented from functioning properly by the indwelling malware.

When our otherwise healthy child becomes ill we do not say that our child's body has somehow become bad. We recognize that the good body of our child is still there but is being suppressed by whatever sickness they have contracted. Isn't it the inherent goodness of our child's body that enables it to heal? In similar fashion, our experience of life reflects this same duality of inherent goodness being impaired by a corrupting influence.

But while we struggle with the darkness and evil in our physical existence on a daily basis, these are just the surface symptoms of the underlying

cause. There is a spiritual power at work that defaces and corrupts God's good creation, resulting in the dysfunction that frustrates and exhausts us.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:20-21)

This state of conflict and dissonance is not limited just to the physical aspects of life. It is also evident in our own hearts. We all have strengths and weaknesses; elements of our characters that are noble and others that are dark. But the relative power of our strengths and weaknesses is not equally matched. In truth, our dark side has the upper hand. Evil is not only present within us, it occupies a position of strength from which it dominates us against our wills and the desire of our better instincts.

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (Romans 7:22-24)

Not only does each of us experience an internal civil war between the competing influences of the law of God and the law of sin, the honest reality is that despite our desire to live rightly we find ourselves falling short of doing so. Not that our every thought or action is wrong. We often think and do the right thing. But over the course of time we have to acknowledge that under certain conditions our fear, anger, selfishness, or other weakness gets the better of us and we end up behaving in ways we later regret. We are not operating at full capacity.

It is the combined effects of the conflict of good and evil that we witness in nature as well as within ourselves that constitute the curriculum for our moral and spiritual education. God allows us to experience the impairment of evil so that we would come to recognize its destructive effect and desire to be free of it. As part of that He also allows us to experience the primary deception of evil as it attempts to present itself as the way of fulfillment for us; that we don't need to rely on God and can find satisfaction outside of harmony with Him.

His greatest desire is that we would freely choose to love and embrace Him. But in order for that to be a real choice He needs to let us experience and consider the opposite. Were He to withhold from us the possibility of rejecting Him our allegiance to Him would be manipulated and less than

genuine. For the sake of authentic relationship with some He takes the risk that not all will make the choice that He desires.

This is the governing dynamic which has defined human life ever since sin entered the human experience through the fall of Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God in the garden. It is also the dynamic which creates a desire for freedom and peace in our hearts.

It is through our contrasting experiences of the good and the bad that we learn that there are two distinct moral systems at work in the universe and that we have a choice to make. Our souls are in play.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; (Deuteronomy 30:15)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, (Deuteronomy 30:19)

For God has bound everyone over to disobedience (Romans 11:32)

But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Galatians 3:22)

These conditions result in the following dynamic. There is a part of us that knows what is right and good and we want to do it. That is the image of God that we are all endowed with and is present in every human being. But there is another part of us that thwarts our noblest desires and we end up behaving in ways we know are not good and often later regret. That is the indwelling presence and power of sin which began to rule humanity at the fall. At our core we know and want what is good and true but we do not have sufficient spiritual strength to consistently live accordingly.

the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)

The fact that we cannot win our inner conflict and truly overcome the dark inclination within us shows us that Jesus was right when he told us what is really going on.

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. (John 8:34)

This may be one of Jesus' most challenging teachings for us to accept about ourselves. It certainly was for those who first heard it, they were quite indignant. We may be willing to admit that we are not perfect but are we willing to believe that we are actually in bondage to the power of sin?

It is vital, however, that we embrace the truth of this statement. Without it the good news of Jesus can easily be misunderstood. Can any of us simply decide to never again succumb to one of our lifelong weaknesses and be truly successful in the effort? Be it anger, fear, lust, bigotry, addiction, pride, anxiety, bitterness or any other failing, we may succeed for a time but the effort is exhausting and under the right conditions we will fall again. We know that our desire alone is not enough to be genuinely free of whatever it is that defeats us.

The truth is that we are not consistently able to live the way we really want to in our own strength. The power of evil or sin has us in its grip. We are hostages being held against our wills, living under the oppression of its corrupting rule.

This is the human condition; we are intrinsically good, made in the image of God, which causes us to desire the good and the right, but we are in bondage, held captive by the power of sin which defeats us and we behave in ways we later wish we hadn't. It is all we have known throughout our life and has therefore become our normal.

And the outcome of our inherent weakness is that we have all done things that violate the design and rightness that we and God desire.

