

The Upward Call – Part 2

We're still in the Kingdom of God. Last week we began the series called The Upward Call and this part is divided into two sections. It's creation to cross which I'll finish with today and then next week we'll pick up cross to kingdom. Now in some ways as you've probably already recognized what I'm doing now is taking the tact of giving a brief overview of much of the ground that we've been over. But that's done with a purpose and the purpose is that we not tuck what we shared away as just some theologic knowledge to someday draw from if we perchance should need it. It's to remind us that every aspect of what we're sharing contains an upward call. And if we don't recognize that, we'll not respond to it and if we don't respond to the upward call of all of these aspects of the truth of God, then we will enter a downward spiral. Because as Christians we will either respond to the upward call of life in the Spirit, with Jesus as the basis and steadily progressing towards summing up all things in Jesus; or we will enter the downward spiral of life in the flesh with self as the basis.

So as we went over last week there's an upward call in Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. That tells us where we're to look for the source of truth and where we're to look for the source of all that is of value. So there's an upward call in the awakening to the holiness of God, the other thanness of God; because we'll either respond to the downward spiral of thinking that we can figure this thing out; or we'll respond to the upward call that this other than God wants us to look to Him as the source of all truth. There's an upward call to viewing creation in all its various dimensions of the cosmo, the macro, the micro, the bio, all those components of creation. There's an upward call in eternity that God has placed in our heart. There's an upward call in our observation of the steady deterioration of the human body. There's an upward call in the recognition of the second law of thermodynamics where the physical universe grinds down into simplicity. There's an upward call in our contemplation of death itself; because when we contemplate death, we're reminded that there's a call of eternity that God has placed in our hearts that we're to respond to. There's an upward call in contemplation of the consequences of sin that we see all around us in this fallen world.

There's an upward call in even recognizing what sin is. We need to know what sin is so that we can recognize the upward call in each frame of reference by which sin is addressed. The first frame of reference is truth. Since we correctly began with God in Genesis 1:1, then truth becomes what that holy God of Genesis 1:1 is and how that holy God views everything else. So we look to God for our interpretation of even what reality is; because reality isn't what we see. Reality is what God wants it to be at that particular moment. When we define truth in any way other than what God is and how God views everything else, then we're going to enter the downward spiral thinking that we can come up with a definition of truth that is divorced from this holy God of Genesis 1:1. And then we'll fulfill Romans 1:25, by exchanging the truth of God for a lie.

The second frame of reference is faith. It's self evident that only godliness pleases God and we sin when we do not please God. So since we define truth as being from God, then we have to ask that God what is the reality or how does He view the reality of pleasing

Him? We don't come up with a concoction of man; we look to this holy God Who is truth and let Him tell us what pleases Him. Hebrews 11:6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God. Yet for the most part, human endeavor is built on trying to concoct our own schemes about what God should be pleased with instead of looking at a simple verse of Scripture and letting this holy God Who wrote the book tell us what pleases Him. That's why Romans 14:23 is true – and whatever is not from faith is sin. We sin when we try to please God some way other than walking by faith in what He is and how He views everything else. So there's an upward call in understanding what truth is. There's an upward call in walking by faith in the light of what that truth is.

The third frame of reference is obedience. Obedience is how we fulfill Romans 1:21 and honor Him as God; because so long as we're not in obedience to Him, we're saying that You are not the source of truth or I'll approach You some way other than by faith. Therefore, not obeying You will bring about the greater good than obeying You, which is to leave ourselves in the position of being our own gods. There's no greater oxymoron, that is no greater self contradictory statement than saying, no Lord. If you look at that statement, no Lord, it is an obviously self contradictory statement because if you view Him as Lord, you will never say no to that which He calls you to do. There's an upward call in knowing that truth is what God is and how God views everything else. There's an upward call in knowing that faith is what pleases Him and that what is not of faith is sin because this holy, other than, omniscient, omnipresent God can only be approached by faith by a created lesser being with a peanut brain by comparison with omniscience. So to think that somehow our brains can wrap around this holy God and let our brains concoct a scheme by which we approach Him and please Him is to simply continue in self worship. There's an upward call of obedience, to know that only obedience honors God as God; because Jesus said in Luke 6:46 – Why do you call Me Lord and not do what I say? He's simply pointing out what an oxymoron it is to say, Lord and then do something else.

