

Finding the Our Story in God's Story

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Who doesn't like a really good story? If done well they masterfully invite us to "live" the life of others and often provoke a rainbow of intense feelings such as happiness, joy, exhilaration, sorrow, pain, anger, frustration, and empathy! And while we are fully aware most are merely personifications of the creative genius of the authors, actors and movie writers do we not find ourselves so immersed in the story that we see ourselves as one of the characters so



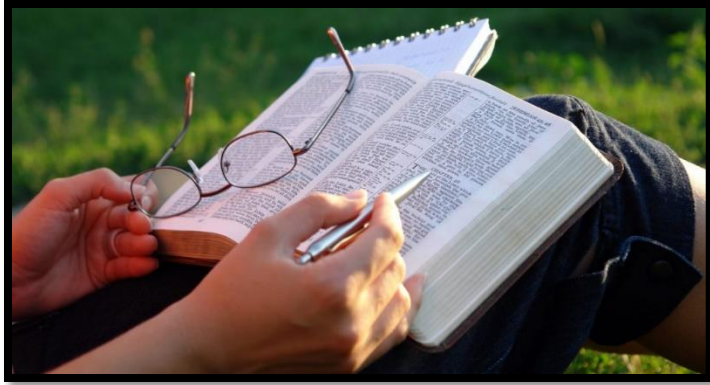
much so that either in our minds or out loud we often yell at the television, "stay away from dark places" or "run before the villain gets you?" Whether we realize it or not stories have the power to not only captivate and hold our attention but also to shape, strengthen or challenge our most treasured opinions and values! And yet despite us knowing this to be true we allow "worldly" entertainment to flow freely in our minds like waves of a sea never giving it a second thought as to how crushing their blows are on our overriding goal to

"be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:16)!" Living in this ever changing, fast-paced society where people only want to set up "self" as their god, have a belief system that constantly changes as their circumstances change, and show off their "happiness" of their sinful indulgences it is hard to know and to be true to one's identity as a God-fearing, joyfully obedient, eternal masterpiece of His grace! The following sermon is going to refer to many biblical stories to help both myself and you locate our identity in the Biblical narrative of God's word so that we might draw nearer, become more like, and yearn to personify Christ's holiness to a world that desperately needs to know and believe in the way, truth, and life (John 14:6).

Biblical Narrative Defined

Our God-given mission can only be successful when its identity and purpose are based on the stories given in the bible. Too often we read God's beautiful love letter to us with the intent of amassing information instead of living, being nourished and quickened by every word that has preceded from His mouth! In the book, *Bible and Mission: Christian witness in a Postmodern World*, Richard Bauckham defines a metanarrative¹ as being "an attempt to tell a single story about the whole of human history in order to attribute a single and integrated meaning to the

¹ This is a term created and defined by the author.



whole.”² The bible is the only story that qualifies as a metanarrative because only God, the creator and sustainer of the universe, can explain the purpose of humanity’s existence. It is each person’s responsibility to examine his or her life in the context of God’s revelation. “Not only is self tied to knowledge of God, but we know ourselves truthfully only when we know ourselves in relation to God.

We know who we are when we can place ourselves – locate our stories – within God’s story.”³ The rest of the rest of this sermon is going to demonstrate how easy it truly is to find one’s identity in the Biblical narrative with the intent of personal transformation and becoming a powerful, witness to the lost of this world in both word and deed.

In the Beginning

In the very first book of the Bible, we learn that with freedom of choice comes great responsibility. Even though being created in the image of God (1:27) meant Adam was given free will God limited his choices by stating his mission was to take care of the garden of Eden



and to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:15-17). The moment Adam and Eve challenged God’s authority to rule over their lives the peace and closeness they felt in God’s presence was forever changed for sin had driven a wedge between them and a holy God the consequences of which were devastating: pain in childbirth, a curse on the ground, and physical death (2:14-19)! In the Garden of Eden humanity’s eyes were

opened but not to become like but opposed to a holy God for now in our sinful nature we tend to love evil more than good (3:4-5)! Given the curse placed on Adam and Eve the words of Apostle Paul, that “we have the right to do anything, but not all things are beneficial” (1

² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 87.

³ Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 27.

Corinthians 6:12) becomes a profound warning when it comes to making the right choices in life! Every day we are bombarded by the fiery darts of “the spiritual forces of evil” (Ephesians 6:12) and must choose to either accept or reject their broad path that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13). When we cry out that we feel powerless to stop sinning (Romans 7) praise be that Christ, the lamb slain before Creation (Revelation 13:8), has freed us from the entanglement of sin that so easily binds us to the ways of this world which oppose and greatly displeases our Lord (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Making Course Corrections

When we locate our story within the context of the witnesses of the Bible, we learn that it is never too late to ask the Spirit to help us make course corrections. Dallas Willard once stated that “choice is where sin dwells”⁴ but I think choice is also where spiritual maturity begins! When the Paul states there is “no one righteous not a single one” (Romans 3:10-12) this does not