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
(Romans 3:23)*

This creates a moral deficit that we cannot restore and a guilt that we cannot cleanse ourselves from. More often than not we cannot undo the damage our failings inflict. Can harsh words or gossip ever be completely unsaid? Can the effects of violence ever be completely undone? Our spiritual enemy then uses our failures to diminish our self worth and convince us of being displeasing to God and deserving of his judgment.

If God's primary disposition towards us were one of fault finding and judgment we would all be guilty of not meeting His desire that we would live rightly. And He would be justified in letting that be the basis upon which none of us are acceptable to Him. But thankfully God's primary objective is to foster relationship with us and his disposition towards us is one of compassion and love. And it is out of this love that He understands

our weakness and looks beyond our surface behaviors to see the true intentions of our hearts.

For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:12-13)

God knows with perfect love and clarity whether our actions and attitudes are the result of weakness, ignorance, or immaturity or whether they are born of willful defiance. Just as a parent differentiates between immature and defiant behavior in their child so also God knows why we are doing what we are doing and deals with us accordingly.

His objective is not to punish us sufficiently for every infraction we have committed. His objective is to draw us to Himself by loving us through our frailty and bring us to maturity by showing us a better way.

An integral part of love is justice and God is committed to its fulfillment. But an integral part of arriving at justice is weighing the intent behind the act or thought and only God can sort out our true motivations.

But even with the best of intentions we are unable to free ourselves from the grip of sin's indwelling power. We continue to repeat the cycle of effort and defeat and the accumulating guilt becomes an ever growing undertow to our vitality. This makes it easier to believe that evil cannot really be overcome, that there is no antidote. And the corrosive effect of the unresolved guilt of past misdeeds can be one of the most debilitating burdens of the human soul.

We can sink into the despair of sin's seeming inevitability that in the end darkness wins. We can settle into a way of life in which we accept a certain amount of sin's mastery as the normal and unavoidable human experience, or believing that we are inherently evil and not acceptable to God or anyone else.

There is perhaps no more powerful life-draining belief that evil and darkness are invincible and permanent. That pain and injustice are intractable. That we are who we are and our weaknesses cannot be

genuinely overcome. That while we sense we are not realizing our full potential we can also come to believe that that is not really possible. After all, this is the familiar and “normal” experience of life we are all used to. That’s just the way it is and there’s really nothing that can be done about it, right?

This is the dark and oppressive environment, the spiritual regime, the status quo that was in effect when Jesus arrived. We have an intrinsic God-given desire for light and rightness but we are frustrated and held captive by the power of evil which keeps us from living the way our hearts call us to. And it is this universal conflicted, guilt-ridden and futility-laden condition that Jesus came to change.

For discussion:

- 1) Where does the “problem of evil” rank on the list of life’s big questions?
- 2) Does the concept that God is allowing evil to function even though He could stop it enhance or detract from the idea that God loves us?
- 3) What does the fact that we can recognize the badness of evil indicate about our core nature?
- 4) Does everyone have a basic desire to do the right thing, an intrinsic moral compass? Are some people irredeemably evil?
- 5) Do you find Jesus’ statement that we are all slaves of sin an easy or difficult concept to accept about yourself? What does that mean or look like in your life?

COSMIC GAME CHANGER

Jesus began the redemption of humanity and all creation from its current oppression.

When Jesus began his public life he announced that his mission was to defeat the oppressive rule of evil and inaugurate the loving reign of God.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

And when he talked about his good news he often referred to it as the gospel of the kingdom, or reign of God.

Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15)

If we study the actions and teachings of Jesus with an eye to determining what his central focus and message was we will find that he came to defeat the existing power of sin which was enslaving humanity and all of creation and then begin to build a new order governed by God’s freedom and love, in order to redeem all those who live by faith. The status quo of sin’s oppressive rule that had existed since the fall was now to be ended and replaced by the liberating reign of God’s goodness. Inaugurating this new order, the kingdom of God, and redeeming a community of the faithful is why Jesus came and is the cosmic aspect of his good news, the gospel.

But this change was not easily achieved. The existing power was not easily defeated. Yet Jesus did what needed to be done to make it a reality; a reality which has benefited the human race ever since he accomplished it, at great personal cost to himself.

