

Galatians 4:4-7 PM

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Date: 22 December 2024

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[0 : 00] Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us. May we see your glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we've just heard in nine lessons and nine carols a summary of the story of Scripture.

And the obvious question for many of us is this. What does this biblical story have to do with my story? Think of a lot of us kind of binge Christmas, like you binge watch a TV show.

We just ingest everything Christmas for seven days, and then it ends and we move on. What does the Christmas story have to do with my life?

Homo sapiens are the only species on earth that share stories. Ever thought about that? It's a universal quality of all people, across all cultures, all races and civilizations.

[1 : 18] No other organism or species creates and shares stories. Have you ever wondered why? Why do humans, from our infancy, love hearing and sharing stories?

It's not just that we love a good story, although we do. Humans need stories to survive. There's a social psychologist named Jonathan Haidt, and he suggests that it's stories that unite societies. It's a shared narrative, a shared story that gives a moral matrix and a purpose that a population can pursue together. Or there's a best-selling historian named Yuval Noah Harari, and he argues the same thing.

We share stories because without a shared story, we could not live together. Human society needs a shared story for us to work.

So, when you think of the American dream, or the Communist Manifesto, or even Hitler's horrific Mein Kampf, these stories, these meta-narratives, give countries and cultures and civilizations a shared story, a common cause, that millions of people can work together and even die defending.

[2 : 45] Human society needs a shared story in order to survive. United we stand. Divided we fall.

And the glue that holds any society together, the foundation upon which a civilization is built, is a shared story. So, what's your story tonight?

As individuals, believing that our lives fit within a bigger story is what gives us purpose. There was a study in 2019 by the American National Institute of Health, and it showed that if you feel purposeless, your life is in mortal danger.

People who feel purposeless statistically die sooner from every sort of ailment, compared to people who feel that they have purpose in their life.

Purposelessness is life-threatening. It reduces your lifespan. So, human life, both corporately, together, as well as individually, depends upon all of us fitting within a story.

[3 : 52] Without this, there can be no collective community, and there can be no purpose in our lives. So, again, what's your story?

What are you living for right now? What's your purpose? Why'd you get out of bed this morning?

Tonight, we hear the story that all of us have been created to know.

The story that makes sense of our world, and gives purpose to our lives. God created us to need a story.

And so, he reveals himself to us by telling us that story, which we all need to hear. The story of God told in the Bible explains to us who God is, who we are, why the world is the way it is, and what God is doing about it.

It's the overarching narrative that makes sense of everything. So, if you're here tonight discouraged with the way the world is heading, this story is for you.

[5 : 01] And if you come tonight purposelessness, directionless, depressed, lost, listless, this story is for you. The story of God reaches its climax at Christmas.

The entire biblical story leads toward what happens on that silent night in a barn in Bethlehem. And the passage we just read, John chapter 1, which is on page 18 of your bulletin, explains it this way in verse 14.

It says, People have seen God.

That's the claim. Because God has become a man. This is what Christmas is all about. This is what the story of God, the story of Scripture, tells us.

The Bible isn't about some distant deity who is unconcerned about us and our world and our pain. It's not an ancient myth or fairy tale that occurs once upon a time, or even a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

[6 : 12] The Bible tells us the historical story of God breaking into our world, bursting into our lives. It's about God becoming flesh, incarnating, and dwelling in order to save us and bless us and lead us to eternal life with him in his kingdom forever.

It's a story that we have received recorded by eyewitnesses, real people who really saw God come to earth. Christmas is the beginning of a rescue operation where God himself leaves heaven and takes on human form to save a lost world.

In John 1, we're told Jesus, who's called the Word, is God. And that Jesus, the Son of God, who is fully God, became flesh and dwelt among us. And then in verse 14, we're told that Jesus comes full of two things.

Jesus comes to bring two things to us. Look at verse 14. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.

Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. The story of God brings us to come and see Jesus and tells us that Jesus brings us grace and he brings us truth.

[7 : 44] These are the gifts of Christmas. Jesus gives all of us grace and truth. We've just heard nine lessons, nine readings tonight that are supposed to summarize the entire story of God leading up to Christmas.

And in each of them, you can find examples of grace and truth, foreshadowing Jesus' birth. So briefly, let me show you truth.

Let me show you how the story of God brings us truth. If you flip back to our first reading, Genesis 3, which is on page five of our bulletins, we're immediately confronted with some hard truths.

Genesis 3 doesn't feel very Christmassy. The Bible begins with God creating everything, and we're told it's all good. And then God creates humans to rule over his creation in his name as his representatives on earth, and we are very good.

And then in our first reading, just barely past the first page in our Bibles, we hear that humanity blows it. We're deceived into believing that we don't need God.

[8 : 57] Humanity tries to write God out of his own story. We decide we can do a better job of being God than he can. We don't need him anymore.

We reject God's story for our lives, and we decide to start writing our own stories without God in them. And this is not just Adam and Eve's sin.

All of us do this. We write God out of our stories. We make ourselves our own gods. And the result we see in Genesis 3 is not a liberated, independent, empowered, self-actualized humanity, but God's beautiful world being broken by rebellion against him.

The goodness of creation is ruined by the evil of human sin. See, when we turn from God, we are rejecting the source of all goodness and light and life.

