

THE PARADIGM NARRATIVE OF THEOLOGY

In the beginning, God created the world. He made human beings in His image with the intention that they would live in His love — in relationship with Him and with one another. God created humans with a free will and trusted them to care for all creation.

God also provided free will to angelic beings. One of them, Satan, used that freedom to choose pride over love and rebel against God. Satan then lured the first human beings into the same broken state — sin. Voluntarily making the same decision Satan made (choosing pride over love), the first humans distanced themselves from God. It was at this time that corruption and brokenness entered the world. Because God is the giver of life, and sin is estrangement from God, sin's consequence to mortal human beings was death.

Yet all was not lost. Rather than turning His back on creation, God decided to give restore the broken world. He chose a man named Abraham and his descendants to represent Him, to show the world who He is and all that humanity was meant to be. Abraham and his people were not selected to merely revel in an elevated status; they were called to bless the world. By knowing Abraham's people, the rest of the world could know who God is and what He loves.

After some time, Abraham's descendants were enslaved in Egypt, a nation that used power and prestige to harm others. Abraham's people cried out to God for rescue and He delivered them out of Egypt. God gave them an identity. He named them Israel and instructed them to live very differently than Egypt — living as a holy people whose mission was to bring about wholeness in the world.

The Israelites came into the Promised Land, which was to serve as a home base from which they could bless other nations. As history continued, Israel's leaders wavered in their level of obedience to their covenant with God. Too often Israel's leaders forsook social justice and holy living. Too often Israel behaved like another Egypt.

This way of living led Israel into exile, enslaved in Babylon. Yet there was always a remnant of Israelites who understood and enacted God's desire for justice and holiness. In the midst of exile, Israel's prophets rose up and spoke of a new exodus — a time when God would offer redemption and liberation to the entire world.

That new exodus arrived when God sent His son, Jesus, to take on flesh and become Israel's Messiah — impacting not only Israel, but the entire world. Born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was called Emmanuel ("God with us"). He ministered to those around him — healing people in body and spirit — and preached the good news that God's Kingdom had arrived. His instructions to his followers were rooted in the two central commandments of God's Law with Israel: love God with your entire being, and love your neighbor as yourself. But Jesus' radical message was rejected by the political and religious elite of his day, and he was put to death by crucifixion. In his death, Jesus became the world's Passover Lamb, atoning for all of the brokenness caused and experienced by the world.

But the story does not end there. In the pinnacle of history, as the love of God defeated sin and death, Jesus resurrected from the grave. In his resurrection, Jesus broke the curse suffered by humanity at the Fall and established liberation and victory. Just as pride defeated love when the earliest human beings sinned against God, love had now defeated pride. Just as human beings had used their free will to rebel against God and His goodness, they could now freely choose to be reconciled with God and join His Kingdom.

Those who join God's Kingdom are to continue the Abraham story, living as a blessing to the world — bringing about justice for the oppressed, showing the world what it means to be holy and whole. According to the Bible, God's desire is that every person would choose to join His Kingdom.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, God's Spirit came to Christ-followers to serve as their guide. Often described like wind or fire, the Spirit directs the Kingdom by empowering, convicting, and comforting those who rely on her leading.

Since Christ's day, the Kingdom has pressed on, remembering Christ's work in sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper while using the Holy Scriptures as their primary means of understanding the narrative of God's salvation, believing that Scripture is entirely trustworthy and reliable to function as God intended it.

In the past two thousand years, many Christ-followers have settled for less than their Kingdom purpose (some have even willingly abandoned the Kingdom, though that is never God's desire for them). Forgetting about the widow and the orphan and failing to live in God's holiness, Christ-followers have not always represented the Kingdom well, but God has not given up on the Kingdom as His means of bringing wholeness to the world.

There will be a day when Jesus comes back to culminate the Kingdom and deliver final judgment on the corruption and injustice of our world, when the rescue that has begun will be made complete. The world will be perfectly, entirely restored and all the members of the Kingdom will share eternal life with God.