

Equipping the Church

Part 7: 'Embracing our Design'

Matthew 1:18-24 *"This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."

Christmas is the season that emphasizes the absolute greatest story ever told - the coming of Christ. There are a lot of people who have this notion that Jesus came to earth to plead on our behalf, to calm down an angry Father that was looking for somebody to punish - but Jesus actually came to do the opposite. He came to reveal a Father Who was passionate for His people. Now in the context in which we live today there's a secularization of our culture happening which is working very hard to remove the concept of a creator completely.

When you get rid of a creator, you get rid of the designer. With no designer, you get rid of design, because you can't have design without a designer. When you don't have design then you're free to do whatever you want and that's where Satan wants us to be. From that very first encounter with the human race in the Garden of Eden, Satan has consistently been telling us we are free to do whatever we want, without consequence.

Design implies that when God created us with design, He created us with purpose. Purpose carries with it, the implication of destiny, and destiny carries with it responsibility and accountability. So the bottom line is, the epic effort to destroy the concept of a creator, a designer, is to erase that which we were born with, that conviction that I must give an account of my life. When God created the world He filled it with all kinds of animals to reproduce after their kind. So there are two laws in creation, that actually reveal part of why Jesus needed to come. Number one, we reproduce after our kind: if you plant a flower seed, you don't grow a horse, it reproduces after its kind. Within each species, there's latitude, but there's no crossing over without consequence. If you mate a male donkey with a female horse, you get a mule. But that mule cannot reproduce, because it is outside God's design – scientists have discovered a vital chromosome which is missing in mules.

So it is in God's design that we reproduce, that we are fruitful - not just in producing other humans but in becoming productive contributors to society. That's who we are. In one of Jesus' parables He talks about ten servants who were given a sum of money, they in turn reinvested it, and the master came back to collect the profits. To the one who increased his one talent to ten, the Master said, *"Now be in charge of ten cities, enter into the joy of your master."*

The main point of that parable is that responsibility is our access to greater joy, greater responsibility. Joy is not something you get by doing nothing. It's something you get by functioning according to your design. Design is what connects us to purpose. Every single person has unique giftings. Each and every one of us has something to contribute to the overall story of mankind that no one else can contribute. There's a uniqueness in every person. We were all made in the image of God and so when you destroy the concept of design and purpose, you've erased the sense of accountability for illustrating who God is. So sin is operating outside of our design. We are designed by God and in God's image. So anything outside of the nature and character of Christ is sin.

Another part of God's creation is what the book of Genesis calls 'seed time and harvest.' That means you reap what you sow. You plant a seed and it will bring forth fruit. If I sow a thousand acres of corn, I'm going to have a harvest of corn. If I sow mercy, I will reap mercy. The law of 'seed time and harvest' is written into the DNA of creation. What you plant you will harvest; what you sow you will reap. Sadly this also applies to sin. If you sow hatred, bitterness, dishonesty, violence, deception, selfishness . . . you will reap all the bad fruit and consequences of that seed at harvest time. Now that was the reality into which God came to earth and took upon human flesh in Jesus.

Jesus stepped into this broken world to stop the flow of sowing and reaping which came from our sin. He actually took upon Himself all the bad fruit from our wrongdoing. He took upon Himself what we deserved so that we could receive what He deserved. That's what salvation is. It's not just a temporary postponement of sin and judgement. Jesus actually took upon Himself the punishment we deserved for all sin, past, present and future. He did that so that we can receive the life He deserved. That's the wonder of the incarnation. That's Christmas.

I saw this picture recently and liked it. It is a Christmas wreath and a crown of thorns woven together. It is a very confronting introduction to the season where everything is about a Father restoring His people to their original design and purpose. Over the Christmas wreath it says, 'This is the Season.' Over the crown of thorns it says, 'This is the Reason.'



The most confronting reality is that this 'master reset' in us could only be achieved through the death of Jesus. He came to do many things, but ultimately He came to die. Let me share some of Paul's words in his first letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:15-17

"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

The last thing that we needed was some kind of soothing ointment over the open wound of sin. We didn't need a spiritual band-aid placed over a problem. Sin had permeated everything and impacted everyone and caused us all to walk away from our design, our destiny, our purpose – but worse than all that, sin caused us to walk away from the Designer, our Creator, our loving heavenly Father. So everything needed to change. We needed a new start, a whole new beginning. In Genesis 1 we read about the creation of all things and how on the seventh day God rested. Since that time, there has never been anything new created until Jesus died and was raised from the dead. Then everyone who puts their faith in Him, the Bible says, is born again.

