

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

March 27, 2016



THE STORY OF GOD'S GLORY

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Discussion Guide

Consummation

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they state they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you consider the world in which we live, would you say it is getting better or worse? Could you elaborate?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Revelation 21.1-5 aloud. Pause. Read the text once more, seeking to envision the scene as if you were John.
- Where does John see God taking creation and people within it? Seek to find as many aspects as possible within the text.
- In what ways does this vision differ from life as we experience it?
- God claims that the words he has declared and the vision John has seen is true and can be trusted (Revelation 21.5). Do you find this easy or difficult to accept? Could you elaborate?
- If what God has declared and demonstrated can be trusted, how might it change the way we navigated life and its experiences today? Could you explain?
- The reality is that God claims to be making all things new, but our experience tells us that everything and everyone is staying the same, or getting worse. However, in the person of the resurrected Christ, we

catch a glimpse of the life God is promising. Read 1 Corinthians 15.20-23 aloud. Ponder these words and read the text aloud again. What do you hear God saying in these verses about the possibility of us experiencing a renewed life?

- Scripture promises that the life we see in the resurrected Christ is the life we will one day experience. But, it also states that we are partakers of that life today and that this should impact how we live in and navigate this world. Read Colossians 3.1-4 aloud. Read the text once more, seeking to pay attention to words or phrases which stand out to you. Allow these to be God's words to you, his words of invitation to live and navigate life differently. Read the text once more and provide time to ask God what the nature of his invitation might be and to consider how you might respond to this invitation.
- Consider sharing God's invitation to you with your group, asking how you might be a supportive community, cheering one another one to lean into God's invitation.

THE TEXT

REVELATION 21.1-5: *WHERE IT IS ALL GOING*

The book of Revelation is a record of a series of visions given by God to John to be written down for seven Churches in Asia Minor (Revelation 1-3). In reading the letter, it is readily apparent that these early Christ-followers are suffering some form of persecution and it is affecting their sense of hope and attachment to a life of faith in Christ. These visions serve not simply to call these Churches to endure the persecution they are experiencing, but are intended to encourage the congregations by declaring that the experience of persecution does not derail God's plans in Christ. God will still restore all things in Christ, or, in other words, God wins.

In Revelation 21, we find the conclusion of the last vision of John which points to the future God is creating in and through Christ. John looks and sees a new creation, a new heaven and earth. The word John uses to describe this newness does not refer

to new in kind but new in quality; that is, John sees a creation which has been renewed. This implies that certain aspects of the former have been retained while other aspects have been radically transformed. (Paul states believers in Christ experience a similar type of renewal in 2 Corinthians 5.17.) Simply put, John sees creation and he knows it is creation because it maintains a measure of sameness. What he sees represents the heavens and the earth. However, they appear to him as he has never seen them before which is in keeping with God's promise made to Isaiah to renew creation (Isaiah 65.16-17). What is so radically different is that the sea has been removed. In the ancient mind, the sea represented chaos and evil. The sea is uncontrollable and capable of great destruction. In many ancient religions, the sea is associated with the gods of chaos and disorder. To say that the sea has been removed is to say that which causes chaos and disorder, that which is truly evil, has been removed from the created order. To remove chaos and evil would imply that all that is good remains, thereby making creation appear as it never had before. In actuality, John is seeing creation restored to its original state, a creation which bears the good character of God (Genesis 1).

John next turns his attention and sees a new Jerusalem coming from God's dwelling place. The phrase "new Jerusalem" never occurs in Scripture, but the term Jerusalem occurs in Ezekiel 1-39 nineteen times in reference to the people of God which is most likely being echoed by John here as he references the prophecy of God to Ezekiel that God would dwell with people (Ezekiel 37.27; Leviticus 26.11-12). What is important to notice is that the people of God are likened unto a bride who is beautifully adorned on her wedding day. The use of the term "bride" makes it clear that the people of God being mentioned are the Church (Ephesians 5.25-33). Therefore, John sees the Church in a renewed state, the people of God righted by God himself; they are coming from God. The specific aspect of their righting is seen in the reality that the people of God have been righted in their relationship with him. God dwells with them as their God and they are his people. This is more

than just language representing God's presence. It is worship language. God renews his people so he might have his rightful place as God and people might fulfill their rightful place around him as his people. This is the purpose of God choosing to dwell among his people, so they might worship him (Ezekiel 33.7; 40.34). What John sees here is more than just God's people renewed, but he sees them restored to their original place as those created to worship God (Genesis 1-2).

