The Backstory: Restoration
Our Longing For Heaven
John 14:1-6
Storyline Fellowship
April 19, 2015

Today, we move into the “fourth quarter” of this Backstory series. And this is the most victorious of all. This first series at Storyline has been a 12-week overview of Scripture, and as you recall, the Bible is one big story with four main headings: Creation; Fall; Redemption; Restoration.

Maybe you are brand new to the Bible and you have very little history with the book. If so: no worries. You can now summarize the entire thing in four talking points.

Creation
In the beginning, God created. Supernaturalism was at the source of the universe. The world came to be when God spoke it into existence. The book of Genesis tells that story.

Fall
When the first human beings were made, they were built to live forever, and they enjoyed friendship with God and harmony with one another. Sadly, they caved to temptation and took the bait of a fallen angel named Satan. They rebelled and infected the human race with a defiant tendency. Because sin entered into our world, we all experience brokenness, pain, sorrow, and death. We are all under a curse.

Redemption
But greater love has none than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rescued us. Sent into the world to be a perfect, once-and-for-all sacrifice, Jesus went to the cross as a volunteer, not a victim. He absorbed the wrath of God against humanity. He took our place, and created a bridge back to God. Through Jesus, we can be restored.

Restoration
One day, a perfect paradise will be reinstated. People will be forever cured of sin and death shall be no more. Satan will be bound forever, and the flock of God will be led by the Good Shepherd. This new world is on its way, another age, a place where all your deepest desires are satisfied.

So let’s talk about heaven for a few weeks, shall we? The idea of a soon-arriving paradise is enough to keep us going on this broken earth. According to Scripture, there is a light at the end of the tunnel that trumps any you have ever seen.

And so today, we turn to John 14, and we look at one of the most comforting passages in the New Testament. In this moment, the disciples of Jesus are deeply troubled because he keeps talking about abandoning them. He reminds them that He is soon leaving. As you might guess, they don’t like what they are hearing. They want Jesus to remain with them.
He is the glue that holds them all together, but He tells them that his physical presence is short-lived. While he is soon departing, they will not be on their own. Watch how this conversation plays out.

14 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.  
2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.  
3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.  
4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.  
7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” John 14:1-7

Watch the way this passage begins in v.1: “Do not let your hearts be heavy.” The Lord Jesus was sensitive to their anguish. He knew that his disciples were stressed. They were worried, nervous, and fearful. Knowing the state of their souls, he says “Do no let yourself be worried.” This was a command Jesus insists upon: Thou shalt not!

His tone was likely soft and gentle. He wasn’t barking out an order like boot camp drill sergeant: “CALM DOWN. STOP BEING A SISSY.” No, like a tender dad to a nervous boy, he says, “It’s gonna be ok. You’re going to make it through this just fine.”

Let me ask you: are you often a worrywart? Do you spend a good amount of time biting your nails and playing worst-case-scenario in your head? The English poet John Keats once confessed this as his struggle. He said:

“Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones.” –Keats

Anybody resonate with that? Which is worse: Getting your mouth poked by a needle at the dentist? Or sitting in that room with its outdated magazines and latex smells and waiting for your name to be called by that woman behind the clipboard? The wait is worse than the injection. Our imagined fears are often worse than the reality!

And in this passage, Jesus is reaching out to his human helpers—these ordinary men that worried about the future. And he says to them, “It all comes down to your decision to trust. Trust in God, trust also in me.” You are going to be a whole lot happier if you will let me handle tomorrow. You’re going to be a better person if you BELIEVE.

Do you know that this idea of “believing God” is the driving theme of the book of John? Each Gospel writer tells the story of Christ with a particular goal in mind. John’s main motive for writing is to inspire belief. In chapter 20, John confesses that his book is abridged. He could not squeeze in everything that Jesus did while on earth, but selected key stories that would drive home a particular point:
Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:30-31

John wrote from a deep conviction. People would be radically changed on planet Earth IF they would simply believe in Jesus and place their lives in His hands. And here in John 14, Jesus describes a couple of ways that we must exercise our faith.

What You Must Believe

1. You must believe that Jesus prepares an eternal place for you. (v.2).

2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

These words of Jesus are incredibly comforting but often misunderstood. Some read these words and they see Jesus wearing a “hard-hat” in the land upstairs. With sweat on his brow, he’s been overseeing a huge project. For 2000 years, he’s been building mansions for every member of his family. That’s not exactly what the Bible is teaching. After all, God spun the worlds into place with a single word. He has never needed time and materials to make something happen.

