

## His Story; Your Story; Our Story

Next Saturday, the elders of our church will meet together for the better part of the day to work on one of our most essential tasks: re-visiting our church's core values so we can evaluate how we are progressing in our mission as a local church. To that end, we have asked many of you to participate in a survey to help us analyze our strengths so we can build on them, our weaknesses so we can seek to correct them, the opportunities that God has placed before us so we can seize them, and the threats that could potentially be undermining our ministry so we can address them.

This past week I read some of the questionnaires—and *I was blessed* by the passion I saw for the ministry of this church. Not just for the things that are going well—but for the things that we could do better. Of course we like to hear about what we are doing well. We *enjoy* hearing about our strengths. But we will never change if we don't recognize our weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. So *please pray* for the elders this next weekend as we gather and pray and evaluate and work toward re-visiting and re-tooling our long range plan.

The thing I want to talk to you about this morning, however, happens to deal with what was mentioned on nearly every questionnaire as a ***strength***. Can you guess what that might be? It is Cornerstone's commitment to the *authority of the Word of God* and its ministry emphasis on the *careful, accurate teaching of the Bible*. Many of you said in the survey (and I have heard many more of you say) that you are here because we are a church that takes God's Word seriously. We preach it. We teach it in our Adult Bible Fellowships, and in our youth and children's ministries. We offer a broad selection of classes on books of the Bible, Bible doctrine, and the practical application of the Bible to life. And if that isn't enough, we offer various conferences each year—all focusing on the authority and sufficiency of the Word of God for life and ministry! And these are good! I think we can rightly say: ***Praise God for that strength***. But the longer I live and the more I study those same inspired, inerrant Scriptures—the more I realize that if we are not careful—***our strength can become a weakness!***

Now you may be wondering in an “anything-goes” kind of culture where truth seems to be a frequent casualty—how can the *attention to the accurate teaching, study, and application* of the Word of God *ever* become a *weakness*? It becomes a weakness when we approach the Scriptures the *wrong way*! When we fail to use the Scriptures the way God intended. That very thing happened in Jesus' day. Turn with me to John 5:39-40 and listen to what Jesus said to the so-called Spiritual leaders of His day who prided themselves on being people of the book:

**[Slide 1A]** You *diligently study* (lit. investigate) the Scriptures because you ***think*** that by them you possess eternal life.

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You are probably asking yourself right now: “What’s wrong with that? After all, they *are* searching the *Scriptures*” Yes. But they are approaching them the wrong way. He adds: “You *think* that *by them* you possess eternal life.” But notice what He goes on to say:

[Slide 1b] *These are the Scriptures that testify about me...*”

The Jews of Jesus’ day had the Scriptures, but *most of them* did not have the *author* of those Scriptures. They read the Bible—but they missed the *person* who was the *theme* of the Bible. They had the *written* word of God—but they were missing the *Living* Word of God. The Scriptures for them had become a series of principles to be understood and debated. A collection of laws to be observed. A history to be proud of. Prophetic riddles to be deciphered. Somewhere in the midst of all that, they had heard about a Messiah. But He was a distant figure to most. The Scriptures for them had become a *system* to be *learned* and *mastered* rather than an introduction to a *Person*!

**Illustration:** I once heard pastor and writer, Steve Estes use an illustration something like this: It would be like me taking this picture of my wife when I go on a trip to Russia. Every day I look at this picture many, many times a day. I set it in front of me when I am shaving in the bathroom or when I am sitting down and eating a meal. I gaze on it before I go to bed and when I get up in the morning. When I arrive at the airport still clutching this picture, my wife comes up to me to give me a hug and a kiss—and I turn away from her and say: “*I love the woman in this picture.*” That is how *we* can misuse the Bible!

We *misuse* the Bible when we study its history—but miss *HIS-STORY*. We misuse the Bible when we feverishly devote ourselves to end times prophecies—but miss the Person to whom those prophecies were designed to point us! Some have asked me for my opinion of the Left Behind series. Quite honestly I think my biggest disappointment with that *sort of* study of prophecy is that Jesus ends up being the One who gets “left behind!” We *misuse* the Bible when we turn its laws and precepts into 10 Steps to Improve Your Marriage or to How Successfully Raise Your Kids—and miss the Bridegroom who laid down his life for His bride or miss the love of a Father who so loved His Creation and Who is so opposed to sin that He took the life of His own Son to bring us into *His family*! Several of us are really thinking through the importance of pursuing meaningful fellowship in this body—and especially in our Adult Bible Fellowships. But if we don’t grasp the fact that true fellowship has to develop out of our relationship with the Father—and that such fellowship is enjoyed *only* as we appreciate the ongoing ministry of God’s Son through His Holy Spirit that He has sent to us, our “fellowship” will be weak and our body spiritually anemic.

