



THE GREATEST STORY

ADAPTED FROM A SECTION IN SCOT MCKNIGHT'S BOOK: "THE KING JESUS GOSPEL"



LET ME TELL YOU A STORY...

In the beginning God. In the beginning God created everything we see and many things we can't yet see. In the beginning God made two image bearers, Adam and Eve. In the beginning God gave Adam and Eve one simple task: to govern this world on God's behalf.

But Adam and Eve thought better and took control of God's exclusive right. They took control of the rule of God and, instead of listening to the good word of God, they listened to the serpent and to themselves and ruined their opportunity to govern as God's co-governors in Eden.

For one dark moment the image bearers acted the part of God. So God banished them from Eden and cast them into the world as we now know it. God would find another way for his image bearers to co-govern the world.

Sadly, all the descendants of Adam and Eve have proven their pattern. We all want to take control. We all want to rule, not under God as God's under-governors but as gods and goddesses. Still, God gave Adam and Eve's descendants the opportunity to right the ship, but they cascaded into a nightmare and all but ruined their opportunity to govern on God's behalf. But God is gracious. Just as he gave Adam and Eve a new opportunity after their desire to take control and rule in Eden, so God gave all the descendants more opportunities. Desire to rule was the name of the descendants' game, and with their building of the Tower of Babel, God chose another way of establishing his rule on earth. How?



God chose Abraham. Then God chose Israel. God would give Israel the task of governing. So God created a covenant between himself and Abraham and Israel, a covenant that was to be eternal and redemptive. God promised to be with Israel as the One who was for Israel. What God did was to transfer the governing assignment given to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and Israel. As the original image bearers were to govern this world on God's behalf, so Abraham and Israel were to bless the nations. They did this well at times, and at other times they took control and chose to do things their own way.

As God's chosen people, God was with them when they were slaves in Egypt and God was for them, so he liberated them from Egypt through the hand of Moses. God wanted them to live properly as a kingdom of priests, so he gave them the Torah and renewed the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. This Torah was to govern them in the land of Israel and, if they allowed it to govern them, they would flourish and would be able to bless the nations. But they did not do well because they

didn't let the good Torah of God govern them. This second arrangement wasn't working either.

When Israel asked for a king like other nations, God at first balked, but eventually gave them what they wanted: a human king. In his own mysterious grace, though, God chose to use this kingly wish and made one of their kings, David, the sort of king God wanted for them. This was the third form of governing on God's behalf. But David was a descendant of Adam and Eve, so he too wanted to take control and messed up the kingly reign. He passed the throne on to someone who messed up even more, Solomon.

One king after another, some of them good and some of them bad, governed God's people Israel and Judah. But each of them wanted to take control, so God sent prophets to them to warn them that there was only one governor, one true King, one and only one God - and his name was YHWH.

Sometimes God had to discipline Israel to get the people's attention. Sometimes his discipline worked, like the exile in Babylon. It led to nothing less than a spiritual revival among those who returned to the land, but that revival wore off too because they were all usurpers. Perhaps they knew they were to govern not only the Promised Land but also the world, but they struggled - except in brief poetic moments in prophets like Isaiah governing the world on God's behalf.

Within a few centuries Israel had seemingly forgotten the assignment God had given to Adam and Eve, the assignment that they were a priestly kingdom designed to bless the world.

After years of deafening silence, God moved into the final plan and suddenly broke into history with someone who was both descendant and non-descendant, someone who would rule rightly and not as a usurper. God sent to Israel Jesus, through

Mary and Joseph, and God told Mary through an angel that her son, Jesus, would someday rule on God's behalf as Messiah. But even though Jesus did exactly what God had told him to do, neither Israel nor the Gentiles around Israel accepted him as Messiah. (This theme consistently reveals that we are all usurpers, we all want to have control and we don't want someone telling us what's best for us.)

Though Jesus was a man known to do good everywhere he went, and though he healed and rescued people from all sorts of problems, and though he brought people to the table who were forgiven and saved and healed and made new again and turned from usurpers to lovers, the descendants - both Roman and Jewish decided they'd be better off putting him to death. So they killed him in the most despicable of manners by crucifying him naked on a cross outside Jerusalem on Golgotha. The usurpers were in control and the descendants had descended to their lowest.

What the descendants didn't know was that Jesus was actually entering into their desire for control apart from God and the death they deserved for their sins. He was dying their death, he was shouldering their sins and the punishment due their sins, and he was absorbing the just wrath of God against all sin. What they didn't know was that God could reverse their desire for control apart from God and reverse their death and start all over again. What they didn't know was that this way of dying as a servant was to become the only true way of living and making peace in this world. What they didn't know was that the cross was the crown and that power comes only when it is surrendered.

They didn't know this. No one did. Not even Jesus' closest followers.

What they didn't know was that they had met their match in King Jesus, who was about to usher in an

alternative kingdom.

To start the world all over again, God, the God who graciously gave Adam and Eve another chance and the God who rescued Israel from the clutches of Egypt and the God who beckons for Israelites to return from Babylon, that same God - YHWH, the Father of Jesus Christ - interrupted history one more time. He raised Jesus back to life to end the dominion of death, to prove that those who want control apart from God would not have the last word, and to show that the descendants could have a whole new (creation) lineage. To make this altogether clear, Jesus appeared to hosts of the descendants and then he was taken up into the presence of God.

What this story shows is that what usurpers fear the most is the 'god-ness' of God but, paradoxically, what usurpers most want is the 'god-ness' of God, and Jesus was that God, and that is why Jesus as Messiah and Lord is the gospel.



We finally had the King this earth needed. He was exalted to reign over the world, over both Jews as Messiah and over Gentiles as Lord. And he summoned all people to accept his forgiving, kindly, peaceful, gracious, transforming rule. If people would but turn to him, they would be forgiven and their desire for control apart from God would be forgotten forever. To create this new society, the kingdom society, the church society, Jesus sent to his people the Holy Spirit to empower them and transform them into servants of God's love, peace, justice, and holiness. This was the alternative politics and the right way to govern the world on God's behalf: by loving others with everything we've got. And this same God chose to do things all over again with his new creation people: he chose to give them a second chance, which is one way of talking about the magnificent theme of God's grace.

He chose to let them be people of the kingdom, called the church, and he summoned them to believe in Jesus, to turn from their desire for control, and to so identify with Jesus that they would enter into his death and into his resurrection and through that find new life. Most importantly, though Jesus was the true king, the true Messiah, the true image bearer, and the true Lord, God gave to Jesus' people the assignment he had given to Adam and Eve. They were image bearers, like Adam and Eve but with a major

difference: they had the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit could transform them into the visible likeness of Jesus himself.

As Christlike image bearers they are assigned to rule on God's behalf in this world. They do this by listening to this story, by living out this story as their story, and by spreading the good news of this story.

They now rule in an imperfect world in an imperfect way as imperfect image bearers. But someday the perfect image bearer will come back, and he will rescue his image bearers and set them up one more time in this world. This time, though, it will be right because Jesus will be the temple, and the garden will become the eternal city, and it will be filled with peace, love, joy, and holiness. All desire for control apart from God will end, and everyone will serve Jesus in the power of the Spirit to the Glory of God the Father. Humans will govern on God's behalf in the way of Jesus. Forever.

