

LOST: More Than Must-See TV
“Guys, Where Are We?”
June 12/13, 2010

And so began one of the most-watched TV series in television history with Dr. Jack Shephard coming upon the wreckage of Oceanic Flight 815.

Good morning everyone and welcome to the Island – I mean, welcome to the beginning of our four-week series *LOST: More Than Must-See TV*.

I’m curious:

- How many have heard of this TV show?
- How many of you have seen at least *one* episode?
- How many of you would consider yourself a fan of the show, even if you just got into it in the past year like I did?
- How many of you are so addicted to LOST that you’ve taken a family vacation to Hawaii because you just had to see where it was filmed? (That’s not the only reason Shannon and Price went there).

For many people, LOST really was “must-see TV.” I don’t typically watch much television beyond news and a few Royal’s games, but last summer LOST became must-see TV for me, too. Thanks to the magic of “streaming Netflix,” I was able to watch the first five seasons in about two months and, I have to say, I was blown away. Not only was LOST an unusually high-quality production for TV, it was also incredibly sophisticated at raising the deep questions that nag at everyone who wonders about this universe in which we find ourselves.

And, sometimes, it even pointed in the direction of the answers ... which is why I came to believe that LOST was “*More Than Must-See TV*” ... and why I decided to do this series.

Why a TV Series?

Of course, some might ask “is it really a good idea for a pastor to use a *TV series* (or movies, which I’ve also done in the past) to teach and preach from instead of just going right out of the Bible?” Fair question.

I think it is – occasionally – for at least two reasons.

1. Jesus often used what people saw to illustrate truth that they didn’t.

For example, the Gospel of Luke tells us that on one occasion, Jesus was preaching and he said to his disciples:

“I tell you to stop worrying about what you will eat or wear. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes.” Luke 12:22-23 (GW)

Now, as a theologian and also as the Son of God, Jesus would have been justified in ending his teaching right there. But he didn’t, because Jesus was more than a theologian, he was a *teacher* as well and teaching isn’t about telling facts. It’s about helping those who are listening to come to a place of understanding.

And that happens when you tie the truth that people *don’t* see to the things they *do* see, which is why Jesus went on to say:

Consider the crows. They don't plant or harvest. They don't even have a storeroom or a barn. Yet, God feeds them. You are worth much more than birds. Luke 12:24 (GW)

*Consider how the flowers grow. They never work or spin yarn for clothes. But I say that not even Solomon in all his majesty was dressed like one of these flowers.
Luke 12:27 (GW)*

That's the way God clothes the grass in the field. Today it's alive, and tomorrow it's thrown into an incinerator. So how much more will he clothe you people who have so little faith? Luke 12:28 (GW)

Jesus used the things that people already saw to point them to the deeper things of God that they *didn't*. And that's my intention in this series as well – to use something a lot of us “saw” to point to things we may not yet “see.”

The second reason I'm using a TV show as a framework for teaching is that ...

2. God often uses what theologians call “general revelation” to open our hearts and minds to “specific revelation.”

The idea here is that echoes of God's presence and activity still exist everywhere in this world (which is what is meant by “general revelation”), and when we become aware of that then we're open to discovering more about who this God is and what He has said and done in the scripture (which is “specific revelation.”)

Now, obviously, the most vivid form of general revelation is *nature*.

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. Psalms 19:1-2 (NIV)

In other words, nature is telling us that there is a God. And, a lot of people, when they hear and see this message will begin a quest to know more about Him, which is what God desires.

But nature isn't the only vehicle of general revelation. The creativity of human beings can sometimes accomplish that purpose, too, because, as image-bearers of God, we still echo His glory *even though that echo has been muted by sin*.

That's why art, music and drama – and not necessarily “religious” art, music and drama – sometimes have a “spiritual effect” on us, as *LOST* did for a lot of people. That's general revelation at work and sometimes it opens us up to hearing something more specific about the God it points to ... which is what I hope will happen in this series.

And since that *is* my hope and intention, I want to pray about that before we begin.