He began by becoming genuinely human yet living a life of perfect rightness.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

He then gave up his completely innocent and sinless life, an extension of God's, as a sacrifice to atone for sin. He did what we could not do; satisfy the spiritual debt that our sin created. He provided the means by which all our guilt could be absorbed and absolved. His perfect sacrifice was a ransom sufficient to redeem and absolve the guilt of all those who please God.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

And Jesus alone, as God's only begotten Son, has the status to accomplish this reconciliation between God and man.

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:6)

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (1Timothy 2:5-6)

God is pleased with anyone who lives by faith, which can be defined as "seeking to discover and align oneself with ultimate reality (God)" in whatever form an individual's life setting affords. God is perfectly aware of how much revelation every person does or does not have and will judge them with perfect impartiality.

Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him". (Acts 10:34)

*But the righteous man shall live by faith.
(Romans 1:17)*

*For there is no partiality with God.
(Romans 2:11)*

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Jesus' atoning sacrifice applies to all those who endeavored to discover and align themselves with God's design over the course of their lives. Any person who orients his or her heart toward finding God's desire and then sincerely endeavors to order their lives according to that which they

understand of that desire will garner His favor. This includes people in all times, places, cultures, and religions.

I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:16)

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (Romans 2:14-16)

The disobedience of Adam and Eve was the cosmic event which ushered in the era of sin's oppression of the human race and all creation. By contrast, the obedience of Jesus was the redemptive cosmic event which ushered in the era of God's liberating reign and absolved the guilt of all who live by faith.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. (Romans 5:18)

and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

This perfect self-less sacrificial act has the power to redeem us from sin's domination and introduce us into his kingdom.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13-14)

having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15)

This is the good news, the gospel on the cosmic scale, the big picture. Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice all those who lived by faith will have their sins forgiven and be welcomed by God for eternity at judgment. Even though all people are slaves of sin and have therefore sinned, God knows whose hearts were genuinely oriented to seek and please him despite their flawed attempts to do so.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient to absolve the guilt of the faithful in all times, places, cultures, and religions. And it is on the basis of what he did that they will have an eternal dwelling with God.

But Jesus did not stop there. He did not stay dead.

Having atoned for the sin of the faithful through the sacrifice of his perfect life, Jesus then rose from the dead through the power of God. Death is the ultimate manifestation of evil's power. Jesus descended into death but the power of his perfect God-life enabled him to overcome it and rise again. By rising from the dead Jesus proved that he is divine, the Son of God.

*who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,
(Romans 1:4)*

*in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high
(Hebrews 1:2-3)*

And by overcoming death Jesus demonstrated his complete victory over sin's power and right to rule.

that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, (Hebrews 2:14)

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus constitute the inauguration of God's coming kingdom on the earth. It was the cosmic game changer in which the rule of sin was overthrown and the reign of God was ushered in. It was the moment in human history when the balance of power began to be tipped in the other direction.

It is the first evidence of his new creation which will eventually encompass and heal the entire natural world with Jesus as its champion and king. Through Jesus' sacrificial death and victorious resurrection the power by which sin enslaved all of creation was broken and began to be replaced by the rule of God.

Even though we still experience the effects of evil in and around us, the vital reality is that through his resurrection Jesus initiated the process whereby all of creation will ultimately be healed and redeemed. We have not seen that good kingdom fully realized yet, but we will.

This is the universal effect of the good news, the gospel. The sacrifice of Jesus is the transcendent provision that absolves the guilt of all who live by faith. And the resurrection is evidence of Jesus' power over sin and validates his standing as the legitimate ruler in God's new kingdom. His emergence from the tomb marks the beginning of the emergence of God's re-creative agenda on earth.

But beyond the cosmic coup that Jesus accomplished there is also a personal aspect, an individual effect that is the truly good news for us today. The successful completion of Jesus' mission established a new opportunity for those who have the privilege of coming to know and embrace him in their natural lives. It is the dawn of a new era of being able to realize our individual potential. It marks the beginning of an opportunity that did not exist before; the opportunity to enter into a new dimension of personal flourishing.

For discussion:

- 1) How would you define "kingdom"? Is the kingdom concept relevant today? What kinds of kingdoms do we deal with daily?
- 2) Is the idea that when we sin a moral debt is created that needs to be atoned for a strictly Christian one?
- 3) How does our life setting influence what living by faith looks like?
- 4) What are some of the implications of the idea that Jesus' atoning work applies to all who live by faith, not just those who have made a profession of faith in him?
- 5) What does the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus indicate about his power and status in the universe?

