

We are given a new story

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[0:00] We're continuing in our preaching series called Seven Things That Happen on the Cross, just leading us through Lent into Easter. And we've already seen over the last few weeks that on the cross our sin became righteousness, that on the cross our shame was washed, that on the cross our enemies were defeated, that on the cross we're shown how to live, that on the cross we see what God is like.

And then the sixth one today, we're going to do the seventh one on Good Friday, but the sixth one today, we are given a new story. We're given a new story.

Does your story define you? I wonder if you've ever had that feeling where someone tells you, oh, he looks just like his dad, or she sounds just like her mum.

I even had it this week when I was talking to someone else on the phone and I said, oh, when we were talking about that, Helen said this, and they said that's exactly what her mum would have said. Which I don't know that that particularly blessed Helen when I told her about that later.

But that thing that you often notice as you grow older, it keeps happening, kind of the older you get, where you notice or other people notice you're picking up habits from your parents, or tics, or just sort of the way that they would say something.

[1:16] And that might be a joyous thing, that might be a deeply frustrating thing, depending on what it is and how you feel about that aspect of your mum or dad. But it can feel a little bit like we're given a story we can't escape, right?

It's like, it just is the case. It feels like you're destined to turn into your mum or dad, to some extent. That can be true of other things. Things happen to you in your life, and then you're like, it feels like I can't escape this story that I've been given.

Can we really change? And what I want to show us today is that at the cross we're given a new story.

Not only can we change, but we are changed. And we find that the direction of our life shifts, so that we end up becoming like Jesus. Let me read to you.

I'm going to start in Romans chapter 5, and I'm going to bounce straight into 1 Corinthians 15. I'm going to read a couple of verses from each one. So Romans 5, 15 to 19. So we are bouncing into the middle of an argument that Paul has given.

[2:16] So forgive me, but there's a point he makes in both these sections that I want us to see. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift, by the grace of that one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.

And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation. But the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by one man's obedience the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Talking about two men. He named one of them in this passage, Jesus. He named the other one slightly before where I started reading Adam. Two men, Adam and Jesus, who seem to dominate

history.

[3:33] Paul does a similar thing in 1 Corinthians 15. I'm again going to jump into the middle of his argument in verse 45. It says, Just as we've borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Paul's making the same point. He calls them both Adam in that one. He talks about the first Adam and the last Adam. Again, it becomes clear in the section around what I've read that this last Adam is Jesus.

This first man is Adam. This second man, as Paul calls it there, is Jesus. Now those are, in one sense, it might sound as I read them quite complicated passages, are full of wondrous truth about the nature of the world, the history of the world, and all that God has done for us.

But the thing I'd just like to draw our attention to today is this repeating thing Paul does where he's like, it matters whether you're with Adam or with Jesus.

It matters whose story you follow. Think about it like this. The world is a story of three, two, one. Let me take you through that.

[5:10] The first thing you need to know about the world is that God is three. God is three, Father, Son, and Spirit in loving union and has always been three and one.

God is three. The second thing you need to know about the world is that the world, so God is three in heaven. The world is dominated by two men, as we've just read.

The first one, Adam, this first man, as the Bible describes him, who once in a garden was given a mission that was going to end up taking over the whole world.

But to start with, he's in a garden in a small land called Eden. And he's given things to do. He's given a grand vision of where his family will go.

And he's told, don't do that. You're not ready. But immediately goes and does that, because that's what everyone does when they're told, just one thing, don't do that. Immediately goes and steps on the grass, as it were.

[6:09] Everything falls apart. And then the second man, Jesus, who puts everything right, who lives, as we'll see in a minute, lives a life that looks surprisingly similar to Adam's in lots of ways, but the result of each action is the opposite.

And everything that goes wrong in Adam goes right in Jesus. If God is three and the world is dominated by two men, the question you have to ask yourself is, which one of those two men do you want to be one with?

That's your three, two, one. God is three, the world is two men. You get to pick who you want to be one with. Do you want to be one with Adam or one with Jesus? The Bible calls this idea having a head.

