

Telling the Story that Makes Sense of All Other Stories - Part 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2016

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] Tell me a story, Grandpa. Nearly every one of our grandchildren has made that request many times, as did their parents when they were children.

Tell me a story, Daddy. Tell me a story, Mommy. Tell me a story. Not just to entertain, although good stories are very entertaining, as we know from Ken Shigematsu. But tell me a story to help make sense, to help make sense of our lives, to help make sense of the mystery of our existence.

We are the creature who is always seeking to understand, to understand who we are and where we are and how we are supposed to be who we are, where we are.

And the primary, indeed primal way of doing this is by telling stories. Every culture in every era, in every part of the world, has a story or cluster of stories it passes on to each succeeding generation.

[1 : 18] Indeed, in many tribal cultures, a rite of passage into adulthood is to be able to tell the story or cluster of stories to the satisfaction of the elders.

This is the case in many parts of the Middle East, even today. You cannot be treated as an adult until you can tell the story that defines that culture to the satisfaction of the elders.

Because the elders know that we simply cannot make our way in the world without knowing the stories that shape our world and help us understand our world.

We all need stories. We all need stories. Children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, to help us know who we are and where we are and how we are to be who we are, where we are.

Tell me a story. Tell me a story. Tell me a story. Which it seems to me is part of the reason we in the so-called West are a people adrift.

[2 : 34] We no longer have a compelling story to tell each other and to pass on to the next generations. Oh, we have all kinds of stories.

The bookstore and online resources offer tons of stories. And I love reading many of these stories to our grandchildren. And I love watching these stories on video.

Green Eggs and Ham. Cinderella. Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Good Night, Moon. Toy Story. Superman. E.T. Star Wars.

Lion King. And Frozen. But as powerful as they are, none of them finally satisfy. All of them are seeking to do what stories are supposed to do.

But none of them help us finally make sense, make the kind of sense we need to have a story do for us. Well, thank God there is a story.

[3 : 36] A cluster of stories that has served this purpose for past generations and can do so again in the present generations. It's the story on which the greatness of Western civilization was built.

But which, sadly, Western civilization has lost. It is the story or cluster of stories that I so long for my grandchildren to know.

And it appears that the only way they are going to know it is for me to tell them and for their parents to tell them.

The only way your children and grandchildren are going to know the story is if you tell it. Now, some of you are too young to imagine what I'm about to tell you.

I learned this great story and the stories in it in the public school. Yes, I learned it in Sunday school, but also in public school.

[4 : 44] Every Christmas season, we actually read the story told by Matthew and Luke in public school. The teachers never overtly argued for the truth of the story, although I remember one teacher that did.

But they did read it. It made sense. It was Christmas. So we ought to know what Christmas is about. So they read the story. I learned the great Christmas carols in public school and in Sunday school, but also in Monday through Friday school.

Every Easter season, we actually read the story told by the gospel writers in public school. Oh, the teachers also talked about Easter bunnies and all the rest of that stuff.

But he or she would also say something like, the Bible claims that a dead man came back to life. That's why we have Easter. I learned it in Sunday school, too, but also Monday through Friday school.

The same was true of Jewish holidays. I learned about Israel being set free from bondage in Egypt as we told the story from Exodus around nearly every Passover.

[5 : 58] It made sense. It's Passover. So in an educational system, you ought to name what it is. Can you imagine? Can you imagine that? Some of you are too young to go, this is just impossible.

This, by the way, is why we, my age person, were able to go to the university and study art history, for example, and actually get it.

When we saw a painting of Rembrandt's prodigal son. We could actually enter into the reality it was pointing to. We had heard somewhere along the way Jesus' story about the father and his sons.

Take the average university student today to a great art museum and they do not have a clue of what these paintings are about.

Take them to the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Have them look up at Leonardo da Vinci's masterwork on the ceiling. They have no clue of what he was trying to say because they don't know the story.

[7 : 07] And sadly, they then do not have the big clues about the meaning of life. Tell me a story. Thank God, God has told us a story.

A cluster of stories in the 66 books of the Bible. And the key to the whole story in the 66 books is the first half of the Bible.

I'll say that again. The key to the story told in the 66 books is the first half of the Bible. The Bible does have two halves.

Not Old Testament and New Testament. But Genesis 1 to 11 and Genesis 12 to Revelation 22.

