

"God's Story and Ours"

We live in an age in which we have lots of facts but little sense of a cohesive unity to draw the facts into a story that gives meaning to life. I hope the message this morning helps us revisit God's Story to gain the wisdom it imparts and to deepen our sense of identity, purpose, faith, and hope. We bring the series, *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, to a close with this message. Beginning over three years ago, it aimed to cover the whole Bible relating major milestones in the larger storyline to the issues of our lives today. This passage from **John 1** can help us revisit the overview, wrap it up and hopefully bring it home.

One of the central claims of the Christian faith is that ...

I. OUR STORY BEGINS WITH GOD.

John 1:1-2 says: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him, all things were made; without him, nothing was made that has been made.*

A. The fact that God exists and created the world is at the heart of the Bible's story, and it makes all the difference in the world.

Many thoughtful and honest atheists have acknowledged that the only rational conclusion of their denial of God is a denial of meaning and purpose for all of life and humanity. Lawrence M. Krauss is an atheistic physicist and cosmologist who has appeared on shows like *The Colbert Show* and NPR's *"Talk of the Nation."* Krauss argues, "[Human beings] are just a bit of pollution. If you got rid of us, and all the stars and all the galaxies and all the planets and all the aliens and everybody, then the universe would be largely the same. We're completely irrelevant."¹ There is no meaning or morality without God. You don't matter, issues of justice don't matter, suffering is meaningless, and so is hope and every beautiful desire.

B. In contrast to that, part of the beauty of the story of God is that it begins and ends with love and relationships.

The God revealed in the Bible exists in a trinity of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three persons are so deeply one that they exist as one God who can never be divided. That means throughout eternity, there has been real love, communication, goodness, and relationship. The God who is love and is good has created us in his image and invited us into a relationship with him. In this vision of life and the world, everything matters, your soul matters, your suffering matters, and your hopes are not futile.

Most of us looking at the world today would say something is wrong. Of course, if there is no God, then there isn't right or wrong. There is just good luck or bad luck in a random and pitiless universe. But as human beings, we cry out over injustice and weep over our losses. Why? Because we know things are not the way they are meant to be.

II. EVERYTHING WRONG WITH THE WORLD CAN BE TRACED TO WHAT THE BIBLE'S STORY CALLS THE DARKNESS.

John 1:5 says, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* In the beginning, God said let there be light, but then darkness came back into God's good creation. In the gospel of John, darkness is spiritual ignorance, sin, and evil.² **John 3:19** says, *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*

When the Bible talks about the battle between light and darkness, it is not just talking about breaking a rule here or there. It's talking about your heart's relationship to the God who made you and the way things really are. The darkness in our society and in our souls comes from and is caused by *displacing God*: not placing him on the throne of our hearts ruling in us, at the center of our hearts filling us

Satan, not just sin is also a part of the story of the darkness. In His book *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis said one thing that surprised him when he first read the Bible was that *"it talked so much about a Dark Power in the universe -- a mighty, evil spirit..."* and the fact that

"this is a universe at war ." You've got to know that you have an enemy! A sly serpent just asking questions but questions designed to seduce, compromise, weaken. A roaring lion who wants to devour you. Be watchful, be prayerful. **1 Peter 5:9** says *resist him, firm in your faith.*

In the *The Story of God and the Struggles of Life*, we've seen a spiritual battle going on, often beyond physical sense or vision but all the time.

- 1. How it all Began:** This was our first season or section in this series, from the Creation to the temptation, the fall, the first murder, and then to the tower of Babel.
- 2. The Journey of Faith:** Abraham is called by grace to bring blessing, but he's called out of a world of deepening darkness to counter the influence of satanic evil.
- 3. The Struggle to be Free:** The call of Moses, the bondage of God's people, the Exodus, and wandering in the wilderness.
- 4. The Call for Courage:** The conquest of the Promised Land followed by the chaotic era of the judges.
- 5. Longing for the True King:** The rise and fall of King David and the subsequent downward decline into greater darkness and sin.
- 6. Waiting for God's Savior.** As the darkness deepened, judgment came. Israel went into exile in Babylon, but during that time, prophets were continually foretelling the coming of Christ.

In all of this history, we see everyday people, while responsible for their own choices and actions, are also victims of the tempter, the accuser, the enemy who opposes God. In all of this revealed in Scripture, God is telling you he wants you on his side in this life, and he wants you well aware of the enemy you face – we *all* face.

III. THE STORY OF GOD IS THE STORY OF GOD'S LIGHT BREAKING INTO THE DARKNESS TO BRING SALVATION.

Listen to **John 1:9-14**. *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become*

children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

A big part of the story throughout the Bible, is that God goes after people even when people are running *from* him. He sends prophets and poets, shows mercy, often withholds well-deserved judgment, and sometimes sends the very discipline we need to wake us up. He calls people out of dysfunctional families and cultures and into a relationship with him that helps and heals even the most beaten down and broken. And then, he does the most amazing thing of all. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. God the Son, without ceasing to be God became fully human, born in a manger then he walked from the manger to his death on the cross.

In our series, seasons seven and eight led us into the story of Jesus.

7. **The Coming of the Christ:** The birth and early ministry of Jesus.
8. **The Road to the Cross:** The later ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

A. What makes the Bible's story of God so uniquely complex in its beauty is that God truly loves us but deeply hates sin.

God works in the world in such a way that he preserves his perfect justice and even demonstrates his holy hatred of sin *in us* while at the same time going after lost people *like us*. **1 John 4:9-10:** *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Something horrible *and* wonderful happened on the cross of Christ. God bore the suffering, the judgment we deserve for our sakes. Because that is how he will make things right again.

