

*Discipleship 101: The Big Picture*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*Psalm 111; Colossians 1:13-23; Luke 19:1-10*

Our final Scripture reading today is Luke 19:1-10. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’” But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.””

We start a new series today called Discipleship 101. Now it might sound funny for those of us who have been a part of church or CrossWay for a long time to be doing a 101 course, because a 101 tells us that it’s an introductory course. Do we really need the basics? After all, in the last few years we’ve studied Matthew, Romans, Acts, Revelation, James...we’ve gotten a lot of insight into who Jesus was, what He did, what it meant, what His followers did, what we should do, and what is to come. None of that is introductory material, right? Many of you watching today have been with me for over 12 years. It’s not like we need a starter course.

But the primary focus of the Christian life isn’t supposed to be Sunday worship. We focus a lot on that, we have worship every week together, but that’s actually supposed to be one piece of the larger program. You can attend worship every week and never believe a thing I say. The focus of the Christian life is being a disciple – in even simpler terms, it means being a follower of Jesus everyday. Not somebody who just likes Jesus, not just a fan, but a follower of Jesus who attempts to live like Jesus taught us to live. And as Jesus told Peter when He called Peter to become a follower, as He told His disciples after His resurrection, He intends us to be followers who make other followers. Disciples make more disciples.

And that’s the tricky bit. Many of us who have been brought up in the church, who learned it from the time we were little children, we believe in Christ, we try to live like Christ, but we don’t have the words to express and articulate it. We believe in a lot more than the basics, but it’s hard for us to *teach* the basics. Even if we came to faith as adults, it’s one thing to accept Christ’s sacrifice for you and to repent of your former ways, but it’s another thing entirely to lead someone else – our children, a co-worker, a friend – to faith and trust. If someone were to come to us and say, “What’s this Jesus thing you believe in all about?”, we might have a hard time answering.

So this series is hopefully going to do two things. First, it's going to lay out the basics of Christianity in such a way that anybody can pick up on them. If you've never believed or you're not sure what Christianity teaches, this is the way to find out. And secondly, for those of us who are believers and have a hard time with outreach, with leading others to believe, this series should give us a foundation for teaching others. I'm going to try and make it so anyone can remember the key points, become a disciple, and make other disciples. Because we're just taking six weeks, everything could go much deeper – but this is where you can start.

Back to that question, “What's this Jesus thing you believe in all about?” Hard question for many of us. We could tell a person how our relationship with Jesus *feels*, but that's not the basis of our faith. We could tell them events from Jesus' life, and maybe they'll pick up on the ideas, but maybe not. And if we point them to the Bible, most likely, they won't know where to start, they'll read a few pages, put it down, and that will be that.

What helps us most is if we understand and can explain the overarching story of Scripture, the truth of things as the Bible explains it, what we might simply call “the big picture.” Once we have the simple form of the story in our minds, we can explore the details and see how everything fits together...and where we enter the picture. And all you have to do is remember four basic words to pass it along: *Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration.*

I'm going to say those words a couple of times, and I want you to repeat them with me. *Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration. Creation. Fall. Redemption. Restoration.* If you can get just those four words, the rest falls into place. Because I am convinced that everything in Scripture in some way fits into these four categories or points us towards them. If we can get a grip on what they mean, you can easily explain God's story to anyone. It's very important that we invite people into the fullness of God's story, because without it, it's easy to create a flimsy faith. A strong faith in God and in Jesus starts with Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

Start at the beginning: *Creation.* The creation of the universe, the earth, and everything in it is of vital importance to understanding Christianity. It also answers a key question many people have about the world – how did we get here? Genesis 1 and 2 lay the foundation found throughout Scripture. God made everything. Nothing that was made was made without Him. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together in perfect harmony form it all.

And the creation was good. It was what God intended. Not only that, but when God created us, human beings, humanity, He said it was very good. We are, in essence, the crowning achievement of creation. Psalm 8 calls us “a little lower than gods” and “crowned with glory and honor.” When God created us, He created us as image-bearers – that in a unique and special way, we reflect God as no other part of creation does. We were made to be like Him. We were also made specially to rule the creation in front of us, to take charge of it and tame it and tend it.