Lost by “LOST”

Ok, let's get into it, and let's begin with the question that so many people have asked: *what is LOST really all about?* I mean, six seasons worth of material; depending on how you count, anywhere from 117-121 episodes were produced.

What ... exactly ... is going on?

And that's the way a lot of people reacted to the show: *what????* Maybe some of you can relate!

And there's no question that *LOST* could be really confusing, especially after the third season when things like *this* started happening.

Oh yeah ... *time travel* ... which is nothing new in science fiction. However, in *LOST*, you had to really understand all the implications

of it in order to keep up with the story. And, at that point, I think a lot of people simply got “lost” and gave up.

But if you hung in there until the *fifth* season ... well, that’s when the producers decided to let everyone in on what was *really* going on behind the scenes on this island. And I was going to try and explain it to you, but I came across a YouTube video that does it much better than I ever could.

So let’s watch that ...

Got all that? Really makes it clear doesn’t it?

Not really. It’s still confusing.

So, how can something that is so bizarre have anything “spiritually revealing” to say to us?

Let me show you a clip from Part II of the original pilot that I think explains it. The survivors of Oceanic Flight 815 have been on the island for just a few days but they’ve already discovered that this is no ordinary place:

- They’ve run into a “smoke monster” and experienced its evil and destruction.
- They’re in the tropics somewhere, but they’ve killed a polar bear.
- And using radio equipment they were able to salvage from the plane, they’ve picked up a transmission from *someone else* stranded on the island for a very long time.

Watch closely as a few of them process this latest revelation.

I just love that “boom” sound!

“LOST” in the Real World

But what I love even more is how LOST from the very beginning raises a profound question that matters ... and not just on some make-believe island, but in real life: *Where are we? What is this place in which we find ourselves? What is the nature of this world into which we’ve pretty much been dropped?*

In a sense, the Island serves as a metaphor for the real world in which we live.

That’s why LOST – as confusing as it is – is valuable. *We’re* trying to figure out where *we* are and what this place is, just like *they* were.

“Oh come on, Rick. Are you saying there are smoke monsters in the real world?”

Literally? No. Metaphorically? Yes, absolutely. They’re everywhere.

- When the doctors have no answers for you, you’re facing a smoke monster.
- When you lose your job and you don’t know what you’re going to do next, that’s a smoke monster.
- When a freak accident happens to you or someone you love, that’s another one.

When tornadoes and hurricanes and earthquakes and tidal waves hit, those are metaphorical “pockets of electromagnetic energy” being released with catastrophic results.

Our “real world” is every bit as bizarre, scary, confusing *and beautiful* as The Island. It’s filled with amazing and dreadful people,

places and things that we struggle to comprehend ... which is why a very smart man, years ago, was inspired to write:

I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; but they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 (NIV)

In other words, because we're created in God's image (with a sense of "eternity" in our hearts), we humans can perceive that something "big" is "out there" but we can't quite fathom it all. We can't make sense of the smoke monsters and the electromagnetic forces and even the people around us. What is this place in which we find ourselves? *Where are we?* That question is a uniquely human burden.

And LOST was brilliant at exploring the issues that we believe will lead us to the answer.

Let me show you an example. This is from the second season of the show where the survivors have discovered a mysterious hatch in the ground and have just blown it open with dynamite that they found elsewhere. But that hatch, at the very last minute we see that it has a serial number on it which led one of the characters, Hurley, to freak out and try at the last minute to stop them from opening the hatch. Listen to why he was so worried about that hatch and those numbers.

So, who's right? Are the events of our lives connected in some way or another? Do the numbers mean something? Or are they just random occurrences?

And that leads to the really big question raised repeatedly through all six seasons –

1. Are we predestined or do we have freewill?

Do you and I have the ability to freely choose our course in life, or is there a pre-determined path of destiny, numbers, whatever, down which we are all going to walk whether we like it or not?

Now, in the show, the main protagonist for the "destiny option" was John Locke. Locke believed that he and all of the crash survivors were meant to be on that island. Watch as he explains his theory to Jack.

