

The Story: Creation...The Beginning of Life

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Date: 08 September 2019

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[0 : 00] So this morning we're launching into our sermon series on the story, and I've talked about this for weeks to come. Essentially, the story covers the main narrative of Scripture from Genesis to, you guessed it, Revelation.

We'll be doing that over the course of 31 sermons, between now and May 2020. So people are saying to me, are you crazy? Yes, I am.

And at times we'll even have guests come and preach in this series, because this is important stuff. You know, ever since I was little, I've always loved a good story.

Heroes and villains, adventure, conflict and resolution. The occasional romance, it's better now, it used to be bleh.

But a sense of justice being served, a sense of the good guys winning. It's probably why I love the book and film series like The Lord of the Rings.

[1 : 03] The Star Wars movies, the Marvel movies. These amazing stories of good versus evil. Of good guys and bad guys. And there's something truly compelling about a great story, isn't there?

Good pacing and character development, to be technical. Tension, action, drama, are some of the critical elements that make a story truly great.

And of course, as a pastor, you assume that I have to say this. But I really believe that one of the greatest stories, or actually collection of stories, humanity has ever or will ever have, is the Bible.

When we hear the word story, I think we tend to make the assumption that what we're hearing is fiction. Don't we? Oh, let me tell you a story. Or sometimes it's embellished.

Oh, have I got a story for you. But we may tend to associate story, that word, with phrases like once upon a time. Or a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.

[2 : 17] But in the case of scripture, it's important that we recognize that the majority of the content we find there is non-fiction. It's historical fact.

Aside from parables, aside from some apocalyptic literature like Revelation, it is fact, folks. I believe we have a tendency to read the Bible as though, as well, it's someone else's stories.

Right? Someone else's history. Someone else's truth. As a professor of mine used to say, sometimes I think we feel like we're reading someone else's mail when we're reading the Bible.

Oh, we shouldn't read this. This isn't for us. It's absolutely for us. The Bible is the story of God's people. And for people who follow Christ today, here and now, it is our story as well.

God is obviously the central character of the grand story of the Bible. It really is all about him and his desire to be in relationship with his people.

[3 : 34] Throughout our series on the story, you'll hear me refer to the upper story and the lower story from time to time. And to give you an understanding, the upper story is how God is at work.

Since the beginning of time, throughout history, through and for his people. And the lower story, don't make position make you feel bad.

The lower story is our story. And it can be often confusing or difficult, can't it? Our story. This is where the words that I've used with you previously, the way it is now, is not how it's meant to be. That's what, that's a theme of the lower story. It's in the lower story where we mess up, where we make mistakes, where we learn to apply the big truths of God.

And you'll recognize that often as we live our lives in the lower story, particularly as we face challenges and opportunities. We often begin to ask upper story questions.

[4 : 44] Where is God? Why is this happening to me? Does God really love me or even care?

Lower story questions asked about the bigger story, the upper story. In the book of Genesis, we see a harmony and unity between the upper story and the lower story.

As God creates humanity and humanity loves God in return. The upper and lower stories only diverge when man sins.

The rest of scripture is then devoted to how God, in the upper story, is relentlessly pursuing humanity. Trying to win them back.

Letting humanity know that he loves us. Guiding us back. And demonstrating his great love for us.

[5 : 49] That, my friends, is the upper story. God's sovereign love and sovereign control over everything in creation. When we consider the Bible, a systematic approach is definitely a solid way to explore it.

So, as Julie Andrews says in the movie *The Sound of Music*, let's start at the very beginning. A very good place to start. Our sermon this morning is titled, *Creation, The Beginning of Life.*

In the Beginning. The beginning of our journey through the story of the Bible is like the beginning of an action-packed movie. If you miss the opening minutes of a movie with its fast-paced scenes, you'll likely not understand the rest of the story.

Or you won't have the context. And it's the same with the Bible's grand story. The story opens in the book of Genesis with a big bang.

Now, this is not, don't panic, this is not the big bang of evolutionary theory I'm talking about.

Although I believe that's possibly how it could have happened. But we can have that conversation over coffee.

[7 : 06] But the big bang of the revelation of God is what I'm talking about here. The revelation of God who is the main character of our story. In the beginning, God.

I have a question for you. Does our understanding of God begin at Genesis 1-1? Or do we think about the fact, or even try to process the fact, that God existed in infinity and eternity before those words were ever written?

Before creation as we know it even took place, as it's recorded in the Bible in the book of Genesis. Let's be clear on that.

God didn't somehow arrive on the scene or show up at the beginning of Genesis. He was always there and he always will be there.

In the beginning, God. Genesis opens and the main character steps forward in a very intentional and personal way.

[8 : 21] The Bible opens in the book of Genesis with the big bang of creation. And the Bible says in Genesis 1-1, let's read this together.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. This initial act of creation was not an impersonal accident, but an intentional action taken with creative purpose by a personal God.

The days of creation unfold both poetically and artistically as an intentional, creative, tender, and loving God creates places.

Days 1-2 and 3 set the stage with places created by God. Light and dark. Sky and water.

And land. We see boundaries created here as well. Not boundaries to restrict, but to give purpose and context.

[9 : 30] Then in days 4, 5, and 6, those places that God has created are then filled with the things for which those spaces were specifically created.

The big bang of creation concludes with the most important of the created ones and the focus of God's core passion. Humanity.

The Bible says in Genesis 1-26-27, let's read this together. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

And as you've maybe heard, when God created woman, the reason she's called woman is God created her and said, Oh, man! Ha ha ha. So we see here that at the center of all creation, the core of God's core passion is human beings.