Those are the two halves. The story that begins in Genesis 12 with the call of Abraham and Sarah that leads to the history of Israel, that culminates in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, and that leads to the new heaven and the new earth, finally makes sense when it is heard in the context of the story in Genesis 1 to 11.

[8 : 22] The authors of the second half of the Bible, Genesis 12 to Revelation 22, assume we know the first half. Which says to me that if our children and grandchildren are going to understand the whole story the Bible is telling, we need to especially take care that they know the story that makes sense of the rest of the story.

Now, it turns out that all the other stories we tell, all the other great stories and myths that cultures tell, are grappling with what Genesis 1 to 11 reveals.

Genesis 1 to 11 is what makes sense of all the other stories. Genesis 1 to 11 speaks to the fundamental questions all the other stories are raising. Questions like, where did we come from, Grandpa?

Why are we here? What are we? Are we alone in the universe? What does it mean to be human? Why does it hurt to be a human? Why can human beings build impressive skyscrapers, do exquisitely beautiful art, play sports, compose and sing songs, and then use one another for their own needs, manipulate laws, exploit the earth?

And why do humans kill? What's wrong with us, mommy? Why do human societies rise and flourish and then begin to rot at the core? Where is God in all this?

[9 : 51] What kind of God is in all of this? Can the world be fixed? Who will do the fixing and when? Now, the most important role of the stories in Genesis 1 to 11 is to help us realize why we need a Savior and what the Savior comes to do.

When we inhabit the stories in Genesis 1 to 11, we come to realize just how good the goodness of Jesus Christ really is. Tell me a story, Grandpa.

And the heart of Genesis 1 to 11 is Genesis 2 to 3, which you have in front of you. If we can just work these two chapters into the heart and mind of our children and grandchildren, they will be able to understand the rest of the Bible.

I'll say that again. If we can work these two chapters into the hearts and minds of our children and grandchildren, they'll understand the rest of the Bible. And they will come to know and love Jesus Christ with greater understanding and passion.

So, this evening, let us listen to our great, great, great, great, great, great, great, on it goes, great, great, great, Grandpa, tell us a story.

[11:14] Tradition says it was Moses who told the story. So, let's listen to Moses tell us a story, a story that makes sense of all the other stories.

The title for tonight's presentation should be Storytime with Moses, Master Storyteller. All right? Have I set this up all right?

Are you following me where I'm going? So, if you'll take out the copies of Genesis 2 to 3 that you have printed for you. Thank you, Melissa, for having that done. We'll read it, and then I'm going to have you turn to someone and answer two questions.

They're very easy, so don't worry. All right? Okay, here we go. This is a lengthy reading, 48 verses. Thank you. We have many different cultures represented in this room, and it would be interesting to know the different questions that different cultures asked about this text.

[12:18] Okay, let's now walk through this passage after we've read it, and we're going to do so in order to make sure that we understand it so that when we tell it to our children and grandchildren, we'll tell it faithfully.

And I'm going to walk through the text drawing stick figures up here. You are very impressed with my artistic ability. I can tell that right away. All right? In the beginning, God made a garden, and it was a garden bursting with life.

Chapter 2, verse 9. Out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food. The tree of life, also in the midst of the garden, literally in the middle of the garden, as a source of everything else.

At the center of this garden is life. It's the life that God has, and it's the life that God is. And God made this garden to share this life.

And God created the human beings to live in this garden, to share the very life of God. That's why we were made. This life that God has and God is, God made the human to share.

[13:33] Now, in Genesis 2, God then reveals what that life is supposed to look like and how that life is designed to be enjoyed. And what we learned from Genesis 2 is that we were created for a four-fold relational life.

We were created for four relationships. We are fundamentally relational creatures. We are made for relationship.

This is why broken relationships hurt more than broken bones. We were made for relationship. Four of them.

Relationship. Of course. Because the God who made us is a relationship. In Genesis 1, we're told, God says, Let us make man in our image according to our likeness.

The Creator can use plural pronouns when referring to Himself. That's because the Creator is a relationship. Turns out from the rest of the story, we know Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[14:41] The Creator is a trinity. The Creator is relationship. At the center of the universe is a relationship. It's the most fundamental thing I know. And so, the Creator creates us for relationship.

Four relationships. The first relationship is with the earth. In chapter 2, verse 7. We are created for a relationship with the earth.

The Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground. Now, some of you may know, In the Hebrew, there is a word play. The word for the man is adam. And the word for earth or ground is adamah.

It's a way of saying that to be human is to have a relationship with the earth. Now, this is reflected in English in human and humus. Or earthling and earth.

We are earthy creatures. We are embodied creatures. And the way to get at that is to say, I do not have a body. I am a body.

[15:46] I can't be me without a body. I can't be human without a body. We are created for embodied existence. We have this fundamental relationship with the earth.

And this is going to be brought out, of course, in the rest of the story, When God makes that great decision to become a body in Jesus Christ, To be raised a body, And then to give us the destiny in a new heaven and a new earth, When we will have another body.

So, relationship with the earth. Second relationship is a relationship with others. And I've got to draw her just a little different. She's a little more squiggly than Adam. And she has a bigger smile. In chapter 2, verse 18, God says, It is not good for the man to be alone. In Genesis 1, We hear this refrain, It was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was very good. This is the first time we hear, Not good. Man alone, Adam alone, Is not what God wants Adam to be.

[16:55] We are made for relationship. And Adam, all by himself, Is not yet fully human. This also, by the way, Is why loneliness is so painful.

We were not made for loneliness. So, chapter 2, verse 18, I will make him a helper suitable to him. Notice that phrase? Look carefully at that in verse 18.

I will make him a helper suitable for him. Literally, it is, According to what is in front of him, Or equal and adequate to him. A great theologian of the last century, Karl Barth, Says that in order for Adam's loneliness To be alleviated, This new human Needs to be both like Adam, But dislike Adam. If this other person is only like Adam, Adam's loneliness will not be alleviated Because he only sees himself. If this new person is to dislike Adam, His loneliness will not be alleviated Because it won't fit.

There's no complementarity to it. So, Eve, God creates, Is both like Adam And dislike Adam. Now, helper, Notice that word helper.

[18:18] The Hebrew word is the word ezer, E-Z-E-R. Now, what's interesting is, In the rest of the Bible, The chief person who is called the ezer Is God.

God is the ezer. According to Kenneth Bailey, Who studied a lot in the Middle East, This word ezer does not mean lowly servant, But, get this, One more powerful Who comes into the picture To help someone in need.

You women were supposed to go, Yahoo! right there. Adam is in need. God doesn't create a lowly servant for him, But creates a creature Who now is going to be, Like God, Able to bring help To this person in need.

And this too is brought out In the Hebrew text in a wordplay. The word for man is ish, I-S-H. The word for woman is ishah. Adam, adama, ish, ishah.

We're made for a relationship with the earth And a relationship with others. Third relationship, We're made for a relationship with the self. And I didn't know how to draw that, So I'm just going to draw this spiral Of a, Kind of a internal picture.

[19:42] We're made for a relationship with the self. Chapter 2, verse 25. And the man and his wife were naked And not ashamed. That's a Middle Eastern way of saying, I can be myself without masks.

There's no need to create a personage. I can look at myself and say, Oh, you are wonderful. Imagine that.

Having that kind of relationship with yourself. No masks. Look in the mirror. Wow. And then a fourth relationship.

The fourth relationship, of course, Is with God. And I didn't want to draw God. So that's why I have the word God everywhere. There's no one place to locate God.

And that's in chapter 2, verse 7 again. The Lord God formed man Out of the dust of the ground And breathed into him The breath of life. It's a great picture.

[20:42] The creator kisses this humanoid. This humanoid is not yet human Until the creator kisses him And breathes his life into him. It's an intimate picture.

For many people, it's too intimate. But it's an intimate picture Because that's the kind of intimacy The creator wants to have with the creature. So that to be human then Is to be in breathed by another.

I'm finally human When the breath of God Is breathed into me. So, we are created for this Fourfold relational existence. And this is what I want to get Into the minds and hearts Of my children and my grandchildren.

If I can get them to get this They're on their way. We are created for a relationship With the earth With other people With the self And with God. And this then Is what the Bible means By the word righteousness.

Righteousness means Right relatedness. Right relationship. And righteousness then Encompasses those For relationship. This is what the Bible means By shalom. Peace.

[21 : 47] And it's what Jesus means Then by the kingdom of God. A place where all these Relationships work. Okay? Now, This is the key thing From Genesis 2.

