

A Gospel Narrative

What is God's Story?

Everyone has a story, and I think everyone believes stories that try and make sense of our lives. As humans, we are inquisitive, and want answers for our existence. These are often referred to as 'cultural myths,' or 'meta-narratives,' which are grand stories that answer questions such as "How did we get here, why are we here? What are the problems in this world, and what are the solutions? What is our purpose in this world, if purpose exists at all?" We also desire happiness and comfort, and are consistently looking for ways to improve the human condition, since deep down, we know something is wrong and this world appears broken. Whether our story includes words like sin or dysfunction, we seem to know that this world isn't quite right. There are a lot of attempts to answer these deeper questions. Many religions, philosophies, political platforms and worldviews have taken their stab at it; some have contributed to its greater good, and some have brought more death and heartache. While the debate rages on, regarding who or what has the best answers for humanity, this story is our attempt to give you God's story as seen through the lens of the bible and our own context

in the 21st century. We believe His story, intersects and answers our stories, and unifies them in ways we can't imagine. This is what *We Believe*:

We believe that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and that this creation was the artistic expression of the glory of His triune nature (The Father, Son and Holy Spirit), for His "Good Pleasure" (**Genesis 1:1-2; Colossians 1:15-17; Ephesians 1:3-14**). Everything that God spoke came into being, and was ordered by His command (**Genesis 1:3-31; Isaiah 55:11**). God literally created substance out of no substance (Ex-Nihilo), and order out of chaos, which we believe He still does through His word in all things. The timing of this creation is irrelevant to the fact that everything we see was created spontaneously (Out of Nothing) by His word, and that "by Him and for Him...and in Him all things hold together" (**Colossians 1:17**), and "In Him we live and move and have our being" (**Acts 17:28**). Everything that God created was "Good," except humanity, which was "Very good" (**Genesis 1:3-31**). There was nothing created by God that was inherently evil, and everything He created He did for "His glory" (**Isaiah 43:7**) and the "Pleasure of His will" (**Ephesians 1:5,6,11,12,14**)! He has no need of any thing, nor is He indebted to His creation for anything at all. Since God is the creator of all contingent matter/beings, we believe

that God is the “Necessary being,” or the “Uncaused cause,” and is not bound by human limitations such as time and space or causal logic, and is an eternal being who is both transcendent (Distinct from His Creation) and personal (Providentially and Sovereignly involved with His Creation). All of the persons in the Godhead (Father, Son and Spirit) are distinct persons, yet unified in essence/being. Although there is an obvious submission within the Godhead, there is clearly unity (**1 Corinthians 11:1-3; Hebrews 5:8; John 5:19**); and all three persons are involved in the “Works” of God including, creation and salvation (**Genesis 1:1-2; Ephesians 1:3-14**). The Father is the architect, the Son is the executor and the Spirit is the power and the presence that ensures the success of the plan to His own glory, and the ultimate joy of His creation. We believe this understanding of the Godhead is the foundation for all biblical community (In all of its forms) and that God has built the need for community into the DNA of all of humanity, and that we are to emulate the godhead in all the family structures God has created (Human family, physical family, spiritual family), resulting in a deep unity in the midst of diversity (**Ephesians 2:8-3:10; 4:11-16; Philippians 1:5,7,27; 2:2; 4:1-2**).

We believe that “*God created man (humanity) in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and*

female He created him” and that man was to be “*Fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue (Protect from evil)*” and “*Cultivate and keep it*” (**Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15**). The purpose of man’s creation was to cultivate the Glory of God and generate God’s praise as it “Multiplied” (**Genesis 2:5,15**). Mankind was made to be satisfied in God’s glory, and live in accordance with its heart satisfied.

