

Outsiders
God's Story, My Story
November 11, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Worship – Good, Good
Live Announcements –

Video – Amy Harris

Feature – Learning to be the Light

A very long time ago back when the biblical nation of Israel existed, things weren't going so well.

- There had been a prolonged drought so the economy (which was primarily agricultural) was in shambles.
- The borders were left defenseless and armies from neighboring countries would

frequently raid their cities and villages.

In fact, in the region of Samaria, a siege laid by the king of Syria was so effective at cutting off the food supply that, according to the historical record preserved for us in the Old Testament ...

... a donkey's head sold for fifty dollars and a pint of dove's dung [i.e., bird poop] brought three dollars!

... the implication being that things were so bad that people were reduced to eating such things and were willing to pay an exorbitant price to do so.

But it was even worse than that. The scripture says that people were so desperate for food that some were cannibalizing their own children.

As harsh as that may seem, within this community there was a group of guys who actually had it worse than everyone else: *lepers* who, because of

their disease and its contagious nature, were forced by law to live outside of the town separated from everyone else. So, these guys were *really* desperate.

In fact, they were so desperate that, one day, they decided to put their heads together and come up with a last-ditch plan for survival.

“Why sit here until we die?” they asked each other.

“We will starve if we stay here and we will starve if we go back into the city; so we might as well go out and surrender to the Syrian army. If they let us live, so much the better; but if they kill us, we would have died anyway.”

Pretty good logic, don't you think?

In essence ... “what have we got to lose? We can either die *here* or we can die *there*.”

“And who knows? Maybe we’ll luck out and catch the Syrians in a good mood. If we’re going to go down, let’s at least go down in a blaze of glory.”

So that evening they went out to the camp of the Syrians ...

... with hands raised high over their heads, ready to beg for mercy.

But as they approached the camp, it felt like something was off. *It was completely silent.* No noise whatsoever.

- No commanders giving orders.
- No laughter of soldiers.
- No sound of horses breathing or pawing at the ground.

As they entered the camp, it was apparent that something was off. Everything set up as it should be, but no one was there!

At the time, they had no idea why or what had happened. Later, they discovered that, at some point during the previous night, God had miraculously driven the army away.

Apparently, He had gotten sick of them oppressing His people, so He had played a little mind game with them. The Scripture says that ...

The Lord had made the whole Syrian army hear [what seemed to be] the clatter of speeding chariots and a loud galloping of horses and the sounds of a great army approaching.

“The king of Israel has hired the Hittites and Egyptians to attack us!” they cried out.

So they panicked and fled into the night, abandoning their tents, horses, donkeys, and everything else.

... which explains why a group of tired, hungry, desperate lepers find themselves completely surprised not only to be “still standing” after their

risky plan ... but to be standing in the middle of *the stockpile of the Syrian army* ... without the Syrian army.

If you were in their sandals, what would you do?

You'd probably do exactly what they did.

They went into one tent after another, eating, drinking wine, and carrying out silver and gold and clothing and hiding it. 2 Kings 7:8 (TLB)

... and probably looking over their shoulders and listening closely to make sure the army wasn't returning!

Anyway ... this all went on for some time until they had eaten their fill and dramatically increased their personal net worth.

But, at some point, they all sat down together and began to reflect on their incredibly good fortune.

- “Just think – only hours ago, we were dead men!”
- “Back there, there was no future at all for us.”
- “Gosh, that place was so bad off, wasn’t it?”
- “Yeah, those poor people back there.”

And then I imagine a hush fell over the group as they remembered the plight of “those poor people back there” – people who were eating bird poop ... and donkey heads ... and even their own children.

And then their hearts were filled with compassion and ...

Finally they said to each other, “This isn’t right. This is wonderful news, and we aren’t sharing it with anyone!” 2 Kings 7:8 (TLB)

Then they began to debate. “Should we go back now? Or wait until morning?”

“If we wait until morning,” they decided, “some terrible calamity will certainly fall upon us.”

“This is obviously a God-thing and He might not be happy if we keep it to ourselves. After all, there’s nothing special about us. We were just in the right place at the right time.”

“Come on, let’s go back and tell the people at the palace.”

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*So they went back to the city and told the watchmen what had happened ... Then the watchmen shouted the news to those in the palace ... and the people of Samaria rushed out and plundered the camp of the Syrians.
2 Kings 7:11,16 (TLB)*

And just like that, the siege and the famine were over and thousands of people were saved from certain death.