It says that Adam is our head, or Jesus is our head. Which can seem like, and the one of them that you're associated with completely changes the course and scope of your life.

Now, it can seem like a really strange idea to us. It almost doesn't seem quite fair. We don't have good parallels, but think about it a little bit like if..

[7:18] I used to be a teacher, and the way it would work in secondary schools is that if a new head came in, a new head teacher, everyone would go, everything's going to change. Because the kind of a head teacher sets the tone, and the whole feel of the place changes around them.

And who that head was, and what they were like, and the kind of tone they wanted to set really, really mattered. It was like the school story became the head story. It's a little bit like that.

Or, I mean, you kind of get the same thing, but not so stuck in lots of businesses. If you get a new boss or something, the tone can change. Sometimes the whole story can change.

Or think of it like whoever your favourite team or sports person is, if they do well, what do you say? You say, you don't say, oh, Bruce Morat just won the World Men's Curling Championship. I mean, he didn't. They weren't competing this year, and none of you know what I'm talking about, but it is our favourite sport in our household.

[8:20] But you don't go, oh, yeah, Bruce won it. You go, we won! Despite the fact I'm not Scottish, and they compete for Team Scotland.

Nonetheless, you're like, we won. That's what, to ground that in something you actually know what I'm talking about, that's what you say if your football team won yesterday.

You're like, we won. We won. It's not they won. It's we won, because you're associated with them, right? You weren't in the pitch. You weren't running around. You possibly weren't even in the stadium.

They couldn't hear you shouting at the TV or watching the recording that happened several hours later on match of the day, but we won as though you participated in it. Now, we all know, of course you didn't, but that's how it feels, right?

It feels like we won because they're your team. You're part of them. So when they win, you win.

That's what we're talking about when we're talking about someone being your head.

It's like either you're with Adam or with Jesus. When they win or lose, you win or lose. Just in a much more, kind of bigger, more fulsome way than when your team wins.

[9:20] But you get to choose. The story of the world is dominated by these two men, Adam and Jesus.

And we read Paul in Romans 5, he talks about the one act of disobedience, excuse me, the one act of trespass led to condemnation for all men, but the one act of righteousness led to justification and life.

He says, when Adam got it wrong, everybody died. When Jesus got it right, there's an opportunity, if you're with him, to receive life forever. Your story can change.

Your story is either Adam's story or it's Jesus' story. How do we know that's the case? I mean, other than the fact that you look around and you see that everybody dies, which actually is proof that Adam is the head of the world and his story is our story, but it might not feel like that.

How do we know? We look at the life of Jesus, we particularly look at the death of Jesus, and we notice that Jesus lived Adam's story, but it ended differently.

[10:32] What do I mean? What Paul calls him in that 1 Corinthians passage I read, he calls him the last Adam. His point is that the Old Testament actually is full of attempts to be Adam again.

It's full of returns to a garden. It's full of people getting it wrong again. It's full of people trying to restart again. There's Adam after Adam after Adam, but he's like, Jesus is the last one because they don't need to be anymore because he gets it right.

Think of it like this. The night before he died, Jesus finds himself in a garden, a place called Gethsemane, praying.

He prays to God, not my will, but your will be done. He actually, before that, he pleads with God, like, is there another way? He knows what's coming, he's expecting his death.

He talks about this cup of wrath that he has to drink. He says, is there another way? Okay, there's not. Well, then I'm going to do what you asked me to do.

[11:34] I will follow through exactly as you asked me to. Why is that important? Because in a previous garden, that first Adam was given an opportunity to do the same thing.

when God said, don't eat the fruit of this tree of the knowledge of good and bad, you're not ready.

He had the option to say, okay, not I quite want it, but not my will, but your will be done.

He had that choice. And he made the opposite choice. He said, no, no, no, my will, not your will, be done. And so in another garden, Adam sat below some olive trees many thousands of years later, Jesus reverses what Adam does by choosing to say, no, no, your will, not my will, be done.

He does what Adam should have done to help us see that essentially he's starting again. He's saying this is a new way to be human. And Adam's problem is associated with a tree.

this tree of the knowledge of good and bad or tree of wisdom that he was told don't eat from, but he chose to eat from it. Our problem is fixed.

