

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY

Luke 24:13-34, 44

INTRO:

1. Sometimes the will of God can feel like a punch in the gut, and you want to do all that you can to escape it. That's how I felt coming home from one of our first trips to Boston.
 1. I'm pretty certain that there was a spiritual thing happening on the trip. The trip began with my daughter vomiting in the car on the way to LAX, and ended with my oldest daughter vomiting about 8 times when we got home. I got really sick.
 2. More than sleepless babies or sick kids, the reality of moving my family, finding new schools, adapting to a culture and climate completely unknown and planting a church (the stupidest thing you could do unless called to do it), all became a frightening reality.
 3. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I certainly didn't want to pray, or read my bible.
 - a. More than anything I wanted to create as much difference between myself and this thing as possible.
 4. About 3 Days later I went for a walk. During this time I had conversations with a few friends (Britt, Tim, Dom) who all rebuked me.
 - a. It was early one Saturday morning that I started to recover from being sick and got up and grabbed my Bible to go for a walk. Walking and reading & praying have been a vital part of my Christian life for the past 15 years.
 - b. I can remember setting out on a dirt path behind my house here in Carp. The mountains were in front of me. The Sun was rising. I felt small. God seemed big and real.
 - c. In desperation I told God that I needed something from Him—something to revive my heart, to remind me of my direction.
 - d. I could smell the rain that was now evaporating by the sun.
 - e. It was on that dirt trail, while reading my Bible that God spoke to me. My heart was revived by a story.
 - f. I knew that God was about to thrust me into a story bigger than myself.
- B) Maybe for some of you the will of God, or your current situation feels like a punch in the gut
 1. You sense that you are supposed to forgive the person that wronged you, You sense he's calling you to reconcile. You know He is calling you to stick it out & be faithful at your job, or with your spouse. You're in an impossible situation, and you don't know how it will work out. You want to create as much distance between you and the situation as possible—or between you and God as possible.

C) These men can relate

1. (One named Cleopas, the other a disciple not named) wanted to get as far away as possible.
 - a. One simple thing changes them. It maybe didn't change their situation, but it changed them.
 - b. What was it? It was a story.

2. A Story? They were about to go through what story-tellers call, 'An Inciting Moment,' a doorway that thru which the character is thrust to which there is no return.
 - a. E.g. Luke's uncle and aunt die so he's forced to join Obi One Kenobi in Jedi training.
 - b. Story guru, Robert McKee says, "humans naturally seek comfort and stability."¹Without an inciting incident that disrupts their comfort, they wont' enter into a story. They have to get fired from their job or be forced to sun up for a marathon. A ring has to be purchased. A home has to be sold. The character has to jump into the story, into the discomfort and the fear, otherwise the story will never happen.

 - c. These men are about to be thrust through a doorway and never be the same.

3. In order for you to be transformed by the story of God, you've got to understand it.
 - a. There is a great deal of How in popular Christianity today, but not a lot of What. What is the story about? Rationalism-stemming from the enlightenment and realism stemming from the 20th century has turned modern Chrsitianity into a religion of pragmatism.
 - b. Young people according to Barna research think that the purpose of Christian faith is to be good and obey the rules.
 - c. We've need a fresh reminder of WHAT the Bible is about. It's a story about Jesus. Saying you don't need a manual to fix you, you need Immanuel to free you.
 - d. Jesus isn't in every verse, but every verse is ultimately about Jesus.

4. Only when you understand the story are you changed by it.
 - a. For us to understand what this story is about, and to give us a redemptive lens to read our Bible's through, we must do two things:
 - i. WE MUST FIND THE NEED
 - ii. WE MUST FOLLOW THE THREAD

I. FIND THE NEED (OF REDEMPTION)

A) THE DETAIL OF THE STORY

1. The fact that the names of the disciples are mentioned, their location is verifiable,
 - a. The New Testament letters were written within 20 years of the actual events
 - b. In a trial, one of the key points of evidence are Eyewitnesses.

¹ Donald Miller, A Million Miles in A Thousand Years (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN. 2009) 105.