A NEW DIMENSION

Those who follow Jesus are privileged to participate in his healing renewal by entering the LOGIC, the "Life of God in Christ".

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available as a personal and present reality to those who follow him. Just as Jesus manifested a new and transfigured life after his resurrection we can also experience a new quality or dimension of life that overcomes the oppression of sin and darkness in our hearts. What Jesus did was not only a cosmic game changer; it is also a personal one that we can begin to realize right now.

*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)*

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)

We can know his presence and power that increasingly conforms our hearts to his, increasingly makes us like him, resemble him. We can experience a change of which system, which kingdom defines and governs our souls. It is a microcosm of what Jesus accomplished on the cosmic scale; a personal resurrection and deliverance of our spirits from the oppression of sin into the life and freedom of Jesus' kingship.

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. (Romans 6:5-7)

*"and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
(John 8:32)*

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Romans 8:29)

This new dimension of eternal life is the essence of God, his divine nature, made accessible through Jesus. The "Life of God in Christ", the LOGIC, is now available to those who are his disciples. This is the good news for us personally today.

He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:4)

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)

Those individuals who follow Jesus are empowered to enter a new dimension of human flourishing through the very nature of God as a present experience. A way of life in which we can experience a growing integration as our attitudes and behaviors come into alignment with the deepest desires of our heart to live rightly. An increasing sense of personal harmony and rest.

And this empowerment comes to us through a new indwelling presence in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit of God who is our new resource of truth and strength, giving us the ability to overcome those things that previously defeated us.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; (John 16:13)

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

While it may have challenged us to believe that we are truly slaves of sin, it may be equally challenging to believe that that can change; that our old normal of being defeated and oppressed by sin can be transformed into a new normal of experiencing victory over it.

Through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit we can undergo a transformative healing whereby the virus of sin is rendered increasingly powerless in our hearts.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, (Romans 8:2-3)

This does not mean that followers of Jesus instantly become immune to temptation or the possibility of sinning, although sometimes God does grant an immediate deliverance. Christian history contains many examples of individuals who have been instantly released from anxiety, alcoholism, physical ailments, or other afflictions. That has and does happen at God's discretion but is not a universal Christian experience.

What is promised to all Jesus' apprentices is that by following him we become connected to the power of God that enables us, over time, to overcome those things that defeated us before. While some are granted the blessing of an immediate release, all are granted the blessing and empowerment of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is not that we become incapable of sinning as followers of Jesus. It is that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can come to a place where we no longer need to, or even want to. It is a matter of learning how to avail ourselves of that power as a continuing endeavor of faith.

By following Jesus we have access to the divine life of God as a present reality. This is at the core of the provision and promise of Jesus for those who are his disciples. By living this "Life of God in Christ", this LOGIC, we can be transformed from discouraged captives under the oppressive rule of sin into joyous victors as citizens in the kingdom of God. Whatever weaknesses defeated us before can now be overcome by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. And as the grip of sin diminishes in our hearts we can begin to realize our true identities as never before.

For discussion:

- 1) What does it mean to flourish as a human being? Is it dependent on favorable circumstances?
- 2) What is your reaction to the promise that by following Jesus we can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, partake of the divine nature and live the LOGIC? Is it appealing, frightening, intriguing, impossible, etc.?
- 3) Do you find the idea that we can be free from sin's domination easy or difficult to accept? Why?
- 4) How can we grow in our ability to identify the leading of the Holy Spirit?
- 5) Have you seen evidence of this new dimension in yourself or others? Non-Christians?

BECOMING OURSELVES

Jesus enables us to realize our true identities as unique beings of God's creative love.

To follow Jesus is to be on the path of personal actualization. It is to be increasingly liberated from sin's deceptive and destructive control and empowered to be growing in the realization of our true God-imaged identities.

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (1 Peter 4:10)

In him we can find the capacity, the spiritual strength to overcome the weaknesses and failings that defeated us before. There is no sin that is greater than the power of God. There is therefore no sin over which we cannot experience victory. We can grow in the ability to access the divine nature so as to become increasingly free. The cycle of effort and defeat can be broken and replaced by a new normal of growing godliness as we live by faith in Jesus.