Creation is important because we see the hand of God in it. As Romans 1:20 puts it, “God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen ever since the creation of the world. People have no excuse, having perceived these things from what has been made.” Creation by itself, with all it reveals of God, directs us towards our creator. Creation shows we have a loving, powerful God who is in relationship with us and who loves us.

We miss that and deny it, though, because of the second of the four major themes of Scripture: *the Fall*. We all know that we don't naturally look for God or honor God; we might have been trained to do that, but it doesn't come automatically. When we look at nature, we don't instinctively praise God for it. And that's because of the fall of humanity into sin.

Our ancestors, Adam and Eve, were told a lie and they believed the lie rather than God. Moreover, that lie was that they could become like God. Sometimes, we get wrapped up in the details of eating fruit from a forbidden tree and how silly and simple a thing that sounds. But the fall of humanity into sin comes from nothing less than Adam and Eve deciding that being like God – essentially taking His place – sounded like a good idea. At that point in time, there was literally only one way to rebel against God, and they did it. So the first sin has almost nothing to do with the external details of “how” they rebelled, it was that they – humans without a locked-in nature, humans without further influence from their upbringing or bad genetics, essentially perfect humans – did in fact attempt to overthrow God's place in their lives.

And we've been suffering the consequences ever since. Many people ask why the world is so bad and why suffering happens and why death is a thing, especially if there is a loving God. They also ask why the Bible is full of wars and why God appears to be angry more than loving, especially in the Old Testament. All of this is explained in the biblical story as the direct result of sin. In Romans 8, we're told that creation itself groans and awaits its liberation from decay. Literally everything in creation suffers under the curse of sin. You want to know why nature can seem so savage? You want to understand typhoons and earthquakes and tornados and COVID-19? It's because creation shares in the decay brought about by our betrayal of God.

That word betrayal seems harsh, but the word that is more accurate for what our fore parents did is treason. The only wise king, the ruler of the universe, the maker of all things, they defied His only command to them in order to become like Him – not to be like Him in grace, love, or mercy, but like Him in His knowledge and power, to take His rightful place. And while we complain that it's not fair that we suffer the curse of Adam and Eve's mistake, we all commit the same treason in our hearts. We want to make our own destinies, create our own rules, live as if the only thing that matters in the universe is us.

The curse reaches into everything, and it runs deep. Because of sin, our human nature is born flawed. We instinctively choose what suits us best rather than others. Our first thought is always for ourselves. Many things that come naturally, that seem in-born, aren't God's intention for us. Our nature is so warped that we hurt people we care about and act self-destructively.

The Bible shows these patterns repeatedly. Even the most righteous people commit horrible acts. Gruesome battles occur between tribes and peoples whose ancestors were kin. God gives Israel a law for them to follow to receive His blessings, and immediately they break it in countless ways. In fact, the law only goes to prove how guilty and broken they are! Time and again, because of the fall, people reject God and godliness. The anger we see from God in Scripture is not childish anger or uncontrolled rage. It is the righteous anger of God, kind, loving, providing, who patiently deals with people who consistently and constantly deny Him, defy Him, and disobey Him. If the story ended with the fall, we would have no hope, only an expectation of judgment for our willful disobedience to the one who made us.

But that's not where the story ends. In fact, there's another thread that runs right alongside the fall, and that's *Redemption*. God did not leave us in the state of affairs we could have been in. Immediately following Adam and Eve's sin, God promises that their seed would crush the head of the serpent, the devil, who introduced them to sin. God does not immediately cause Adam and Eve to physically die, as expected, but clothes them despite their sin. God establishes a family to know Him, starting with Abraham and his offspring.

When Abraham's descendants eventually find themselves as slaves in Egypt, God provides redemption for them and brings them out into the land promised to them. God provides food for them for 40 years in the wilderness. He gives that people the law. The law not only teaches them how to live in right relationship with God and one another, but it also gives them a means of sacrifice to get back into right relationship with God when they have sinned.

Throughout Israel's history, God redeems and saves His people from their enemies. The book of Judges tells about a cycle over 400 years where the Israelites forget about God, come under oppression, cry out to God, and God redeems them through a special leader of God's choosing. In the time of the Israelite kings, God sends prophets and priests to guide the people back to Himself. God is always providing opportunities for those who would turn to Him to do so and receive His blessing.