[10 : 56] Lots of translations say mankind, but I like to say human beings better. It's a little more inclusive. But let's consider this for a moment. Consider the beauty of all creation.

Everything. Vern talked about his meteor shower experience on the mountaintop. Mountains, rivers, vast forests and oceans, deserts that stretch on for miles and miles.

Eagles, lions, whales, sparrows, camels, armadillos, kangaroos. My friends, all the beauties of creation are secondary to you.

Do you need a minute? That should be both extremely humbling and a really huge self-esteem booster.

So if you take nothing away from today, and you might not, remember that. God's supreme passion has been to be with us at all costs.

[12:14] But then, as we so often do as humans, we felt, I think we can do better. Somehow we can be more important in ourselves and in our own position than in the place and position that God has put us.

Can you relate to that? The Bible story continues in Genesis with the big bang now of the fall of Adam and Eve.

We recognize, we need to recognize something important here, that Adam and Eve were created from the very beginning with the freedom to choose.

Well, he certainly could have. Maybe you've thought about this. God did not force them to love him. God does not force us to need him or want him or love him.

But we do. It's at this point that we recognize the tale of two trees. Let's read this together.

[13:29] And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Continuing in verse 17, we read God's command.

But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it, you will surely die. Given the freedom to choose, and a little encouragement from Satan, Adam and Eve made their choice.

Most of us can likely relate to this in some way. Whether we remember it as children ourselves or as parents, we love our children.

We want to protect them. But we also want them to make their own choices in life. So we tell them that it's not a good idea to do something.

[14:37] We lay out clear consequences. And then they go ahead and do it anyway. Adam and Eve thought they knew better.

They rebelled against God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God's perfect plan to be with people was ruined.

We've barely begun the story. And already we see that break in harmony between the upper story and the lower story.

And over the coming weeks, we'll see how the rest of the Bible is about God's pursuit to get us back. We blew it and he still wants us.

Throughout the Bible story, we'll see how it reports the big bang of the damage of sin to the human race.

[15:41] Because Adam and Eve chose a different vision than God's vision, sin became a fundamental part of their spiritual DNA.

And then they went and produced more sinners, right? In Genesis 4 to 9, through the stories of Cain and Abel and Noah, we see sin and the sin nature continue to permeate humanity over and over.

But then through Noah, God presents the first do-over. The first covenant or mulligan, if Len likes that expression better.

We're talking golf this morning and how much I hate it. The first covenant, that first do-over by which God seeks to restore harmony between himself and humanity comes through Noah.

While God passed judgment on humanity and the floodwaters come, God still demonstrates his love and faithfulness through a rainbow.

[17:00] A visual sign of a binding covenant that gives humanity a second chance. You can define a rainbow however you want.

This is how I choose to define it. The flood erased the wicked human race, but it did not remove that sin nature from Noah's family and his descendants.

The Bible says in Genesis 9, 20 to 23, let's read this together. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard.

When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside.

But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders. Then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so they would not see their father's nakedness.

[18:09] I was reading that and I thought, what? What is going on here? There's so much at work here. The Bible doesn't condemn, for those of you who like to have a glass of wine, the Bible doesn't condemn either making or drinking wine.

But being drunk and naked in this context are certainly not great examples of a man who has been declared righteous and a man who certainly knew better.

Then Noah's son Ham essentially just walks into his father's tent. He shows none of the respect that a son should show his father. Once he sees his father is passed out and naked, rather than covering him up, which would have been the right thing for the eldest son to do, we get the sense that he essentially goes out to his brothers and says, guys, check this out, and brings them in with him.

Yikes. The whole situation is just messy. And it seems to suggest that sin still plagues humanity. Even so soon after the flood and God's new covenant, we're getting it wrong again.

But even in this big bang of sin, the Bible story offers a clue to salvation. After Adam and Eve have sinned and become aware of their nakedness, they made fig leaf clothing to cover themselves.

[19:44] Then God took away the fig leaves and covered them with the skins of animals whose lives had been given, sacrificed, so that Adam and Eve's sin could be covered.

My friends, that's our clue to salvation here already. The restoration of that unity between the upper and lower stories.

For God to restore the vision that human beings are his supreme passion, to restore that vision will require the shedding of blood.

This morning, as we've explored the creation story, I hope that you've been reminded of an important truth.

Remember what I said near the beginning, that all of creation, everything, was created with you in mind and for you.

[20:52] I hope that you've been reminded of an important truth and that is the value of all human beings. Hear me in those words.

The value of all human beings. And also the importance, your importance, to God.

He wants to be with you. Think about that. You. Personally.

He wants to be with you. At great cost to God, he has done everything possible to get you back.

Because you are that valuable to him. My prayer for each of us this morning is that we are constantly reminded that the true source of our value, our self-esteem, lies not in what we think of ourselves or even of what those who are important to us in our lives think of us.

[22:10] True self-esteem begins by believing what God says about you. I created all things.

But even more than that, I created you. I know you. I see you. You are loved.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you so much that you love us. that you created us not by accident but with intention.

And Father, as we begin to explore the nature of the upper story and the lower story and your love for us and your desire to be with us, you will speak to us clearly in the way that each of us need to hear that message.

Father, thank you again for your word. Thank you for each one who is here this morning. I pray that you would guide them and protect them as they go out into their week.

[23:18] Bless them and remind them that they are loved by you. We pray these things in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.