In that born again experience, they become something that has never existed before - a new creation. So when we were born again into Christ, we were given the ability once more to grow into the fullness of what God designed us to be. In that context, we bring a fruitfulness to the planet through our life. All of that is impossible without the grace of God. It's impossible without a miracle of God unfolding in our lives. ***"Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*** This needs to become a champion verse for all of us. Let's read on:

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Say this with me out loud: **God has given me the ministry of reconciliation.** That is actually true for every disciple of Jesus Christ, no matter how old or young. It's a mandate. Once you have been reconciled to God, it's in your new nature is to be a reconciler. You are to produce after your own kind. You are to bear fruit from the tree into which you have been grafted.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Jesus came; lived a perfect human life; faced every kind of temptation a human being can face, yet He did not yield to any of them in the slightest measure. He became what would be called a lamb that had no blemish and was not defiled. There was nothing wrong with this lamb at all, so He became the perfect offering. Why? Because this cycle of sowing and reaping was going to go on destroying people for eternity unless someone stopped it. We were powerless to stop it - all of humanity was caught up in the vicious 'sow and reap' reality. So Jesus stepped into the middle of that mess and basically said, *"Let the harvest they all deserve - now come to me."*

MERCY is when I don't get what I deserve.

GRACE is when I get what I don't deserve.

So can you see, this is not an angry father who is looking to destroy people. This is a loving Father who was willing to sacrifice His only Son, Who stepped into this 'cause and effect' creation and willingly bore the fruit, reaped the harvest from the sin which had consumed us all. God's design for His whole creation, including us, requires productivity, increase, reproducing after its kind, sowing and reaping; it's the way you come into life. If He changes those basic laws of creation, He changes the way we also come into breakthrough, into maturity and progress. So instead, Jesus embraced the punishment, the consequences for all that was wrong with us. Then Jesus turns to us and says, *"You are now reconciled to God and I have given you the ministry of reconciliation. Go and tell others the truth so I might reconcile them to the Father also."* What is that truth? It's right here in one of the most confronting, powerful, amazing verses in the whole Bible - a verse which contains the very essence of the gospel. *"For He (the Father) made Him (the Son) who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* (v.21)

"That we might become the righteousness of God in Him." What an amazing statement. What an incredible reality. This is the gospel: God made Jesus, Who knew no sin personally, to become sin so that the real sinners, the ones who rebelled against God and did whatever they pleased, would be restored to our proper condition, our original design, our Creator's image, and therefore become the righteousness of God.

Only then can we become equipped disciples who embrace the mission of Christ, the ministry of reconciliation. Only then are we able live as our Creator and Designer intended. Only then is the Church Jesus promised to build, equipped and ready to complete His mission on earth. God's design for us is that we live in perfect harmony with Him and that we live and move and have our very being in Christ, through Christ and for Christ. All that comes as a free gift. That free gift comes to us in love, with no strings attached, no requirements, no religious hoops we have to jump through – it is a wonderful, outrageous and dangerously free gift.

So you see friends your favour before God and your right standing with God is not in any way determined by your personal performance – and just as well – because if it was, then your performance would have to be absolute 100% perfect, because even the tiniest sin would destroy you in the presence of God. Your eternal relationship with God, has been secured by God Himself. He wouldn't trust you with something so important to Him. On our smart phones and computers today we have an option to reset the device and 'restore factory settings.' Well that is exactly what God did for us and only God could do it. He restored our default settings; our original design; our intended purpose - and He did it all in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is the gospel! This is the Truth! Believe it, receive it and watch it transform your entire life. This is why every man, woman and young person on this planet pays homage to this Christ every time they write the date. This is why all our schools, our hospitals, our judicial system, our governments all have their roots in the community of faith which this one Man birthed when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a tree. This is why all the armies that have ever marched; all the navies that have ever sailed; all the parliaments that have ever sat; all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected mankind on earth as powerfully as this one solitary life; Who entered our world in a smelly cave in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago.

When sin entered our perfect world, everything broke and all of creation has been groaning ever since to be put right – to be reset, rebooted, restored to it's original purpose. Only the One Who made us and designed us could press that reset button and He did that through the most outrageous, unbelievable act of love and grace.

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

As another Christmas season comes upon us, my hope and my prayer is that we would pause to consider the magnitude of what lies behind the tinsel, the presents and the roast turkey and ham. As our focus is drawn once more to a tiny, cute little baby in a manger, may we not miss the true reason for this season. The ultimate destiny for that baby was a brutal execution on a cruel Roman cross and because He followed His destiny; because He fulfilled His assignment on earth to the very end, you and I have been reborn, reset, restored and reconciled to our Creator, our Designer our heavenly Father forever.

Praise be to God!