God gave humanity everything it needed to survive and flourish as a culture (Sight, a rational mind, creativity, food, water, beauty, etc.). Man was created in God’s image (Both male and female), which characterizes the godhead as similar yet different, unified, and yet distinct. Therefore any aberration of this union is an affront to the purposes of the creation and the clear distinction that God intended, since distinction in unity best images Him in this world. It is “*For that reason that a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh*” (**Genesis 2:23-25**). The creation of the distinction also depicts the “Otherness” of creation which is a construct that best demonstrates love and compassion, and mirrors the relationship that the Godhead perfectly shares with one another. Without distinction, there is no true love and compassion. While many see distinction as evil, and the foundation of war and strife (nations, gender, race, etc.), we see it as a

created show of God's desire to demonstrate His diverse artistry, and it is a good thing along with all of creation.

We also believe that God created the woman to come alongside her husband to carry out the mandate that Adam had been given to "*Cultivate*," a God glorifying culture, and that while they are perfectly equal in essence they reflect the Godhead by being similar, yet distinct, and demonstrated a submissiveness and role distinction that carries out God's mandate in a glorifying manner (**Genesis 2:1-15; 1 Timothy 3:13-14; 1 Corinthians 11:1-3; Ephesians 5:22-31**).

We believe that before sin was introduced into human community, humanity had perfect peace (Shalom) with God (Theology), and one another (Sociology), as well as with themselves (Psychology) and their environment (Ecology), which enabled them to be complete in Him, and enjoy and worship God perfectly as they were created to do; to "*Declare my praise*." They were whole, and had a perfect shalom (Peace) and joy in the worship of their creator, and therefore were satisfied and complete, not desiring more than they were given.

We believe that in spite of this shalom, man was tempted by Angels that were created by God and rebelled in desire to be their own gods; to act on desires and

impulses that placed them above God for their own glory (see **Isaiah 14**). This was not done outside of God's notice or even His plan, but in time, man "*Rejected God, the only source of living water, and made for himself cisterns; broken cisterns that could hold no water*" (**Jeremiah 2:13**). It was this pride in his heart that led to this calamity, and the subsequent fall of all of humanity making the heart of man "*Desperately wicked*" and spiritually dead inside (**Jeremiah 27:9**). The heart of Adam's sin was idolatry and a pride that would be passed on to all of humanity. This made man perfectly deserving of God's wrath and judgment, since in his disobedience, his heart (Motivating Center) became "*Desperately wicked*," and capable of every form of evil act. Judgment then is a carrying out of perfect justice against this rebellion, and no man is without excuse (**Romans 1-3**).

Subsequently all of humanity is born with an innate nature to be his/her own God and is dead to God and His salvation message apart from the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in their lives (**Genesis 3:5-6; Romans 5:12**). Man reflects this deadness by either creating a pleasure filled life apart from God, or a religious/pious life apart from God's will in order to control his or her own salvation/destiny (See **Luke 15:11-32**). By either course, humanity has rejected God as the "*Fountain of living Water*" and created for themselves their own salvation

mechanisms that never fulfill our God-given desire to worship, and have settled for lesser gods (Which is Idolatry) to try and assuage the God-shaped vacuum their rejection creates (**Jeremiah 2:13; John 7:37-39**). So we are damned for our bad works, as well as our good works, and in dire need of a savior (**Hebrews 6:1**). It is this rejection of God and consequent worship of “lesser gods” that has left humanity dissatisfied and desiring more, which has led to the brokenness that all humanity experiences on a regular basis (Wars, racism, bitterness, un-forgiveness, religious-fundamentalism, slander, greed, sexual misconduct of all forms, exploitation, etc.).

We believe that the consequence of this sin is far-reaching and catastrophic, creating theological, sociological, psychological and ecological brokenness and destruction. Man’s shalom is shattered, and humanity continues to look for many “Broken cisterns” to fill this cavern in their souls, creating more and more calamity on this earth as we continue to search for meaning and joy apart from the reason we were created; the worship of the eternal God. Man continues to worship, but unfortunately is too easily pleased, and settles for many solutions that “*Seem right unto man, but in the end come destruction*” (**Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**). Man’s problems can never be fully solved by treaties, human psychology, therapy, social work, philanthropy,

wealth, education, human institutions, military might, religion or political ideals. However, humanity, in their rejection of God, continue to create avenues of shalom out of their own pride and idolatry, that never satisfy, and ultimately lead to dissatisfaction and death.