The last frame of reference is the judge. Who is the judge? Is it me or is it God? This is the frame of reference that gets to the root of all that is sin. We first discovered this, remember, with Adam and Eve when they committed the original sin and ate the forbidden fruit. That was disobedience and we appropriately view it as such. But it was far more than disobedience. They judged God. And it's been the same problem with every human being ever since. In order to disobey, they had to pronounce themselves as judge; and in fact, as the judge of God. They judged that God did not love them. They judged that God was not operating in their best interest. They judged that God was withholding something of great value from them. They judged that God was selfish and wanted to remain the only one with this category of knowledge. They judged that God was lying when He said they would surely die if they disobeyed. Thus, they judged God at every level. They didn't regard Him as the source of truth. They didn't walk by faith in Him and they didn't obey that which He said. And by doing all of those things they judged God which is to position themselves in the status of self determining that they could self determine who is the judge—God or themselves. There's an upward call in that revelation; because the revelation for us is to know that every time that we sin we are judging God. Every time that we declare what truth is in opposition to what He says,

we're judging God. Every time that we walk by faith in anything other than this holy God, we are judging God. Every time that we disobey what He says we are judging God. So that upward call in that revelation should lead us to put the brakes on, declare stop, no more of this, to turn and gaze at this holy God and from that moment on respond to the upward call of all these revelations of what is at the root of sin.

There's an upward call in knowing what sin is including at its root. There's an upward call in knowing the consequences of sin. There's an upward call in knowing that we judge God as the root of every single sin any moment of our lives. But here is the key revelation about the grace of God embodied in that revelation. The purpose of conviction about our sin, including our sin of judging God, is not to put us down. The purpose of the conviction is to call us up. So our God is a God of wrath and terror; but only for those who are not in His Son. But in His Son the purpose of conviction is never to tear us down, it's to call us up, a redeeming purpose so that we're purified, so that we can be accurate reflections of His glory to planet Earth instead of accurate reflections of ourselves onto planet Earth.

Our judging of God, of course, is what sets the stage for His judging of us. Matthew 12:36 – and I say to you that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the Day of Judgment. There are no neutral moments in our lives. Romans 3:23 – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There's an upward call, or should be, in the knowledge of human beings that we will be judged by the holy God. There's an upward call that we'll be judged even for what we would regard as trivial and insignificant things. God doesn't view them as trivial because at every moment we're either declaring His glory and reflecting His glory or we're doing something else. So every moment of our lives is to be judged. Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death. That death, if apart from God, means the lake of fire for all eternity future for every action of a human being that departs from the perfection of God. For each such action, we would have the eternal outer darkness of no communion with God while receiving the fullness of the wrath of God for all eternity. That's how serious God is about declaring His glory.

There's an upward call from the knowledge of sin, from the knowledge of the impending judgment and from the knowledge of the horror of Hell for all eternity because God is that serious about preserving His glory. The upward call from all that is the revelation that should shatter all men in their pride, that a created being cannot stand before a holy God while cloaked in his own righteousness. That is the most hopeless of all human endeavors and the greatest folly of any human being to think that this holy God Who is a consuming fire should somehow be satisfied with our self determined achievement of what we call righteousness before Him. That is the ultimate futility. But there is, again, utility in futility. When one recognizes the absurdity of that, then there's an upward call in the futility of that human position. The upward call is that we need another way to come before this holy God. Without a savior, we are hopeless, we are helpless, and we are helpless to change the fact that it is hopeless all of which represent an upward call of humanity to this creator God.

But as Christians, thank God we are not hopeless. Hebrews 7:26-27 ends with this (speaking of Jesus and what He did on the cross) – for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. That’s why the Gospel is such good news. The good news is in that hopeless condition of humanity standing before a holy God, we have a Savior. And it’s continued good news that we only need one; and it’s good news that we only need that one, one time because this one is God Himself as the Son of God. And this God, Who has saved us, has a name. We do not have an impersonal, vague, nebulous, hazy, theologic abstraction that we call God. This God came to Earth in the form of a man so that we would unmistakably see God. And that’s how we see God, is by looking at Jesus. So it’s always useful to remind ourselves of Who this Jesus is; because every time we don’t walk by God as truth, that we don’t walk by faith in God, but walk by faith in something else, or that we disobey God, we are in some way in that moment diminishing the revelations of Who this Jesus is. Because if we were living in the light of Who this Jesus is, we would not be defining truth some other way; we would not be walking in faith in some other thing, and we would not be disobeying this God.