- c. Eyewitness of the New Testament abound and by reason of the years that the writings were completed, they were easily verifiable.
- d. Alexander and Rufus (Romans), 500 (1 Cor 15)
- e. C.S Lewis shows that detailed realistic writing didn't occur for another few hundred years.
- f. Not only that, but the detail is counterintuitive to the story (e.g. these disciples are walking away)

B) THEIR RESPONSE SHOWS THEIR NEED

1. The direction that they are headed (v.13)
2. The emotion that they show (v.17)
3. The Conversation They have (v.17): "We thought he was going to redeem Israel"
 - a. This shows that they hoped they would be free them from Roman rule
 - b. This would be like saying, "We thought he was going to fix our economy"

C) WHAT ARE THEY IN NEED OF?

1. About a year ago I started to really be interested the components of a 'good story'
 - a. At a Creative Story telling class, one instructor pointed out that a 'good story' is almost always about redemption.
 - i. Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Rocky.
 - b. We thought he was going to redeem Israel, but he died.
 - i. We thought he was going to be the one to finally deliver
 - ii. There is a basic intuition that we all have, whether we've had parents that under-developed us, or over-developed us that we are just not right with the order of the universe.
 - iii. That we fall short in some way (love neighbor, family)
 - iv. So we search for ways to free us (substance, lovers, success)
 - v. But those things that we think to bring freedom actually enslave.
 - vi. We all have a desire to be redeemed. From Bob Marley to Karl Marx, we sing about it and philosophize about it.
2. Their desire was a good desire, but it was misplaced (deferred/ over-desire). *Why?*
 - a. (v.25) Jesus points to their hearts
 - b. Foolish & slow of heart to believe...the real story
 - c. When they read the scriptures they thought it was a manual to fix them; when it's about Immanuel, who saves them.
3. They read the scriptures as a form of self-salvation, a sort of way to get things from God, but not to get God.
 - a. Instead of being swept into the bible's story, a lot of us sweep the Bible up into our story.

- b. Instead of being an opportunity For redemption, the Bible becomes an opportunity for narcissism.
- c. Instead of entering into that story, we manipulate the story so it enters our story. ²
- d. *In our common humanity, we consistently ignore Scripture and continue to practice obedience as a way of brining God to dispense his favor. In doing so, we not only ignore the limitations of our humanity but also tar God's character. We turn him into the ogre in the sky who shows his favor only when he is paid with enough "filthy rags." It's for this reason that when the message of grace goes underground in the history of the church, the worst abuses of faith occur.* ³-Bryan Chapell.

"It is exceedingly difficult to get into another habit of thinking in which we clearly separate faith and [works of] love.... Even though we are in faith ... the heart is always ready to boast of itself before God and say: "After all, I have preached so long and lived so well and done so much, surely he will take this into account." But it cannot be done. With men you may boast ... But when you come before God, leave all that boasting at home and remember to appeal from justice to grace. [But] let anyone try this and he will see and experience how exceedingly hard and bitter it is for a man, who all his life has been mired in his work righteousness, to pull himself out of it and with all his heart rise up through faith in the one Mediator. I myself have been preaching and cultivating it (grace) for almost twenty years and still I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I may contribute something, so that he will have to give me his grace in exchange for my holiness. Still I cannot get it into my head that I should surrender myself completely to sheer grace; yet [I know that] this is what I should and must do.

-Martin Luther, "The Sum of the Christian Life"

- 4. Whenever reading the Bible, in order to understand the story you've got to start by asking the text that you are reading, 'what's the need for redemption.'
 - a. One professor calls it the 'Fallen Condition Focus.'⁴
 - b. You can find the need by asking the question,
 - i. What was the intent of the Author?
 - ii. What was the struggle, burden, ambition of the character?
 - c. Asking questions like this will not only keep you from making allegorical mistakes that some make when trying to get to Jesus too quickly—INSTEAD OF MISSING JESUS, YOU MAKE THE OPPOSITE ERROR OF FINDING **MAGICAL JESUS**.

² Scott McNight, The Blue Parakeet

³ Bryan Chapell, 298.

⁴ Bryan Chapell, Christ Centered Preaching

- d. Instead, it will help you to understand the story and to experience the work of the Spirit of God through the passage.
- e. What about you? Where is the need for redemption showing up in your life today?
 - i. Like the characters in our story (Cleopas, other disciple), you can find out by your emotions, responses, reaction to loss, conflict.

D) SEGWAY: But finding the need of redemption is only one side to understanding the story. You've also got to

II. FOLLOW THE THREAD (OF REDEMPTION)

A) THE NATURE OF A GOOD STORY

- 1. About the time that I started learning more about story-telling, I read a book about the nature of stories where the author said, 'A Story is when someone wants something and overcomes conflict to get it. **Chesterton (see below)**'?
- 2. A Good story casts a spell
 - a. Our word gospel comes from Old English the two words "Good" and "Spell (News)."

