

Welcome

One of the great classics of science fiction is 2001: A Space Odyssey. It was released in 1968, and was a collaboration between film legend Stanley Kubrick and sci-fi author Arthur C. Clarke. In the film, essentially humans discover that super-intelligent aliens have been guiding human evolution for millions of years.

[Still of money with bone] The opening sequence of the film is one of the most famous in history. It opens on a group of apes struggling to survive. They're chased from their watering hole by another group of stronger apes, and awaken the next day to find a massive obelisk standing outside their cave (it's clearly alien). The apes fearfully touch it. In the next scene, one of the apes is walking among some bones, when he picks one up and realizes he can use it as a tool. (This is where the iconic score comes in.) The apes, now armed with bone tools, return to the watering hole and kill the leader of the other apes with their bone tools. As they screech in triumphant celebration, the lead ape throws his bone high into the air. It turns over and over... and dissolves into a spaceship in the distant future of 2001.

This is the moment that solidifies the meaning of the scene: the obelisk was sent to earth by unknown aliens to jumpstart human evolution. What began with a bone hammer has become, by the future of the movie, space shuttles. By the end of the film, the lead character has encountered another obelisk that triggers another stage in human evolution - he becomes the star child. (yeah it's weird)

2001: A Space Odyssey embodies what we can call the myth of progress - the idea that the narrative of human history is one of constant improvement. Of course, most people don't think hyper-intelligent aliens are responsible for our advancements. Most of us think we're going to figure everything out on our own. We'll cure disease and solve poverty and even death itself.

Promise of progress assures us that the good life is just over the horizon. All we have to do is... do a little more. Work a little harder. Put in a few more hours. Get into a few more activities. And THEN we'll have it made. How could we not? What makes life better isn't waiting for God to speak, then responding, but working, earning, achieving. Progress is the key to the good life.

Today, I want to challenge that assumption. I want to pick at the bedrock of progress we've built our culture on. We'll find it's not so sturdy, that progress doesn't actually pay off like we hope it will. And we'll find that what makes us fully human isn't a little more effort, but a freedom to love and be loved we only find in God.

The good news today is that the climactic event in human history isn't ahead of us, but behind us. The work is already over. There's a tremendous freedom we find in life with God. So let's celebrate that freedom and peace this morning!.

Message

This is the season of Eastertide, when we explore the implications of Jesus' resurrection. We ask, "What has this new world made possible?" This year, our series is called Strangers in a Strange Land, which is a

take on a classic sci-fi story. Throughout this series, we're exploring various sci-fi visions of the future. Sci-fi often offers visions of a better world that are based on human achievement. In this series, we're challenging those visions and the assumption that we are able on our own of making a brave new world.

We're comparing these sci-fi stories to the letter we call 1 Peter. This is a letter written to early Christians about what it means to be Christians in a culture hostile to Christianity (strangers in a strange land, if you will). Peter is convinced, as we'll see again today, that what's making the world better is *not* human effort, but the work of the Spirit, through the Church, in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection.

So let's talk about Progress. Progress is a way of viewing time - one that assumes time had a beginning and is going somewhere. Most people in history didn't see time as going somewhere. They saw time as circular - following the cycle of the seasons. The future will look a lot like the past.

But we see time as linear. It had a beginning and it's going somewhere. Tomorrow is going to be *better* than yesterday. It's important to note that the Scriptures also have a linear view of time. Time had a beginning - when God spoke the world into existence - and the world is going somewhere. God is making all things new, a process that began when Jesus was raised from the dead.

The big question facing us is: who's in charge here? Who's making the world better? The Myth of Progress says it's all on us. It's the assumption that a bone becomes a hammer becomes a wheel becomes a chariot becomes a car becomes a plane becomes a spaceship becomes somehow the salvation of the human race.

[Scripture Slide] The good news of the Scriptures is that it's not on us. Turn with me to 1 Peter chapter one. Last week, we saw that Peter wrote to a group of early Christians who were suffering because they didn't follow the way of Rome. Their choice to follow Jesus made them strangers in their own world. Peter offered first words of comfort to them, assuring them that their suffering was not accidental or unnoticed by God, but rather was a refining pain that was making them fit to live in God's new world.

We're going to pick up right where we left off last week. I want to read verses 17-23 with you, then work back through to pick out several of the ways Peter's words challenge the myth of Progress. As we read, listen for how Peter understands God's work in our lives:

And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents." For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake.

Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. -- 1 Peter 1:17-23

How does Peter challenge the myth of Progress? In several ways. He begins by observing that God doesn't play favorites. Progress plays favorites - it says that new is better, that hard work is what makes us valuable. So people who work hard are worth more. (And we assume that people who have more worked harder, which we all know isn't actually always true!)