And I love that story because it illustrates so clearly what God *always wants those who find the “stockpile of salvation” to do*: to share it with others because ...

- They need it as much as we do.
- And there is nothing special about us.

There’s no superlative quality about us that makes us any more deserving than anyone else to have been led the stockpile which is Jesus Himself.

And so, the appropriate response is to share it; to share Him and our faith in Him; to become, in the words of Jesus Himself – “the light” – and, in the words of the Apostle Paul, ambassadors for Christ ...

... which is why we’re doing this series called

Outsiders.

Recap

As I've said pretty much every week to this point, that word often has a negative connotation because, in our current political and cultural state of division, the goal is for *outsiders to remain as outsiders* and, in fact, *the further out* they remain the better.

If you're labeled an "outsider" these days, you pretty much know you're not welcome. You're not wanted.

But not so with Christianity.

In Christianity, the hope isn't that an *outsider* – someone who does not know or follow Jesus; someone who's not part of the tribe called "Christian" ... the hope isn't that outsiders will move further out.

Instead, the hope is that *outsiders* might someday become *insiders*. The hope is that they, like us, will find the stockpile of grace and mercy and freedom and purpose and meaning; “life abundant” Jesus once called it.

And, again, because those of us who are insiders – those of us who *do* know and follow Jesus – are called to participate in turning this hope into reality for the outsiders in our lives, the question we’ve been looking at in this series is “how can we maximize our effectiveness as Jesus’ representatives?”

And we’ve been focusing on a little equation that looks like this:

$$\mathbf{MI = HP + CP + CC}$$

Maximum Impact (MI) happens when you combine ...

- “High Potency” with ...

- “Close Proximity” with ...
- “Clear Communication”

High Potency means that your relationship with Jesus is strong and it's apparent that it's influencing your life.

We just saw a really good example of that in Amy's story, right? Her relationship with Christ is clearly and positively affecting how she is perceiving and handling the difficulties in her life. When you hear her talk, you think, “I want what she has.” That's what we mean by potency.

Close Proximity (or CP) means that instead of avoiding outsiders because, well, they're *outsiders* – they're sinners who might corrupt you – instead of avoiding them ...

- You pursue them
- You engage them
- You love them

- You serve them
- You build meaningful relationships with them

... like Jesus did.

Finally, *Clear Communication (or CC)* means that you are able to explain who Jesus is and what He has done for the world and for you. In other words, you're able to tell God's story and your story and you're able to give reasons for why you believe.

Now, this particular element of the equation is so critical because without it – without clear communication – you're just “a really nice person.”

And while that's a good thing (and we could use more truly nice people in the world), if we're Christians, that's *not* the thing to which we're called as ambassadors for Jesus. Being “a really nice person” isn't the assignment we've been given.

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Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

At some point, as Amy said, you have to speak up.

Now, if you were here or watching online last week, you know that we started talking about how to do that.

Actually, that's not totally accurate. We also talked quite a bit about how *not* to do that.

I won't go into the whole thing again (if you weren't here you can check it out on our app, website or podcast), but it basically came down to this: when communicating with people who are not of the tribe called "Christian" – beloved *outsiders* who God wants to become *insiders* so

much that Jesus would come and *give His life ...*

The goal is not to ...

- Defend your political opinions
- Defend your views concerning cultural morality (or lack thereof)
- Defend the Bible (in particular, the Old Testament)

That doesn't mean you can't hold strong and well-reasoned opinions about all of those things. *I* do. I hold strong opinions on all of those things. And I think they are well-reasoned.

But that doesn't really matter because, when representing Jesus – when communicating with people who are not of the tribe called Christian – beloved outsiders who God wants to become *insiders* so much that Jesus would come and *give His life ...* the only thing we're told to give an answer for, the only thing we are told to defend is the reason for our hope!

And what is the reason for the hope we have in God?

It's not a feeling. It's not our immediate circumstances. It's that Jesus of Nazareth was raised from the dead.

Without that, nothing Christianity tries to say about God – that God is love, God is good, God is all-powerful – nothing Christianity tries to say about God is worth listening to.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no reason whatsoever to be a Christian. It's all a joke. And we're a joke for even being here.