Now, that clip reinforced the predestination/freewill issue, but it also raised another question that ran throughout the series as well. Maybe you picked up on it. Locke said that Jack was a man of science while he was a man of faith. And the running debate between them was "what's the best way to perceive the reality of this world around us?" I mean, we're trying to figure out "where are we?" But what's the best way to get at the answer to that question?

2. Do we "know" best through science or faith? (Or, more technically, through rationalism or empiricism?)ⁱ

Should we trust our intuitions as Locke did? (And, by the way, the name of that character, John Locke is significant in that it was the *real* John Locke, a British philosopher in the mid-1800s, who first defined the idea of "empiricism.")

Anyway, can we trust what our intuition tells us or should we limit ourselves to only what can be discerned through rational methods like science? That's a question that has burdened philosophers for ages.

But it's not just a question for the philosophers and the sages; it's a question that comes up for almost all of us. For example, whenever we hear a scripture in a sermon, do we believe *that* – do we trust what claims to be a "specific revelation" from God, or do we not?

How do we really *know reality*? It's a fundamental question about life on The Island and life in the real world.

Now, one of the things that LOST did *exceptionally well*, I think, was to illustrate the struggle we all have to live on one side or the other of that argument.

For example, Locke, as we saw, was convinced that it was his destiny to find and open the hatch. But once he did, he lost his faith in that destiny ... because the sole purpose of life in the hatch, he discovered, was to simply punch a button every 108 minutes to keep the world from being destroyed.

Pushing a button to save the world? Sounds crazy, doesn't it? After a couple of weeks of doing it, that's exactly what Locke concluded – this is crazy. But, as it turned out ... well, let's just watch a clip that summarizes that part of the story.

He believed, then he didn't believe, then he believed again. Sound familiar? Sound like any of us? Maybe daily? It's hard to be a person of faith.

But it's just as hard to be a man of science. Turns out that Mr. Skeptical, Jack Shephard, has, in his life before the island, experienced the irrational and the unexplainable. In a flashback (and there are a lot of those in LOST, as well as flash-forwards and flash-really-really-forwards) ... in a flashback, we see what happens after Jack does surgery on a woman who was critically injured in a car accident.

And that whoosh means that it's back to The Island time for Jack where, like many skeptics in the real world, he struggled to *remain a skeptic* because it's hard to be a skeptic as well.

So, the value of LOST, I think, is that it creatively raises some of our deepest questions.

- Where are we? What is this place in which we find ourselves? Are we in a place where we're simply predestined to good or bad luck, or do even the most mundane button-pushing activities of everyday life matter more than we know?
- Can we best determine the answers to those kinds of questions (and many others) through science or faith? Rationalism or empiricism?
- And how do you live with the fact that after all of that is said and done and all of that is considered, that in many things, *you just do not know the answer with absolute certainty.*

And that's exactly where LOST left its viewers in the finale a few weeks ago. As one commentator wrote ...

The finale, for many fans, wasn't just about the end of the story; it was about *solving the mystery*. Leading up to the finale, LOST websites were abuzz with chatter about the questions that needed to be answered.

But, those who expected the finale to answer all those questions, however, may have been disappointed. *Some* of the mysteries were addressed in the finale. Most were not. In fact, the final hours of LOST showed *little concern for satisfying viewers' curiosity* ...

... which made a lot of people mad, as reflected in this satirical video that was posted just a few days later.

Watch ...

I think you get the point: there were a lot of unanswered questions!

In fact, it kind of bothered me, too, at first. My exact words to my daughter, Katie, who watched the finale with me, were: *"emotionally satisfying, intellectually not so much."*

But the more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that *that is probably what they wanted people to say*. Why? Because that's what life really is like in the real world (and, remember, The Island is a metaphor for the real world).

On “The Island” of real life you don’t get all the answers, so you have to learn to live with the questions.

We talked about this several weeks ago when we looked at the Old Testament book of Ruth. Remember that story? There were smoke monsters everywhere along with a bunch of coincidental events that “just so happened” to work out for good. Evil was at work; the hand of God was at work; freewill was at work; destiny was at work ... but no one at the time knew exactly how it all fit together.