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:4)

that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, (Ephesians 4:22-23)

The patterns and habits of defeat and darkness that have previously ruled our spirits can be replaced by fresh expressions of love and light that reflect the uniqueness with which God has created each of us. And as our encumbrances fall away our true humanity and God-reflecting identity can emerge.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: (Romans 12:6)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

The downward spiral of sin's dominance and repression can be ended and replaced by a journey of increasing freedom and realizing our potential as never before. This is what Jesus meant when he said we can be born again. Not that we can be born a second time in the same way. But that we can be born in a new way into a new life.

But realizing this promise of being born again and having our true identities emerge and flourish is contingent on our embracing a teaching of Jesus that is at first glance a paradox.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)"

On the one hand we are promised a new and liberated kind of life yet on the other hand Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and lose our lives. How do we reconcile these two teachings? What are we losing and what are we finding? How far does denying myself and losing my life go? Am I giving up who I am and becoming his mindless puppet by following him?

Losing our life and denying ourselves should not be understood as relinquishing our core identity or personhood. It does not mean we cease to be the unique beings we are all created as. Nor does it mean we give up our wills and reason. God would not be honored if the result of following his Son would be that all his disciples were turned into identical and unthinking robots. In actuality he promises us just the opposite.

The call of Jesus to lose our lives and deny ourselves needs to be viewed as a call to turn away from the dynamic which has been the defining "normal" in our lives up to that point, namely the oppressive reality of sin and its practical outworkings in everyday life. It is that part of us, the dominating sinful nature part, which was keeping us from realizing our core desire to live rightly, that we are called to deny and lose. Jesus says it is necessary that we deny our *old* normal in order that we might enter into our *new* normal.

Jesus does not call us to deny ourselves in order to make us less of who we truly are. In truth, Jesus' call to deny ourselves and lose our lives is the

path by which we can more fully become our true unique and individual selves, increasingly unencumbered by the grip of sin.

One of the great ironies and most effective deceptions of our enemy is that if we pursue our desires outside of God's design we will find our unique identity and fulfillment. In reality this path leads us to a place of deadening sameness as those desires become our masters and enslave us. By contrast the path of following Jesus to live within God's order leads us to a place of growing liberty and vitality, enabling us to truly realize the unique fulfillment He desires for each one of us. If we want to become the best version of ourselves, getting to know and emulating Jesus is the best way for us to grow in that direction.

What at first appears to be a paradox is actually a statement of promised cause and effect. If we want to grow in the divine-nature life that is available in Jesus, we need to travel the path of leaving behind those things that keep us from that life. That is the part of our life that Jesus wants us to deny. This is the essence of repentance and it is a core element of following him.

The reason to deny ourselves is to truly become ourselves, increasingly free of the oppressing and deceptive rule of sin which keeps us from living the way our hearts call us to. The path of self-denial, properly understood, is in fact the path of self-actualization in which our true good God-imagined identity is empowered to emerge.

This is a vital organizing principle of the follower of Jesus; that I will, with continuing intentionality, embrace the mindset of allowing God to teach and lead me in all areas of my life for the purpose of identifying those things that are impediments to my growth in the LOGIC, the "Life of God in Christ", and then taking the steps that would result in those impediments being removed.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, (Hebrews 12:1-2)

It is a continuation of living by faith but with the added dimension of being led and empowered by the now indwelling Holy Spirit to fulfill the desire of my heart to live in harmony with God, myself and others, an objective I could not realize before. And the overarching motivation to embrace and live in this mindset is to grow in my participation in the

divine nature by which I become more fully myself and thereby more fully manifest the goodness of God.

applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-8)

It is undeniable that following Jesus involves a continuing willingness to examine ourselves and deny those things that stand in the way of our realizing his eternal life now. This will mean making changes in terms of our attitudes, time, and treasure to bring them into alignment with God's values.

It may also mean we need to forego some things we no longer view as profitable. And across the pages of Christian history there have been those who have even chosen to forfeit their lives in martyrdom rather than forfeit their faith in Jesus. Such is the power of his divining presence in the human heart that they would choose to die physically in order to live spiritually.

Whether or not a given disciple of Jesus is faced with that extreme decision the reality is that for all Christians there will be real choices to be made. Choices that will either lead to darkness or lead to light. But if our hearts are open and willing to learn and be led, God is more than willing to supply us with the strength to enable us to act on those choices.