However, God in His grace began His assault on evil, by limiting the lives of humanity and introducing physical death as well as spiritual death as a consequence of this rebellion. This grace limited man’s ability to unify under a very destructive self-governing structure (**Genesis 2:17; 11:6-7**). While humanity strives for unity, they consistently divide, as pride and fear destroy relationships, and cause wars; personally and corporately (**James 4:1-3**). While many humans believe the problem is our distinctions, the gospel reminds us that it is our own sinful hearts, and that redeemed distinctions are the only thing that produces love and compassion and any real meaning. Therefore we believe that “salvation” isn’t just the “saving” of individuals, but the redemption of creation (**Romans 8:8:19-25**), and the physical nature of our selves. The human solution continues to be either the eradication of desires or distinction through coercive means, while the gospel changes hearts, and re-shapes the sinfully broken thought patterns of human logic, restoring God’s creation the way He intended it. Therefore we believe that Jesus, who is eternally God’s

Son *“Emptied Himself and took the form of a bond servant, and being made in the likeness of man, and being found in appearance as a man (Without losing His divine essence), humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death...”* in order to perfectly execute the will of the Father, *“...even death on a cross”* (**Philippians 2:7-8**), which was predetermined *“Before the foundation of the world”* (**Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 4:3**). Jesus was able to be our perfect substitute since He too was a man (Therefore taking on the penalty of our infraction/sin), and He was God (Being perfect enough to pay for our sins), which enabled Him to sinlessly atone for our transgressions and give us His righteousness, which was needed to be righteous enough to enter into the eternal presence of a Holy and righteous God. *He who knew no sin, became sin on our behalf* (**2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24**)

We believe that God rightfully judges humanity for this cosmic treason, yet in His grace He promised to send a savior to crush sin and evil, and deliver humanity from this horrendous fall. He then demonstrated this grace with a sacrifice of a Ram and a covering of their nakedness, symbolically demonstrating that one day He would cover their sin, with His own blood, which was promised by God to destroy evil through the *“Seed of the woman”* (**Genesis 3:15,21; 22:13-14; Exodus 12:42-51;**

Hebrews 9-10). While it is unclear as to the nature of evil in the garden, and the will of man in this fall, we know that God is perfectly sovereign, yet He is not the author of evil. On the other hand, we know that He is the *“One forming light and creating darkness. Causing well-being and creating calamity”* (**Isaiah 45:7**). In spite of God being completely sovereign (yet not being the author of evil), man’s will is not absent from this decision. Sin occurred through man’s desire and choice, and God remains fair in judging humanity for our rebellion and pride. We also believe that, *“Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin,”* that, *“The free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many”* (**Romans 5:12-15**). Just as sin came through one man, salvation also comes through one man’s (Jesus) work on the cross.

Subsequently we believe that *“Salvation is of the Lord,”* and whom God *“Foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son”* (**Romans 8:28**) and *“That by grace we are saved through faith, and that, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works that no one should boast”* (**Ephesians 2:8,9**). Our salvation is purely and totally the work of our Lord. Until our dead hearts are regenerated by the saving

power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot “Choose” God for ourselves (**Matthew 15:12**). We often create religion and religious rituals in an attempt to assuage the gods of our shame and fears, but we cannot come to Jesus “*Unless the father first draws*” us and atones for our sins (**John 6:44**). This however does not mitigate human will, but tempers it under the sovereign will of the Father, which still requires that humanity respond favorably to the gospel (**Romans 10:13-15**; see too **John 1:12, 13**), which is irresistible when the power of the Spirit regenerates the dead heart of humanity. We believe that God has every right to make that call through the work of His Son, and that He is both fair and fully glorified through those that find eternal life in Him, and those that are judged to eternal damnation. One highlights God’s love and mercy, while the latter demonstrates His justice and holiness. God does not judge anyone unjustly, nor does He allow anyone in His presence unjustly. We all are destined for judgment, and therefore God is just in all of his actions. We also believe that god’s eternal judgment is His eternal justice for the many gross wrongs that have been perpetrated by evil throughout history. Any lack of judgment in the afterlife would render this life meaningless, and the violence and offense we see in this world insignificant. Therefore we believe, that in order for God to be truly just, he would need to have the penalty of sin, which is death, paid for according to the law that He

