



THE STORY



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Scripture: The Story – Chapter 4

I don't know if you have discovered this about me yet, but I can be a pretty passionate person. When there is something that has stirred my heart or an issue I am particularly convicted off, I can get a little loud, a little animated. And I am aware this personality trait of mine is not always endearing to some people or it can convey a mixed message. On more than one occasion, I have had people asked me, *are you mad? Are you angry?* And most of the time, I am not. I just get a little over enthusiastic sometimes.

Even my beloved wife who has known me for over 40 years can be thrown off guard at times. A few nights ago, after returning from trip to Costco. Ah Costco, we went for some bread and chewing gum and over \$200 later we have a trunk full of stuff. Does that happen to you? As we were unloading the car, I went to help Carolyn, who had an armful and I noticed the bread, my favourite bread was dangling precariously about to be dropped. As I snatched it from her hands, I perhaps mumbled something could have been interpreted as anger, but it wasn't. I was just enthusiastic about my bread.

Several years ago, as I was just starting out as a young pastor, our church was in a bit of transition. Our lead pastor had just resigned, leaving four of us on staff to cover the responsibilities of a fairly large congregation. There was some stress and tension and an obvious disconnect between the pastoral staff and the Elder Board. Things reached a point where the four of us were invited to an elder meeting to try to resolve some of the issues with a mediator. I don't know if you have ever sat in on a meeting like this but when people are sharing their

thoughts, feelings and opinions, things can get emotional. At one particular point, I spoke up about an issue that I felt was particularly divisive and the chair of the elders got up and left the meeting. Just walked out. And the room went silent. I was stunned. I thought we were sharing how we were feeling but as I think back on it, perhaps my enthusiasm, passion and conviction got the better of me. I was young, these people were all older than me and now I have offended someone. So, I had a choice to make. I could defend myself or I could apologize. That was hard. Because I thought I was right, justified to say what I did.

I slowly stood up looked over the group and sincerely apologized if my words and tone had been out of line. And I remember it like it was yesterday, the mediator stood up, walked over to me, held my shoulders, looked straight into my eyes and said, *Paul, we accept your apology. You are forgiven.*

You are forgiven. Those words that day just spoke right to my heart. They gave me shivers because up to that point, I don't think anyone had ever said that or done that to me before. You know what we tend to do to each other. If someone offends or hurts us, and they offer an apology. And in our world today, we are fortunate if someone even acknowledges that they have wronged us. But do you know what we tend to say in return to an apology? Just think back on your week, what do you say to someone who wronged you and said sorry?

Oh, it's okay. No problem, don't worry about it. It's no biggie. And we kind of slough it off and the magnitude of the transgression and hurt isn't really

acknowledge. Maybe just as importantly, the depth of forgiveness isn't experienced by the offender. Do you see that? It is powerful to have those words spoken to you, *I accept your apology. You are forgiven.*

By the way, I drove to the chair of the elders later that night, the guy who left the meeting and apologized to him, face to face. He forgave me, but I don't think his wife did but that is another story.

If you are just joining with us today, we are in week four of a 31 week odyssey as an entire church called, THE STORY. We are working our way through the bible, Genesis through to Revelation, using this resource called THE STORY.

What we are quickly noticing is that in the history of creation there are actually two stories. The first is God's upper story. The way God is at work unfolding his plan for redemption and salvation for his people and then there is this lower story. That is the one we are all living individually, day to day in our lives. God's story involves us, humanity.

As a way of a visual, let me just remind you of where we have been and where we are headed. By the way, we now have two charts in the foyer if you want to have a closer look sometime.

God's larger story is actually broken down into 5 smaller movements. In our 31 weeks together, we will look a little closer at each of these movements.

They are:

1. The story of the Garden
2. The story of Israel
3. The story of Jesus
4. The story of the Church
5. The story of the New Garden (back where we started)

Three weeks ago, we began with **Movement 1. The Story of the Garden** and we see that God's vision right from the beginning was to be in relationship with humanity. But sin enters into the picture and mars that vision. But all hope is not lost. God promises to remove the roadblock and bring humanity back to him and he starts by building a nation. Two weeks ago, when we shifted to **Movement 2, The Story of Israel**, we see that it is through Abraham's line that God promises to build this great nation. Abraham had a son Isaac, who had a son, Jacob, who has 12 sons, one of whom is named Joseph and that is what we looked at last week, the good news, bad news story of Joseph. Divine Providence which means that God who sustains and uses everything can take even evil and recast it into something good. Did you witness God's divine providence in your life or the lives of those around you this week?

