

## **The Greatest Story Of All Time**

It is an old, old story ... a story that began long ago ... way back in the mists of time. It is the story of how all this came to be. ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** He made it all. And then ... ***God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.***

This is the story that has been handed down to us, received by us, and believed by us. It is the story that has shaped our lives and our view of the world. All of creation comes from the hands of God and He is the One who created us ... each one of us. ***God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.***

## **Stored Wisdom**

All people live by a story ... a narrative of life and its meaning. Have you ever reflected on and analyzed the story by which you live? Have you examined what it is you believe about life, purpose and meaning, the destiny of humanity, asking why do I believe what I believe? Every human culture has their stories of life's origin, the meaning and purpose of living, and the destiny of humanity. These narratives form the foundations of cultures and nations – ancient and modern. ***The power to guide and even to transform societies is found there in the stored wisdom of the human past.*** Much of the ancient world was guided and governed by stories that told of gods who seemed so much to be reflections of base human desires or in rare cases noble aspirations. Others worshipped the creation, nature, seasonal cycles, as though the earth, sun, and moon were divine. Many cultures sought to manipulate the gods through ritual and sacrifice to ensure favor to humans. For some cultures, this included human sacrifice – such as the sacrifice of babies to the god Baal (named in the Bible) to ensure prosperity. Meanwhile the actions of ambitious, greedy, and cruel men and women continued unabated.

Today there are many narratives that compete for human hearts: various religions, “isms” like marxism, nazi-ism, fascism, Islamism, hedonism, atheism, and so on ... each purporting to carry the truth of life, origin and destiny, and therefore how we should live. So little do people realize that what historians and philosophers call “post-modernism” has over-taken the narratives that have guided Western Civilization – including our nation and culture- for millennia. Post-modernism, simply put, elevates feelings and personal experience over reason and wisdom handed down through the ages. Post-modernism believes that there can be many truths, not one “true truth,” or over-arching truth and

narrative for all people that is eternally true. Today many people around us are like that ancient Roman Governor Pontius Pilate when he queried Jesus: “What is truth?”

## **His-story**

Countering all these other narratives is God’s story ... this story unfolds in the Bible. The book of books recounts how God, Creator of all and everything, has revealed Himself through history and people, and why He does so. This narrative of life, meaning, and destiny is centered on God, beginning and ending with Him. **It is His story and it has the power to redeem the human condition.** It is in this story that Christians find the true narrative of the world, bringing meaning to all people of all races, nations, languages, cultures, and ages, and they proclaim it to the world. It is a story that moves straight ahead on a time line from Genesis to Revelation, and it is the key to understanding the plot of History and our place in it. **The Bible tells the narrative of human life that comes from God and will one day return to God.**

In Genesis we read that God created a world teeming with abundant life and declared it ‘very good.’ Yet there were boundaries for humans: ... *the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”* Gen. 2:17. You see, they had fallen for the temptation to make their own story THE story ... and isn’t that the temptation all of us face? In a sense they said, “God we don’t need your story, we can create our own story.” (Isn’t this the very thing post-modernism does?)

And because of what the first humans did – that is, they disobeyed their Creator believing they could determine for themselves what is good and evil, right and wrong – we have inherited the brokenness and pain that comes from life that is disconnected from the Source of all life. Because people were never designed to be independent from God’s provision, the result was a ‘fall’ from the perfection they had previously enjoyed. The consequences of their arrogance are broad and deep and fatal. *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return,”* Gen. 3:19.

And to this day, **because humans have dis-connected themselves from the eternal God, they have severed their tie to eternity.** The consequence is death and all the deadening behaviors and attitudes that enter into life before that final breath. For not only has our tie with eternity been cut-off, so has our tie to the source and essence of all goodness ... our good God and Creator. That’s what we mean by sin ... that disconnect from our Creator and the relationship He intended for us to have with Him. **Sin is our alienation from God.** In humanity’s desperate attempt to regain the goodness of God’s life and creation, while still trying to control it all, people have tried to fill the emptiness of soul with all

kinds of behaviors, schemes, and visions, from drugs and alcohol, to money and power, to utopian visions of vast organizations that bring economic and material prosperity for all and perfect human harmony. None of them work.

## **To The Rescue**

Yet God did not give up on humans - His own creation. *For God so loved the world ...* that He set about rescuing humanity from their sin and a sin-broken world.