[12:57] The New Testament repeatedly calls the cross a tree. It's not, it's literally a beam of wood, but it calls it a tree, kind of symbolically speaking, because the problem started at a tree, and Jesus is going to fix the problem at a tree.

And the Bible just wants us to help see these parallels, so deliberately uses these kind of words so that we can spot them. And in case we weren't spotting it in John's Gospel, in his resurrection

account, as Jesus dies, and then he's buried, we're told he's buried in the middle of a garden. And it uses deliberate language so that we know we mean in the middle of the garden, just like the Holy of Holies is in the middle of the temple, and the Holy of Holies is in the middle of the tabernacle, and those two trees were in the middle of the garden in Eden.

And I haven't shown you that, but like John uses lots of very specific language so that you're reading, you go, oh, you're trying to show me something. He's buried where those, where those trees were.

And then on Sunday, as the tomb is empty, John tells this story of the resurrection in this very enigmatic way, where Mary, who we know, we know already in John's gospel, she's walking around, he doesn't use her name, he calls her the woman, because in Eden, Eve was called the woman before the fall.

[14:18] So he uses the same language so that we spot the parallel. And she meets a man who she thinks is a gardener, which was Adam's job. And that gardener names her Mary in this passage.

Her name appears on his lips just like Eve is named by Adam. And John does these things deliberately so that we go, hang on, you're telling this story in the frame of Adam's story so that we see that what's happening in the resurrection is a new creation.

When Jesus said he is finished, he meant a lot of things. I'll talk about that on Friday, but including creation. It's finished. Sixth day of the week and on the first day of the week, new creation in a garden.

Why? Because he wants us to see that Jesus is a new humanity. It's a new way of being human that you either, you're with Adam or you're with Jesus and you actually get to choose which story you want.

You get to choose who you want to be united with. And so that question is who are you united to is ultimately important. Who are you going to participate in and therefore whose story do you get?

[15:33] Do you want the I tried it my way and that screwed it up, man? Or do you want the death and resurrection, man? Those are essentially the choices that you have. And okay, most of us in the room might be a few people who are exploring but the most people in the room here are believers so you're like, oh yeah, yeah, I'm with Jesus, I'm with the death and resurrection, man.

But what does that mean for you? It means it changes your story so that we can in fact in our lives now as well as in the age to come live a new story.

What do I mean by that? Think of his disciples. There's one called Simon who they all nicknamed Rocky or we know him as Peter because that's what that means but they called him Rocky which was the kind of personality that he had.

He was a rough and tumble sort of guy and Jesus and if you read his story you know that he messed up pretty much in quite a serious way just before Jesus died.

he's like, no, I'm not with him because he realises what will come if he's associated with him he's like, I'll have to die like he does. And yet this Rocky becomes the rock on which Jesus says he built his church and in fact does, he's crucified at the end of his life, does share Jesus' death quite a long time later.

[16:54] We might think of John and indeed his brother James. James dies quite early, the first of them to die but John who's called the son of thunder because him and his brother are angry young men who are full of fire.

These are the guys who at one point because they've read the stories and Elijah go, hang on, when Elijah was in this town he called down fire on heaven on the people who didn't like him. Should we do it Jesus because they've been mean to you and Jesus is like, no.

But John becomes, he's the only one who isn't killed actually but he dies in his old age as a man known for his peace because his story has changed or indeed Paul who didn't walk with Jesus but started following him after Jesus died and rose again who ended up changing his name as part of it but was a man who spent his life trying to kill Christians and then becomes kind of the foremost evangelist of much of the Roman Empire and spent his life being persecuted for his faith just like he used to persecute Christians.

