

## The Most Important Story Ever Told In Six Steps and Seven Words Various Texts

Unbelievers often, and when we were young Christians, we would also, approach the Bible as a mosaic of little but separate, unrelated pieces. Reading the Bible in this fragmented way, we attempt to extract theological truths, moral precepts, historical data, etc. in a way that is beneficial to us. But in so doing, we fail to see the Bible for what it really is, the revelation of God in the one true story of reality, written by a divine author who invites us into His story, the one and only true story on which the forever of everything depends.

Simply put, when you make the Bible about you, you lose its intended benefit. The Bible is not about my behavior but God's creating and redeeming activity in the world. When you read the Bible as God's story, it benefits you most. After all, this is the Bible's claim:

The Bible is a single, true, comprehensive, compelling story

- a) **True** – there is only one accurate story
- b) **Comprehensive** – it tells the story of everything and everyone
- c) **Compelling** – it requires a response. Our lives are to be shaped by its telling

Reading it like this gives us the answers to life's most important questions:

- a) **Who am I?**
- b) **Why do I exist?**

For those of you who are new to Heritage, I occasionally preach a sermon like this because it is the context in which Heritage exists, teaches, and ministers. Living in God's story, rather than making God's story all about us is one of the several things that makes Heritage distinct in Northeast Tennessee.

God's story, as revealed in the Bible, is why and how we live as a church...and how you should live as an individual, couple, family, etc. Plus, if you see the Bible like this, it makes all the smaller pieces fit together in an understandable way. It all begins with...

### **One: Creation**

I'm fond of saying that we learn two important things about God from creation, but I want to expand on that. Let me say three things and each of them will be challenged throughout the Bible and your life.

- a) **God (alone) is God**

Only two chapters from now Lucifer will attempt to be God.

Note: He already has –

Isaiah 14:12-15 - *How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!.... You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' <sup>15</sup> But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.*

Genesis 3:1-5 - *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

In the Isaiah passage, Lucifer clearly wanted to replace God. But how so in the Garden? By defining reality: *What is life? On what basis do we live or die?* These are realities only God can define.

Thinking about religion? Ask these four questions for any supposed god. Are you omnipotent? Omniscient? Omnipresent? Do you live in Trinity? (This last question makes Christianity's God unique).

#### b) God is great

Job. 38:1-12 - *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said.... "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. <sup>5</sup> Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? <sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, <sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? <sup>8</sup> "Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, <sup>9</sup> when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, <sup>10</sup> and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, and here shall your proud waves be stayed"? <sup>12</sup> "Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place...*

#### c) God is good

At the end of every creation day, God announces that his creation is "good" and on the last day says that it is "very good" (Gen 1:31). How is creation good?

- 1 – It reflects God's nature
- 2 – It measures up to God's standards
- 3 – It does what God made it to do

Note: Sin is not a ‘thing.’ Sin is an absence, a lack. In the beginning there was only good a reflection of God’s character, measuring up to God’s standards and doing what God created it to do. But sin robs creation of that reflection, lowers these standard and deviates from God’s plan. Good can exist without sin/evil but sin/evil cannot exist without good. Sin/evil is a parasite feeding off of good. Think about food, sex, etc. Sin is the abuse and ruin of the good.

How do we know that standard is corrupted?

*Romans 8:22 - For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

Where does the Bible begin? Where does life begin? Where does everything begin? God in creation!

Hold onto the Godness, greatness, goodness of God because the rest of what you read in the Bible and what happens in your life, will test those three truths about God.

## **Two: Fall**

*Genesis 3:1 – “Did God actually say?”*

In those four words, the most gargantuan, far-reaching catastrophe has occurred.