Now as we get started today, I need to mention one more thing about Joseph. When he was sold into slavery by his brothers and brought from the land of his ancestors to Egypt. That plays an important role in God's upper story. The famine in the land during the time also caused all of Joseph's family to move and settle in and around Egypt. God has a purpose in that. He is moving his people closer to a land that he has in mind for them. See, how the story is unfolding?

Today we turn to chapter 4, so if you have your books you can turn there. I trust many of you have had a chance to read it this week to prepare. If you have your bibles, you can turn to the second book of the bible, Exodus. At the beginning of the book of Exodus, we see that 400 years has now passed since the heroics of Joseph, saving the Egyptians and the surrounding nations from famine. Obviously, a new Pharaoh is in charge and his memory of the past is all but faded. Over this time, God's people, the Israelites have been busy.

On page 43 of your book or,

Exodus 1:7

but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

If fact, the Israelites were procreating at such a rate that they now were becoming a real threat to the Egyptians and their way of life. Look as the text continues.

Exodus 1:8-9

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.⁹ “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us.¹⁰ Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

There is now some real resentment from the Egyptians towards the Israelites. There is fear and intimidation in their growing size and potential influence, so Pharaoh puts a plan in motion to stifle them and the oppressiveness begins. The Israelites are forced into slavery. But the more they are oppressed, the more they multiply and spread throughout the land.

I am a big fan of HGTV and home renovation shows. Sometimes, “Leave it to Brian”, Brian Balmer or “Holmes on Homes” Mike Holmes or even Chip and Jo, face an obstacle in a renovation called Asbestos. Asbestos is fire retardant material that was used in building homes years ago. More recently, asbestos have been found to cause cancer. Undisturbed, it poses little risk, but when drilled into, broken or agitated in something like a home renovation, it can release fibres that get in the air, spread everywhere and can cause damage if breathed in or ingested. That is why it needs to be handled gently and carefully through what is called an abatement.

Like the asbestos fibres when disturbed or broken, spread out; so the Israelite people did as well. The more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread until finally, a genocide is enacted. Pharaoh orders the death of all new born Israelite or Hebrew (terms used interchangeably) boys.

This is the world in which Moses, a Hebrew was born. Do you remember the story? In fear for his life, Moses’ mother hid him in a basket in the reed banks of the Nile River and in the providence of God, he was found by Pharaoh’s daughter who adopted him as her own. And so Moses, the Hebrew was raised amongst the royalty of Egypt. He was given the finest education and every advantage in life at that time. As a young man, he found himself perfectly positioned to help his people, the Israelites. He had the ear of Pharaoh, he had been spared of death by God and placed in this incredible position of opportunity. But then everything went sour.

Moses, in a rash moment of anger, over enthusiasm lets down his guard. He lashes out at an Egyptian who is beating on an Israelite, one of his own people. Moses ends up killing the Egyptian. Which forces him to flee for his life into the wilderness.

Instead of being in Pharaoh’s good books, Moses is now a wanted man. He spends the next 40 years tending another man’s sheep in the wilderness. What a waste. All the hopes and dreams for his life seem smashed. Destiny lay in ruins. Moses was a young man when he had to flee Egypt, 40 years was the best part of his life. It was his peak and it is now seemingly wasted, because of one mindless, rash act.

Maybe you sit here today and know exactly how Moses felt. Perhaps as you reflect on your life, you feel like you too have wasted some of the best years of your life. Maybe on a broken or unhealthy relationship. Maybe on holding a grudge or being consumed by bitterness. Perhaps it was because of a dream you let slip away because life just happened.