3. TOLKEIN AND LEWIS ON THE ROAD

- a. Secondary belief—When someone tells you a story and you know it's fiction but it's so well told that you get scared, sad, angry. You care about the character and are excited for the resolution.
 - i. We're in a culture where the leading voices of modern world & literature known as rationalism say there's no point. But we still want stories that good triumphs over evil, sacrificial heroics that bring life out of death. We pay money to watch those movies because, as Tolkein points out, we have deep human longings.
 - ii. We desire the kind of stories that evoke a secondary belief—that there is a love without parting, a way of escaping death.
 - iii. Tolkien says, why would people feel this way, "We're made in the image of God, but we're fallen. Humans know that at the fact level, we're all going to die, there's no escape, good is not going to triumph, and yet underneath, we all feel, 'there couldn't be death. Good ought to triumph over evil."

iv. Tolkein believed that even though that at the factual level we know it's not true, we still pay money to see. We don't want to read the Odyssey. That's why the popular stories tend to be fairy-tales.

b. C.S Lewis deeply felt that the power of fairy-stories/myths. But he said, even though they point to what life ought to be like, he said, Yes but myths are lies though breathed through silver.”

c. Tolkein says, no there not. Look at the gospel, you have everything that you long for in a story (escape from death, love that conquers death, when everything looks the darkest, you get a triumph out of death.

d. The gospel is not one more story pointing to the underlying reality. Rather, Jesus is the underlying reality to which all the stories point. The reason that we know that is because of THE RESURECTION!

i. Jesus Christ has opened up cleft in the pitiless walls of this world. He has punched a whole in the concrete slab and has opened up the barrier between the ideal and the real.

ii. The resurrection means that Jesus is not one more beautiful story that makes you feel good for a little while.

iii. Jesus Christ is the underlying reality to which all stories point.

iv. The peculiar quality of joy

B) You can have your blinders removed if you go to the scripture.

1. THE BIBLE IS A STORY —

a. Go to the Bible. But that's not enough!

b. You've Got To Find The Need (Redemption)

1. (v. 24, 44) **FOLLOW THE THREAD** (IT IS CHRIST)—They never had read it with the Hermeneutic key that Christ gave them. How do we know?

a. Jesus Said it was about him (Luke 24:44; John 5)

b. Jesus say's to the

c. The apostles wrote and preached it being about Him (Acts 4, 7).

d. The bible stories we learned about in Sunday school are not given chiefly as moral examples for us to imitate, but as stories of sinners, who in spite of their unfaithfulness, were beneficiaries of God's gracious promise.

i. Jesus said, "It's about me."

e. Take David and Goliath

i. It's a great stories about

ii. No! It's about the greater than David, the real King.

f. Take Daniel.

- i. If we read the book so that we can 'dare to be a Daniel,' we're missing the point!
 - ii. It's about the Son of Man, the greater than Daniel who threw himself into the Lion's den for you and was mauled.
- g. He's the hero behind all heroes, he's the prophet behind all prophets, He's the fulfillment of the law, he's the purpose of the sacrifices.

The bible is a grand story, from Genesis to Revelation, with Christ as the lead character. The more we hear that story, the more we find ourselves being written into it as characters. We discover ourselves not in the fading scripts of this age or in glossy magazine images but in the story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. We are there with Adam and Eve, capitulating to the lie. We are there with Abraham and Sarah, hearing and believing the gospel and being justified. We are walking along with the disciples, not getting it, then getting it, then not getting it again, and then really discovering what his journey was all about. And we are there with the company of heaven, worshiping the lamb. It is the purpose of preaching and sacrament to put us there, to kill our dead-end character and to write us into God's script. ⁵

-Michael Horton (*The Gospel Commission*)