After Genesis 3, we are no longer in relationship to the God of our good, hence the good we all so desire and need. We have been separated from it by a disaster of our own making. No one can blame Adam and Eve. We are all equally culpable. Because we are cut off from God, we have also lost our good end. We are, in other words, *in the middle of a mess*. We have lost:

- a) Harmony with God. 3:8, 23
- b) Harmony with each other. 3:12, 16
- c) Harmony with creation. 3:17, 16-19

This is what the Bible calls ‘Shalom,’ = peace, wellbeing, health.

All the spheres of life—marriage and family, worship, work and play, school and state, vocations and the arts—everything, everywhere bears the scars of our rebellion.

Sin is present in everything— in pride of race, in arrogance of nations, in abuse of the weak and helpless, in disregard for natural resources, in destruction of living creatures, in slavery, deceit, terror, and war, in worship of false gods, and the frantic, self-destructive escape from reality.

We have become victims of our own doing, our own false claim to be God.

Anytime you displace God – *EGO* = ‘edging God out’ – we drive the stake further into our hearts. We almost daily repeat this calamitous error and only God can rescue us.

**We no longer:**

- a) Love God
- b) Love ourselves
- c) Love other humans
- d) Love the world

We have become abusers of everything.

But...the story is not over. Even though God is righteously angry, and we are deserving of the destruction we have wrought, God continues to seek us.

We were expelled from the Garden for our own good, lest in sin we eat of the tree of life and live forever separated from God. Immediately after the Fall, God promised the long process of redeeming everything to himself.

**Genesis 3:15** - *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*

It is a plan that God had in mind even before he created anything (Eph 1:4).

Sin has not taken God by surprise and redemption is not a plan ‘B.’ With all of the ups and downs, the twists and turns, the hope and despair, you read about in the Bible, it is the amazing way in which

- a) God is going to demonstrate his existence and true nature and
- b) the means by which we are going to everlastingly fall in love with him for our own temporal and eternal benefit.

In the sad, heartbreaking process, but we are going to repeatedly try many other lovers and find them all unfaithful *and* harmful. “*But God*” (Eph 2:10), in unrelenting pursuit, is going to repeatedly prove himself to be our *summum bonum*, our greatest good. He begins with....

**Three: Israel**

The Edenic intent of establishing Israel was to

- a) Create a global garden
- b) Fill it with a people in love with God
- c) God would dwell forever with those people

## a) The Man

**Genesis 12:1-3** - *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that*

- a) I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And*
- b) I will make of you a great nation, and*
- c) I will bless you and*
- d) make your name great,*
- e) so that you will be a blessing.*
- f) <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and*
- g) him who dishonors you I will curse, and*
- h) in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*

(Think about how God's 'I will's' in this passage have come to pass and Lucifer's 'I will's' in Isaiah 14 did not. Think about that you choose the devil's promises over God's promises).

- 1 - The Unconditional Promise – Genesis 12
- 2 The Conditional Covenant – Genesis 15 & 17

## b) The People

1 – Formed by Blood (Passover) and Power (Red Sea). Exodus 1-18

**Note:** Egypt was not a prison. It was a womb.

2 – Bound in Covenant at Sinai. Exodus 19-24

**Exodus 19:4** - *You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

3 – God dwelling among his people. Exodus 25-40

Exodus – God creates the people

Leviticus – God establishes the standard for their relationship

Numbers – The people journey toward a land which God promises to make a Garden

Deuteronomy – God gives the people guidelines for a good life

The three representative leaders of Israel are:

- a) Abraham – Through whom God provides the people
- b) Moses – Through whom God provides the place
- c) David – Through whom God provides the kingdom

God intended Israel to be a witness to the seven nations around them. But instead, they became like the other nations. Like Adam and Eve in Eden, Israel disobeys God to their own ruin. By

- a) violating the divine principles, (just like A&E), they
- b) lose their place (just like in Eden)
- c) and lose themselves (just like A&E, they die in a foreign land)

*"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."*

- Francis Thompson

*"God cannot give us happiness apart from himself  
because there is no such thing."*

- C.S. Lewis

#### **Four: Jesus**

One of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and others is clarity concerning Jesus and his Kingdom.