So when I keep putting this poster up, it’s not to say that I don’t think people can remember; it’s that we still have that tendency to drift back to thinking that somehow we can define what truth is. We can define what obedience should be. We can define what walking by faith really means. But when we drift from this, we will never reflect the light of the world because this is the light of the world that’s more or less summarized on this poster. All of these things taken together tell us and remind us why Jesus is the way, why Jesus is the truth, why Jesus is the life; because if He were not these things, He would not be the way, the truth, and the life. So He is the light of the world; we are now the lights of the world to reveal Him to planet Earth. But we can’t do so if we don’t live in the light of Who the light is. Colossians 1:15 – He is the image of God. Colossians 2:9 – He is the fullness of Deity in bodily form. Hebrews 1:3 – He is the radiance of the glory of God. And remember we more or less described the glory of God as being the eternal, intrinsic, infinite perfections of God. That’s a mouthful but that gets at what the glory of God is and when you look at this, Jesus is the radiance of all of that of God. Hebrews 1:3 also – He is the exact representation of the nature of God. Matthew 1:23 – and they shall call His name Immanuel which means God with us. He is the God man. Matthew 17:5 – This is My beloved Son. He is the Son of God. Hebrews 1:2 – In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son. He is the message that the Father God has for us. John 1:14 – And the Word of God became flesh and dwelled among us. John 14:9 – He who has seen Me has seen the Father. You can’t see the Father except by looking at Jesus. This is the method by which God the Father has declared to us that we will see Him. Now no man can see Him face-to-face because He is a consuming fire. But Jesus suppressed that glory, if you will, came to Earth in the form of a man so we could see the glory of God in a way that wouldn’t consume us in the process. John 10:30 – The Father and I are one. In the mystery of the Trinity, He is the one God. Remember the horizontal axis of the Trinity: Father equals Son equals Holy Spirit.

Can there not be an upward call in this Jesus? Can there not be an upward call in reminding ourselves of Who this Jesus is? Can there not be an upward call in these descriptions of Jesus? We can’t fulfill Matthew 5:14 and be the light of the world unless

we respond to this upward call of the light of the world. There's an upward call in knowing that our purpose, as Christians, is to bring the light of God through His Son to the darkness of this world. There's an upward call in knowing that we're not here to trifle away our lives. There's an upward call in knowing that we are here to reveal this God to the rest of creation.

The upward call continues with the cross of Christ. But I say there is no upward call to the cross of Christ unless we're mindful of Who Christ is. So the cross of Christ will diminish to insignificance to us if we aren't living in the light of Who the Christ is that's on that cross. John 12:32-33 – And I, if I be lifted up from the Earth will draw all men to Myself. And He was saying this, remember, to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die—the cross of Jesus Christ. So this man, the Son of God, Who has been lifted up on His cross will draw all men to Himself. Because of all things that have occurred in human history, the focal point and the focal question is asked by this man basically hanging on this cross. As He said to Peter in Matthew 16:15 – And who do you say that I am? That's the one question that all of humanity has to address. He could not make it any simpler. To reduce the eternal destiny of every human being down to one focal question, what do you say about My Son? How do you regard my Son? Who do you say that My Son is? There's an upward call in that question, even knowing the importance of that question. But that question will have no relevance to us if we aren't phrasing the question in the light of the previous poster about who Jesus is. Men try to say all sorts of things about who this Jesus is. They try to say all things about who He is, but they cannot. Remember, they try to say that He's a good man, a great man, a great teacher, a great philosopher, a moral man, a prophet, a great prophet, the greatest prophet. But none of those things are proper answers nor proper perspective about the question. The upward call of who Jesus is does not allow us any of those answers. And you'll recognize, being Bible students, that I'm quoting C. S. Lewis who explained that Jesus is one of three things. He is either the greatest con artist who ever lived; or He is a total psychotic who lived His life in major delusions; or He is Who He said that He was. So in C. S. Lewis' short form, He's either liar, lunatic, or Lord. Jesus does not leave you with the option of damning Him with faint praise by saying nice things about Him. That is not one of the choices. And remember we get to choose; but we don't get to choose what the choices are and we don't get to choose the consequences of the choices.

