

The Story of Redemption [Slide 1]

I'm going to do something different than the typical sermon today. Instead of looking at a passage of Scripture or a topic, I'm going to talk about the overarching story of the whole Bible. When you boil it all down to a sentence or two, what is the Bible really about? I've done that on your sermon outline under the main idea. [Slide 2] The main story of the Bible is a love story about how God reconciles his people to himself after they sinned against him.

You may not think of the Bible as a love story. It certainly doesn't fit the modern notions of a romance novel. Yet it is arguably the greatest love story of all time. It is about the greatest sacrifice possible in order to meet the desperate need of the beloved. I'll give you an overview of the Bible showing how the books support the overall story or metanarrative of the Bible.

Looking at the overall organization of the Bible we can divide it into three main parts. Genesis 1-2 describe God's creation of a perfect world including mankind. The great bulk of the Bible from Genesis chapter 3 to Revelation chapter 20 records God implementing his plan to redeem mankind. Revelation 21-22 describes how God restores his people and his creation and returns them to the perfect world that he created in the beginning.

[Slide 3] Let's begin our story with creation and the question of why did God create mankind and the world in the first place? The Bible doesn't directly provide that answer, but we have enough clues that I think we can draw a reasonable inference. First, the universe and the Earth. Why did God create them? Genesis 1:31 tells us that at the end of creation God surveyed all that he had created and pronounced it very good. What made it good other than the fact that God created it?

I suggest it was good because, in particular, the Earth was designed to support human life. We now know from our study of the universe and the many different physical constants of the Earth that had to be exactly fine-tuned to support life, that our planet is meticulously crafted to support human life. The size of our planet, our distance from the sun, the gravitational constant, the rotation rate of the planet and a myriad of other factors had to all be carefully designed to narrow specifications in order for this planet to support life.

A couple of textual clues indicate that God created with man in mind. When God describes the purpose behind him creating the stars, the sun, and the moon he says in verses 14-15 that they help distinguish days, and years and seasons. Why would that matter unless you had a creature that somehow needed to know the passing of days, years, and seasons? What creature monitors the passing of time and plans his agriculture around the regularity of days, seasons, and years? Man needs to know those things. God created the stars, sun, and moon so that man could keep track of days, seasons and years. In verse 29 God tells Adam and Eve that he has given to mankind every plant yielding seed and every tree yielding fruit to man for food. The plants were created to provide food for man who was designed to be able to eat and to digest those plants. God lovingly crafted Earth for us.

Why did he create us? He did not need us. God is completely self-sufficient. Because he is a trinity of persons, he wasn't lonely. He did not need to love someone because the three persons of the Trinity could love each other. Why then did God create us? Again I speculate, which is always a risky thing when trying to understand God's motives, but we do have a clue. One of the main ways God characterizes his relationship with us is in the imagery of him being a father and us being children. I imagine that God created mankind for the same reason a married couple

decides to have children. They want to bring into existence people like them whom they can love and with whom they can have a relationship.

God created us in his image so that he could have a relationship with us just as a husband and a wife have a child in their image so that they can have a relationship with that child. And for some period of time God and man enjoyed fellowship with one another. Their communication was open, unhindered, and completely honest because without sin there was no need to lie, to hide, to blame, to deceive or to stonewall.

[Slide 4] Our story brings us to Genesis 3 and the fall of man from harmony and bliss to death and decay through sin against God. We learn from the New Testament; however, that God had already planned for our redemption before Adam and Eve sinned. Look at Ephesians 1:4-6 on your outline. Let's read that. Read. Before God created the universe he had already planned for our redemption. He knew Adam and Eve were going to sin and the three persons of the Trinity had already worked out the plan to redeem mankind before God created us.

[Slide 5] In Genesis 3 Adam and Eve sinned against God and God ordained that sin would have painful consequences. What were some of those consequences? Death, both physical and spiritual death, entered the world. God removed the tree of life from Adam and Eve. Not only will man physically die, but he will no longer automatically have access to eternal life, because his relationship with God is broken. God curses the ground and childbearing so that both work and having children become painful. Conflict arises between Adam and Eve. God warns that she will try to control and manipulate him and he will harshly rule over her. But in the midst of all the negative consequences for their sin, God provides one bright ray of hope. He prophesies in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. This is the first reference in the Scripture to the coming Messiah who will bring victory to God's people.

All these negative consequences of sin are a severe mercy from God. They are an act of grace. You ask: How is that? What would happen if the only consequence of sin was Hell? What if in this life there were no negative consequences for sin, no physical death, no pain and suffering, no relational conflicts, no sickness or disease, no natural disasters? What if the only consequence to sin was Hell? There would be no immediate motivation to repent and confess one's sin.

Pain and suffering alert you to the fact that there is something wrong with this world, that there is a problem that needs to be solved. For many people it takes the prospect of death or of suffering to halt their pursuit of pleasure long enough to ponder whether they need to change something in their life. Sometimes the only way God can get people's attention is through pain or the prospect of death.

[Slide 6] The next chapters of Genesis reveal that when mankind is unified under one language and one culture, man more thoroughly and efficiently disobeys God. The unity of all mankind does not bring about Heaven on Earth, but rather brings about disaster as man's sin has few limits. In Genesis 6-8 people become so evil that God has to send a Flood to wipe out most of mankind and start over with Noah's family. Then in Genesis 11 mankind refuses to spread throughout the Earth as God commanded in Genesis 1, but instead people decided to build a tower to Heaven, apparently some ill-fated attempt to challenge God. God confused their language so that from that day forward people spoke many languages and from that event the nations of the world originated.