I love the way one commentator describes our 3.5 lb brains:

The teacups of our thinking and language have not even yet approached the capacity of holding the ocean of divine truth.

–Borchert, The New American Commentary

This is the challenge when human beings try to comprehend heaven. God’s wisdom looks like the Pacific Ocean. Our wisdom resembles a tea party for petite little girls. We don’t have containers to hold the deeper things beyond that which we have seen. We are forced to make sense of mega heavenly realities by employing miniature ounces of understanding.

So, the Gospel of John is not trying to portray Jesus as being in the construction business. He’s not laying drywall and painting rooms at the moment. Rather, when Jesus said that he was going to prepare a place for his, he was referring mostly to his humiliating crucifixion and death on a cross. The main preparation for heaven would be Passion Week, and a resurrection that would swing open wide the door to a paradise.

Now, let me say this: it sure doesn’t hurt for us to think of Jesus “getting our rooms ready.” That’s what a pregnant mother does while she waits for her contractions to start and for her child to arrive. While she waits for the baby to be born, she picks the perfect paint color, she commands her husband to assemble that crib months in advance, and she has the child’s name stenciled perfectly on the wall. This is a mother’s joy. And it is
wonderful to think about Jesus in heaven waiting for his children to arrive. We are emboldened by this idea that the Lord is ready and waiting for the trumpet call to collect his family and to usher them into their new land.

Jesus uses this idea with his disciples. “I may be leaving, but you will soon be coming to me. And you’re going to love it there.” And no need to worry—there will be plenty of space for all who want in.

This idea of heaven is hugely helpful when applied. As human beings, we get weary in life, discouraged, depressed, disheartened. There are seasons in our lives when we seem to be “getting through another day,” trudging along. The Bible says that God has “set eternity in our hearts” (Eccl. 3:11). Human beings hunger for the other world, the one that we wait for.

The Apostle Paul put it this way:

**I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Phil 1:23-24**

Paul was fed up with the frustrations he felt on Earth—the persecution, the flogging, the arrests, the fears, the worry, the struggle with his own indwelling sin, the broken relationships in his life. He longed for that sweet release of slipping away, but he knew that God still had work for him to do on earth. His destiny had not yet been fulfilled. He still had homework, so he would remain in the body a while longer.

And this is how Christian people often feel at funerals—when a spouse, or a best friend, or a brother, or a parent has died. There is this heightened desire at death, to go and to be with that person, in a place without sorrow. The earth can be a lonely island. But Jesus says, “Trust me. The time is coming soon when you will be in a new place, prepared just for you.” And this desire to be “home” will never leave you on planet earth. It will only grow. It will help you “believe.”

Now back to the text. In v.3, Jesus says more. You must believe that I will keep you company in heaven…

**2. You must believe that Jesus is coming to take you with him. (v.3)**

> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Christ not only takes you to a new place, but plans to keep you company. The New Testament teaches that one day, Jesus will suddenly appear in the sky, *and when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (1 Jn 3:2).

So it’s not like Jesus is going to pick us up and then drop us off on some other planet where Satan is outlawed. No, He plans to dwell among us, to be with us, as our close-at-
The Evolution of the Temple
Let me help you understand how the closeness or the presence of God grows throughout the storyline of Scripture. Hang with me for a moment: a brief history lesson. This will particularly helpful for those of you that have little background with the Bible.

Way back in the Old Testament, God’s people were enslaved in Egypt for 400 years. The people felt like God’s ship had sailed. He had abandoned them. Maybe you have felt like that before. Ever asked the question, “God, where are you?” The Hebrew people felt alone. Just when the culture had counted Him out, God shows up on the radar, in the form of a burning bush.

[Image of burning bush]

A man with a checkered past named Moses suddenly stands in the presence of Almighty God and is told to remove his shoes. He stands on holy ground. He was in God’s presence. And this unqualified man had been handpicked. He was God’s chosen instrument for rescuing his people.

After a series of plagues, Pharaoh gives Moses the green light to take his people home. The Hebrew people go and they soon find themselves wandering in a desert without a home. So what does God do? He re-establishes His presence. The Lord makes Himself visible through a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. The people now believed that God was with them.

It wasn’t long after that when God introduced a new idea. He told the Israelites to construct a tabernacle—a tent that would house his presence.

He would make His power and glory visible at periodic times in the tabernacle. So they built it and they positioned it in the center of the camp, as a living witness that God was with them. They were not alone; God tabernacled with them.

Then came the temple.