gave His people. Therefore while it is true that, “*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (**Romans 3:23**) we are “*Justified as a (Free) gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith*” (**Romans 5:15-17**), Which “*Was to demonstrate His righteousness (Justice) because in the forbearance of God He passed over sins previously committed*” (**Romans 3:25**). Subsequently God is fully justified in Christ’s actions to save sinful humanity, as well as, judge them for their sin when they reject His only avenue of salvation good enough for our crime. Therefore, Christ is “*The savior of all men, especially those who believe*” (**1 Timothy 4:10**) making His work on the cross sufficient for all men, yet efficient for those that put their trust in this saving work. God is both merciful and holy, and will not be mocked.

We believe that Christ not only paid the penalty for our sin, but that “*he who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” Our righteousness then is His, and not our own, giving those that believe in Him perfect status before a holy and righteous God. As we begin to realize how holy God is and how great our sin actually is, the cross becomes larger in our lives, and we are able to live grace filled lives with those around us. We become motivated by

God's love to love others and begin a ministry of reconciliation that was given to us by the Father for His glory (**Matthew 22:37-39; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**). This also allows us to be people of repentance because we hate our sin, not because we feel guilty or are trying to manipulate God into doing something for us, but because of His great love for us (**John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8-11**). When we are living in grace, we come to realize that we need to repent of our *"Dead (Good) works"* (**Hebrews 6:1**) as much as our bad works, and that our sins are not necessarily something we do, but are reflective of a heart condition that rejects God in numerous ways including religious devotion, which, without a redeemed heart, can create a self-righteous heart or a bitter one (The result of religion apart from Jesus). The religious mind continues to think that sin is external, and solutions are internal, and that we are accepted through our works, whereas the gospel shows us that sin is internal, and the solution is external (Jesus), and that our acceptance is in His work, and therefore we can glorify Him in our work as a result. Thus it is *"not what enters into a man's mouth that defiles a man, but what proceeds out of the mouth that defiles him...the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile a man, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft false witness, slanders; these are the things that defile a man"*

(**Matthew 15:10-20**). Our actions are ultimately just a symptom of a bad heart condition, which is *"Desperately wicked, who can understand it"* (**Jeremiah 27:9**)? Only the Holy Spirit's transformative, regenerating power can transform this heart of stone, and make it a *"Heart of flesh"* (**Ezekiel 36:25-30**).

Thus, we believe that God's narrative (The Bible) reminds us that God will perfectly and fairly judge evil, and that He is at work in the world reconciling the world to Himself. However even in just judgment, He gets *"No pleasure in the death of anyone,"* and desires that all *"Repent and live"* (**Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9**). He visually began this work of redemption by calling a people to Himself for His purposes and His own glory. That those people were to be a *"Blessing to the nations"* (**Genesis 12:1-4**) and it would be His redeemed people to take up the mandate to *"Be fruitful and multiply"* and demonstrate His glory to the whole world. Subsequently God called Abraham to be the father of nations, and to point to God as our only salvation. In spite of God's kindness to humanity, humans continued to deny Him and transgress His laws, while crying out for secular forms of government, rather than placing themselves under the benevolent control of a sovereign God. Man continued to show the results of his rebellious heart, and failed to glorify God, and be the witness to His glory (See