So what I want to do for the next few minutes is simply illustrate for you what it means to use this precious book the way God intended. I said a moment ago that the Bible is *HIS-STORY*. By that I didn’t mean that the Bible is just a compendium of stories about Jesus. It is one unified, seamless story with One major Theme and One major Person. There are many stories in the Bible. But they are sub-plots of *His-Story*. Jesus said so much when he spoke to some of His disciples after His resurrection in Luke 24:44:

[Slide 2A] <sup>44</sup> He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

First of all, you need to understand what Jesus is talking about here. The Hebrew Bible from which Jesus and His disciples read had *three major divisions* which are outlined in this verse. They were called *the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings* (although sometimes the Writings were referred to as the Psalms). So when Jesus talks about the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms here—He is referring to the entire Bible of His day. Notice again what He talks about. There is a theme. What is it? **Fulfillment**. Is this a fulfillment of a number of prophecies so that we can convince our unsaved friends through some sort of statistical analysis that Jesus was real and actually did come to earth? As if the mere compiling of historical fulfillment makes Christ’s coming more real because so many prophetic events coming to pass could not have been a mere coincidence (**Silver dollars in Texas illustration**).

But that is really not the point of prophecy. As true and important as that is, Jesus is talking about much more than that. He is talking about the fulfillment of a *promise*. A promise that is ultimately embodied in a **Person!!**

You say: Well he didn’t really say all that much because verse 46 makes it seem pretty brief: [Slide 2B] “He said to them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day....’”

Keep in mind that Luke is only giving you a summary of what Jesus said. But Jesus is talking about the *message of the entire OT!* And if He stuck with the same pattern that you see a few verses earlier with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, you can be sure He took some time to explain. Just listen to Luke 24:27: [Slide 3A]

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Talk about an unforgettable Sunday School lesson! And if that is not enough, the Person about *whom* the Scriptures speak is also actively working in the hearts of these listeners. Look at Luke 24:45: [Slide 3B] *Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.*

What would it look like for us to use the Scriptures the way Jesus did for those disciples on *that* day? Do you think people today can do that? Based on what Jesus is saying to us in this text, I think we can. In fact, I think that is precisely what He wants you and me to do. So here we go. We are going to try and go through the whole Bible. Imagine that! If it took Pastor Bob five years to get through Romans, we could be here for a while. In fact, I have asked the ushers to lock the doors so we don’t lose anybody! Seriously, we are going to do this in about 15-20 minutes. I’m not kidding either!

So where do we start? Go back to the very beginning. Where God creates the world in six days and man is the culmination of God's creation on the sixth day. The Garden is a beautiful place—not only because of its perfection prior to sin—but because it is the place man was created to be: In the presence of His Creator, worshipping Him and adoring Him for His infinite goodness and kindness. There in the Garden, Adam and Eve have everything they *need*. There in the Presence of their Creator-God—they possessed the fulfillment of everything that their wants could ever suggest. And until sin entered this picture, man was thriving. He thrived because He had meaning and purpose. All of that is a gift from God and comes to man by God's life-giving Word. He assigns to them a role. "Be my image-bearer before the rest of Creation. Be in your lives a visible representation of my Invisible Attributes. And join me in a relationship that makes you at once a family with me and puts you in partnership with my Creation purposes—namely ***to fill the entire earth with my Glory***. And so Adam and Eve are given the privilege of continuing what God has done in Creation and expanding the borders of Eden until the ***whole earth*** becomes a flourishing Garden like Eden. God gives just one prohibition: *Don't eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*.