Jesus Christ is God's Word for the "last days" who brings the word of the Old Testament prophets to completion (Heb 1:1-2). He is the end of God's saving acts in the history of Israel (Romans 1:1-4), and thus fulfills all prophecy (Acts 13:23-33). The real meaning of prophecy always lies in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must gather that to profit much in the holy Scripture we must always resort to our Lord Jesus Christ and cast our eyes upon him, without turning from him at any time. You will see a number of people who labor very hard indeed at reading the holy Scriptures – they do nothing else but turn over the leaves of it.... And why? Because they do not have any particular aim in view, they only wander about [A]lthough they have gathered together a number of sentences of all sorts, yet nothing of value results from them. Even so it is with them that labor in reading the Holy Scriptures and do not know which is the point they ought to rest on, namely, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (**John Calvin, Sermon on Ephesians 2:19-22, 1559**)

2. **Biblical Theology** is the study of the Bible from a Redemptive Historical Narrative Approach. It sees all of scripture in terms of *longitudinal themes* (D.A Carson).
- a. In the end, there are really two ways that you can read the Bible.
 - i. Either is primarily about you and what you must do, or it's about Christ and what he has done.

⁵ Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI. 2011) 169.

- b. Think of an ACORN
 - i. Systematic Theology describes categories of scripture, while biblical theology unfolds the life inside.

c. Now, some people think the Bible is a book of rules, telling you what you should and shouldn't do. The Bible certainly does have some rules in it. They show you how life works best. But the Bible isn't mainly about you and what you should be doing. It's about God and what he has done. Other people think the Bible is a book of heroes, showing you people you should copy. The Bible does have some heroes in it, but (as you'll soon find out) most of the people in the Bible aren't heroes at all. They make some big mistakes (sometimes on purpose), they get afraid and run away. At times, they're downright mean. No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne—everything—to rescue the ones he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life! You see, the best thing about this Story is—it's true. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.⁶

—Sally Lloyd Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*

C) HOW IS THE BIBLE A STORY ABOUT JESUS (THEMES, PRINCIPLES, STORIES)?

1) THEMES ARE RESOLVED IN JESUS

- a) *Theme of King and Kingdom.*
- b) *Theme of Grace and Law in the Covenant.*
- c) *Theme of Creation, Fall, and Re-creation (Resurrection).*
- d) *Theme of the True God vs. Idols.*

2) PRINCIPLES (COMMANDS ARE RESOLVED IN CHRIST)

3) STORIES (HEROIC ACTS ARE RESOLVED IN CHRIST)—⁷

⁶ Sally Lloyd Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His name* (

⁷ We must not think that 'putting the text into the One Story Line' means that we have to identify one 'longitudinal theme' as the, controlling theme of the Bible. Many people have tried to show this. The most popular is probably kingdom, and a close second is 'covenant.' Not only do most Biblical theologians disagree with this on hermeneutical grounds. I think it is pragmatically unwise. Every theme has its own nuances and if we choose one

a) **Individuals' story-lines.**

All the individual stories point us to Jesus, as we locate them in the history of redemption (often with the direct help of the New Testament writers, often not.)

- Jesus is the true and better Adam who *passed* the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us (1 Cor 15).
- Jesus is the true and better Abel who though innocently slain has blood that cries out for our acquittal, not our condemnation (Heb 12:24).
- Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the comfort able and familiar and go out into the void” not knowing whither he went!” To create a new people of God.
- Jesus is the true and better “Isaac” who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us all. While God said to Abraham, “now I know you love me, because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love, from me.” Now we can say to God, “now we know that you love me, because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love, from me.”
- Jesus is true and far better Jacob, who wrestled with God and took the blow of justice we deserved so we like Jacob only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.
- Jesus is the true and better Joseph, who at the right hand of the king forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.
- Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant (Heb.3).
- Jesus is the true and better Rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of God’s justice, now gives us water in the desert.
- Jesus is the true and better Job—the *truly* innocent sufferer who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends (Job 42).

theme as the theme, we tend to become unbalanced in our understanding of the gospel. We may over-stress the mystical or the legal, or the individual or the corporate.⁷

- Jesus is the better Samson, whose death accomplishes so much good (Judges 16:31).
- Jesus is the true and better David, whose victory becomes his people's victory though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves. Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn't just risk losing an earthly palace but lost the ultimate heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life but gave his life—to save his people.
- Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so we could be brought in.
- Jesus is the true “Teacher” (Ecclesiastes) who may lead us through despair to help us find God. He took our meaninglessness-without-God upon himself when he ‘lost’ God on the cross.⁸

a. **Communal story-lines.** It is not simply the stories of individuals that point us to Christ.