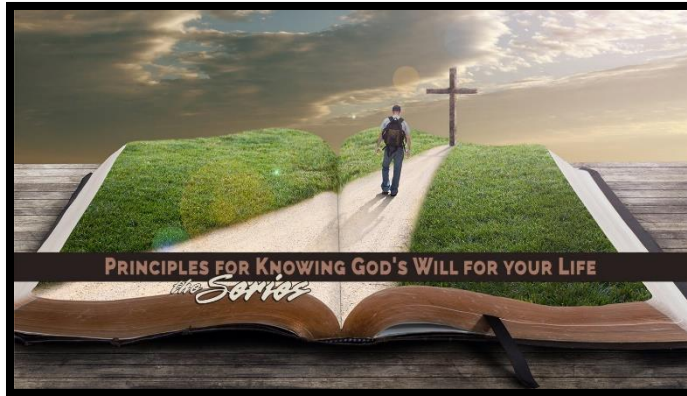
mean that our rightfully earned title of “worm” (Isaiah 41:14) negates the truth that there is no sin once confessed (1 John 1:9) that the blood of Christ is not able to cleanse, or the other titles we have been given like Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) or royal priests (1 Peter 2:9)! When we identify ourselves in the Biblical stories, we receive great hope for even those totally immersed in sin made Spirit led course corrections! To hear

that Apostle Paul went from being the “chief of all sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15) “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9:1), to one who suffered greatly to spread the Good News amongst the gentiles, or that King David who went from being an adulterer and murderer to being a friend of God (2 Samuel 11; Acts 13:22), or the prostitute that washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, tears and perfume receiving forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50), or Zacchaeus the chief tax collector who despite robbing from his own people gave four times the amount back and due to his faith received salvation (Luke 19:1-9), and Manasseh who despite doing “more evil than the nations the Lord destroyed before the Israelites” (2 Kings 21:9) pled to the Lord for forgiveness and was forgiven and freed from the Assyrian prison; gives us great hope that no matter how far we wander from the Lord through confession we can always return to His loving embrace! From the great cloud of witnesses in the Bible we learn that it is not our circumstances that define us but our attitude! While we might feel like Manasseh, trapped in a prison of sin, we must not forget that when all we can offer is a contrite and broken heart (Psalms 51) it is enough because He who grants forgiveness has paid our price in full!

⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, p 46.

Seeking His Will

To get on the righteous path our Creator wants us to do two things: obey His commands and to seek and obey His will for our lives. The world bombards us with so many ways to live our lives that if we are not careful God's word can become but one choice amongst many. To break from this age of self-glorification God's word must become to us the bread of life by which we live (Matthew 4:4). Obeying God's commands are not to be seen as a source of burden, i.e., placing unnecessary restrictions on our lives, but instead the means of pleasing our Creator and proof that we are indeed saved (1 John 5:1). When we read the Bible, we also find



that to please God we also must seek, know, and obey His will for our lives. Upon conversion each of us have been given spiritual gifts to accomplish the divine roles God assigns us throughout our lives (1 Corinthians 12). Those who trust in the Lord and are willing to be living sacrifices God will direct their paths (Proverbs 3:5-6; Romans 12:1-2). For example, when Abram was called to leave his home he obeyed

and became the father of the great nation Israel (Genesis 12:1-3), when called Moses put aside his excuses he became God's ambassador of ten mighty plagues and the ruler of His people (Exodus), once Elijah heard the gentle whisper of God's voice he stopped being scared of those seeking his life and proceeded to anoint two kings and a prophet (1 Kings 19), once Gideon received signs of God's will he led 300 men and defeated the Midianites (Judges 6-7), and despite being ordinary men the moment Andrew, Peter, James and John knew God's will they dropped their nets and fished men (Matthew 4:18-22). It is precisely by seeing our story within these great witnesses that we learn how important it is to listen and be willing to submit to our Lord so that through prayer, meditation, and Godly counsellors we might hear the voice of our Creator telling us exactly what we must do to please Him!

The Courage to Obey

While obeying God and obtaining the reputation of one of the great witnesses in the Bible is always intriguing and sought after, who of us is brave enough to take the risks or suffer for His name's sake as they did? Would you have the courage to be like Moses and stand before a leader of a mighty nation and say, "let my people go" (Exodus), or the courage of David to face a giant that makes others quake in their boots (1 Samuel 17), or the courage of Daniel and face the hungry lions (Daniel 6), or the courage of Esther and ask a king to change his mind and spare your people (Ester 4-5), or the courage of Peter who despite the storm walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33), or the courage of the apostles who despite being imprisoned and told by the Sanhedrin to stop spreading the Good News boldly stated "they must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:17-42) or the courage of Apostle Paul who despite being warned by the prophet Agabus of

imprisonment and great persecution proceeded to travel to Jerusalem (Acts 21)? This kind of courage does not come from finding one's identity in self but in the Lord! Our identity in God's



word is not one of self-indulgence, for God is our portion (Psalms 73:26), nor is our identity one of fear (2 Timothy 1:7), for greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)! From the Biblical narrative we learn that in putting on the full armour of God (Ephesians 6) and standing firmly on the rock of our mighty Rock and Fortress (Psalms 71:3) God's will becomes unshakeable for when He is for us NO one can ever stand against His plans for our lives (Romans 8:31-39)! Though we are often sent like sheep amongst wolves (Matthew 10:16-20),

we are not to fear for Thy rod and staff (Psalms 23) will always lead, comfort, and assure our hearts the pain and suffering we feel now is but temporary and irrelevant compared to the glory we are about to receive (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)!

Finding our Story in God's Story

God's story is unlike any other story we can read for contained within its pages is a love letter that explains our identity and purpose. Our Creator has given us life and freedom of choice not to indulge in our every fantasy but to humbly and joyfully bow our knees to submit to His



right to rule over our lives! Choice is where sin dwells but is also where holiness is obtained. It is through prayer and meditation on His word that we learn how important it is to not only obey His commands but also to know His will and become living sacrifices. While this process of staying on the narrow path of righteousness is far from easy, praise be that through confession course corrections can be made, for there is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot wash clean! He who has given each of us spiritual gifts to accomplish divine goals has also, when we put

on His armour and stand firmly on the rock of our salvation, given us the courage to accept and stay on any path He chooses for us! It is precisely by finding our story in God's story that we learn of our identity as His image-bearers and children and it is here that God invites us to draw nearer, become more like, and yearn to personify His holiness to a world that desperately needs to know and believe in the way, truth, and life (John 14:6)!