

Gospel of Transformation

Part 4 of 4

St Matt's - July 2021

Ephesians 1:3-10

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

John 4:13-15

¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

The Gospel of God

A Good Story in 4 Acts:

Act 4: Transformation

We have come to the fourth and last instalment in this four-part sermon series where I am tracing out the Gospel of God from Genesis to Revelation.

Our four Gospel headings are:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Transformation



Recap

If you missed some or all of the first three Gospel chapters they are available as text or audio on our church website in the Resources section.

Introduction

1 Corinthians 1:18
For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Last week I brought a view on salvation as God's Redeeming work in Jesus Christ. Some words from St Paul written when he goes deep with the Corinthians provides a good transition to Transformation: (1Corinthians 1:18)

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For us who are being saved the message of the Cross is the saving power of God. What this reminds us of is how salvation is both a moment and a process. In the fullness of the Gospel, those have who called upon the Lord have been saved, are being saved and will be saved.

Q So if I am asked: “Are you saved?”

A My answer is: “Yes, I have been saved, but it ain’t done yet! My salvation is still being worked out - even in fear and trembling”¹

That ongoing process can be described in various ways: At one time it was widely referred to as ‘Sanctification’ recognising that we are called to be Holy or, ‘Saints.

In Christ we are made Saints as God’s Holy People. That is why my typical greeting to you on Sunday morning is: “Good morning Saints” because in Christ we are saints while at the same time the process of becoming holy or sanctified and saintly is still a work in progress.

We will come back to this in considering the disciple’s work of bringing our fleshy nature to death so to grow in the Spirit of Christ.

The Biblical term I prefer for this on-going saving work of God is ‘Transformation’ which applies to everywhere God is at work to save his creation and humanity within that, both now in this age and into eternity.

Something we need to be clear on at this point is the belief that people can really be changed and that applies to everyone. If for some reason we believed that people are set in their present character forever then Transformation is not possible.²

Now to be really clear on the difference between Redemption and Transformation I thought of an illustration:

It so happens that my laptop needs repair. The W and S keys are randomly failing which is a bother! If I bring it away for repair and the keyboard comes back fully functional then that is Redemption. What was lost has been restored and the laptop is redeemed from the scrap heap.³ I would be happy with that. Righteousness restored is good!

Transformation is when the laptop brought in for keyboard repair comes back with expanded RAM, more processing power, higher resolution screen, longer battery life, and extra functions. Can you imagine my surprise if what I sent in for keypad repair came back upgraded several levels? That is Transformation as we are considering here.

God’s glorious salvation plan is not a great ‘fix-it’ repair job. We are not going back to the garden as it was before fig leaves but to a New Jerusalem in unimaginable glory – Transformation is the ongoing upward work towards that.

And it’s all about Jesus Christ through whom all things were made. The scope of God’s saving work is described in the opening chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

⁹ He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:9-10

He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹ Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

² This has implications for present nature-nurture debate around sexuality and consideration of ‘Conversion Therapies’.

³ Some 4 chapter gospel models online refer to this 4th chapter as ‘Restoration’ but that will not do.

2 Corinthians 3:18

And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

That glory becomes evident in personal transformation we see now, in this age but a greater glory awaits. I want to see more transformation like that here as well.

Anyone who receives Jesus as their redeemer becomes a work in progress involving real change –that is real change not just a repair, a paint job or some cosmetic makeover.

Q So what transformation can we expect here in this age of the Holy Spirit before Jesus returns to reign on earth in person as Messiah?

A A few pointers:

- God is at work to redeem and transform but it is a battle. God's Kingdom is advancing but not in a linear or predictable way. The best illustration I have for this is to think of how the Second World War ended in Western Europe:

While not overlooking the Soviet Union's efforts in the east, victory over Nazi Germany was determined on 6 June 1944 once the Allies had gained a foothold in Normandy and opened the Western Front. From then on victory over Nazi Germany was a matter of time. The push to Berlin could begin. One British general -Bernard Montgomery- thought it could be over by Christmas that year but his attempt to achieve this failed terribly and then came the German counter offensive of the Ardennes Campaign. In the end it was May 1945 before Berlin was taken.