[Slide 7] Against the backdrop of sinful man resisting God, we read in Genesis 12 that God makes a covenant with Abraham and his family, who will eventually become a nation of people. One of the promises that God makes to Abraham is that God will bless all the nations of the

world through one of Abraham's descendants. This is the second reference in the Bible to the coming one who will be the world's salvation. From Genesis 12 through the book of Exodus, God makes a nation out of Abraham and his family. God brings into existence the Jewish people.

[Slide 8] In Exodus through Deuteronomy God provides the Law which defines righteousness and how a sinful people can relate to a Holy God. This is all part of the Mosaic Covenant or the Old Covenant, a working out of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

The Law defined the Jewish people and described their relationship with God. The Law prescribed a series of sacrifices that enabled a sinful people to live with a holy God in their midst. The Law prescribed what righteous behavior looks like. And the Law provided Israel with their reason for existence. They were to be a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In Exodus 19:6 God says, "Read."

The Jews were to be a kingdom of priests to the other nations. They were supposed to represent God to the nations, witnessing to the Gentiles the truth about God, and they were to represent the nations to God, praying for the Gentiles. The whole Israelite nation was to be a missionary nation to the other nations of the world.

We also learn from the New Testament that the Law functioned to reveal sin to people. Romans 3:20 says, "Read." People would read the law and realize that they had sinned against God. The Law also taught people that they couldn't keep the Law and needed a savior. Paul describes the Law as a tutor that leads people to faith in Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 3:22-26: "Read." The Law acts as a tutor because if you really try to keep the Law, you realize you can't do it, that you need a Savior or a deliverer who can somehow help you to fulfill the Law's requirements. The Law is a tutor that leads people to Jesus Christ, because he can save them. The rest of the Old Testament is a record that the Jewish people could not keep the Law of God.

[Slide 9] That brings us to the history books of Joshua through Esther. Some of the key themes of these books are the following. Whether the people are led by Judges, by Israelite kings, or by foreign kings when they are in exile, the Jews never become a kingdom of priests or a holy nation. Often they turn to other gods rather than being faithful to Yahweh. They fail to faithfully witness to the nations about the true God.

King David comes closest to being the ideal king. In fact he becomes a type or picture of the coming Messiah, but even David is a terribly flawed individual he fails to be the righteous king. Nevertheless he is a man after God's own heart and God promises to David a descendant who will reign as king forever in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. Let's read those verses. Read. This is prophecy of the coming Messiah, the King who will rule over Israel and all the nations.

[Slide 10] Standing in the middle of the Old Testament is the wisdom literature, the books of Job through the Song of Solomon. The wisdom literature instructs people how to live life skillfully. Some of the psalms such as Psalm 22 and Psalm 110:1 either describe or prophesy the coming Messiah. The Song of Solomon provides an analogy of God's love for his people in the love story of the king for his wife.

[Slide 11] In the books of the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi, God calls his people to covenant faithfulness. Some highlights in the prophetic books are the following. God prophesies a coming son in Isaiah 9:6-7 who among other things is described as eternal Father. God declares he will make a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Hosea is a picture of God's love for his unfaithful people. Jonah is a picture of the nation, Israel, failing to fully be God's witness to the Gentiles. Malachi prophesies that God's messenger will appear to prepare the way of the Lord, a prophecy that was later fulfilled by John the Baptist.

[Slide 12] The Gospels of Matthew through John are in many ways the climax of God's love story. God sends his Son as Savior of the world. We learn that God will save us through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus died and paid for all our sins declaring in John 19:30, "it is finished" or more literally "paid in full." The Father resurrects the Son proving that he accepted the Son's death on the cross to pay for our sins. Jesus then commissions his disciples to go to all the nations of the world to make disciples.

[Slide 13] We learn in the book of Acts that God institutes the church as his new agent to witness to the whole world about Jesus Christ. The church is born by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in chapter 2 after Jesus tells his disciples in Acts 1:8 that they are to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and the very ends of the earth. The book of Acts records the gospel spreading and Paul and others planting churches as God makes good his plan to bless all the nations through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ.

[Slide 14] In the New Testament letters of Romans through Jude the believers in Jesus learn how to live out the New Covenant relationship with God through the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[Slide 15] In Revelation chapters 1-20 Satan and sin issue forth in full-blown rebellion against God but God prevails over evil and prepares to enact his final redemption. During this time the Great Tribulation breaks out on the earth, leading to persecution of the Jews and believers in Christ. However Jesus comes back to the Earth and destroys all those who oppose him in Revelation 19. In Revelation 20:4-6 Jesus sets up his millennial kingdom on the Earth. Then after one final rebellion of the wicked, God brings about the Final Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15.

[Slide 16] That brings us to the last part of the love story in Revelation chapters 21-22. God fully restores his people and his creation and they live happily ever after. God dwells with his people. There is no death or no curse. Mankind once more has access to the tree of life. Mankind is washed clean of all sin and lives in Heaven with robes washed clean of all impurity. All are at peace and harmony as God originally intended, before mankind fell into sin. God will overcome all the negative effects of man's sin and will redeem all those who received the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

That is the overarching story of the Bible. Despite being spurned and rejected by those he loved, God redeems his people by sacrificing himself to pay the penalty for mankind's rebellion. He removes all evil and reconciles with all who will have him as their God. Every fairy tale that ends with the words, "They lived happily ever after," is a dim foreshadowing of the great story of God's redemption where the heroes, those who trust in God's Son, live happily ever after. The end. (Close in prayer.)