As Paul put it:

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NIV)

And quite frankly we all need to just shut up about it.

But Jesus *has* been raised from the dead. So we cannot keep silent.

And, again, I went into a pretty good amount of detail on this last week (including why it's reasonable to believe that Jesus was resurrected) so I'm not going to say any more on it this morning.

The point (at least as it pertains to clear communication with outsiders) is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the main thing is not politics, not morality, not even the Bible.

The main thing is Jesus: who He is and what He has done, particularly His resurrection.

God's Story

So, let's talk about communicating *Jesus*.

Obviously, being able to communicate the basics of what we *believe* about Jesus – that He was God in the flesh, that He lived and died and then rose again – is pretty important.

But what's *more* important is being able to communicate *why* it even matters – more specifically, why it's good news – and what to do about it.

So, what's the best way to do that? How do you explain the Gospel – the good news – in very simple terms?

In my experience, most people are typically open to one of three approaches. And, as I explain these to you, I think you'll see that these are all saying the same thing at the core but they start in a slightly different place.ⁱ

Let's call the first one "The Big Story" of creation, fall, rescue and restoration.

... which is actually a good way to describe how the overall story of the Bible itself points to Jesus. Everything runs in His direction.

This particular approach connects well with people who like to know the big picture as well as people who are passionate about issues of justice. It describes ...

- What God intended – or the purpose of *creation*
- What went wrong – or the *fall* of humanity
- What God has done – or the *rescue* (which is where Jesus comes in)
- And how God is going to set things right – or the *restoration* (which means the transformation Jesus begins in people now and will complete when He returns to rule as King)

Now, this story can be told in very simple words – four of them, obviously. But it can also be told in *more* words and very creatively.

Here’s an example from an organization called *The Bible Project*.ⁱⁱ

Video clip – “The Big Story”

We’ll put a link to that on our Facebook page early this week. And I highly recommend you check out their website for the many other excellent and informative videos they’ve created.

The second approach of explaining the Gospel is called “The Gospel according to 321.”

This one has some similarities to the Big Story but it gets a little more personal.

I like it because it begins with the idea that the Supreme Being we call “God” is actually a Trinity of interdependent beings who live together in perfect unity and love. That’s *three*.

It also illustrates that the world is being shaped by

the first Adam who represents all of us and our fallenness and also by the second Adam (the son of God who came to earth as Jesus of Nazareth) who came to save us and God's creation. That's two.

Then, finally, it explains that all of us are, by nature, one with Adam but we can become one, by faith, with Jesus.

Check it out.ⁱⁱⁱ

Video clip – “The Gospel in 321”

So we have The Big Story and the Gospel according to 321.

The final and simplest approach to explaining the Gospel (because it's only two words) ...

... is simply “Do vs. Done.”

This one is particularly helpful for people ...

- Who are already aware of their own sinfulness
- And who sense something needs to happen for them to have peace with God.

Check it out.^{iv}

Video clip – “Do vs. Done”

So, there you have three approaches to talk about Jesus and why what He did matters to us.

- You can use four words: Creation, Fall, Rescue and Restoration
- Or three words: Three, Two, One
- Or two words: Do vs. Done

They all start in a different place but they share common elements, mainly that ...

- The world’s a mess
- We’re a mess
- But God loves us and His creation

- And though we're all part of the problem and deserve to be condemned, through his death Jesus stands in our place and offers forgiveness and healing
- And then, through His resurrection, begins restoring us and eventually, all of creation.

And the way we get in on that is not by *doing something* because the *doing* has already been *done* by Jesus.

We get in on the deal by trusting Him.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

My Story

Now, as I said at earlier, clear communication

means being able to tell in some way not just *that* story – but also (assuming you’re a Christian) *your own* story – specifically, the impact that knowing Jesus and following Jesus has had on your life.

This matters more than ever these days because, as I’m sure you know, no one buys anything without first checking the reviews. That applies to faith, too, which is why ...

The best endorsement for Christianity is an authentic Christian who can explain how following Jesus makes their life better and makes them better at life.

Let’s take that piece by piece.

What do I mean by an *authentic* Christian?

Among other things, being authentic means ...

- Being real and transparent about your successes and failures in following Jesus

- Not pretending to be better than you really are
- Not acting like you have it all together when you don't.
- It means *admitting* you're wrong when you're wrong.
- It means being teachable – being open to learning how to think and act differently.