**Part 1 of God's rescue plan was the covenant with Israel.** God chose one man, Abram (whose name was soon to be changed to Abraham) and made him a promise: that his extended family will be a prototype of what humanity can look like when restored to intimacy with God. His descendants are the people of Israel. God sent prophets to Israel with visions of a day when the perfection so briefly enjoyed at creation (the past age) will be re-created (the age to come) and all suffering and sin of the present age will be erased. This story is found in the Old Testament.

**Part 2 of God's rescue plan** to redeem His creation from the brokenness it had fallen into because of the arrogance of human kind, came in the first century A.D. The most decisive milestone in history was when God himself walked the earth as a human being: **Jesus of Nazareth.** He was born into this world, taking on all of human life from baby to manhood. "The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable."-- Ralph W. Sockman

It is this birth, this historic milestone that we celebrate at Christmas – God entering time and human life to rescue us from all the sin and brokenness we can ever know and experience. This Jesus announced and demonstrated that the eagerly awaited age to come had started to break into the present age - in the person of Jesus himself.

Jesus was ultimately killed. To many it looked like any other execution by the Roman authorities, but **from the perspective of God's story the death of Jesus was a final sacrifice for all the sin** accumulated since the beginning of time and for sin still lingering in the world. No longer was sin a barrier between people and God. Miraculously, Jesus rose from death, His bodily resurrection God's vindication of His life and death *and* a foretaste of what we too can one day experience – overcoming death, the awful consequence of sin.

And so the Christian story tells this great truth: *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life, John 3:16.* God's own Son took on and defeated all the evil consequences of human fallen-ness and sin, up to and including death ... a most shameful death on a cross as a criminal ... and so redeemed our broken lives. Now, **when we take Him into our lives He begins to transform each of us into a new man or woman,** bringing us back to that original intent when God first

created humans. Countless millions of persons have met Jesus and also found their lives transformed through Him. How about you?

This is the story that gives meaning and purpose to our world, to our living ... to our lives. All of creation and all of humanity came from God, and our intended destiny is complete restoration of fellowship with God and life in heaven. It is made possible through Jesus Christ. [That's my story and I'm sticking to it!]

### **What's Your Story?**

Each one of us has a story of our life's experience ... our actions and reactions, upbringing, education, work, choices made and choices missed, victories and defeats, relationships and accomplishments. And what does it all add up to?

It is **within the plot of God's story** that **Christians can make sense of life**. Finding our place in God's story – through a relationship with the One whom we celebrate at Christmas - gives meaning and purpose to our living. Where are you in this grand story of God? Is there room in your heart today for God to write His story – so that your story becomes a part of the grandest story of all time?

The truth is Jesus came into the world at Christmas because of the hard things in life. At the heart of the Christian faith is this conviction: ***"For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross,"*** **Colossians 1:19-20**. At Christmas God didn't just step into history to save souls - to pull human souls out of the created order. There's so much more. The whole story is that God entered creation to redeem all of it from the fallen-ness, the broken-ness, and the darkness that has encompassed your life and all lives since the beginning. Obviously God has saved me, as I am a part of creation, but that is just part of the story. God's work of redemption narrates the entire world. The whole of life - political, economic, institutional, ideological, family and personal relationships – has been redeemed because God in Jesus received all of creation into Himself, even up to and through the cross and the empty tomb.

What does all of that mean? It means that joy is possible, true joy, because in Him our situation (including all our individual situations) is not impossible. In all the grief we experience, God is there, not taking us out of the situations but walking with us through them and redeeming all for good. **In Jesus the human condition** – in all its complexities and confusion – **is being called back to God and will one day be made whole again.**

God cares about you. He came in person to extend a hand to you ... so come to Him ... repent of your selfish desire to control all and allow Jesus to enter your life as Lord and Savior from all your own broken-ness and darkness of

soul. This story, a true story, has been called the greatest story ever told. Make it your story.

***He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf, 2 Cor. 5:15.***

### **Sermon Take Away**

**Because humans have dis-connected themselves from the eternal God, they have severed their tie to eternity.**

**In Jesus the human condition – in all its complexities and confusion – is being called back to God and will one day be made whole again.**

**The Bible tells the narrative of human life that comes from God and will one day return to God.**

**God's story has the power to redeem the human condition.**