While the fall of Berlin was determined in June 1944, it was not until eleven months later that the victory was realized. Those eleven months saw the most vicious and costly fighting of the war as the Nazi regime fought with fanatical resistance. For my family living in occupied Holland it became hell on earth, even as salvation was generally progressing from the south. In fact it by passed them until May 1945.

In the progress of God's Kingdom bringing transformation to the world we are living in a similar time between the redeeming victory of the Cross affirmed in the Resurrection and the full realization of that in a transformed humanity gathered in Jesus Christ in a new creation.

One way this can be described is as 'Already – Not yet.' As mentioned earlier, salvation has come but is not yet fully realized. It is here, but is still coming.⁴

- In the personal arena the ongoing transformation is a contest and battle between the Holy Spirit and our fleshly nature which we determine. It is about whether the new life received from Jesus is nurtured to advance bringing forth fruits of Christ's Spirit within us, or whether the old life of selfish egotistical rebellion, lust and desire, lived lies and addictions etc. is held on to.

⁴ This is described as 'Eschatological Tension'.

I think of it as the gardener deciding which plants to water and which not to water, or more proactively, what to pull out and what to promote with a supporting stake and extra care.

- In the personal realm this needs to involve transformation of our minds.

We heard Paul saying it so clearly to the Romans:

²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2
Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

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Another computer related illustration may make this transformational renewal of the mind clear in contemporary terms:

Jesus is an operating system, not an app!

Personal transformation involves changing our personal mind's 'operating system' which involves:

- changing world view,
- changing values,
- changing beliefs,
- changing politics,
- economics,
- personal tastes,
- language,
- lifestyle etc.

It is about what makes us tick as us hence 'renewal of the mind.' That is our operating system and not just an extra app added to do a specific function when we need it such as we weather or banking.

The basic method for this is discipleship which is what St Matthew's Church says it's all about: Growing Disciples. It's relearning who to be and live in the spirit of Jesus through repenting and believing. It's repenting as intentional transformation towards a complete mind reset in the pattern of Jesus. As a preacher I set out to contribute to this. We bring the old nature and its desires to death so that God's new life given in Christ may fill us.

- The outflow and overflow of this personal transformation is transformation in the wider world. When this dynamic takes hold in a human heart it becomes the seed that sprouts a mighty tree of influence. Many of the transforming heroes of preceding centuries who changed the world for the better had transformed, and transforming hearts. They were themselves transformation projects before they launched any project for wider transformation. That is where God works first to then overflow in the world as transforming power in:
 - Society
 - Law
 - Culture & Arts
 - Civilization

- Care of the earth and ecology
- Economics

To Conclude:

In all this there is much glorious hope to celebrate:



1. If you have tasted God's redemption and something of his transforming work we can be very encouraged. Paul writes about this to the Philippians (1:6)

⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

We are all works in progress which God will complete. He finished his first creation and he will complete the renewed creation including us.

2. The Holy Spirit we know and taste is described as God's 'down payment' or 'deposit' on this completed transformation project. Even our small experience of God may assure us that Holy Spirit is on the job within us.
3. We may also be encouraged that God is determined to renew the earth even as humanity is acting as a poor steward of it: John heard Jesus say: (Revelation 21:1-6)

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with people. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

4. That affirmation gives us encouragement when evil seems to carry the day. God will have the last word on his day

The intense battle we face are no surprise as the end comes: (Paul to Timothy: 2 Tim 3:1-5)

3 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Does this not seem familiar today?

Our hope is for God's salvation to be complete in a new heaven and a new earth, a salvation which has started and will be completed by the day he returns.

The Gospel does not bring us to a bus stop where we wait to go to heaven when we die!

We will be with Jesus but sharing the fullness of his saving work – totally transformed for a resurrected life as he pioneered.

THAT IS THE GOSPEL!

AMEN