And the story doesn't end with his sacrifice...

B. Jesus rose again from the dead and proved who he was, and showed us what our future could be.

The resurrection of Jesus is called the "first fruits" of the new creation. Just as his broken body was raised and renewed, the story of God will not be completed until all of creation is made new and perfected. This larger story is like the key that fits the human heart. It explains the larger story of our lives. A famous author from England, G.K. Chesterton, wrote this:

If I found a key on the road, and discovered it fit and opened a particular lock at my house, I would assume most likely that the key was made by the lock maker. And if I find set of teachings set out in pre-modern oriental society that has proven itself of such universal validity that it has fascinated and satisfied millions of people in every century, including the best minds in history and the simplest hearts, that it has made itself at home in virtually every culture, inspired masterpieces of beauty in every field of art, continues to grow rapidly and spread and assert itself in lands where a century ago the name of Jesus Christ was not even heard; if such teaching so obviously fits the locks of so many human souls, in so many times and so many places, are they likely to be the work of a deceiver or a fool? In fact, it is more likely that they were designed by the Heart Maker...

IV. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THE STORY OF GOD?

If we keep with the themes and images of the Scripture we've read, I think we can sum it up with two ideas that can also help us. **Verse 14** says, *And 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.* So here's how we should respond. We need to receive the *grace*, and we need to live the *truth*.

A. Receive God's *grace* by receiving Jesus.

Look back at **verses 11-12**, *He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* That's how you receive the grace. This is how you live in light of the story. You open your life up to your creator and redeemer by receiving Jesus as your

King and Savior. You open every part of your life up to Him. The Bible calls it "repentance" what it means in effect is that you reverse that part of the story where we listened to the lie and started living in darkness. You return to him, and you receive or trust in Jesus.

Receive God's grace by receiving Jesus.

B. Live the *truth* by walking in the light.

The word "light" appears seven times in these verses! That's a familiar picture in the Bible, and it is very helpful if you actually think about it. It's all through the Bible. **Psalm 56:13** *For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.* The light is truth and goodness and the love and presence of God. Darkness is deception and evil and harmful and bitter. Your task, having received the light *in* Jesus, is to walk in the light *with* Jesus.

Seasons 9 through 11 in our series were all about receiving God's Grace and walking in the light.

- 9. The Birth of Something New:** The beginning of the church, the conversion of Paul, and the first gentiles coming to faith.
- 10. The Spreading Flame:** The missionary journeys of Paul and his early letters to the churches ending with Romans.
- 11. How to Face The Future.** This picked up at the end of Acts and took us through the other New Testament epistles, the imprisonment of Paul, and the prison epistles, the pastoral epistles, the epistles of John and Revelation.

CONCLUSION

I want to leave you and this series with four keywords.

1. Story. Let the story of God shape your sense of self. You are and were made for God, and your heart will not rest until he is central. If you have received Jesus as your Savior and Lord, whatever your career, education, and station in life, you have been called into God's storyline of salvation. You are to live in a relationship with God and for the glory of God in all you do. Jesus lays claim to every aspect of your life and every minute that you live. From the kitchen sink to the

commute in the car, the office, workplace, and classroom, on your pillow, there is not a minute or a molecule in your life without value and meaning. Live it to the fullest in communion with God, faith, and hope.

2. Scripture. As the story of God shapes your sense of self, let the word of God fill your heart and soul. All through the story of God, we see this, from the promises believed by Abraham to the songs sung by David and the faith of Daniel, Hanna, Esther, and Mary. The imagery of Psalm 1 says it all, those *who meditate on the word of God are like strong and fruitful trees planted by streams of living water.*

3. Suffering. You don't have to like it, but you will have to face it, do so with faith. Who in Scripture never had to suffer. The story of God is full of the sufferings of his servants. Don't be surprised by it. Don't let suffering lead to bitterness or doubt. Remember how many of God's people at the center of his story held onto the promises of Scripture even in the experience of suffering.

4. Salvation. John tells us that Jesus came into the world full of grace and truth, and to those who believe in him, he gave them authority to become children of God. **John 1:12** *But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* Believe that! Believe in him. Have you ever done that little exercise where you put yourself into a verse? Have you received Jesus? Have you believed in his name? If so, what does this Scripture say of you and to you? You are a child of God. He gave you what you could never earn: the right to become children of God. That's your story. But are you there in the story? Have you received him? If not, why not? If not, will you receive him today? If so, will you marvel at that? You don't deserve it. It is a priceless gift of grace with eternal significance. Give thanks and walk in the light.

Amen.

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Chrst.

God of light your light shines in the darkness. Shine into me. Fill me with grace and guide me with truth. I believe Jesus is the true light. His

death is the sacrificial payment for my sins that fully satisfies your righteousness and his resurrection is the awesome demonstration of his victory. He is my Lord and Savior, my hope and my salvation May I walk before you in the light of life. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Gracious Father, Holy Spirit, Lord Jesus, shine fully into my life and through me into this world. May your story shape my identity and purpose. May your Scriptures be, in practice, a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. May your promises sustain in times of suffering or uncertainty. May your saving grace fill me with the joyful assurance of your gracious presence now and for eternity to come. Amen.

- Communion
- New Members
- Baby Dedication
- Puerto Rico Comissioning

1 *Richard Panek, "Out There," The New York Times 3-11-07*

2 John 3:19, 8:12; 12:35,46, 1 John 1:5, 6; 2:8,9,11