Well as you know—that plan seems to unravel almost immediately. A rival authority slithers in and places doubt about God's goodness and God's Word in Eve's mind. And before you know it, they are forsaking God's life-preserving instruction for the rival counsel of the serpent. Just like that Paradise is lost. Adam and Eve far from attaining the false promise of godhood, have plunged themselves and their descendents into sin and ***death***. It is in that moment when God needed only to have carried out judgment that we hear ***the first promise about Jesus***. Even as God declares an all out war on the serpent and announces his doom, we hear the first words of promise in Genesis 3:15: **[Slide 4]**

*And I will put enmity between **you** and the **woman**, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*

As a holy God pronounces judgment on a satanically-inspired insurgency, He offers the hope of a Deliverer. In coming to our rescue, this "seed of the woman" will suffer a terrible blow. But that very blow to *his* heel will become the means by which *He* crushes the head of the serpent.

And you can trace this theme through the rest of Scripture. In chapter four, Eve has *two* children. Jealous Cain rises up and kills righteous Abel. A case of mere sibling rivalry? Or is it just one of many conflicts that unfold between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman? As Genesis unfolds, so does the murder and mayhem from the line of Cain. And so in Genesis 6:5-8 we read that...

**[Slide 5]** *"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and **his heart was filled with pain**. <sup>7</sup> So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them."*

*Noah and the ark* is another one of those stories where we often miss the main point. The ark and God's subsequent covenant with Noah are about God's determination to keep His promise. Here is God—infinately holy and therefore able to grieve with an infinite grief over our sin. So much so that it fills His heart *with pain*. How do you explain that? You can't. His justice demands judgment. And judgment comes in the form of a massive flood the likes of which not even the people of New Orleans could imagine. All but eight people die. But God's mercy clings to His unfailing promise. [Slide 6 A] The promise that God will not ultimately *destroy* His creation, but will ultimately re-create it and sustain it for all time. But upon what basis is this promise given to Noah? Noah's effort? Well he did believe God and he obeyed by building the ark. Yet he is also the man who goes and gets drunk almost as soon as he gets off the ark! So what's the reason? Just listen to Genesis 6:8: [Slide 6B]

*"...Noah found favor (grace) in the eyes of the LORD."*

And that favor had nothing to do with Noah's inherent goodness. It had everything to do with *a God who keeps His promises*.

You might expect the flood to have created a better world. But in chapter 11, the sinful seed bounces back with a vengeance—this time poised to take heaven by storm. They build a stairway to heaven. [Slide 7] Why? To humbly seek the Lord? No—to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4). And so God scatters them. And then sets out to choose a man from the line of Noah—specifically the son named, Shem. And do you know what Shem means? "Name." It's as though God is saying: *I alone have the right to make a name for myself*. Later on, we will meet the one who is the Name above all names. But for now we see only faintly see Him as a distant promise given to one of Shem's descendents—a man named , Abram. Abram was a pagan whom called out of the city of Ur. A man who nonetheless believes in God's promise—even when it sounds as ridiculous as two people old enough to have Great Grand children having their first baby.

It is with Abram, later renamed Abraham, where God's earlier promise to Eve really starts to take shape. It involves Abraham having descendents and the promise of a land. But it ultimately points to something much bigger. [Slide 8] Listen to Genesis 12:3: *"...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* How can the whole world be impacted by one man. Or even one nation? The plot begins to thicken.

God eventually fulfills His promise and gives Abraham a child named Isaac. A child that he is ultimately willing to offer as a sacrifice. [Slide 9]Until God, at the last minute, provides His own sacrifice. That wouldn't be the first or the last time that God would do that. The Scriptures both in Genesis and later in Romans point out that in spite of several stumblings, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. But *what* did he believe in? Years later, Jesus would say of said of Abraham: "Abraham rejoiced to see *my day!*" (See John 8:56).

Let's fast-forward to Abraham's grandson, Jacob. Was he a *handful*. Or a heel-full. His name means "heel-snatcher" because he grabbed his twin brother's heel as he was being

born out of his mother's womb. Like a younger brother trying to push his way to the front of the line, Jacob's whole life was lived around obtaining God's covenant promises—but by doing it *his* way! And for that he paid dearly. His deception of Isaac in order to pry the inheritance away from his older brother sent him on a one-way trip from home. But on that journey—he had an amazing experience at a place called Bethel (House of God). (You can read about it in Genesis 29:10-17). At Bethel, he makes a pillow out of rocks (This wasn't even a Motel Six. It was more like a Motel Two or something). Any way, he falls asleep and has a dream. [Slide 10] And in the dream there is a ladder with angels ascending and descending. And then God reiterates this promise again. The same essential promise that He made in front of Eve. That he made to Noah and Abraham. Each time through the promise is getting more and more detailed. A seed crushing the serpent. No more worldwide flood—the hope of grace in the distance. Then a man with a whole bunch of seeds. But out of that—one out of whom all nations will be blessed. And now God is saying—Jacob—its not about you pulling this covenant off. It's about ***Me fulfilling my Promise!***

