

THE META-NARRATIVE OF THE BIBLE

Hello, and welcome back to the second week of our discipleship groups, where we are talking about reading the Bible and familiarizing ourselves with its contents so we can better understand it as we read.

There are many theological themes that can be followed throughout the Bible. However, the overall narrative of the Bible is the story of God's relationship with humanity, how it was lost, and how it was recovered. It is the story of our incomparable place as God's children, created in His likeness for the purpose of rulership alongside God, and how it was lost, and God's image in humanity was distorted. However, even though we got distorted, God did not "cut His losses" and simply do away with humanity before it got too bad. No. He found a way to recover lost people and restore them to their rightful position as His children....And His children are to exercise their authority over God's creation alongside God.

Last week we looked at the history of Israel within the narrative of the Bible. Today I want to tell the story of what the Bible is all about.

This is the story of loss and recovery.
This is the story of salvation.

One of the most important verses in the Bible is Genesis 1:1, which is the very beginning of this story, in which all of us have a part. It simply says, "In the beginning....GOD.

The importance of this cannot be underestimated. This story starts with God. He is the Main Character, the Author, the Founder, the Creator, the Mastermind, the Savior, and the Finisher of this story. WE are invited into HIS Story.

If Genesis 1:1 is one of the most important verses in the Bible, Genesis 1:26 is one of the next most important verses of the Bible. This verse gives us a window into the reason we were created, "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Adam and his wife, the first humans from whom we are all descended, were created in the Garden of Eden to be God's image and to rule and reign along with Him over His creation. We were created to be with God and to do God's works alongside Him. There is nothing else in all creation that has the rightful place of being God's children; nothing else that was created in His image; nothing else created to be like Him; nothing else given authority to rule with Him. Only humanity. What an important place we have! Don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not worth it!

Then we arrive at Genesis 3, which tells the story of how humanity got to the place we are today. We were created in perfection and to have perfect relationship and communion with God. Yet there was The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that was placed in the midst of the Garden. God had said to Adam and his wife that they were not to eat of this tree, and if they did, they would surely die. The fact that it was

there raises many questions. Many have asked: “Why was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil put there? Couldn’t all this have been avoided if God didn’t put it there? Was God tempting the man and woman in the Garden?” Those are good questions. But, when it really comes down to it, we were created for relationship with God—a relationship of love and mutuality. I suppose a relationship cannot have real love if there is never any other option. Robotic love and obedience that has no other choice cannot really “choose” to love. They “have to” love. There is nothing else to love or choose! God doesn’t want that. He wants a real relationship. Real relationships and love happen when we choose one another in the face of another option.

Yet in the face of the other option, another word that was spoken to them by the serpent. It was a word that called into question God’s intentions, God’s goodness, and God’s truthfulness. It was a word that provoked doubt and encouraged selfish disobedience. But, you know what? It is no different with us today. God has given us His Word to obey, but there is always another word...another voice...another opinion...and another worldview to listen to...and they can’t all be right. We need to decide which word carries authority in our lives: God’s or someone else’s. At any rate, the deception of the serpent worked. Adam and his wife transgressed God’s command and ate of the fruit they were told not to.

God had told them the if they ate the fruit, they would surely die. And die they did. They did not physically die right away, but death comes in many different forms. Their relationship with God died. Death was introduced into their marriage. They lost their second son to murder, and their first son, who did the murder, was banished—thus losing their first two children to the effects of sin.

The effects of sin...

This is what drives the rest of the story of the Bible.

You see, sin knows how to do three things really well, and those things are to steal, kill, and destroy. The ravages of sin are seen in each one of our lives and in the whole world around us. Hatred. Violence. Wars. Immorality. Broken lives. Broken families. Broken relationships. Pride. Selfishness and death. This is what was unleashed upon our world when humanity sinned at the Tree.

Sin always produces death.

Sin cuts us off from God’s presence and life. As a matter of fact, it is the sin in each one of our lives that ultimately deserves the death sentence, which is an eternity separated from God’s presence, just as Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden and from God’s presence.

The rest of the story of the Bible is about how God set in motion a chain of events that led to the recovery of humanity and His plan for us. The BAD NEWS is that we deserve to die for our sins. The GOOD NEWS is that God has provided a way for us to return to Him. After sin, God did not come up with a “plan B”; he set out to recover the original “plan A”, which is to have us as His children ruling and reigning over His creation alongside Him.

History is not only linear, moving in a straight line from start to end; it is also cyclical...it repeats itself...as it moves toward its final conclusion. There is a constant cycle we see of God's creation, humanity's rebellion, and judgment that comes as a result. We are going to see this cycle of creation, rebellion and judgment play out over and over again. We even see this cycle not only in world history, but in smaller microcosms of national or even personal history.

We just saw this first cycle. God created the world. Adam and Eve rebelled. Their judgment was to be expelled from the Garden and God's presence.

The second cycle of creation, rebellion and judgment is seen after Adam and Eve leave the Garden. There is now a new way of living in a sinful world that no one had seen before. It was new start. A bad start, but new nonetheless. As humanity populated the earth, they grew increasingly sinful, until, as Genesis 6:5 says, "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Remember, sin always brings death. Because the severity of sin in the world, God had to start all over. He saved Noah and his family, and sent judgment in the form of a flood to wipe out the wickedness of the world.