And so, of course, the result will be wickedness and darkness and death. Our relationship with God and with one another and the world is broken. So we're hitting our first reading.

[10 : 10] Bit of a truth bomb. We try to replace God with ourselves, and we're told the result is that now there will be pain in our lives and in our families.

Because of our sin, there will be a power struggle in human relationships, which will become dominated by conflict and oppression and tyranny, rather than mutual service and love.

Because we've turned away from God, life for us will now be frustrating and hard, full of suffering and pain and hunger and ultimately death.

Genesis 3 tells us our world is broken. We are broken. And it's our fault. We've tried to erase God from his story, from his creation, and from our lives.

The biblical story tells us the truth that explains our lives and our world. Jesus comes full of truth. But the story of God is not just truth.

[11:14] It's also full of grace. At the moment that sin is first conceived in the human heart, at the moment we turn away from God, we see in Genesis 3, God is already at work writing his story of grace into history.

He says in Genesis 3, verse 15, to the serpent, who's the source of evil and deceit and rebellion against God, that he will be crushed by a child who will descend from Eve.

Even though in the act of killing the serpent, the child will be killed as well. So God promises that evil will be destroyed. He gives us truth, but he gives us grace at the same time.

He gives good gifts to people who do not deserve them. The rest of our readings tonight were full of grace, full of God giving good gifts to people who didn't deserve them.

In the second reading, page 6, God chooses an unremarkable man, Abraham, and promises him incredible blessing. Abraham's story was one of frustration and failure.

[12:23] He was elderly. He and his wife were infertile. There was no future for Abraham. No reason for his story to ever be remembered in history. Until Abraham was written into God's story.

God gives Abraham incredible, undeserved grace. In your offspring, all the nations of the earth will be blessed, he promises. Fast forward, and God's grace is further revealed through the prophet Isaiah, thousands of years later.

Speaking about this promised offspring of Eve and Abraham, Isaiah says, For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder.

His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Just like Abraham, God's people will be given a child we do not deserve, who will reign as king over the whole earth.

And this child will be God himself, and he will be the Prince of Peace. His kingdom will never end.

He'll be defined by righteousness and justice, meaning that evil will be no more.

[13:34] Go again now to our sixth reading. This is on page 13. We journey to Nazareth in the first century under Roman occupation. Where an angel from heaven visits an unknown, unmarried, unremarkable teenage girl, and he tells her, The Lord is with you.

You've found favor with God. You'll conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great. He will be called the Son of the Most High.

And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. In our seventh reading, this cosmic king, this God-man, is born in a barn in Bethlehem.

And nobody knows. And nobody notices. And finally, in our eighth reading, the angels go to the last people you would ever invite to a party.

Shepherds. They were dirty. They were social outcasts. They weren't allowed to worship in the temple. They were lowly workers who were considered unclean, and lived alone outside of society with animals.

[14:51] And the angel says to these shepherds, don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Now notice in all of those lessons, in all of those stories, none of the human characters deserve God's blessing. None of them deserve God himself entering their lives.

and writing them into his story. And neither do you. And neither do I. But he does anyway. The story of God is full of grace.

Jesus comes full of grace and truth. One pastor puts it this way. He says, the truth is that we are more sinful than we ever dared imagine.

Every human heart is stained by sin. No one is righteous. All of us turn away from God. The whole world is now implicated and contaminated by our sin.

[16:00] Death has entered the world and all our woe. That's the truth. But then the grace is that we're more loved than we ever dared hope.

Even though we've sinned, God, way back at the moment of our fall, already has a plan to bring his grace to undo our evil.

We're more sinful than we ever dared imagine. But in Jesus, we are more loved by God than we ever dared hope. Jesus brings both truth and grace.

This is the story you have been created to hear. It's the story that gives purpose and hope and life and light. But tonight, we're just scratching the surface of the story of God.

There's so much more to say. To fully appreciate the grace and truth that Jesus brings, you need to hear more of the story. And the new year, that's exactly what our church is going to do.

[17 : 06] In January, we're going to start a new series called The Story of God. And we're going to look at the entire arc of the Bible story in nine episodes over nine weeks.

Seeing God at work in the world to bring us all grace and truth. Our entire church is going to look at this at Sunday services and our midweek small groups.

But I get to host this special group that's called Next Steps, which is intended for people who want to learn the story of God for the first time. Or people who are curious about the Bible and want to walk deeper into the story.

Next Steps will meet on Wednesday nights in a home. It's meant for anybody. From any kind of religious or spiritual background or lack thereof.

It'll be full of people with different beliefs who are curious about Jesus and the Bible and the story of God. And so we'll discuss it in a warm, safe, open, friendly environment.

[18 : 11] So please consider signing up. The info is in your bulletin on page 23 or it's on our website under the events page. I'd love to see you there as we look at the most important story ever told.

Jesus comes full of grace and full of truth. And through Jesus, God offers to enfold us into his story, into his family, into his kingdom of light and life that is dawning on earth and will eclipse and overwhelm the kingdoms of this world.

In Jesus, we have seen God's glory full of grace and truth. Jesus comes to tell you the story of God, to show you God and to bring you to God.

He comes so that all of our stories, our lives may be woven into God's story, into God's life. Jesus, full of grace and truth, can make God known to us.

Through Jesus, you can know God. He is true. He is grace. And he is yours to receive this Christmas.

[19 : 29] Amen.