The whole of this Relational existence Hinges on Or turns on A command. It's only one command. Only one command Was given in the garden.

Only one command. How many commands? One command. And I would submit to you That all the other commands God has ever given us Are all a variation On this one command.

If we had time I could show you How all the ten commandments Come down to this one command. How everything Jesus says In the Sermon on the Mount Comes down to this one command. It's in chapter 2 Verses 16 and 17.

From any tree of the garden You may eat Freely eat But from the tree Of the knowledge Of good and evil You shall not eat For in the day That you eat of it You will surely die.

[22 : 52] The one command Do not eat From the tree Of the knowledge Of good and evil. A couple of observations About this. This is not an unfair command Because we do not need The knowledge of good and evil.

I'll come back to that. We do not need it. So this is not an unfair command. This is also for our good. It's a warning. Notice that God does not say If you eat of this I'm going to spank you.

He does not say If you eat of this I'm going to kill you. He says if you eat of this I'm not going to need to spank you. I'm not going to need to kill you Because you're going to die. It's just the way it is. Notice also It's not a choice Between good and evil.

Sometimes I hear people Talk about that way. We don't want our kids To get this. Go down that road. It's not like There's an evil tree And a bad tree And God says Don't choose the evil tree. That's not what's going on here.

And this is important. It's not called The tree of knowledge. I hear people doing that. It's not the tree of knowledge. If you ever If you ever hear someone Say it stand up and go No, no, no.

[23 : 57] It's not the tree of knowledge Because God does want us to know. God created us To discover everything. God wants us to know everything About his creation. I think God is delighted With his recent discovery About the gravitational waves And the validation of Einstein's theory of relativity.

God really likes us To discover those things. I mean God's not threatened By human beings knowing anything. What are we going to discover That God doesn't know? So it's not the tree of knowledge. It is the tree of the knowledge Of good and evil.

Say that with me. The whole phrase. Knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge of good and evil.

Again, one more time To make sure we get it. Knowledge of good and evil. Now, this is a particular Kind of knowledge.

And here's the key thing. When you trace this phrase Knowledge of good and evil Through the rest of the Bible You discover two key things. Number one, Children do not have it.

Children know a lot of things. I got a lot of really bright grandkids. But they do not have The knowledge of good and evil. And the second thing you discover Is that the elderly lose it.

[25 : 13] The elderly know a lot. I'm 68. I know a lot. My father-in-law is 92. He knows a lot. But we're increasingly losing The knowledge of good and evil.

And most people Between children and elderly Think they have this knowledge. Okay. Daniel Fuller Who taught me this When I was in seminary Writes this.

To the original readers Of Genesis 2 The knowledge of good and evil Signified Signified The possession of that maturity Which frees one From being dependent On someone else For guidance On how to act wisely.

The knowledge of good and evil Is the knowledge that frees one From being dependent On someone else For guidance On how to live wisely.

Little children do not have that. Do they? They cannot live on their own. And the elderly lose it. One day I'm going to lose it. And the rest of us Think we have it.

[26 : 25] The one command is Do not aspire To the maturity Possessed only by God Whereby you might Consider yourself Independent from God And able to enjoy A fulfilled life By taking matters Into your own hand And making Your own plans For your own For your own future welfare.

Only God can live independently. We cannot. And if we try We will die. Sign the Declaration of Independence And we are signing Our own death certificate.

This then is why Jesus will call us To become like little children. Jesus blesses little children Not because they're cute. They are. Jesus, someone once said Jesus blesses little children Because they're incompetent.

They can't make life Happen on their own. Do not aspire To the knowledge Of good and evil. Do not eat From the tree Of the knowledge Of good and evil.

Because it will all unravel. It will all fall apart. All four relationships Will be affected If you eat Of this tree. Eat Of this tree.

[27 : 48] Do not eat Of this tree. In the day That you eat You will die. Now we're going to see In a moment In Genesis 3 That Eve Took and ate Adam Took and ate I Took and ate You Took and ate And what's interesting Is Those two verbs Take Eat Are not found In the rest of the Bible Together Until That night That Thursday night When the Creator Having become a creature Took bread Broke it Gave his disciples And said Take Eat If you eat This bread You will not die You will live forever Because this bread Brings you back Into dependence On me Journal Books The Word Music New so

Too In the rest of the Bible Aye peppers Lunch Jie Vhood You