Following Jesus does not include an automatic improvement in our circumstances. It may happen or it may not. It may even add challenges to our lives. Jesus does not promise us health, wealth, or popularity. He does not preclude these things either. What he does promise us is a way of life in which our most treasured possession, our souls, can find strength and peace in any circumstance. A way of living that enables us to deal with life, death, and eternity effectively.

The underlying truth is that the value and joy of participating in his divine nature and being on the path of becoming genuinely myself will far exceed the cost of any sacrifice I might be led to make. The cost of what I give up will be more than compensated for by the benefit of living in purposeful unity with God.

The kingdom of heaven (reign of God) is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

The good news, the gospel, is a personal opportunity to undergo a fundamental change of the dynamic that governs our hearts and lives. Each Christian can experience a unique liberation and re-creation through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But there is also a common element of growing self-less love and compassion that characterizes his community of God-natured followers. And this love that following Jesus brings forth in our hearts compels us to share his transformative opportunity with others.

For discussion:

- 1) Is it wrong or prideful to want to be the best version of ourselves? Is Christianity (or any religion) sometimes perceived as being opposed to that?
- 2) How common is the sense that we are not realizing our full potential? What holds us back?
- 3) What is the impact of knowing we are each unique expressions of God's creativity?
- 4) Does denying ourselves mean we relinquish our identity? Does following Jesus result in our becoming more or less individual? How does denying ourselves result in becoming ourselves?
- 5) Why are the changes Jesus calls us to make worth it?

LIVING PREVIEWS

We are purposed to be eye witnesses of and change agents for God's emerging re-creation.

As followers of Jesus we have the opportunity to be eye witnesses and emissaries of the redemption and renewal that he began. Our personal experiences of liberation from sin's control and the resulting freedom and joy are firsthand knowledge of the presence and power of Jesus today.

but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses (Acts 1:8)

We can be active ambassadors of the loving nature and kingdom of God as our lives increasingly resemble that of Jesus.

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ,
(2 Corinthians 5:20)*

and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:24)

*In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
(James 1:18)*

We have the privilege of being living demonstrations and previews of what the coming reign of God will look like.

Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

As we continue in our pursuit of God's leading the Holy Spirit empowers us to participate as forerunning change agents of his emerging kingdom by bringing his love and wisdom to bear in every arena of life. Our calling and purpose is to exhibit God's divine nature in our personal as well as our societal interactions as a daily way of present living.

The Great Commission

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, (Acts 26:18)

Our work is to manifest the loving reign of God right now in whatever our life setting may be. To be salt and light to those who are still in bondage and darkness.

*Your kingdom come. Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)*

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,
which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:10)*

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and
of sound judgment. (2 Timothy 1:7)*

And one day the process that Jesus began, of redeeming and healing the entire cosmos, will be completed and brought to full expression.

*He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind
intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration
suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things
in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.
(Ephesians 1:9-10)*

We have the opportunity and the commission to manifest the character of God and the loving nature of his rule as we live the LOGIC, the “Life of God in Christ”. It is the way of fulfillment and rest for our souls in this life and beyond.

*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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. For My yoke is easy
and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)*

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.
(Colossians 3:14)

For discussion:

- 1) How are Christians eyewitnesses of God's re-creative program? Why is eyewitness testimony important?
- 2) What motivates us to fulfill the Great Commission?
- 3) What qualities can we as followers of Jesus project to those around us?
- 4) Are Christians to be active in manifesting God's agenda in present society or are we to be passively waiting for God to settle it all at the end of the age? Why?
- 5) What are some of the privileges and responsibilities of being living previews of God's reign?

THE OPEN WAY

The offer is still on the table, it's your move.

Jesus, as the only begotten Son of God, offers us something no one else can, the opportunity to connect with our Creator and experience his divine nature as a personal and present reality. By virtue of who he is and what he accomplished the way is open for us to enter into such a present and interactive relationship with God. This is the essence of Jesus' gospel, his good news, the cosmos-altering accomplishment that continues to resonate and appeal today. He began the redemption of the universe from its current dysfunction and by following him we can begin to realize that renewal as a process of personal spiritual flourishing right now.

We can be changed from victims to victors as we apprentice ourselves to him in a walk of faith. Real life, true life, our true humanity and identity awaits us if we will avail ourselves of it. We have an adversary that would convince us that our present physical life is all there is and that evil is inevitable. That the sensual and temporal pleasures of this life are the best we can hope for. That is a deception that will keep us from true eternal life if we heed it.