Seeing God's people restored to their rightful place as worshipers of God, John next witnesses the lives of God's people transformed as they experience God's presence. In his presence, people find God wipes every tear from their eyes; that is, grief ceases to be part of life as people stand in their rightful place. This is because, in their rightful place, people experience the removal of all which causes such grief: death/destruction. This in turn removes all need for crying, mourning, or pain. Here John sees the restoration of people to life as it was meant to be experienced. In this brief vision, John sees the trajectory of what God is doing in Christ. He is taking everything back to the beginning (Genesis 1-2).

God himself declares that this is the case. He is making everything new. He is presently engaged in the act of recreation through Christ. This statement indicates that God is not finished. What John has seen is not yet fully reality. However, God is in the process and he assures John that the vision and his promise to achieve that vision are trustworthy and true, worth writing down to be read and repeated. These words are worth recording because they form hope for God's people, hope that God is actively working to take all of creation, including them, back to the beginning.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

What is wrong with the world? I am. However, in Christ, that is being rectified. Sounds great, but it often doesn't match reality, or at least life as I see it. In Christ, I am being righted. By his Spirit I am learning to live as I was meant to live, but the world around me is still a mess. I am still a mess. It is this mess which makes me want to give up. My

mess hurts. It hurts me and others, and it seems, so often, like I will never be free of this mess. When I see where it is headed in what God is doing through Christ, I have hope. Yes, I am still a mess. Yes, the world is still a mess, but God isn't finished. That means the mess I see and am doesn't change where God is taking things. God is involved in a great act of recreation. He didn't create everything all at once. He isn't recreating everything all at once. He is a God who likes to work in process, but this is a process for which I know the ending point. The end is the beginning, everything back to the way it is supposed to be. It is this hope which keeps me moving forward, most days. Some days I really wonder if it is all going anywhere expect down the tubes. In these moments I look to Christ, the resurrected Christ. In him I see the first fruits of what is coming (1 Corinthians 15.20-23). I see what radical transformation looks like, what it looks like to leave the best and remove the worst, how things stay the same and yet are radically different. I see in him living proof of where it is headed and know that the same is being worked out in me, not one day but today (Colossians 3.1-4). I may not be back where I belong, but God is in process today and tomorrow and the next day until he is finished. I know where this is headed, and because of this I have hope, a hope which says I can live today as I was meant to live and will one day live.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

What is wrong with the world? We are. We are out of place, out of the place we were created to fill as worshipers of God. Being out of place puts us out of sorts. The Gospel proclaims that even in this state we have hope. God wants us back because we are his blessed creation, and has made a way possible through Christ. So often this hope seems more like a wish. We and the world around us remain out of place, and it hurts. It hurts so badly that we want to give up. It seems like we will never find our way back. The hope we have in Christ is more than a wish. It is real, a real living hope in the person of Christ. We know where everything is headed, back to the beginning, back to the way it was meant to be. Everything includes us. That means, in Christ, we are headed back to the beginning, back to the

way it was meant to be for us. We have living proof that this is possible in the resurrected life of Christ. In looking to him we see what life can be on the other side of death and all it brings into our lives: pain, sorrow, mourning, and tears, so many tears. It seems impossible, but we have living proof that it can be and will be, even with us. For us, Easter is more than a celebration that a single man defeated death. Easter is a celebration that we too might live, really live in the place we were meant to live. With this hope, we can live this life today. The sorrows of life can be met with joy. Loss can be met with thanksgiving. Pain can be embraced with worship because we know where it is going. We see it in Christ, and he has shared his life with us. This powerful truth, when embraced with conviction can radically change how we move through life. When we understand that reality is not what we see around us but what we see in Christ, our lives can be filled with joy and peace even in the deepest and darkest of experiences. During this season, we encourage you to meditate upon the resurrection of Christ. Consider reading the accounts of the resurrection in the Gospels, noting how Jesus was the same and yet radically transformed when he was resurrected. Consider reading Paul's expansion upon the resurrection and the implications it has upon our lives in 1 Corinthians 15. Meditate and ponder these passages slowly, allowing God to speak to you through Scripture. You can use the instructions found in The Journey on the back of your bulletin as a guide for how to hear God in these texts. Be open to him speaking to you about life as it is meant to be and will be as we see in the resurrected Christ. Allow him to fill you with hope and grace to embrace all of life with the assurance that what is true is what is in Christ, not what is around us.



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