This is that “burden God has laid on men” as we read earlier. We have the reflection of eternity in our hearts which makes us ask those “big questions,” but as limited human beings we cannot fathom the answers. We do not know what’s going on behind the scenes – how it all works and how it all fits together.

What Matters Most

So, if that’s true – if we live on a wonderful and dangerous Island called “Earth” with a bunch of stuff we’re probably never going to figure out, at least in our lifetime, then what’s the point of it all?

And, in the end, I think LOST answered *that* question very well; probably better than most of the people, including me, who watched it!

I want to show you two clips that are just perfect illustrations. This first one takes place near the end of the overall story. Jack has come to believe (30 years before the crash - this is that time travel thing again) that if he sets off a huge bomb at the center of the island’s electromagnetism, it will undo all the bad stuff that’s going to happen in the future, including their plane crash. But not everyone in that group agrees with him. And so, those who disagree with his perspective are trying to stop him.

And, they’re on their way to this confrontation with Jack, this big showdown, but as they are, they run across a husband and wife who were also on the plane ... and who haven’t been seen or heard from in a long time.

Listen to what they say and see if you can figure out “the point.”

I love that scene, where Bernard offers Juliette an opportunity to change direction and have tea as she is going off to this battle. She’s got this gun. It’s such a wonderful contrast between “being right” and “having all the answers” and what “the point” really is.

And if you haven’t figured out the point yet, you will on this final clip, which is from the very first season, less than a week after the plane crash. Tensions are running high; water is running low and what little there was has gone missing.

Watch what happens.

Truer words have never been spoken: “if we can’t live together, we’re going to die alone.” And that *is* the theme that runs from beginning to end, if you saw the finale, quite literally, in LOST.

So, if you were going to sum it up, I think you would say it like this:

1. According to LOST “the point” of life on The Island is relationships and community. Any other issue (including “answers” science-based or faith-based) is secondary.

That’s why they didn’t answer all the questions. In fact, if you listen to some of the commentary, you realize that the creators of LOST aren’t even sure of the answers themselves! But that’s OK because, when you live on an island like ours, *that’s not what’s most*

important.

Now, at this point, someone could say “wait a minute, Rick. This whole LOST thing is interesting (or not), but you’re supposed to teach us what the Bible says not what some goofballs out in Hollywood dream up.”

And that’s exactly right.

But what’s amazing is that what LOST teaches is pretty much what the Bible teaches!

2. According to the Gospel “the point” is the same.

Life is ultimately about relationships and community not answers.

And we know this implicitly because the three-part being we call God is by definition a relationship; a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And as those created in his image, we are meant to reflect God’s nature, which means we are meant for community with Him and with others. That’s of primary importance.

We also know that explicitly because Jesus himself taught it. One day, a Bible scholar came to him and said, “I’ve spent years and years trying to figure it out, Jesus. I’ve read the law. I’ve read the Prophets. I’ve read all the stuff in the Old Testament, but I’m still kind of confused. Maybe you can help me figure it out...”

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

“I mean, there are things in there that make sense, but there are things in there that are really really scary. There are things in there that I have no idea – what is the point?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

That’s what it all boils down to in the end, Jesus was saying.

A few years after Jesus, the Apostle Paul echoed Jesus’ thoughts to some early Christians who had become impressed not with “rational knowledge” but with “spiritual knowledge.” Apparently, the Holy Spirit had unusually gifted some of them with the ability to “see and know” things that couldn’t be rationally discerned. But Paul reminded them ...

Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

What’s going to remain is this ...

These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10,12-13 (NIV)

Greater than answers to questions about this world; greater than answers to spiritual questions about another world ... is love. It’s about relationships and community.

And next week, as we continue this series, we’re going to talk about how you actually get to be part of a community where people really do love each other. What does it take to become part of a community like that? And the Bible and LOST have some really good things to say about that.

But for today, what we need to know and what we need to affirm is that we *really do need each other*. This isn't a one man show. We don't all live on our own island. Relationships and community. Everything else is secondary.

Let's pray.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ See <http://tinyurl.com/273uwb> for a simple explanation of rationalism and empiricism.