There's an upward call coming from this holy God of Genesis 1:1 Who so overtly and simply requires an answer to the question, who do you say that I am? Am I a fable? Am I totally evil? Am I full of lies? Am I totally delusional as a psychotic divorced from reality or totally who I say that I am, the Son of God Who came to be the Lamb of God to pay the price for the sins of the world? No man can escape answering that question, who do you say that I am? And all men related that one question will either enter the upward call of that question or enter the downward spiral of the wrong answer to that question. So, of course, you respond to the upward call of that question from the mouth of Jesus by saying You are Lord; You are Who You say You are because You are truth because truth is what God is and how God views everything else. And You came as God, the Son of God to reveal to us, tell us and model for us so that we can see God, how God views everything else. So You are truth and since You are truth, You are Who You say You

are. You'll either do that or you will enter the downward spiral by saying You are a liar or You are a lunatic or You are anything less than or different from that which You have said You are. A focal question—and there's no greater upward call to humanity and even to us as Christians as we walk out the Christian life by asking ourselves every moment of our lives who am I saying that He is at this very moment? So if you want to be shaken out of lethargy, if you want to be shaken out of lukewarmness, if you want to be shaken out of the malaise and the plateau of Christian life, it's to live life every moment in the light of the question, who am I saying that this Jesus is at this very moment? There's an upward call in asking yourself that question constantly.

Well then remember we went through holiness and sin and judgment and then came to the cross. We began that by looking at the God man in the garden. So we shouldn't forget that amazing struggle of the two aspects of this God man in the Garden of Gethsemane. The travail in the garden prior to the cross gives clarity to both aspects of the God man. There's an upward call in a form in that because we are God men also; not in the sense that He was as the one Son of God, but we are not mere men either because Paul chastised the Christians for behaving like mere men because we aren't mere men. We're the temple of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God lives within us. So how can we be mere men when we have that within us? Matthew 26:38 – Jesus says My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death. Luke 22:44 – And being in agony He was praying very fervently and His sweat became like drops of blood falling down upon the ground. That travail at what He was about to endure as He contemplated the cross led Him to say in Matthew 26:39 – My Father if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. But it wasn't possible because He was here to fulfill the prophecies of God about coming to pay the price for the sins of man as the Lamb of God to be our redeemer. That's travail. Can you imagine being under the travail to the point of that kind of grief and agony to where drops of blood are flowing out of your body? And that was before the cross. But even under the pressure of that travail, Matthew 26:39, He uttered – Yet not My will, but Thine be done. And it's going to be the same way for us. We're either going to be wanting to escape suffering in this material realm as our primary consideration or we're going to want to bring glory to God in the midst of whatever suffering may take place in this material physical world.

The faith of the Son of God in the Father God in that circumstance was not in escaping agony and not being excused from suffering, not in designing His own preferred plan; but His primary drive was to fulfill the purposes of God and if the purposes of God could be fulfilled by not having to drink from this cup, then good. I'll escape the suffering. But if the purposes of My God cannot be fulfilled when I rush to escape this suffering, not My will but Thine be done because I'm here to accomplish Your purposes not to live a pleasant comfortable life in this physical realm. For us, of course, the upward call is summarized in Jesus' statement: deny self, take up our cross and follow Jesus. Just like Jesus, we're called to be Christlike; so we observe Christ to see what it means to be Christlike. So in the Garden of Gethsemane He denied self and took up His cross and followed the will of His Father to perfection. There's an upward call in observing that kind of struggle of the God man at the travail that was awaiting Him, the man wanting to avoid it, but the Son of God doing it to satisfy the plan and purposes and will of the

Father to redeem mankind; because it will be that way for us in our suffering. We look at suffering as something to be avoided but there will be times in your life when the suffering is there and your call is to reveal the glory of God by manifesting Christlikeness into that situation to model for those around you that there is a God, that His purposes, His plan, and His character, His calling transcend anything that takes place in this physical realm. And I yield to that plan no matter what is happening over here in this physical material frame of reference.

Luke 23:28 – Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and your children. Stop weeping for me; because I am perfectly fulfilling My entire purpose for leaving the glory of Heaven and coming to Earth in the form of a man to live a sinless life to go to the cross as the Lamb of God to redeem mankind, to display the grace of God for generations to come, for ages to come. So don't weep for Me as I fulfill this purpose. Weep for yourselves and your children that you do not know Who I am, that you must remain in this fallen world, that you're not assured of your salvation for eternity future with Me, that your sin put Me in this position, and that you have cursed your own children by saying in Matthew 27:25 – His blood be on us and on our children. There's an upward call embodied in that to us to never want to lead one of these little ones astray by declaring that Jesus is anything other than Who He said that He was. There's an upward call in knowing that we have many reasons to weep here on planet Earth for ourselves and our children. We have no reason to weep for this Jesus Who perfectly fulfilled the plan of God to redeem the world. The Father is well pleased with His Son. The Father is well pleased when we respond to the upward call of His Son to have that attitude in the midst of our suffering.