The continuing choice as to whether or not we will live by faith, "*seeking to discover and align oneself with ultimate reality (God)* ", is ours and He will honor it. He has granted us the privilege and responsibility of deciding whether we will pursue or ignore Him. And one day he will confirm our decision to be either with or apart from Him for eternity based on the living choice we made.

His desire is that we would open our hearts and take Him up on His offer. That we would not settle for the semi-conscious life of pursuing temporal pleasures which will fade and end. But that we would pursue the fully-conscious eternal "Life of God in Christ", the LOGIC, and find the joy, peace and purpose our hearts yearn for.

This is why Jesus has inspired such devotion and discipleship through the centuries. This is the core of his appeal to the human spirit, the good news. This is the picture that emerges as we connect the dots of his life, death, and resurrection. This is the common thread which runs through the heart of the genuine expressions of Christian faith across history.

This is the *effect of the facts* that brings us joy and terrifies our enemy. Those who follow Jesus are infused with his divine nature and find themselves becoming more loving, integrated, and centered; realizing

their true potential as their genuine God-imagined identity emerges from the oppression of sin's mastery. Increasingly able to find the joy in life as well as deal with its challenges, growing in the ability to be at peace in whatever circumstance, knowing that this life is but a pre-cursor to our ultimate dwelling. Realizing an expanding compassion for their fellow man and all creation. Recognizing their privilege and purpose to be an active participant in manifesting God's emerging re-creation right now, in real time.

This is the good news, the gospel, of what Jesus accomplished and makes available:

Jesus began the redemption of humanity and all creation from its current dysfunction and by following him we can participate in that healing. We can be infused by God's divine life, empowering us to realize our true identities as unique and loving change agents for his emerging re-creation. We can live the "Life of God in Christ", we can live the LOGIC.

And as to the question, "what was Jesus selling that continues to be bought today?"

Jesus offers us the opportunity to have a relationship with God that enables us to become the best version of ourselves as agents of His project to heal the world.

Any sincere heart that endeavors to follow Jesus will grow in goodness and godliness. And it is this progression toward wholeness, the likeness of Jesus, the experience of his God-life, which becomes our most treasured possession. Its value supersedes all that is temporal, even physical life itself.

To walk with Jesus is to enter into eternal life, the life of God, in the here and now. It is to connect with the power of the One who created the universe in a transformative and re-creative way that refreshes our souls and replenishes our vitality. It is to deny ourselves and follow him only to find that by following him we actually find and become ourselves.

It is to join with all those who have followed Jesus through the centuries before us as living beneficiaries and messengers of the opportunity he established. It is to be emissaries of and change agents for the burgeoning reign of God that Jesus began and will find its full expression when he returns at the end of the age. And it is to find the rest and satisfaction that our hearts desire as we seek the wholeness and peace that is the universal human quest.

For discussion:

- 1) What is the most significant decision each person is called to make over the course of their life? Can that decision change?
- 2) What is the central offer of Jesus? What is the product he was selling? Why do we care? Why do we share?
- 3) Why is Jesus the only one who can make this offer?
- 4) To follow Jesus is an intentional mindset to do what?
- 5) What is the difference between accepting Jesus and following him?

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”

the apostle Paul- circa 56 AD



“The glory of God is the human person, fully alive”

Irenaeus of Lyons- circa 200 AD



“Now, with God’s help, I shall become myself”

Soren Kierkegaard- circa 1850 AD



“We are born that we might become, as a conscious individual,
a new life form of God”

M. Scott Peck- 1978 AD



“The gospel isn’t about getting into heaven after we die, it’s
about getting into heaven before we die”

Dallas Willard- 2010 AD

EMBRACE THE OPPORTUNITY

Enter the LOGIC:

Be honest -

Recognize that God exists and that the universe is in a state of oppression and dysfunction.

Be humble -

Recognize that your heart is also torn and under sin's dominion.

Be decisive -

Choose to turn from darkness and embrace Jesus by faith as your champion to deliver you.

Develop your LOGIC:

Engage your will -

Endeavor to grow in the knowledge and experience of his divine nature through prayer, worship, study, fellowship and service.

One day at a time -

Stay the course, believing that God's power is greater than any sin and that he lovingly sees the intention of your heart.

Step into your purpose -

Seek God's leading and then engage with your life setting as a joyful eye witness of and change agent for his emerging re-creation.