The third cycle begins with Noah and his family after the flood. We see much of the same language in Noah's story as we see in Genesis 1 and the creation of the world. This is a new beginning. Centuries pass and the world begins to be populated again. Come to Genesis chapter 11, and the world begins to rebel against God again at the Tower of Babel. Are you guys seeing this pattern go over and over again? It is the pattern of sin. Sin is innate in every human being, and it rears its ugly head in every person and in every generation. Once again, God judges the peoples of the earth. Their rebellion was to make themselves as God, and at the Tower of Babel, God's judgment was to confuse their languages and spread them all across the earth to interrupt their wicked plans.

This fourth cycle begins in Genesis 12 with God calling Abraham—this is really the beginning of the story of salvation. In Genesis 12:1-3, said to Abraham "Get out of your country, From your family, And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." It is important to note that at the very beginning of this call, God had the whole world in His sights.

God made a covenant with Abraham that He would be the father of many nations and that the land that became known as Israel would belong to him and his descendants. Abraham fathered Isaac, who inherited this covenant, and Isaac fathered Jacob, who also inherited this covenant. God eventually changed Jacob's name to Israel, and he became the father of 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. The point of this part of the story is that God was making a nation for Himself, through which "all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Believe it or not, we are getting to the end of this story really fast!

Over the next 400 years, the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians with severe cruelty. God delivered them through Moses, with 10 powerful plagues. The final plague,

however, was the one that finally freed them. There was a plague of death that was unleashed on Egypt, but the way the Israelites escaped from death was through the blood of a lamb smeared on the doorposts of their houses. This is the greatest foreshadowing in the Bible. Just as SIN has a cycle of creation, rebellion, and judgment, REDEMPTION has a cycle of rebellion, death, and freedom. The death of a lamb delivered them from slavery and death so they could be free to serve the Lord God.

From their freedom from slavery, God made a covenant with Israel so they would be His special people. He gave them His Word—the 10 commandments—and formed them into the nation that was to be a light to all the nations. From this point all the way through the Old Testament, it is a story of God's people being continually unfaithful to Him and unable to keep His commandments. The power of our own hands and the strength of our own will is not enough to reach God's demand of perfection. We cannot keep His Word—this is the story of unfaithful Israel! The story of Israel is the story of each one of us—in and of ourselves we CANNOT do what is good and right. We CANNOT keep God's laws because sin lives in us. Whatever ills you see in the world, they are not due to racism, religion, politics, poverty, or money—they are due to SIN and SIN alone. And sin only knows how to destroy, and it is endemic to each of us.

For this reason, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ. God Himself came and lived among us as a Man. Now, we never finished the fourth cycle, which started with Abraham. Abraham was the beginning of it...the creation of the salvation story, but Israel was in constant rebellion against the God who had delivered them. As with all the cycles, creation, then rebellion, will always end in judgment. This cycle ends with the ultimate judgment of God being poured out upon Jesus as He died on the Cross. He died for our sins. In fact, Jesus is called "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Remember the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts? This was the ultimate foreshadowing...Well, just look at the blood of the lamb splattered on the doorposts of a house...it makes a cross! It is through the blood of Jesus that we are delivered from slavery to sin and the death sentence sin has condemned us to. That is the cycle of redemption—rebellion, death, and freedom. We see it in the Exodus story with the lamb. We see it in the sacrifices in the Old Testament of an animal dying in place of a person so they could be forgiven. And now, we see it with Jesus. But there is also another cycle of redemption. Jesus said that to be His disciple we must deny ourselves, take up our cross—meaning dying to myself—and follow Him. Our old sin nature is rebellious. We die to ourselves, and we live in freedom. It is this same cycle!

Now, back to the other cycle of creation, rebellion, and judgment: The fifth cycle began with Jesus' resurrection. This is a new creation, and Jesus is known as the new Adam! Since the resurrection, billions of people worldwide have been forgiven of their sins, yet much of the world rebels still. In the end, there will be a final judgment for the rebellion of our world today. This is not God being angry...sin destroys, and God must destroy sin, or sin will destroy us.

Stick with me here...we are coming to the ending of this amazing story:

There is a sixth cycle—When Jesus comes back as He promised, He will begin a 1,000-year reign called the Millenium—we read this in Revelation twenty, verses one through seven. Those who were faithful to him will rule and reign for these 1000 years. At the

end of this period, there will be another great rebellion among humanity and there will come the final judgment.

Now, with the seventh cycle, we come to the end of the story of the Bible. The book of Revelation says there will be “a new heaven and new earth.” Everything is remade—it is a new creation!

This seventh cycle—note the number seven, God’s number of perfection—will no longer have rebellion and judgment...it will be only perpetual blessings. The cycle is broken! Revelation 21:3-4, “Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” And Revelation 22:3 also says, “And there shall be no more curse...” At the end, God does away with the very curse of sin and death that has for so long plagued humanity.

And at the very end of the book, we see the fulfillment of what was written about the destiny of humanity from Genesis 1:26, where God said we were to “have dominion” over His creation, Revelation twenty-two five says, “And they shall reign forever and ever.”

The story of the Bible is the story of a recovered relationship with God and the fulfillment of the destiny for which God created human beings. The story of the Bible is that this fulfillment is only through the redemptive and saving work of Jesus Christ in His death and His resurrection.