Yet the curse of the fall was still there. The sacrifices made to return people to right relationship with God had to be constantly repeated. Israel was still in regular rebellion against God. And there was very little way for those outside of the nation of Israel to worship God, to serve Him, and to be in that right relationship with Him. God had promised that all the nations would be blessed through His relationship with the people of Abraham...and yet because of the fall, very few ever experienced it.

So over time, God provides details about His ultimate plan to redeem His people, those He would redeem despite the curse, those He has chosen out of His great mercy and love. Not a contingency plan, not a never-ending system of sacrifices to make temporary amends for sin, but a permanent solution to break the curse. God promised a Messiah who would rescue His people. Over the centuries, through God's prophets, more and more about the Messiah becomes clear.

Enter Jesus. He was not the conquering hero Israel wanted. He was the compassionate son of God the world needed. Through living a perfect life and following the Father's will all the way to the cross, Jesus does something incredible. In His perfect life and death, the perfect justice of God is met. The perfect wrath of God on our treason is satisfied. The perfect love of God is poured out, and the perfect grace of God is demonstrated. Total redemption comes.

Now, all who come to Jesus, who trust in Him and become His disciples, are redeemed. We are no longer children of the old Adam, through whom the curse of sin and death came. We are now considered the children of the new and perfect Adam: Jesus. This once-for-all sacrifice defeated sin and death and made it possible for believers to fight the sin nature in this lifetime and to be purged of it once and for all in the next. And as our story of Zacchaeus today demonstrates, if God has chosen to redeem you, no matter your sins, you will be redeemed! That's why Jesus came!

Through Jesus' redemption, we can be in right relationship with God, knowing His love and loving Him in return, for all eternity. And that leads us into the last concept: *Restoration*. Now the way we're going to use that term restoration is a bit bigger than what we might think. If you watch any of these home-improvement shows, you might hear them saying that they are going to "restore" a house built in 1885 or something. But, it's not just restoring the house exactly the way it was. When they're all done, you know that house never looked that good in 1885. Even if every shade of paint was the same, even if every floorboard was made of the same wood, it's got electric light! It's got air conditioning! It's got a modern refrigerator, an expensive tub, the finest furniture, stuff the first family in 1885 couldn't dream of having!

In the same way, God has a restoration plan, but it's not just bringing things back up to code. When God restores His vision for His creation, it's not going back to the Garden of Eden, back to a short-lived paradise, no. It's going to have continuity with the first, it's going to be like the first, but it will be so much better. As many of us learned in our study of Revelation, God has big plans for His restoration project! So big, in fact, that we can almost say that God's promised restoration is also *transformation*.

And the best parts of that restoration and transformation are meant for us to enjoy. God promises that we are adopted into His family as sons and daughters when we come to Jesus for redemption. When restoration comes, when God renews all things and sets all things right, there will be true justice. There will be no more mourning or crying or pain, no suffering of any kind. We will be priests in our own right, serving God in His presence, and at the same time in some way we don't fully understand, kings and queens, ruling and reigning with Christ who saves us.

Visions of that transformation, of the world to come and the judgment that will bring it about, were given to the Old Testament prophets, to Daniel and Isaiah to Ezekiel and Malachi. This restoration that has not yet come is the hope of all disciples. It is not a hope of heaven alone, but a place where heaven and earth meet. And most importantly, the relationship that God had with Adam and Eve in the beginning before the fall will be restored. As Revelation 21:3 says, "Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them."

These four concepts – Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration – they are a guide to everything we see in Scripture. Are there other themes, other teachings? Sure there are! But they are all set within God's larger purposes. If someone can understand the big picture of Scripture – which is really the big picture of all of human history, understood rightly – they can begin to see why Jesus is so important, and they can see where they fit.

You might think, "If we're going to learn and teach Christianity, don't we have to start with Jesus?" The reality is, we're going to talk a lot more about Jesus next week and in the weeks to come. But we have to start here. It's been said that Jesus is the answer, and that's right. But before you get to the answer, you have to know the question. Because the question we need to be asking is this: "How can I be redeemed from the fall into sin so that I can fulfill the purposes God created me for and participate in God's eternal restoration project?" We get that question from the four basic parts of the story of Scripture. And Jesus is the answer to that question. I hope you'll be here to learn more about His redemption next week.