For 40 years, Moses had been living day to day, just maintaining the status quo and sometimes we to get locked into the status quo too, don't we? A job becomes a career. We acquire a house and with that, a mortgage. We are locked in. We get married, have a few children and we wake up one day and 20 or 30 or 40 years have passed us by and we wonder, what? What has this life been all about? Do you ever feel passed your prime? Like the Montreal Canadians or Tom Cruise. And no one bets on the washed up one, the one who is passed their prime. No one, except God. God always seems to use the most unexpected person to do some of his most amazing work. The person that we would never choose, God does. God steps back in Moses's life in a rather dramatic way.

He is tending his father in law's flocks in the middle of the wilderness when suddenly,

Exodus 3:2-6

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." ⁵ "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Talk about making an entrance! That would kind of wake you up wouldn't it? A burning bush and disembodied voice of God. I think I would hide my face as well. God goes on to tell Moses, that he has heard the cries of his people. He knows of their misery and of their plight so he is going to rescue them and he is going to do it through Moses.

In the middle of page 46,

Exodus 3:10 God says,

I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

God always seems to use the most unexpected person to do some of his most amazing work and understandably, past his prime Moses, responds like probably most of us would have.

Exodus 3:11

*"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?
Who Am I?"*

Do you know what I find interesting here? If I am "voluntelling" someone to do something, I usually accentuate all of their positive qualities that make it seem like they are the only choice for the job. Like my son on garbage night.

Hey, DJ, the garbage needs to be taken out. I mean you are the only one, buddy. All that time spent at the gym. Now is your time to shine. You are the only one that can handle those garbage containers, ensure they are lined up on the street, right next to those recycling boxes. You were made for this task, my son.

That is what I do, don't you? But it is interesting in the text. God doesn't list off all Moses' credentials or the good qualities or traits that make him fully qualified for this position. He could have. Remember, although 40 years have passed, Moses was raised in the courts of Egyptian royalty. He knew all of the Egyptians ways, he knew their culture, their language. He knew how to speak to Pharaoh. He had some rich history and familiarity that not one other Israelite possessed at this time. All of this made him, quite honestly the only reasonable choice to confront Pharaoh. But God doesn't mention any of that. Instead, his respond to Moses' hesitation, to his excuse?

Exodus 3:12, middle of page 46, God says,
“*I will be with you. No excessive fawning over him or flattery. Just, I will be with you.*”

Apparently that wasn't enough for Moses so he responds to God, *well if I go to the people and they ask the name of the one who sent me, what should I say? What's your name? How should I ID you?* Listen to God's response to Moses, in

Exodus 3:14
God said to Moses, “*I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'*”

It is important to remember that God had been silent for a long time in this situation with the Israelites. Under slavery in Egypt they would have been exposed to many other gods. If Moses showed up and said, *God sent me.* Their natural answer would have been, *which one? Which god?* God responds, tell them I AM has sent you.

We are given many titles for God in scripture, *Kurios, Adonai, Elohim* but this is the name God calls himself. I AM. Without getting into the full explanation for I AM WHO I AM. In Hebrew language of the Old Testament, it would translate, YHWH, it is where we get the word, Yahweh or Jehovah which means literally, *I am, I cause to be.* Yahweh.

Now if I was to meet you for the first time and you introduced yourself to me, *Hi, I am Bob* and then I in turn introduced myself to you and said, *Hi I AM*, and left it at that. That would be a little confusing for you wouldn't it. If you were to ask me how I was doing and I responded, I AM..... You would be waiting for me to finish the sentence wouldn't you? We don't get by saying, I AM, because we are always changing aren't we? On any given day, I am cranky or tired or excited or angry or I am fine. I am fine, our standard answer right!?! The point is, we have to finish the sentence because we are always changing. I am one thing today and another thing tomorrow. But God, God never changes.

I AM WHO I AM, Yahweh, is the same yesterday, today and forever. God is everything he has always been and everything he will always be. That is why, when God asks you or me or Moses to do something, it isn't really about us at all. God is not looking so much for our ability as he is, our availability. He'll look after the rest because he never changes.

For hundreds of years, before GPS technology, sailors and other navigators determined directions and their position in relation to the equator by using the North Star. It is known for its' property of remaining in a fixed position throughout the course of the night. Unchanging. When everything changes around it, the North Star remains the same. It is true. You can depend on it. It is sure. And we have come to use this expression, *that's my true north* to mean something that is our anchor, our fixed point that helps us stay grounded and navigate a changing world around us.