**Mark 1:1-3** – In the NT, we are jumping into a river that began in the OT is carrying us along into the future.

Jesus comes as the fulfilment of a promise made at the Fall and the culmination of Israel's story. This is extremely important because his appearance teaches me essential element of the Gospel. Have you ever heard the phrase,

- *"Hell on earth?"* – That's what we do (James 3:6).

Negatively speaking, the Bible story is all about God getting Hell out of us and the world. Positively speaking, the Bible story is all about God getting Heaven into us and the world.

- *"Heaven on earth?"* That's what Jesus does.

Jesus lived a Heaven-filled, Hell-free life.

**Mark 1:14-15** - *Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

How does Jesus do this? **John 1:29** - *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* Hell exhausts all of its power on Jesus on the cross and fails to overwhelm him.

Jesus basically says two things:

1 – The Kingdom of God is already present (in salvation – Matt 12:28)

*“Let me show you how this is done and what it reaps”*

3 – The Kingdom has not yet arrived in fullness (in judgement – Matt 7:21)

Jesus is God, personally come to -

- a) Define Good – His teaching in 55 parables
- b) Demonstrate Good – His power in 37 miracles
  - Think of the biosphere as a review of Eden and a preview of Heaven
- c) Demand Good – His command (to repent)

The first command Jesus offers is: *“Repent and believe in the gospel.”*

We too often picture Jesus as a pleading Savior knocking on the door of our hearts and asking for permission to save us. He is really a demanding Savior telling us to repent or perish.

1 – The Problem –

- Romans 3:10 - *None is righteous, no, not one*
- Romans 3:23 – *All have sinned...*
- Romans 6:23 – *The wages of sin is death...*

2 – The Solution – 2 Corinthians 5:21 - *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

ILL – God’s kingdom is here in salvation and coming in judgement!

- a) Jesus announces it
  - b) He demands a decision
  - c) He warns of the cost of either
    - acceptance – forgiveness, righteousness, peace, etc., - or
    - rejection – destruction of present life and eternal damnation
- But once again, as is *our* history, humanity rejected God’s offer of *shalom*.
  - But once again, as is *His* his-story, God continues to reconcile and restore all creation.

The resurrection:

- 1 – Proves that Jesus is who He claimed to be
- 2 – Makes Jesus the firstborn, prototype of the new creation as the perfect person
- 3 – Exalts him at God's right hand as rightful King of everything
- 4 – Commissions God's people to be emissaries of the good news
- 5 – Guarantees God's kingdom come!

In effect, Jesus gave us a taste of the kingdom, but the meal comes later!

### Five: Church

After Jesus makes it possible for us to live in fellowship with God...

*Colossians 1:13 - He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*

...he commissions his followers to carry that Gospel/good news to the world.

*1 Peter 2:9-10a - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, [God has invited us into his story] that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people;*

- The Gospels tell the story of Jesus, and
- the book of Acts tells the story of Jesus's continued work through his people.
- Just as the Father gave Jesus His Spirit (Luke 3:21-22), so
- Jesus gives the Spirit to His people (Acts 2:1-13).

Israel failed in its mission to be a light to the nations. Jesus fulfilled Israel's mission and then gathered a new people comprised of Jews (12 apostles) and Gentiles (Paul/Luke) to continue that mission.

The Holy Spirit forms a new community, replacing Adam, Eve and Israel, who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). They witness:

- a) In Jerusalem. 3:1-6:7
- b) In Samaria and Judea. 6:8-12:24
- c) The ends of the earth. 12:25-end



Hence, the church is a missionary community, and our lives reap 'goodness' only as we enter God's story and become participants in God's redemptive story through our jobs, homes, recreation, hearts, minds, bodies, resources, absolutely everything.

The whole content of apostolic preaching can be summarized as the application of the day of salvation inaugurated with Christ's advent, death, and resurrection.

