

Bible Stories

IN THE REARVIEW

2 Timothy 3:16-17

November 25, 2023

This is the final sermon in our Bible Stories series. It is a journey that has taken 18 months.

The very first story sets the theme for every other story. God created a perfect environment, free from sickness, death, conflict, war, divorce, murder, hatred ---- need I go on....

Adam and Eve worked side by side as equal partners and the animals were their friends. If that wasn't awesome enough, God actually came and walked with them every day – face-to-face – nothing in-between. There was no need for a wall – a curtain – a sacrifice.

There was one special gift God gave Adam and Eve – Choice. He gave them the freedom to choose to love Him or not love Him. To trust Him or not trust Him. To believe He wanted only the best for them or to believe that He was holding out on them.

Why? Why would God insist on free will? Because the foundation of His government is perfectly CHOSEN love. He knows that forced love is not really love. Forced loyalty is not lasting. Only in an environment where freedom to choose exists does genuine love grow and flourish and last.

That kind of freedom is risky, however. God knew that and yet, He willingly took the risk because freedom to choose is so important to Him.

Everything in the vast garden was for their use and enjoyment. However, in the midst of all this perfection, there was one thing God didn't want Adam and Eve to know anything about – sin. He wanted to spare them the knowledge of evil. He wanted to protect them from the devastating consequences of sin, so He limited the devils access to one tree and then said to Adam and Eve, "Stay away from that tree."

So, for an unknown period of time all was well, until one day, Eve decided to venture out on her own. She found herself near the forbidden tree and instead of turning around and walking away, she let her curiosity get the better of her and she wandered over to check it out. All that was required of her was to obey that one command, "Stay away from that tree," so by wandering over SHE PLACED HERSELF in a vulnerable position.

When the beautiful snake popped out from behind one of the luscious fruit, she should have run, but again, curiosity got the better of her and she stayed. She had a conversation with the snake, because she thought she could, because she thought she was smart enough to handle it on her own.

- Genesis 3:6-13 - *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me-- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."*

The rest, they say, is history.....

Every story that followed is a mixture of God's pursuit of people, His ultimate goal of restoration, employing people to accomplish that goal, and humanifies resistance nearly every step of the way.

- God provided a way of escape – only 8 CHOSE to get on the boat.
- God said, “I will never again destroy the whole earth with a flood.” – they built a tower, just in case.
- God told Abraham that if there were 10 righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah, He would spare both cities – the angels had to drag the only 4 people – who were sort of open to leaving – out before the cities were destroyed (one of the 4 longed for Sodom, turned around and became a pillar of salt. The other 3 ended up in an incestuous relationship - Hmmm)
- God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his only son – then provided His own sacrifice instead.
- Joseph was a bright spot – but he, too, had much to learn and un-learn as he grew in faithfulness to God.
- Moses thought he could “help” by murdering an Egyptian – it took 40 more years before he was actually ready to lead God’s people to freedom.
- God’s people spent 40 years wandering around the desert because of their choices and lack of faith – God wandered with them.
- Even after entering the Promised Land, God’s people proved to be faithless – God remained faithful.

In the rest of the Old Testament, we see God working with people, most of whom were less than stellar, in order to fulfill His promise of a Redeemer for the world.

In the fullness of time, all that God had been working toward, was revealed. The New Testament opened with the birth of the promised Redeemer, Jesus.

- John 1:1-18 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men..... ⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..... ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..... ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

Along the way, He healed, fed, cast out demons, raised the dead and got cross ways with the religious establishment.

His disciples, were slow to believe and quick to desire power and position in God’s earthly kingdom and were confused when Jesus kept insisting that His kingdom was a heavenly one.

- Matthew 4:17 - *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*
- Matthew 5:3 - *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- Matthew 5:10 - *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- Matthew 7:21 - *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus further cemented this truth when he said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Ultimately Jesus CHOSE to die for humanity.

He was not a victim of circumstance. No one forced Him to leave the glory of heaven. He CHOSE it. This too, the disciples were slow to understand.

Finally, the book of Acts, reveals 2 important truths:

The Holy Spirit is real and powerful and dynamic and amazing things happen when God’s people CHOOSE cooperation and obedience rather than rebellion.

As we look at the Stories of the Bible in the Rearview, here are my “What do we do with this story?” thoughts:

The Bible is a history of God's plan to restore humanity to Himself and finally eradicate the cancer of sin. He is faithful to His promises. He is patient and long suffering – way more than I, if I had been in His place.

Because this has been written down, I can trace His fingerprints throughout history. I can see for myself that what He promises to do – He has done – and my faith increases. My trust increases. All these stories benefit me.

- *Ellen White (Ed 173.2) - In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.*

Finally, while the world likes to extol the virtues of people, the Bible Stories teach us that, except for a few notable individuals, there is very little good in humans to recommend them. There is little room given to recount the virtues of even the best of men. We are fickle, stubborn, rebellious, arrogant, self-indulgent ---- need I go on?

And yet, God chose to go searching for us. He came to seek and save that which was lost, that one little, insignificant planet that had willed to sin.

What a wonderful and precious story.