And the world is changing constantly isn't it? New technology coming out. Did you notice, Apple just came out with their iPhone 8 a few weeks ago. And the iPhone 10 is due to be launched in late October. Now, I am not a techie but, what happened to nine! Did they skip right over iPhone 9! That's how fast things are changing. They didn't even have time for 9! They moved right from 8-10! The world is changing, we are changing, the church is changing.

We did communion a different way last week. Threw some of you for a loop. The truth is that constant change will freak us out if we don't lock into a true north, something that grounds us, something that is unchanging. Yahweh. I AM WHO I AM. He is the one who was and is and always shall be. He is the eternal God. He is unchanging.

Moses is about to lead the nation of Israel through great upheaval and change but he can trust in that which does not change, YAHWEH. Maybe that is just what you needed to hear today as your world seems to be spinning out of your control around you. You can trust in the one who does not change.

Back in the text we see that Moses has a few more excuses for God but they work through them and God sends him off on the mission to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. As we read through the next few pages of the book and chapters in Exodus, we see there is a bit of a standoff between Moses and Pharaoh. There are a series of signs and wonders exchanged and then God really unleashes his power through nine plagues on the Egyptian people to get Pharaoh to relent and let His people go. The plagues, do you remember them? Turning the Nile River to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness. But none of these serve to soften the harden heart of Pharaoh. The Israelites remain in oppressive captivity in Egypt.

And that is when God sent the tenth plague. This was the one that changed everything and revealed not only God's power but also his plan. His plan of redemption and salvation for his people not just in this time in history but foreshadowing salvation and redemption for his people for all of history. Look at Exodus 12 in your bibles or the bottom of page 50 in your books. God instructs Moses to tell all the Israelite people to take one-year-old unblemished male lambs, slaughter them and then take their blood and splash it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their homes. They are to eat the meat in a special way and then God says in,

Exodus 12:12-13

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

For many of us in the church, we are familiar with this story. In fact, a lot of the history of Judaism and Christianity can be tied back to this event. The Passover. Rich and meaningful. But I think we have glossed over just how eerie and strange this night

must have been. Have you ever thought about the night of Passover?

At the stroke of midnight, the first born of every household and animal not covered by the splash of blood on the doorframe of their homes, took their last breath. What a night of sorrow. Can you imagine? As many of you know who were here last weekend, I officiated at a funeral this week for the son of a friend who died tragically. He was the first born of his family and there was tangible sorrow in that church on Wednesday.

Can you imagine the scene here in Exodus? Page 52 in your books or in,

Exodus 12:30 it says,

Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

The only ones spared of this misery were the Israelites. Why? Why were they spared? It was because they were positioned beneath, the blood of the lamb. The blood of the lamb was on their doorframe. They were under its' canopy. Have you ever wondered, if you were there that night and God asked you to do this, slaughter a lamb and put its' blood on your doorframe. Would you have done it? It was a rather bizarre request. What about now, would we do it now? Seems unimaginable doesn't it? But here is the thing. We, humanity today, right here, right now, 2017. We have the same problem as the Israelites in Egypt did 3500 years ago. We too are enslaved. We too are oppressed. We too are weighed down. By Sin. We are trying to live life under our own power, our own strength and control. And it is oppressive and tiring and enslaving. Some of you feel that even now. It has been a tiring week. Do you know what we really need? Like the Israelites, we need a deliverer. We need someone to save us. Someone to help us walk out of the wilderness. What we need is the blood of a lamb.

What God did through Moses 3500 years ago was foreshadowing. It was pointing the way for the salvation of his people for all time. But it had to involve blood, the shedding of blood. Remember what we said a few weeks ago. Those animal skins that Adam and Eve used to cover themselves after they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. Something had to die to cover their shame. Do you see how THE STORY is already unfolding? God's upper story and our own story? Because now the blood is flowing.

If I was to jump ahead 1500 years from the story of Moses to the time that Jesus walked the earth, do you remember how John the Baptist referred to Jesus when he saw him approaching?

