

## Magnificent Ruins...

### HE IS RISEN!

If you were to give the Bible a title, I think a very good one might be “Magnificent Ruins!” It seems to me that is the story of God as told in his words. The story begins with some of the most profound words ever written: “In the beginning God created....” (Genesis 1 v1)

This is a statement that rocked the world! Here is the beginning of a story to replace all other stories. Here is a story that puts God at the beginning. Here is a story that places God above everything that is known. Here is the story of God, and in this story, God creates.

He creates a magnificent world with sky and sea, and land and birds and animals and plants and fish, day and night. The pinnacle of this magnificent creation is the people who are made in the image of God himself. Male and female, he created them, and when he had finished his creation, God looked at all he had made and it was very good.

God gave man and woman his world as a gift to live in and enjoy. In the beginning God created a magnificent world and it was very good.

The serpent was craftier than all the other animals and he sowed doubt in the minds of Adam and Eve. He sowed doubt about God’s goodness: “Did God really say...?” He appealed to their pride: “You will be like God!” He flattered them and they fell for his flattery.

Sin shattered the world. God’s magnificent creation was in ruins. In perhaps one of the hardest conversations God has ever had, when he searched for Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, he said: “You were not meant for this!” Sin has its consequences and God’s dream lay in ruins! But God’s story was not over. God created because He loves and love never fails, and God did not give up on his magnificent creation.

God created because he wanted to share his love with others. God created because he wanted to share relationship with others. God created because he wanted others to know and experience the joy he has himself, in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And God did not give up on his dream of knowing and being known by those he loves and created.

Creation lies in ruins, but it is magnificent ruins because God is at work. God is at work to love, to cherish, to restore, to heal, to win back those he created. God is at work when he chooses Abraham to become the father of a nation. God is at work when he chooses Israel, the smallest and most insignificant of people to be a light to the gentiles. God is at work when he performs a miraculous rescue of Israel from Egypt. God is at work as he people miraculously cross the sea to escape the Egyptians. God is at work in their many years of wandering in the desert providing them every day with just what they need. God is at work as they enter the land that he promised he would give them – a land flowing with milk and honey.

God is at work in the ruins: loving, wooing, helping, caring, leading, guiding. God tries everything to win his people, those he loves, those in ruins.

Love never fails: it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres – and God gave his excellent best.

Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2 v 11)

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross. (Philippians 2 v 6-8)

God came to us, to those he loves, pitched his tent with us and did life with us. God is at work in the ruins; loving, wooing, helping, caring, leading, guiding.

God is at work in the ruins, taking the extraordinary risk of letting his only son be born as a man. God is at work as a young Jewish couple become parents of the saviour of the world. God is at work as Jesus lives and grows among the people he created.

God is at work as Jesus walks among the people, going from town to town. God is at work as Jesus is confronted by demons, set to ruin the lives of those

they possess, as he disarms them and casts them out. God is at work when he stops and reaches out his hand to touch a leper, an unclean outcast, whom nobody else will touch. God is at work when he tells a paralysed man, brought to him by his friends on his mat, and lowered down through the roof, to get up and walk. God is at work when he invites a crowd to a picnic of 5 loaves and 2 fish, where he breaks the bread and, in that one act they all understand perfectly, welcomes them to his table. God is at work as he raises a boy who has died, the only son of a widow, powerfully demonstrating he makes what is dead, alive, what is unclean, clean.

God is at work as he welcomes a tax collector, one of the most despised and unpopular people of the time, powerfully showing that anyone is welcome in his kingdom. God is at work as Jesus accepts children and invites them to come to him, even though others try to stop them. God is at work as Jesus tells stories and parables that leave the people astonished and wondering. God is at work as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and as the crowds wave their palm branches and shout: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

God is at work in the ruins: loving, wooing, helping, caring, leading, guiding. God is at work in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus asks if there is any other way but the cross.

God is at work as he is beaten and whipped and put on trial. God is at work as Jesus carries his cross, literally to the place of his execution.

God is at work in the ruins; loving, wooing, helping, caring, leading, guiding.

God is at work as Jesus cries from the cross: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" God is at work as Jesus speaks his last words: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." And then he died.

According to John's gospel Jesus last words were: "It is finished!" Maybe the people really thought it was – finished, that is. They'd watched other would-be messiahs come and go. They'd watched other would-be messiahs crucified. Maybe it was over, again: "It is finished!" Maybe Jesus' claim to be the king of a different kingdom was really just that – a claim. Maybe he'd fooled them with tricks and clever stories and maybe a bit of magic.

The people, it seems, thought so. The authorities hoped so. Even the disciples thought it may be so. Everything in ruins, all those hopes and dreams, but God

was at work in the ruins, and he was about to do something extraordinarily magnificent.

**24** On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. <sup>2</sup>They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup>but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup>While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. <sup>5</sup>In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? <sup>6</sup>He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: <sup>7</sup>‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” <sup>8</sup>Then they remembered his words, (Luke 24 v 1-8)

The ruins of the cross had become something magnificent.

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;  
<sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2 v 6-11)

God was at work in the ruins of the cross to tell his magnificent story. The story of his great and magnificent love, love for all people, love for you and me. The story of just how far God was willing to go to demonstrate his love for us. The story of love that simply never gives up and never runs out. It's the story in which the cross most fully reveals the character of the one who loves. The one who loves you because he loves you because he loves you...

It's the story of your unsurpassable worth in the eyes of the one who loves you. It's the story of the one for whom to love you more is, simply, impossible. It's the story of the one who loves you in exactly the same way he loves his one and only son. It's the story of the truth that you are loved with the very same love that God eternally is. And, it's the story that tells you, you will always be loved this way.

Some people thought it was finished. Some people hoped it was finished. Some people feared it was finished. Maybe some people still do. Maybe you are one of them. God's story is the story of magnificent ruins, and God was still at work in the ruins of the cross. God still loves you, wants to woo you, longs to help you and care for you, to lead you and guide you.

It's been a tough year by any standard. Most of us, if not all of us, have struggled in ways we never would have imagined would become reality. Maybe, for some of us, we feel in one way or another life has been ruined. Maybe, for some of us, we feel a part of life lies in ruins. Maybe, for some of us, we've carried a part of our life that is in ruins for a long time. Maybe, for some of us, as we look forward, we face what, right now, appears like a future, ruined.

The story of the Bible, God's story, is the story of magnificent ruins. It's the story of the one who is always at work, and does some of his very best work in the ruins. It is in the ruins that God heals and restores. It is in the ruins that God inspires and encourages. It is in the ruins that God leads and guides. And it is in the ruins that God meets us with his great and magnificent love. God's greatest desire for you is for you to be loved and to love and to know this love.

### *Pearls*

*The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. With her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mummy. Can I have them? Please, Mummy, please!"*

*Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$ 2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."*

*As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbour and asked Mrs McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace.*

*Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere – Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.*

*Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"*

*"Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."*

*"Then give me your pearls."*

*"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess – the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favourite."*

*"That's ok, Honey, Daddy love you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.*

*About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?"*

*"Daddy, you know I love you."*

*"Then give me your pearls."*

*"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."*

*"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you." And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.*

*A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. "What is it Jenny? What's the matter?" Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her*

*daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure.*

*So much like our heavenly Father.*

If you will give God your ruins, he will give you his life, his love, his grace and mercy and he will give you his peace. God will still be at work until one fine day, he will come to you.... until one bright hour, when he will gather you to himself and everything will be new.

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