



Talks

GLUE – Session 3 – Community

Recapping from Session 1 – Creation

So far, God has made human beings to be co-creators with him in the world. God and humans are together working to bring order out of chaos and everything is good and right and lovely. Perfect

Recapping from Session 2 – Collapse

Because of human pride humans have separated themselves from God and from each other. God is pure and perfectly holy and we are not. We have got ourselves into a mess.

1. God has a plan

I have a confession to make – and please, don't tell the Bishop. I was kicked out of Sunday school. In fact, I was kicked out of nursery school too. It is true to say that my school years were pretty fraught. I was certainly no angel but I had a run of bad luck and suffered both emotional and physical abuse at school. It is true to say that by the time I was 16 and starting my A-Levels I had a serious problem with authority – particularly teachers. I was a bully and what most would call a total pratt. Then, I had a new teacher for one of my A-Level subjects. He was patient and didn't get angry, and although I pushed him to the point where I was excluded (we called it suspended in those days) he never gave up on me. His words of encouragement still ring in my head to this day, "Gavin, I believe in you. We can do this." In that subject to everyone's surprise I got a B. Some years later when I too became a teacher I wrote to him. It turns out that in the 20 years of teaching not one student of his had ever failed.

I was amazed by one man's determination and faithfulness not to give up on a 'lost' student and in my years as a follower of Jesus, I have been amazed by God's determination and faithfulness not to give up on humanity – including me.

For some reason God has chosen to involve us in his plan to redeem, restore and renew the world. We got us into this mess and God wants to work with us to get us out of it.

So, God comes up with a strategy and he chooses a bunch of people to form and build a community that will bless and influence the world. This people will be his agents or ambassadors in the world. They will represent him and show the world that God is God. This people, was founded on Jacob (who became known as Israel) and Jacob was the son of Isaac who was the son of Abraham. Today we know of Israel as a place but Israel started as a community.

Read: Genesis 12:1-3

But why start with a people in that part of the world? Why not Wales or New Zealand? Well, the answer is strategic. You see, this community called Israel was on what was called the crossroads of the world. Of the influencing world powers at the time, Israel sat between the empires of the east and west. Whoever influenced that region could influence the known world.



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2. The first deal is done

So God chooses this people and he does a deal with them. He says to them, “If you will be my people then I will be your God.” In other words, “I promise to protect and guide you but you must promise to follow only me.” This promise made to Abraham and his descendents was a covenant or a testament. This chosen people were to be God’s priests to the world – to be a living example of a blessing for the nations.

Read Genesis 17:1-9

Now remember the whole water and chaos thing? Well, think on this. The people of Israel were enslaved to the Egyptians for a bit and they were rescued by God (led by Moses) by crossing the Red Sea – it parted miraculously. And then, when they were led into a land that would be their own, they crossed the river Jordan that parted miraculously. Do you see? These were symbols that God had not given up his plan to bring order out of chaos in the world and these symbols became reminders to the people of Israel about their God and their mission to the world.

3. Building a house for God

Although God couldn’t be physically united with them because of the whole sin thing (remember – God is pure and holy and we are not) he could guide them and speak to them from a distance. At first the people built tents but later they built a great temple in Jerusalem.

Exodus 25: “They shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst”

This temple had outer bits and inner bits and right in the middle was this place called the Holy of Holies. It was where God’s presence would be, and once a year (on the day of atonement) a high priest would go through a whole heap of cleansing rituals to go into the Holy of Holies and be in the presence of God.

(Note: Jews today mourn the loss of the temple and feel that without it they are an exiled people)

4. Forming Community

It takes time for this community to form and the story we read in the Old Testament is of a people who keep making mistakes, doing their own thing and going their own way. But God, keeping his side of the bargain, keeps bringing them back in line. He gives them laws to help them be distinctive and prophets to announce how they are doing – blessings or curses.

The Bible is split into two sections. The first section called the Old Testament (covenant or deal) are the writings from this community of people called by God. It contains their history, poetry, songs, teaching and prophecy (God’s word to them).



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Even though they kept abandoning God, getting beaten up and handed over to their enemies – one enemy after another - something went on for centuries and centuries, there was a pervading hope. Amidst all the problems this idea or theme (based on the promise) kept cropping up that God would establish his Kingdom through this community. That someone would be raised up from within the community – God's chosen one, God's anointed one – who would lead the people into freedom from their enemies and establish God's rule once and for all. This person was called Messiah (in Hebrew) or Christ (in Greek). And so the people of God waited. In fact, the last recognised prophet was in about 400 BC and before Jesus comes on the scene there is 400 years of radio silence. Then within a hundred years everything changes for the Jews – everything.

Perhaps this section should be called Commitment because throughout the Hebrew Bible we see God's commitment to his community?