

# COMMISSIONED

## THE ART OF LIVING OUT THE WORDS, WAYS, & MISSION OF JESUS

### 9.1 Partnering in the Mission of Jesus

#### The Story of God

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Jesus was a master storyteller. He was whimsical and profound, inviting and compelling, relevant and timeless. We often use the word “Gospel” to refer to his teaching, life, and death and resurrection. Although it is used primarily as a religious word in our context, it was once a word that simply meant “breaking news” or “good news.” It was the kind of story that grabbed the headline above the fold. But sometimes, I worry that we have made God’s story boring. Or even worse, off-putting.

Today, we often communicate the Gospel like this: “Jesus loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. But if you don’t follow the plan, you will burn in hell forever.” It’s doubtful that any of us have used those specific words (at least in the second part) but it’s essentially what we have often communicated. That’s not likely to sound like “good” news to most people. We have reduced the Gospel to a story that is condemning, truncated, and anemic. We need to change the narrative.

The Gospel is not a set of statements that we give mental assent to.

It is not an eternal fire insurance policy.

It is not a means of forcing people into moral conformity through scare tactics.

At its core, the Gospel does not present a set of rules to live by but proposes a calling to live for.

Part of the problem with our stories is that we have reduced the story of God to something like this: Adam and Eve sinned. Jesus died to make it right. We acknowledge sin and point to redemption but it keeps the story centered around us. We forget what came before and what comes after.

The story of God is not a two-act play of fall and redemption. The story of God has four movements:

Creation

Fall

Redemption

Recreation or Restoration

In the beginning, God. He references himself over 30 times in the opening chapter of Genesis alone as if to declare this is his story and it's ultimately about him. Both author and protagonist. In the beginning, he created, and it was all good. And he made people in his image. The starting point for loving our neighbors is to remember that every person you meet is an image-bearer.

The Good News begins with good news. God created. And he created us in his image. He blessed us. And he sent us on mission.

Then the Fall happened. Sin and corruption entered the world. Sickness, brokenness, violence, destruction. The Fall represents how the world is today.

But sin is not the only power present and at work in the world today. The greater power is the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross to redeem his Creation. Jesus referred to himself as the way, the truth, and the life. He said he came to give life and give it abundantly. In Luke 4:18, he said that he came to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

That is more than issuing individual fire insurance policies. He is offering hope that a return to the original intent is possible. Redemption is not just about our own individual need for salvation. Redemption is about God's original plan for all of creation. Redemption represents what the world can be through Jesus Christ.

In the end, God will create a new heaven and new earth. Everything will be restored to its original goodness. We are invited to play a role in that restoration work. The story begins with creation and ends with new creation. It begins with the image of God and ends with the revealed glory of God. It begins with us walking in perfect communion with him and ends with us ruling in eternity with him.

Creation- what the world ought to be.

Fall- what the world is.

Redemption- what the world can be.

Restoration- what the world will be.

When we remember how the story begins and ends, we find connection points with our own individual stories. When we remember the author and the protagonist of the story, we better understand our place and role in it. It's a story of bondage to liberation. It's a story of isolation to reconciliation. It's a story of darkness to light and good defeating evil.

This understanding of the story of God has got to frame our lives. When we understand that his story includes restoration, then we recognize that we have a role to play in that...regardless of what domain of the marketplace we find ourselves in. God has unique purposes for government, arts, media, business, academia, justice.

In the Bible, the story was told over and over again.

The entire book of Deuteronomy was a retelling of the story of bondage to liberation.

Before Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, he told them the story of deliverance again.

When the priests rediscovered the book of the law in the temple, King Josiah had it read aloud to the entire nation of Judah.

Ezra read the story out loud to the exiles returning from Babylon.

The story of God reminded people who they were, whose they were, where they were going, why they were going there, and how they were supposed to live once they arrived. It reminded them they were no longer enslaved, but free. They were no longer isolated, but connected. They were no longer walking in darkness, but light. God was not far, but near.

In the New Testament, the early followers of Jesus pointed to the continuing story of God as evidence that Jesus was God in flesh and his message was worth repeating.

When Stephen, the first martyr, was questioned about why he followed Jesus, he didn't respond with theology but with the story of God.

How well do we know the story of God? Are we able to tell the story of God? Are we willing to invite others into the story of God?