



faith life and learning

Connecting Our Story to God's Story

By Dr. Brant Himes

One of our goals at LAPU is to help each and every student to articulate how their life journey connects with God's story. We believe an important part of the LAPU experience is giving students a lens to see how God's work in the Bible has continued through history to impact the world around us in profound ways. This means our students encounter the key narrative of creation, fall, and redemption as they study the Bible. Next, students are challenged to apply the continuation of this narrative to their lives and in the world.

In the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2 describe God's good creation: sea, stars, land, plants, animals, and more are all made by a creative God and display his glory. Creation then culminates with humans, made in the very image of God. God placed them in the world to cultivate and create, to care for, and to help God's world thrive. But then, in Genesis 3, paradise is lost; humans - in their pride, wanting to be like God - choose to rebel by going against God's instructions not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This breaks the intimate relationship and oneness that humans had with God. They are kicked out of the garden; the tree of life is now out of reach, protected by angelic swirling swords. The consequences of sin permeates all aspects of life: the ground is hard, relationships suffer, pain disrupts even the most fundamental of human endeavors. Yet there is a promise even now: the serpent who instigated the humans' rebellion will one day be crushed, even as he strikes at the heel of the savior.

The rest of the Bible, from Genesis 4 through Revelation, tells the story of God's great efforts toward the redemption and restoration of humankind and the rest of creation. Exodus and Deuteronomy, for example, recount how God rescues his people from Egypt under the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. God implores his people to follow him in faith and obedience, as he establishes the Ten Commandments through Moses,

and leads them to the Promised Land. Yet, even in their rescuing and redemption, God's people continue to rebel and forget about God's goodness and faithfulness.

Then, in the New Testament, the story dramatically changes. Here, the gospels introduce the most consequential person in history: Jesus of Nazareth. We read in Luke, for example, how Jesus came to heal, set captives free, and proclaim the good news that God's kingdom has arrived, on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus himself comes as the Son of God, fully human and fully divine. In the Old Testament we saw time and again how the human propensity toward sin and rebellion continued to keep people out of close relationship with God. In the New Testament, God himself comes through Jesus as a bridge to connect to humanity. The oneness that was broken in Genesis 3 could now be restored in the person and work of Jesus.

Jesus changed everything. He saw the suffering, pain, sin, and confusion of the people; and he reached out and healed, spoke truth into their lives, and forgave them for their sins. His radical love turned the world upside down. The lowly were raised up; the mighty were sent to the back of the line. Jesus disrupted the religious culture so much that he was killed, hung on a cross to die.

But that old rugged cross - that tree of life that had been protected by angelic swirling swords since humans left the garden - would usher in new life for the world. Jesus died and was buried; but three days later appeared to his friends and followers, very much alive. Jesus' death on the cross had been defeated through his resurrection. The reality of the world changed; death no longer had the final say - it had lost its sting.

In the book of Acts, we read how Jesus' friends and followers started to share and spread this good

news of Jesus through the power of the Spirit of God. As Jesus ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit became manifest among those early believers. The Spirit empowered them to speak, travel, and share the news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with all who would listen. First, their message reached only the ears of the Jews; but soon the Spirit led the disciples to the Gentiles, as well. God's good news continued to spread, changing lives.

People began to see hope for their lives and for the world. Because of Jesus' power over death, and his ministry of healing and redemption, people from all walks of life realized they could live differently. They could live life with an orientation toward hope, redemption, and reconciliation. Just as God reconciled himself to the world through Jesus, those who follow Jesus could be reconciled with others. Oneness can be restored.

While lives can now be oriented toward hope, the world is still suffering under the effects of sin. Jesus conquered the grave, but the final abolition of sin must wait until Jesus comes one last time, to usher in God's ultimate kingdom.

So, we live in a world between the already and the not-yet. Already, Jesus has redeemed us and he invites us to live our lives fully devoted to him. When we recognize this redemption for our own lives, we can participate in the continuing work of redemption that God is doing in every corner of society. But the world is not-yet restored. Sin still wreaks havoc, ruining lives, spoiling the creation, and mocking the hope of Jesus. God's grace works tirelessly to restrain the full effects of sin, allowing us to experience beautiful glimpses of God's kingdom

on earth; but not until Jesus returns one more time will the serpent's head ultimately be crushed.

Until that time, followers of Jesus are on a mission: to proclaim the good news of Jesus and to live lives that are fully devoted to ushering in the goodness and graciousness of God in all the world.

In other words, followers of Jesus are invited into the story of redemption and hope.

For LAPU, this means our community is always seeking to engage the power of the gospel in the world around us. We ask each other: Where will you shine a light on God's redemptive grace in the world? How will you live a life of hope? How will your faith make a difference in your family, among your friends, and toward your neighbors? We navigate these questions all together - as students, staff, faculty, and administration - in our classes, through conversations, and in our daily interactions with each other. We then piece together our disparate experiences of faith, and thread connections to God's work in our lives and through our learning. Each one of us is part of God's redemptive story, and as a community, we commit to discovering and living out the meaning and implication of this story in everything we do.

Whatever your job, vocation, or station in life - indeed, wherever you find yourself - know that Jesus is calling you to walk alongside him in showing the world his grace, creativity, love, goodness, and salvation.

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