But Peter wants to make very clear that God doesn't rescue us because of how good we are, how hard we work, or anything of the sort. In fact, the ransom God paid for us - his own life - demonstrates that our worth as people is, as he says, 'far more than mere gold or silver.'

This worth comes not from our efforts or our morality. It's essential to our nature. We are created in the image of an infinite God, so we have infinite worth. In God's kingdom, we are worthy not because we have earned worthiness, but because we bear God's image. God demonstrated the infinite worth of every human by dying for us.

Again and again, Peter insist that God is the actor, the mover, the one implementing the plan that began before the world was even created, a plan that came to fruition when God raised Jesus from the dead.

The resurrection is the antidote to our addiction to Progress. The Church has confessed from the beginning not that Jesus rose from the dead, but that Jesus *was raised* from the dead. In his humanity, Jesus was as powerless as any of us is in the grave. His resurrection wasn't a result of his efforts or holiness but of God intervening in human history, beginning to make all things new.

Jesus' resurrection is the turning point in a different story of humanity, one that insists that we're not defined by how hard we work or how much we accomplish, but by allowing God to make us into the people we were created to be.

The Church spread like wildfire across the Roman empire not because the first disciples were amazing preachers or strategic missionaries but because the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead was alive and at work in them.

The resurrection proves the world isn't about us. It's God's story.

This can actually be scary for us to realize. We like the myth of Progress, particularly in religion. We want a God who gives us bootstraps but then insists we pull ourselves up. We like Progress because *we're* in charge. Progress has convinced us we make pretty good captains. If I get better, it's because I worked hard. And if bad stuff happens, at least I know who to blame. If Progress is god, then I'm either on the right side of history, or I'm not. But either way, it's *up to me*. We like to be in control.

But Peter reminds us that God rescues us. That it's through faith in Jesus we're restored to our full humanity. We're not steering the salvation ship - that's God and God alone. That's good news, because again and again, God has demonstrated how faithful and trustworthy he is.

[Cross with "It is Finished"] Friends, the good news of Easter is that God has done all the hard work to restore us to our full humanity. We don't have to work harder. We *can't* work harder. If you think doing more will do anything, you're diminishing the work of the Cross. And who among us could work harder than the Cross?

This is *good news*. We don't have to earn anything. It's not about how good you are, how pretty you are, how smart you are, how hard you try.

What matters is that God raised Jesus from the dead as the beginning of a new reality, a new way to be human. And now the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is alive and at work in us.

We don't earn, work or deserve. All we do is respond.

So let me ask you a question: where do you think you can't afford to take a break? Where are you tired, but you're convinced if you skip or step away or hit pause it's all going to fall apart?

That's the god of Progress whispering in your ear. Work harder. Do more. You're almost there.

But friends, that's a false promise. The horizon of hard work is always moving, just another day away. We're living a bad story, a story that says we're good enough on our own to turn bones into hammers into spaceships into salvation. But God tells us we're image-bearers. Our call is not to rush headlong into an unknown future, but to follow God, to reflect God's image to the world in love.

God has done the work. You don't have to earn or achieve. You can simply receive God's good gift, respond to the world around you in love.

We're going to talk more about how we do that, but our first response to this good news is to approach the communion table.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] The climactic moment of human history isn't something out in front of us that we need spaceships to get to. God's idea of the climax of human history isn't progress at all. It's something

that happened 2000 years ago, and it's not something we work for, but something we receive. God's idea of progress isn't about us living longer or accomplishing more, it's about teaching our hearts to be like God's heart of love.

1. Where are you afraid or unwilling to take a break?
2. What would it look like for you to hit pause in that area?

Assignment/Blessing

The practice of Sabbath is given to us to resist the siren song of Progress. Sabbath is a divine waste of time - it's doing things that are explicitly non-productive. So maybe you keep your phone off for a whole day. Maybe you let your kids pick your agenda for the day. Maybe you cook a big meal and invite some friends over (that's my personal favorite).

God insists on the practice of Sabbath because of how easily we're lured into thinking our value comes from what we accomplish or earn. Sabbath is how we stop and remember our worth comes not from our tools and our efforts, but from the plain fact that we bear God's image.

I dare you to observe a Sabbath this week. (If you don't know where to start, grab our Spiritual Practices guide on the way out). I dare you to stop, just for a day, and see how the world keeps right on spinning. When you stop, here's what you'll find: the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is at work in and around you. The Spirit is making all things new - not us. Let Sabbath reframe how we see ourselves, how we interact with our friends and family, how we see even the work we do.

Go waste some time and see what God does.