Years later, it was time for the tent to go. The land of Canaan, the Promised Land had become their home. They had a piece of property and a more permanent palace was built. This one far more sophisticated—a place where sinners could offer sacrifices to God and where the priest would give offerings. God’s Spirit would be thick in the temple. And this little fortress became a symbol of the nation’s special relationship with Almighty God. And this system of sacrifice continued for centuries.

And watch what happens when Jesus arrives. The book of John, written that we might believe, says this in the opening chapter.

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us [tabernacle]. We observed
His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Jesus tabernacled among us. He was the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Through Jesus, God becomes visible. He became a tangible, touchable presence. And the disciples soon realized that this man was God with skin on. He was the pillar of fire, He was the tabernacle and the temple, He was the burning bush. Finally, God was with us, and like one of us. And this Jesus was approachable, calling little children to himself and accepting party invitations with outcasts. He loved people, and reserved a special affection for his 12.

But What Now?
But then one day, he tells the 12 that he’s going on a trip. He’s about to depart, and the disciples were all torn up about it. They couldn’t afford to lose His presence—they had waited so long for it. But notice, as the conversation continues, that Jesus promises to remain with them. Look down at v.25 of this chapter…

25 “All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” 27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Jn. 14:25-27a

Jesus says, my powerful presence will fill up your temple. But now, the temple is not a place of brick or mortar. The temple is the human heart. Jesus says, “I will fill up the souls of men and women who receive and believe. I will give them fire for living out their call; I will give them peace for times of rest. The church will be my temple, and the church is a people. The church is not a building, or a campus, or a piece of land. The church is a tribe, and wherever two or three gather in my name, there I am in the midst of them. The Holy Spirit comes upon his people.

So the Apostle Paul, later, would challenge the Christians to keep their lives clean, to flee from sexual immorality and from all that stains our souls and quenches the flow of the Spirit:

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? 1 Cor. 6:19

Before Jesus died, he told his trusted men, he told his church—I will not leave you as orphans. I leave you with my spirit, and this is a temporary fix, until that great and glorious day when the resurrected tribe rises from the grave and joins me in this new physical realm. Until that day, make your heart a temple, make your life a living sacrifice, and wait with a blessed hope.

Do you know that in the book of Revelation, that last book of the Bible, we see the perfect end to the story? Before He signs off in Holy Scripture, God supplies the church with a metaphorical photo of heaven. We don’t get details, but we get the basics. With
our teacups of understanding, God keeps it simple.

The Apostle John sees and reports:

**I saw the great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.** Rev. 21:21b-23

This is what Jesus was talking about. When this age ends, and the next one begins, we will live inside his presence like never before, and we never feel alone again. Loneliness will reach extinction.

And so, in the passage, Jesus is attempting to explain all this to the tribe of teacups. His earthly men could not comprehend heavenly things, and they were confused, so Thomas raises his hand with a question.

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

These men needed one main truth, and this is a truth that will get you in trouble today: Jesus is the only way. When God put on flesh, He didn’t give us a dozen good options for getting into the kingdom of heaven. He didn’t say, “Just choose a religion and try to be a good person.” No. He said, “I am the way, the truth, the life. Nobody gets in unless they come through me.”

These words run against the grain of our society. In an age of pluralism, Jesus is exclusive. There are not a hundred roads to heaven. There is only one path, and it goes by way of a cross.

And so John writes his book with one passion and purpose: to persuade you to believe.

**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.** He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God… John 1:10-12

Through Jesus Christ, you can be born again. And that is what it takes to get into the kingdom of heaven. You have to be born twice—once on earth—as you come into this world a human being. And born of heaven, as the Holy Spirit fills your heart and seals your soul.

I am told of a tombstone—true story—that is found in the backwoods of Alabama. The
man’s name was Solomon Peas, like the vegetable. The caption over this man’s buried body reads:

*Here lies Solomon Peas*
*Under the lilies and under the trees*
*Peas is not here, only the pod*
*Peas has shelled out and gone home to God.*

And this is true for all, who are found in Jesus. Death is not a dead end, but a doorway to the presence of God. For those who receive Him, to those who believe in His Name.

Are you ready?

Response:

*To those who are worried:*
Pray for a sweet release and a heart at peace. Release your burden.

*To those who have lost loved ones, or have loved ones at the point of death:*
Ask for an opportunity to share the truth with that person, ask for a sense of peace about the paradise to come.

*To those who have never received Jesus:*
Ask the Lord to fill your temple. See the bulletin about the Gospel.