Judges; Romans 3:23). Because of man's continued rebellion and desire to save themselves, God showed Abraham and his lineage and the prophets, that a sacrifice would be needed to fully pay the penalty of our sins, and that animal sacrifice (While Demonstrative), could not properly pay the penalty for this destructive calamity, but there would be a final sacrifice that would destroy sin and shame forever (**John 1:29-36**), and cause obedience out of a renewed heart and not a ritualistic act of sacrifice and duty, because it is "*Better to obey than to sacrifice*" (**1 Samuel 15:22**). His central act was sending His Son to be that final sacrifice, once and for all, that would beat sin and death, by physically raising Him from the dead, by the power of the Holy Spirit, making Him the only "*Name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved*" (**Acts 4:12**). Subsequently, because of the resurrection, we believe that there are not many paths to heaven, but that Jesus is the "*Way, the life and the truth, and that no man can see the Father, but through Him*" (**John 14:6**). The idea that all paths lead to god(s), is of itself a religious statement that is both dogmatic, and contrary to both the laws of logic and the scriptural revelation we have in our possession. It is also the worldview of much of the west tainted by the winds of their own context and fiercely offensive to many other cultures. No human institution has been able to fully represent God on this

earth, but Jesus did call out His church to be the "New Israel," and His bride to walk alongside Him to fulfill His mission on earth (**John 10:16; Ephesians 5:29-31; Romans 9:6**). Thus we are not just saved by the power of the gospel, but we are also saved for the "Purposes" of the gospel, which is God's missional work on earth (**Ephesians 1:10-11; John 20:21**). Thus the church (Ecclesia) is God's called out and redeemed missionaries to be a blessing to the nations, and a witness to "*Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the outer parts of the world*" (**Acts 1:8**). Whereas the gospel is God's in-breaking into human culture in order to redeem it for His own glory, the church is called to be part of that mission, as we proclaim the gospel and live out its implications in a god-glorifying fashion. What God began, and saw that it was "Good," He is redeeming, and will one day at Christ's second coming fully redeem creation and present a "*Holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her Husband*" (**Revelation 19:7,8; 21:2**) and His will, "*Will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" (**Matthew 6:10**).

We also believe Jesus will return a second time and complete what He began at the cross, and His subsequent resurrection from the dead, and the establishment of His church, which contains all those people who believe in Him for their salvation, repenting of

both their evil and good works, and recognizing Him alone as their savior, and he will finally judge the “*Living and the dead*,” finally destroying evil, and ushering in a new heaven and a new earth that will be fully redeemed and free of evil, and filled with the presence and reign of God.

In the meanwhile the Church exists as the called out people of God for His own glory. We see this in that, “*the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places*” (**Ephesians 3:10**). God’s people, the church, are His witnesses to the world of God’s restoration of brokenness, and hostility and hate. God is glorified when the church represents God’s intention for the world, so that the dividing walls of hostility are broken between man and God and man and man. Racism, hate, prejudice and segregated worship services are a product of sin and not the product of the Spirit of God (**Ephesians 2:10-3:10; Galatians 2:14; Revelation 5:7-9; 9:7**). His Church is governed by Deacons and Elders (**1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; Acts 14:23; 20:17-28**) to watch over the church and shepherd it, teach it and serve it.

We exist to live for His mission and His glory (**Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9**). The church stands in the gap proclaiming God’s story until the return of our

Lord Jesus Christ, when we will all obtain *glorified* bodies and will spend eternity in Christ worshipping Him whom we are created to worship and find our joy in. Therefore to “*live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (**Philippians 1:21**). In death, we find the ultimate joy we are striving for on this earth. The Church will glory in this joy, as it perfectly worships God in Christ for eternity. While we express this contentment here on earth as we find joy in the “Good” things we are given in this life, we cannot find our hope and ultimate joy in any of them, but find them *in Christ*, and will fully realize this in eternity. Prior to that, we are given a *pledge of our inheritance with a view to redemption* through the Spirit of God as a down payment and reminder of His grace while we continue to live as broken people in a broken world (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).