When I was a child growing up in the church, we used to sing a song called: “We are climbing Jacob's ladder.” And I sort of got this picture that the Christian life was about being faithful and climbing the ladder of obedience or something like that. That song *totally misses the point of this text*. [Slide 11] This isn't about Jacob climbing His way to God. This is about God coming down to Jacob. This is where Jacob finds out that it's not about our ascent to Him, but ***His*** descent to us. This is yet another text about Jesus! You think I am making this up? Listen to Jesus in His own words in John 1:51:

He then added, “**I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.**”

What is Jesus saying? He is saying: ***I am that ladder. I am the link between heaven and earth. I am the means by which sinful man can have fellowship with the Living God and allow people once again to dwell in Bethel—or the dwelling place of God (i.e. the new Eden)***

Do you see how this connects with the larger theme of promise that runs through the entire OT? Do you see how the entire Bible points not to a *system*—but to a ***Person***—not just to fulfill mere predictions—but to fulfill God's promise to Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses—and right on through the Bible?

Again, let's fast forward through OT history until we come to a man named David.. When God finally applies the promise to David and His offspring, it gets even more specific. The promise to David involves a king and a kingdom that will never end. Earthly kingdoms (including many of David's future descendents) will rise and fall. They will rule and fail. You can read about them in the books of Kings and Chronicles. But all of their accounts pave the way for one of David's descendents who will sit on a throne that will endure forever. He is called ***the Son of David***.

But is that what you think about when you hear the name of David? No. You think of the stories of David—like David and Goliath. So let me ask you a question. If what Jesus is telling the disciples in Luke 24 is really so, where is Jesus in this story that is perhaps our

favorite OT story? The story of David and Goliath. You know—the story of the under-matched shepherd boy going up against the Philistine giant from Gath. And what is it we typically extract from this story? A lesson like this: With God on your side, you too can defeat the giants in your life. The giant of discouragement. Or the giant of failure.

But is that all David and Goliath is about. A nice story with a happy ending and a moral that you can take home and live by? Or is there something more going on in this story? Is this not a sub-plot of the main plot that Jesus was alluding to. If so, then it might sound like this: What David is doing here is *foreshadowing the work of his greater Son, the Son of David—which puts this familiar story in a different light.*

*We have the same details—but notice how the picture changes.* The story of David is telling us that the Israelites could not go against Goliath. They simply cannot do it. They need a substitute. When the substitute comes, He is no hulking Arnold Swarzenegger. He is not even a full-grown man. He is weak and vulnerable. A mere boy. Everyone in the crowd isn't watching a super-hero take down a villain. They watch a lamb being led to the slaughter. [Slide 12] But God uses his apparent weakness to destroy the giant. And David becomes Israel's champion-Redeemer so that His victory is imputed to them. And they get all the fruit of the victory as much as if they had won the battle themselves.

This is more than a story with an unexpected, but happy ending. It is a sub-plot in a much larger part that carries a promise to its ultimate fulfillment in a Person. And that Person is the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

That plot is found not only in the earlier books of the OT that contain so many stories, some of which we have briefly glimpsed. That same plot winds its way through the many chapters that explain God's Law [Slide 13] —a law that man finds ultimately impossible to perfectly keep and whose demands require endless sacrifices [Slide 14] Yet in that same law we find the character of Christ who always pleased the Father and in whose death all the OT sacrifices find their fulfillment.

That plot continues to weave its way through the wisdom books like the psalms of which so many become laments uttered by the Savior even as He suffered for us on the cross. "My God, My God why have you forsaken me" was written by King David in the 22<sup>nd</sup> psalm, but ultimately so it could be uttered in the place of all of God's people by the *Son of David*. The prophets decry the sins of their contemporaries—but they look beyond their contemporary times to the two comings of Christ—first to suffer, then to reign.