2. HOW DO WE FOLLOW THE THREAD?

a. Compare and Contrast

- i. Sidney Greidanus is helpful when he reminds us that we do not need a good example in our text in order to 'get to Christ'.
- ii. When we say Christ is the completion or fulfillment of every text, that means that he is not only a comparison but a contrast to every text.
- iii. Christ is a better David, Samson, and Moses--so we don't have to apologize for their flaws.
- iv. Their flaws show us Christ by way of contrast. Or look at the cries for justice in the Psalms.
- v. In one sense, Christ validates those cries--human injustice is serious! It *does* have to be paid for--it cannot simply be shrugged off or covered over.
- vi. See--it takes the cross of Christ to reveal just how justified are these cries for retribution! But in another sense, it takes Jesus' atonement on the cross to lead us to think of ourselves differently than David (or the other Psalmists did).
- vii. His death for us vividly shows us that we all deserve condemnation and it also shows us that the ultimate price for the sin (of our enemies) has been paid.

⁸ Tim Keller, *Preaching the gospel in a Post-Modern World* (Reformed Theological Seminary, 2002)

- viii. Therefore we do not seek simple defense and justice but not vengeance or personal retribution. We are to pray for our enemies, as Jesus did. Jesus is thus a 'better Psalmist' and so the Psalmist points us to him by their limitations (in their stage in redemption history).

C) APPLYING IT TO THE TEXT

- 1) So Christ Centered Hermeneutic (RHN) does two things
 - a) Finds the need (for redemption)
 - b) Follows the thread (of Redemption)

III. HOW TO EXPERIENCE IT'S POWER

1) **YOU'VE GOT TO ENTER THE STORY (IN COMMUNITY)**

- a) *The whole reason why we love video games is because we want to enter into the story. We want to engage a mission.*
- b) *This is a story that is true!*

2) **YOU'VE GOT TO FALL UNDER IT'S AUTHORITY**

- a) *The Princess the Goblin* story by George Macdonald.
 - i) The story is of a little princess Irene (8yr), who lives in a very dangerous place, and has a grandmother who lives high up in top of the castle.
 - ii) The Grandmother says, "I'm going to give you a magic ring for when danger happens. When danger happens, put the ring under the pillow and feel a thread coming from the ring. If you feel the thread and follow the thread, it will take you to me and to safety.
 - iii) But you've got to follow the thread! You can't go backward or turn to right or left, you've got to go forward to feel the thread.
 - (1) The first time that Irene is in danger, she puts the ring under her pillow and feels the thread and follows it.
 - (2) But it doesn't take her up to her grandmothers room, instead it takes her outside where the goblins are.
 - (3) After going outside, she continues to follow the thread which takes her into the cave of the goblins, and she's saying this is crazy.

- (4) Of course as she follows the thread the Princess rescues Curdie from the Goblin dungeon without even meaning to find him; she was following the thread and it takes her where she needs to go.
- a) If you start to put yourself under the Bible's authority and scrutiny, you will start to feel like you're on an adventure.
- i) Let's say, you decide to obey God's authority in the Bible, and it's command to marry only those that are spiritually compatible. It won't be long until you seem to be going away from happiness, joy.
 - ii) Or if you decide to obey God, telling the truth at work in a situation that would compromise your career success.
 - iii) Dietrich Bonhoeffer lived in New York after escaping Nazi Germany
If it is I who say where God will be, I will always find there a [false] God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature. But if it is God who says where He will be...that place is the cross of Christ.
- b) He followed the thread. You say, "Well that didn't go over very well." Oh really. Thousands of people were inspired and set free?
- i) Accept the adventure/journey by coming under the authority of a will that is not your own.
 - ii) G.K Chesterton says: Since our world view no longer has wonder, then we steal it through art, stories, literature, plays and movies. Then momentarily we have wonder, especially if the story has these 3 elements: 1) The story must show that there are mysterious powers "out there" beyond ourselves. 2) The story has a situation of doom and hopelessness. 3) There is a heroic key, which unlocks the barrier between the impossible situation we are in, and brings forth are solution, redemption, rescue, deliverance, and salvation.
 - iii) What is the story? **C.S. Lewis** says, "A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside." Jesus' death and resurrection has punched a hole in the impenetrable barrier between our impossible situation and God's glory. Jesus is the ultimate prince that kisses us sleeping beauties. Jesus is the ultimate St. George who slays the dragon. Jesus is the ultimate Hero who dies to save the universe, the world, the city.

