

TUTORIAL

1.3

The whole Story

Learners will think about the fact that in contrast to all other "stories" - which are fragmented and inconsistent - the Biblical narrative provides the framework for an understanding of the way things are.

Fragmented stories

Different cultures - our own included - have lost the true account of the way things are, but it has not happened all at once, it has been a gradual process, often taking centuries. This process of losing the True Story has been slowed down by the fact that the natural world tells part of the Story about God - it's as though creation has been speaking truth to the vague echo of truth that each man is born with.

Romans 1:19,20 They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. 20 For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Many groups still retain fragments of the Biblical account. There are stories that talk of creation, of a flood, of a time when languages came to be. But as each group turned away from worshipping the One True God and began to replace the truth with their own stories, there was a gradual forgetting and turning away from what they knew to be true - a continuing replacement of truth with fragments of other stories - either their own or from other religions. The stories that people tell to try to make sense of the world are often disjointed and self-contradictory.

Reality in the Biblical narrative

How have we responded to the confusion that exists - how have we tried to tell God's Story? We have often only added to the confusion by telling parts of the story, by taking pieces from here and there, assuming the listeners will make a cohesive story out of it all. We might tell a story about Daniel and the Lions, then Peter & John healing a lame man, add a sermon from some verses in Luke and then another from Nehemiah. There has been little continuity, or

sense of historical truth. Many times our listeners come away with no understanding of this being a story with a beginning and a middle and an end - a narrative of God's actions in real space and time - His Story.

For people to understand the enormity and significance and Truth of the Story, we need to tell it from the beginning and then continue on to its conclusion. It is a Story that is tied firmly to reality, to history, and to real events. It has progression like any story or narrative does, and it moves from logical cause to effect. Disjointed and confused stories need to be replaced with a comprehensive seamless story of reality, because that is what it actually is - and the truth must sweep away the fragmented story people have come to believe.

The way we present God's Story needs to demonstrate the difference between people's confused and fragmented views of reality with the historical Truth we find in the Biblical narrative.

A focus on God's character

Presenting Biblical truth with a focus on man's felt needs, keeps man at the centre of his world and at the centre of the story. The other mistake that we can make is to focus our teaching on man's sinfulness. Of course people need to realise their sinfulness and their need, and this should be one of our most important teaching goals, but it isn't the focus of the Story.

The primary purpose of any Bible teaching should be, not to elevate the sinfulness of man, but to elevate God - to bring glory to Him, and to bring out His character through the things He has said and done. This is the purpose for which we are created. This is the purpose of His Word. It is His Story.

1 Chr 29:11 *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things.*

Rom 11:36 *For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.*

Col 1:16 *For through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.*

He made the things we can see and the things we can't see - such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

Rev 4:11 *"You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased."*

Reality for man can only come into focus when he understands who God is. This is the basis for all truth. We need to tell His Story which focuses on Him. Only then can man know who He is and understand the world in which he lives.

Proverbs 9:10 *Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom.*

Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment.

The main focus of our teaching should be the nature and character of God and His glory.

The story of grace in response to man's sin.

As we tell about the fall and the sinfulness of man, the important focus will not be on "So what are you going to do about it?" rather it will be "Ok, listen to the story of what God has done about it."

God's Word is centered around the story of what God has done about the problem of sin. It is His response to man's rebellion and how He has brought about reconciliation - the plan of salvation. It is about Him redeeming - buying back out of sin - people who are lost and unable to help themselves.

Christ is the centre

The Bible tells about the coming of the Messiah, God's Son, within a real historical setting and as the fulfillment of God's plan of reconciliation. The whole Story has lead to this point. It is God's next and greatest action in the ongoing response to the problem of sin. It was certainly the greatest event in all of history - but it was not an isolated event.

The story of God's redemption plan begins in the Old Testament and then culminates in the New. When we teach only the last part of the story there is the great risk that people will not understand. They hear the solution but they don't understand their true dilemma. Because their fragmented confused "story" remains unchallenged, they don't see how the events of Christ's life and death relate to them. It's a story, but not the story.

When Christ's life and death are not placed within the historical context, there is the risk of it being seen as just another story among many stories.

Answers to difficult questions

The cruelty of man, the issue of pain, the question of how a loving God can allow war and suffering - these are things that many people raise as objections to Christianity or are confused about. The answer to all of these things is interwoven in the Biblical narrative. Issues such as these can only be understood within the whole framework; as God, without a single exception, acts righteously and justly but also lovingly and graciously.

And the answers to those difficult issues can only be understood when man's depravity is seen in its historical perspective. When people understand that the human condition is a result of the fall, and that this was not God's intention for man, but actually the logical result of man turning his back on his Creator and on the purpose for his creation.

When we tell the whole story, we are answering peoples' questions as God has answered them - from the basis of the Biblical narrative. We are not presenting a religion, or selling our own particular interpretation of the world. And if people choose not to believe, then it is God's story they are rejecting. We should teach so that God's nature is clearly seen through his actions, and on the basis of his redemption plan. Then He will be glorified and people will have the opportunity to respond to truth - rather than what they might say is just "one religion among many".



DISCUSSION POINTS

The Whole Story

1. Describe your formative experiences of hearing Bible stories and being taught from the Bible. Who or what, in general was in focus? Has it been your overall experience (without being unduly critical) that although God was mentioned, the “heroes” of the stories were often people? David, Samson, Peter etc. What implications do you think this has for our view of God’s Word and God Himself?
2. When you are reading or studying a portion of God’s Word, how much do you usually think about things like: Who was writing or saying this? To whom? What was their physical setting? What was their worldview like? etc. OR, do you tend to think just about what God is saying to you personally at the time you’re reading the passage? Do you feel there is a conflict between these two approaches to the Bible?



ACTIVITIES

The Whole Story

1. Read the book of Ruth through in one sitting. Then;
 - (1) Briefly note any observations you have, or questions that come to mind, about the historical and cultural setting for the narrative.
 - (2) Comment in any way you like about God's role in the events recorded.
 - (3) Reflect on how this particular story fits into the whole of the Biblical narrative and God's Purposes.
 - (4) Note anything about this part of God's Word that encourages, inspires or challenges you personally.

(Note: Keep it brief. You should end up with no more than a page of notes.)