Therefore we believe that eternal life is that we may “*know Him, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent*” (**John 17:3**), and that we have hope in this life that Christ will return and reign together with His church, basking in the worship of His people who glorify Him through their all satisfying worship of His being. We also believe in the imminent return of our Lord, who will completely abolish evil, death and sin, and reign, with His people in a new heaven and new earth for eternity. Subsequently we believe that arguments in regard to the scheme and timing of Christ’s return are fruitless, and fail

to recognize that our blessing isn't found in the future, but are multiplied into the future. Christ is the prize and no other gifts can usurp the value and purpose of a worship relationship with God through the Cross of Jesus Christ.

We also believe that while much of the promises have been fulfilled in Christ's first coming, not all of them have, and that there are aspects of His blessings such as sinless lives, complete healing and redemption, no tears, etc. will not be fulfilled until Christ comes again. Therefore we hold to the idea of an "Already/not yet" eschatology, which means that we are perfected "In Christ," but that perfection will only be manifested when we are finally glorified at the end of the age (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; 1 Corinthians 15**).

Until then, we still see in a mirror dimly (**1 Corinthians 13:12**), but continue to gain insight as we meditate on God's revealed word, which is profitable for "*Teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*" (**2 Timothy 3:15, Romans 12:2**). God has also supplied the church with gifts of grace and individuals that help us grow in unity and the knowledge of Jesus, and live to His glory (**Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12:3-9**).

Also, though we believe that God is capable of using any gift He desires for His purposes and in His timing, and that we believe that He is the giver of every perfect gift willing, ready and able to bless us immensely (**James 1:17**), we eschew the "Prosperity Gospel" as a partial truth that ends in heresy, bitterness and/or self-righteousness. It turns our eyes dangerously toward the horizontal as the prize, and fuels the idea that God is the means to an end of our happiness, health and wealth, which scriptures find in God alone, and perfectly when we see Him face to face. Man is broken, and God is the only source to joy and healing that will last forever beginning now and into eternity! We are told by Jesus that in this life we would experience *Tribulation*, but in Him we would have peace (**John 16:33**), and any teaching that does not include a doctrine of suffering is not a biblical truth, and fails to teach the whole counsel of the human experience on earth. Knowing God does not eradicate our suffering here on earth, but it shows us that our savior went through any suffering we will travel through, and He is with us as we walk through it now (**Psalms 23:4**). It also teaches us that we have a great future hope in Christ, that minimizes the suffering we are going through in this life (**2 Corinthians 4:7-18**).

What Do I do To Have Jesus Christ Lead My Life?

(John 3:16; Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31; Romans 3:23; 6:23;
10:8-15; Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 11:6)

“Jesus lived the life we couldn't live

and died the death we should have died”

Lecrae

Even though we are truly saved by God's grace, and Jesus has paid the price of our sins on the cross, and there is nothing we “Do” to receive salvation, scripture is clear that we still are obligated to *Believe* (Which means trust) on Him as our savior rather than in our own saving mechanisms, and to make that as a public confession through baptism and confession. **Romans 6:23** says, “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” which is such a blessing!

This process begins with **Repentance** (Acknowledging that we are sinful). Many people stumble over this, because they do not feel they have lived a ‘bad’ life, but

sin isn't just what we do, but who we are in the core of our hearts. Until we can admit that we have rejected God's way for our own, we cannot come to Him. We are greatly separated from God, with no way to Him, but through Jesus first, by admitting that we are sinful and in need of saving. It is important here to recognize that we are in need of repenting of our religious good works, as well as our rebellious actions.

From acknowledging our sins, we must then **Believe** that Christ is who He says He is, and has truly paid for our sins! *Faith* is a gift of God that activates His saving grace in our lives. It is by faith that we are pleasing to God.

We are then to be **Baptized** as an act of obedience to Jesus as Lord of our life. Baptism doesn't save us, but we are commanded to be baptized, as it is a visual and public commitment to Jesus as the Lord of our life. In baptism, we receive the **Holy Spirit** which empowers us to live the life we cannot live without Christ dying for our sins, and the Spirit empowering us to do so.

For more information please write to theaiinitiative@gmail.com