So, no, don't weep for Jesus; but weep for ourselves and our children. We do so because there are times that we will refuse to respond to the upward call of this Jesus, including on His cross. And instead enter the downward spiral, revealing that He is less than He said He was, thinking that He is less than He said He was, modeling for our children that we think He's less than He said He was; and thus, potentially lead these little ones astray. Oh, the heart of any parent would be quickened at the revelation that what awaits a child who is missing the testimony of Jesus in their lives to think that the primary purpose of parents, the way I would look at it, is to be Earthen vessels to bring this God's grace, through Jesus Christ, to the children. So why would we for any moment want to build our lives on something other than revealing to these little ones the proper view of Who this Jesus is? There's an upward call in all of that for parents.

Luke 23:34 – Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. But notice, remember, that we are still accountable even for what we do not know. We like to focus on being accountable for what we do know and deny that we're accountable for what we do not know. Jesus didn't say excuse them; He said forgive them; because excuse would mean they are not going to be held accountable. But forgive means they are being held accountable and my precious blood is going to be required to pay for that sin. They did not know what they were doing because throughout their lives they would not know what they were doing; because all any man has to do, apart from the witness of the Word of God, apart from the witness of Christians, is to look at creation and see the holy God of

Genesis 1:1 Who's written His name across the universe to make every man accountable before Him for that revelation alone. So they did not know because they would not know. There's an upward call for us in knowing that sin is not excused. They would not know God because they would not know all the testimony that He had given of Himself, including Who Jesus had said that He was during His time on planet Earth. There's an upward call in knowing that sin is never to be excused, but forgiven and forgiven only because the price was paid one time in one event by a priceless thing called the blood of the Son of God. There's an upward call in looking at what they did not know because it's also what we did not know and what the unsaved around us still do not know.

What did we not know? We didn't know His holiness. So we didn't know our sin. We didn't know that truth was how God views reality. We didn't know that what is not of faith is sin. We didn't know that every disobedience is to refuse to honor Him as God. We didn't know the full extent of our depraved natures. We didn't know the audacity required to stand before a holy God cloaked in our own righteousness. We didn't know that we were constantly stealing His glory. We didn't know that we worshipped a lesser God than what He truly is. We didn't know of our need of a Savior. We didn't know how big of a Savior we needed. We didn't know of our destiny in Hell apart from Him. We didn't know the fullness of the horror of Hell. We didn't know that we sought to annul His judgment so that we could declare ourselves as justified every step along the way. We didn't know that we constantly judge God every moment of our lives. We didn't know that we were playing a role in crucifying Him because our sin is why He was on that cross. We didn't know that all the while He was interceding for us saying, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. So there's an upward call in all of those revelations; because the veiled still do not know; and the veiled are who we were; and thus serve as our present reminder of the grace of God poured out on us. There's an upward call in knowing how amazing that grace is. There's an upward call in knowing that His grace covers what we did not know. It covers what we still do not know and it covers the rest of humanity and the rest of humanity desperately needs to know this grace that they're not availing themselves of. And there's an upward call in knowing that we are the Earthen vessels to bring this grace to the rest of humanity who still does not know.

Luke 23:43, spoken to the thief – Truly I say you today you shall be with Me in Paradise. Remember this thief had been cursing Him; but this thief then made the following statement. Luke 23:42 – Jesus remember me when You come in Your kingdom to which Jesus said today you will be with Me in Paradise. There's an upward call in knowing that all of humanity follows the course of one of these two thieves on either side of Jesus. You either say that He's coming in His kingdom and I want to be remembered or you operate in no fear of the Lord and turn and continue in your self righteous declaration. II Corinthians 11:3 – Do not be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. You see, God did not make it complicated. God is relentless. It is true. Love is relentless. Truth is relentless. He is relentless, but He keeps it simple. So He is simply relentless; but He is also relentlessly simple so that we don't miss it based on complexity. Anything that makes the Gospel of Jesus Christ complicated is a downward spiral. Anything that adds to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a downward spiral. Anything other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a downward spiral. Anything that reduces Jesus to less

than Who He said He was is a downward spiral. We need to see the upward call embodied in all those aspects as this Jesus working through us as Earthen vessels is revealing Himself to the rest of humanity. So we will respond to His upward call or we will remain in a downward spiral, producing dead works, dead testimony, dead abundant life, dead churches, and so on. That is our choice. So as Paul would say, may it never be that we would continue that downward spiral. May it never be that we as Christians would refuse the upward call of revealing God through His Son to planet Earth and be a bearer of our own image by projecting self onto planet Earth rather than a bearer of His image to reveal Him on planet Earth.

That is the upward call and we'll pick it up there next time. If you're not getting the idea, there's an upward call.