Even the Gospels in the NT, which are conspicuously *about* Christ are more than mere biographies. They are more than a random selection of Jesus' favorite teachings. They are confirmations of ancient promises that have their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ. And each author painstakingly ties the promises together to show you and me that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, Moses, and David, the people of God in every age. Even you and me.

The **book of Acts** isn't just a handbook of Church History. It is the ongoing ministry of Christ from heaven by His Spirit through His Church. And the **epistles** explain how the church collectively fulfills Christ's promises as we demonstrate our reconciliation with God by living it out in relationships with each other. We show the world that God is true, that the Trinity is more than an abstract concept, that Jesus is a loving bridegroom. How? By applying the Gospel in our relationships. How? By knowing and falling in love more and more with a Savior who is the fulfillment of **all** of God's promises.

Revelation tells us that the rest of the story and the best of the story is yet to come. The story that started in a Garden and runs through a Garden called Gethsemane will finally end up back WHERE IT STARTED. In a Garden! Just listen to John describe it in Revelation 22:

*1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the **tree of life**, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 **No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and His name will be on their foreheads.**"*

In Revelation 22:13--Jesus Christ Himself is speaking. It's almost the end of the Bible. Listen to what he says: "I am Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and The End." One person meditated on that verse. And as he thought about the Alpha and Omega, which are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, he began to ponder about our own alphabet and all that the Scriptures reveal about Jesus:

To the artist, He is the Altogether Lovely One.

To the builder, He is the Chief Cornerstone.

To the chef, He is the Bread of Life.

To the doctor, He is the Great Physician.

To the educator, He is the Master Teacher.

To the florist, He is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley.

To the geologist, He is the Rock of Ages.

To the horticulturalist, He is the True Vine.

To the intellectual, He is the Wisdom of God.

To the jeweler, He is the Pearl of Great Price.



To the king, He is the Prince of Peace

To the lawyer, He is the Judge of all the earth.

To the manufacturer, He is the Creator of all things.

To the newsman, He is the Glad Tidings of Great Joy.

To the oculist, He is the Light of the World.

To the philanthropist, He is Gift of God.

To the Queen, He is the King of Kings.

To the rabbi, He is the Messiah.

To the scholar, He is the Truth.

To the theologian, He is the Author and finisher of our Faith.

To the undertaker, He is the Resurrection and the Life.

To the visionary, He is the Revelation of God.

To the waiter, He is the one who came not to be served but to serve

To the x-ray technician, He is the Word of God before whom all things are open and naked.

To the youth, He is the Life.

To the zealot, He is the Revelation of God for whom man is worth living.

*He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and The End--and everything in between!!!!*

From Genesis to Revelation, Jesus is the theme that binds *all* of the Scriptures together. Or as C.S. Lewis put it: ***“Jesus is the chapter on which the whole plot turns!”***

That is what ***His-Story*** is about. But let me ask you a personal question. Has ***His-Story*** become ***your*** story? Notice I didn't ask you if you were familiar with all of the sub-plots. I didn't ask you if you could argue for a system of belief. I asked: Has ***His-Story*** become ***your story***? Have you embraced not only the facts about Him and come to a saving relationship with Him by shifting the weight of your trust from yourself to the One who

has done for you what you could never do? And if you have come to that place in your life, are you seeking to grow in an intimate knowledge of Him? Do you long to exclaim like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

*“Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

*But there is one more question I need to ask: Is His-Story not only your story—but do you see it as **Our Story**? What I mean by that is this: Do you look at your brothers and sisters as people whom you happen to sit near in church or in your abf. Or do you see that we are in a relationship that has eternal implications along with present urgencies. We have a story to tell in this community. And as hard as it is to believe—there are many within just a few blocks who do not know His-Story. There are literally thousands within a 5 mile radius. And there are tens of thousands, no hundreds of thousands in metro Detroit. A lot of you are telling that story each week where you live and work. And we need to keep doing it. But what seems to get the attention of a watching world is when you find ways to tell not just your story—but our story. When the world can see us together—in action. Things like putting roofs on houses, offering medical care to the poor, and being tutors and big brothers and sisters to kids with learning disabilities. Also, helping people who need the love and power of a Savior that is stronger than their enslavement to drugs or alcohol. That is what you call **incarnating the story of the Christ together in a visible body** before a watching world. May God be pleased to tell His story in Roseville more and more through us.*