His story has flipped and changed because he met Jesus and then lived a new story. That can be true for us. That first passage I read in Romans 5 in verse 17 says for if because of the one man's trespass death reigned through that one man to Adam much more were those who received the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Reign in life. If you're a follower of Jesus you can receive a story that is reigning in life and we live in a world of noise of competing stories of basically everything in the world tells you a story about itself and about yourself and about the world the three questions of what you're for what the good is and where we're going are answered in a story by pretty much everything out there but all the technology you might use has a different version of that story of what you're for what the good is and where we're going pretty much everything you watch or encounter or read has a version of that story of what you're for what the good is and where we're going so we are bombarded with stories but Jesus says no no reign in life we learn stories from reels and from rolling news and from notifications we learn stories from lies people tell us about ourselves we learn stories from our own sin that we get trapped in we learn stories from other people's sin and the way it wounds us but there is a true story cut through it all that says you can reign in life that says what you're for is to worship God that says what the good is is to be united with Jesus and then gain his character and that says that where you're going is to be with him forever in the age to come enjoying his presence but that story changes how you live now and Jesus he tells us to live out our new story almost like actors on a stage where he's given us a script a complicated one

[20:11] I'm not quite sure how that works but practicing as it were for the age to come perfecting maturing in ourselves the kind of character that will look like Jesus that we need to live in the age that is coming learning how to be human that's the invitation he gives to us it's like learning how to be human he rescues us completely it's not like oh my word if I don't learn it well enough will I get in that's not a question you get in because he's like come on in we go you're getting on the basis of all that he's done for you but his invitation is but you can learn how to be human and live free of everything that has once bound you and this new humanity if you like there are these two humanities Adam and Jesus this new way of living this different approach to life should change everything we should be able to ask ourselves the question does my life look different from my neighbours and it should in fact every single area of your life should look different because you follow Jesus now usually what happens is he takes us through one at a time one at a time and he says how about we how about we fix that next doesn't bombard us with a sudden need to oh my word

I've got to flip everything up usually he's kind and leads us to repentance through his kindness and just puts his finger on actually you haven't yet changed there come on that's his invitation to us this morning if you don't know him the invitation is you can be united with him if you do know him the invitation is where is he saying your life does not line up with his what's he what's he putting his finger on if you think actually my life looks pretty much exactly the same as my neighbours oh ok that's ok just need to repent turn your heart to him and he'll show you how to live differently he says reign in life and we respond I don't know how but what he means by that is live this story live this gospel story live this story that we've sung live this story that we read in the scriptures so that does mean yes get the bible into us so that you know the story but it also means adopt habits that point your life in a particular direction it does mean be a community but it means that we turn all of our lives towards attempting to follow him in living his story that we assume that the death and resurrection story that Jesus has given us has something to say to everything that we might do in life and that we need to get it into us and live according to it not not because if you do the right things

Jesus will love you no no no he loves you that's why he's come to rescue you but to apprehend who we are by which I mean if you're following Jesus he says no live like this this is who you are I've made you to be like this and then we start to do Christian practices perhaps in order to help us learn how to be the thing that he says we are he invites us to live a new story so he also Jesus gave us one thing to do that we're going to do in a minute we'll sing a song first and then Andrew will come

and lead us through it but you'll have seen that around the room that there is bread and cups of juice we are in a little bit going to take the Lord's Supper together which is very much a story driven life and death thing that retells our stories to us this is if you like the place par excellence that Jesus gives us to learn what his story is he says come and eat come and drink come to a table that he would give us a meal of life and joy in bread and wine that's the heart of what his story is life and joy this is where we learn how to live that probably isn't how you think of it but it is one of the reasons that he's given it to us as a symbol that we can learn how to live what does he say life looks like an invitation to a meal an invitation to a party an invitation to joy

Lord Jesus we come to you we are delighted that you would offer us a story we haven't earned that leads much better than anyone we could write to for ourselves and we ask again today that you would get it into us that you would get the gospel under our skin that you would teach us how to live that you would show us what you're like that we would know our sin was taken away and our shame was taken away and our enemies were defeated and that we would then act differently because of that but mostly Jesus we come to you and wonder that you would rescue us and wonder and delight we didn't deserve it we didn't even ask you to you chose to come and do it for us because you love us I mean it was ridiculous Lord if it wasn't true it would be bonkers and yet it's the truest thing there is thank you so much