What makes authenticity so attractive is that pretty much everything in our world – especially our social media presence – is a big fat production designed to make people think more highly of us.

But an authentic Christian doesn't need to people to think more highly of them. He or she realizes that Jesus already knows all their secrets and has forgiven all their failures and sins so that's not necessary.

As for explaining how Jesus has made your life better and made you better at life, I think that's pretty self-explanatory. When you take the long view of your life ...

- What's changed and changing externally and internally?
- What challenging situations are you better able to handle – where are you experiencing peace, for example – because you know that God is for you? Again, what we heard from Amy is great illustration of this.
- What good things do you find yourself doing and what good thoughts are you thinking that are not natural to you?
- What temptations and natural tendencies are you overcoming?

And just to be clear, we're not talking about *perfection* in these things because no follower of

Jesus reaches that in this life. We're talking about *progress*.

We're talking about being able to describe to an "outsider" the stockpile we've found in Jesus and how they, too, can get in on the deal.

Invitation

Now, at this point, I could end this message and feel like we've talked about some things that are practical and helpful. But as I was preparing this week, I had a sense (from God I think) that I need to do one more thing.

And this "thing" might turn out to be life changing for some of you because some of you are unable to define how knowing Jesus has made your life better and how following Him has made you better at life. In fact, this is *the second time I've talked about doing this particular life inventory* in the past month or so and both times, you've realized that even if you gave it a lot of thought, you

wouldn't be able to list much other than going to church once in a while.

And speaking of church ... when you're here in this room, you feel *something*. But once you walk out those doors, there's no sense of God's presence at all in your life. It's like it never happened.

If any of that is true of you, I feel like I'm supposed to ask ...

- Could that be a sign that you don't have a relationship with Jesus?
- Could it be that you've never invited Him into your life?
- That you've never said "yes" to him as your leader?
- That you've never *personally* received Him as your savior?

- That you've never made the move from the Do plan to the Done plan?

And I don't say any of that to be critical or condemning of you in any way whatsoever.

Instead, I'm only pointing it out because it's one thing to know *about* Jesus. It's another to know *Jesus* – for Him to be in your life and you to be in His.

And today, right now, God's story and your story can come together. You can receive Jesus as your savior. You can say yes to Him.

And to help those of you who are ready to make this decision, we're going to do something this morning that we've not done in the almost 25 years we've been in existence. In just a minute, we're all going to stand together and the band is going to do a song. And while they do that the words are going to be on the screen if you'd like

to sing along.

BUT, more importantly, if you are ready to join your story with God's story; if you are ready to begin a relationship with Christ, you are invited to walk down to the front here at the stage where several of our ministry leaders will be standing and they will help you pray to receive Jesus.

Sometimes people don't know how to do that, so that's why we're offering this opportunity this morning. We may not ever do it again but, I just felt impressed that this is what we're supposed to do today.

So, if you need someone to help you with that, you come.

If you need someone to pray with you about *something else*, please *don't* come now. You come *after* the service because this is just for people who want to receive Jesus today.

Ok, let's stand together.

Now before we sing – one more thing: if you're feeling like “wow, I need to do this. I need to go up there and have someone help me receive Jesus” that's God's Spirit talking to you. So be bold and be brave don't delay.

And Holy Spirit we invite your presence right now. We ask that you would draw people who *need* Jesus to Jesus.

I ask in His name. Amen.

Come.

Worship/Feature – O Come to the Altar

Closing – Rick

Would you be seated for just a couple more minutes?

1. Note about Nathan at info center

2. Immediate impact: no Celebration of Christmas ... will be adding “Christmas at the Movies”
3. Finally, next week, close out this series with one more really important factor in maximizing our impact as ambassadors for Jesus ... and I’ll give you a hint. *It’s not all up to you.*
4. Offering @door

See you next week.

Endnotes

ⁱ This idea is based off of Tim Keller’s thoughts expressed here:
<https://www.acts29.com/tim-keller-explains-the-gospel/>

ⁱⁱ The video is called Image of God and is located here:
<https://thebibleproject.com/videos/image-of-god/>

ⁱⁱⁱ This video along with others that expand on the concept can be found at
<http://three-two-one.org/take-the-tour/>

^{iv} This presentation is at <https://vimeo.com/124237023>