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Do you remember what the Apostle Paul said about Jesus in,

1 Corinthians 5:7

For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

We need what the Israelites needed in the time of Moses and God gave us the perfect lamb, Jesus. Sacrificed for the sins of the world. We now position ourselves not under blood of the lamb splashed on the doorframes of homes but under the blood stained cross of Jesus.

The old Exodus, now stands in the shadow of the cross. Do you see how the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ unfolds all the way back to the Old Testament? Every story works together to reveal that we too need a deliverer, today. We too, need the blood of the lamb. God sent him to us. It is Jesus. We see the image of the cross on many things in our society, don't we? Scattered throughout the landscape on church buildings and even some schools. It is on the necklaces, pendants and jewelry some of us wear. The cross is a wall ornament in

some of our homes and it is plastered on CD and magazine covers and even inked on our bodies as tattoos.

What does the cross mean? When you look at it, what do you see? What does the cross mean to you? Take a piece of paper, pencils and paper from the pocket slips in front of you. Take a moment and write down one or two words, what does the cross mean to you?

The cross means death. And it means pardon. It shows us the depth of our sins. Just how far we have fallen away from God. How separated we have become from him. At the cross is the intersection between God's love and his justice. The Cross means forgiveness and acceptance. Compassion and grace. It means restoration and cleansing, freedom and victory. But maybe more significantly, the cross means deliverance. It is the means by which we have been saved. Led out of the darkness, the wilderness. Not the cross itself, but Jesus' blood shed there at Calvary.

Do you know what it means to be forgiven? Maybe that is our greatest obstacle today. We live in a world that has forgotten its' true north. Everything is changing so rapidly and we just keep changing with it and we have lost track of our foundation. Our anchor. The one who never changes, Yahweh. I AM WHO I AM. And we rationalize, I don't need forgiveness. I haven't done anything too bad.

Romans 3:23, tell us,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We, all of humanity have sinned and that sin has created a roadblock between us and God. A God that created us to be in relationship with him.

But there is hope.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

On that piece of paper you took out earlier, beside what you wrote about the cross, take a minute and write out in a few short words, a confession. What is standing in the way of your relationship with God? Is it, pride, greed, lust, envy, lack of faith, fear? What is it? Take a moment and confess it to God.

Remember those words spoken to me at the elder meeting all those years ago? When I confessed that I had been too harsh, that gentleman walked over to me, grasped my shoulders and said, Paul. *You are forgiven.* That was powerful. But that is nothing, nothing compared to what the King of King and the Lord of Lord, did for me on that cross. Through his blood, soaked into the cross beams of that frame, he declared, *It is finished.* I am forgiven. You are forgiven. No more needs to be done when we turn to him.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Without receiving the blood, we are doomed to death just like those Egyptians. But through Christ, we have eternal life not someday in the future, but right here and right now, when we surrender our lives to him. Have you done that, surrendered your life to Jesus?

It is interesting that Moses went on to become a leader of the Israelite people. He led them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea and the intention was to travel right to the Promised Land that God had in store for them. But the people got cold feet. They let fear stop them from moving into all that God had in store for them but that's a story for the coming weeks.

Where does this story meet you today?

You know when Moses told the Israelite people to slaughter the lambs and splash the blood on their doorframes to protect them from death, we are not told whether they all did it. We just assume they all did, don't we? But it was a choice, no one coerced

them. We have a similar choice. Will you, have you received the lamb of God, Jesus who takes away the sins of the world? Will you stand under the blood of the cross? The gospel is free but it is never forced. We do have a choice. What is your choice today?

Let's pray.

Response. *Bring cards up, walk through the door frame to the cross, drop you cards, under the blood of the cross.*

Points to Ponder

THE STORY

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

Chapter 3

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Why did Joseph's brothers want to get rid of him?
2. Why does God allow hurtful things to happen to people?
3. What were the positive effects of Joseph's being sold into slavery?
4. What does Joseph's statement to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good," tell about God?
5. In what ways have you seen God work through the most bleak and hopeless situations to cause a greater good?
6. Why can God be trusted at all times?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray for those who are going through particularly difficult times. That God would reveal himself and his purpose through these situations and that they would trust God through these valleys in life.