Just as the kingdom is subduing all creation to God, it should also subdue everything about us to God's kingdom.

The church's mission – your life should re-present Jesus!

How is the kingdom of God coming / God's will in Heaven, being fulfilled in you on earth?

The kingdom is here in salvation, saving you...

- Saved from the penalty of sin
- Saved from the power of sin

but is also coming in judgement.

- Saved from the presence of sin

And so, life's three big questions are:

- a) Who am I?
- b) How do I get involved?
- c) What is the profit for doing so or the loss for not doing so?

We are a subversive, counter-cultural, revolutionary band of sabotaging Jesus-followers who are plotting the literal overthrow of everything that is anti-Christ. We weekly gather to:

- a) remind ourselves of this life-defining mission,
- b) encourage each other to remain faithful to Jesus and
- c) receive instructions on how to further God's kingdom in the world,
- d) all-the-while, confidently waiting for Jesus to return in power and glory.

### **Six: New Creation**

**Revelation 21:1-6** - *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place<sup>[a]</sup> of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. <sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things*

*new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”<sup>6</sup> And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.*

The Revelation presents us with the consummation of Eden, the end of all God originally intended for this world and us.

- a) Every Fallen, Anti-Christ, thing passes away
- b) The New Jerusalem (God’s Kingdom in its fullness) comes down from Heaven to earth
- c) The great intercessory, missionary, ambassadorial prayer of *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven”* comes to fully pass
- d) God dwells among his people
- e) He makes all things new

- Jesus returns
- Final judgement occurs
- Creation is renewed

*“Far as the curse is found”* requires that salvation be more than individual redemption. In fact, humans are the model for and promise of what God is doing in all creation.

*Romans 8:19-21 - For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation.... itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

The restoration of all creation includes the restoration of whole human life. Paul sums up everything in these verses:

*Colossians 1:19-20 - For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

In the end, God does what he always intended to do:

- a) Create a people for Himself
- b) Create a place for His people
- c) Live with His people

## Conclusion:

This is the story of God. It is the only true story. It is...

- a) **True** – there is only one accurate story
- b) **Comprehensive** – it tells the story of everything and everyone
- c) **Compelling** – it requires a response. Our lives are to be shaped by its telling

In His story God reveals himself and invites us to participate in his redemptive purposes. This gives value and meaning to our lives. In its simplest form, He tells His story in six steps and seven words:

- 1 – Creation
- 2 – Fall
- 3 – Israel
- 4 – Jesus
- 5 – Church
- 5 – New Creation

## Community Groups:

- 1 – Can you tell the story of the Bible in seven words?
  - 2 – What does it mean that the Bible tells the only true story?
  - 3 – What questions does the Bible answer:
    - 1 – Who am I?
    - 2 – Why do I exist?
    - 3 – What are the rewards/losses for believing/not believing this story?
  - 4 – What three great truths do we learn about God from Creation?
  - 5 – How does the world and life challenge these truths?
  - 6 – What did we lose in the Fall?
    - 1 – Harmony with God
    - 2 – Harmony with each other
    - 3 – Harmon with creation
- Shalom
- 7 – What does Genesis 3:15 promise?
  - 8 – What was God's plan for Israel?
  - 9 – Explain the Francis Thompson quote, "*All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.*"
  - 10 – What is the 'good news' that Jesus preaches? – the kingdom of God has arrived!
  - 11 – How does Jesus's life review the garden?
  - 12 – How does Jesus's life preview the New Jerusalem?
  - 13 – What is the church's mission? To re-present Jesus!
  - 14 – How does the new creation fulfil God's original plan?
    - 1 – Create a people

2 – Create a place

3 – God lives in that place with His people

15 – How do we lose the emphasis of the Bible if we make it all about us?

16 – How does the Bible become the powerful instrument God intended it to be if we remember to make it all about God?

17 – How would you tell someone the whole Bible story in 7 words?