

## The Bible's story of redemption

September 22, 2019 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

This morning we're going to do something that I've been eager to do for a long time now. We often spend our time focused on the smaller stories of the Bible, but today we're going to zoom out and look at the Bible in its entirety to answer the question 'does the Bible tell one coherent story?'

There are two reasons I'm excited to do this - one apologetic and the other devotional.

The apologetic reason is this - critics of the Bible will often claim that the Bible is nothing more than a pointless collection of irrelevant stories. I was listening to a podcast recently where the host said 'the Bible's nothing but a collection of random stories; why should I listen to that?' When I heard that, I thought 'that's too bad. Because yes the Bible is a collection of stories but it also tells one overarching story too. It tells a very important story, a story that's very important to listen to. So that's the apologetic reason for this morning. To see how it all fits together.

And second, the devotional reason is this - when you're reading the Bible for yourself, I want you to be able to see at any given time 'oh ok I see where this fits into the whole.' As politicians know, you can get into all sorts of trouble when you pull things out of context, so I want to set you up to be able to read any given passage in light of the whole of Scripture.

To do that, I want to tell you about the four icon challenge. A graphic designer in the States started to think 'I wonder if I could distill a story down to its basic essence and then express that in four icons.' He started taking movies and books and breaking them down into their basic plot points and then illustrating them in a series of four pictures. That's grown into something online called 'the four icon challenge.'

Here's some examples. See if you can figure out what stories these tell. ([Romeo and Juliet](#), [Sound of music](#), [Jurassic park](#)).

Now as it happens the story of the Bible can be told in four pictures too – and I'm going to tell it with the earth, an apple, a cross and a sunrise. To put words to those pictures – creation, fall, redemption, glory. That's the basic story of the Bible. Yes, there are many other stories that happen within the confines of those headings, but they all go together to tell the story of creation, fall, redemption and glory. So let's look at each of those in turn this morning as we tell the Bible's story of redemption.

So first, Creation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth. He existed before the Creation; He had always existed, but at that point in history, God chose to create the earth. He made day and night, land and sea. He made creepy crawlies and quadrupeds (herd animals) to live on land; He made fish for the sea and birds for the air. He made every kind of plant from ash trees to zinnias. And to top it all off, He made humans in His own image. He made man and woman to reflect His character in the world and to take care of the whole thing. He set Adam and Eve up in the garden to work and to keep it, really to steward all of Creation as His regents here on earth.

That was a real privilege – first of all, He brought them into existence; not only that, He gave them purpose and value and responsibility. He said 'this is mine, but you take care of it.' And the only thing

that He forbid them to do was to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They didn't need to know about evil, its destructive power and potential, but instead, to rely on God, who was entirely good.

And for a while, they did that. They walked with their Creator in the cool of the evening and He provided everything they needed. They lived in and took care of a literal paradise.

And then, the Fall. The Devil, who we talked about a few weeks ago, took the form of a serpent and began to plant doubts in the peoples' minds. "Did God really say not to eat of that tree? And does God really have a right to tell you what you can and can't eat? Who does He think He is? And how do you know that He has your best interests in mind?" and that was enough to get Adam and Eve to turn their backs on God to trust in themselves. Eve took the fruit and took a bite and gave some to her husband and in an instant, everything changed.

There's something interesting going on here – in Latin, malus is the word for evil but it's also the word for apple – and so a lot of translations have said they ate an apple. Whatever the fruit was, doesn't really matter, because what they did was evil.

They turned their backs on God. They trusted in themselves. They created a breach between them and their Creator and so the image of God in them was warped. They were still capable of good but now they would be drawn to evil.

And that's the state that we all find ourselves in. No, none of us eat an apple and sin against God, but all of us ignore God's will and go our own way. That's sin. That's a problem that we all deal with. And just as God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden as punishment, so God will cast out all who ignore Him, for all eternity.

But God doesn't want it that way. In fact, 1 Timothy 2 tells us that God wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. (3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1Ti 2:3-4 NIV).

And we can see that even in the Fall – Genesis 3:15 – the proto-gospel as it's sometimes called - God promises that there will come a day when the snake will attack the woman's son, but the son will crush his head.

15 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." (Gen 3:15 NIV).

And so God, who is rich in mercy and abounding in steadfast love, put into effect His plan of redemption. But here's the thing. This wasn't plan B. Satan didn't step in and mess up God's plan and now God had to do something about it. Ephesians 1 tells us that this plan was in effect from before the Creation of the world. Revelation 13:8 tells us that the Lamb who would ultimately secure redemption was slain from the creation of the Earth.

4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Eph 1:4 NIV).

8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. (Rev 13:8 NIV).

God knew from before Genesis 1:1 that we would turn our backs on Him and yet He is so full of mercy that He still chose to create us even though it meant suffering the indignity of being rejected by His own creation. He made us and gave us free will and set into motion a plan to redeem us from our sin.

Now that plan unfolded in a series of stages throughout the Old Testament and we're going to look at them in turn. Each teaches us very important things about God and about us and so we're going to look at them one at a time, starting with the period I'm going to call 'the Fathers.' Admittedly, there are lots of different ways to divide up the OT, but I'm going to use five stages, starting with the Fathers.

After Adam and Eve left the garden, they began to experience the evil they had chosen when they ate the fruit. Their one son murdered the other and that was just the beginning of the problems. Eventually, things got so bad that God decided to wipe out humanity and so He sent a flood to cleanse the earth of its evil. He did however tell Noah in advance to build a boat and so Noah and his family and a whole zoo of animals were preserved to repopulate the earth.

But there was a problem. The evil remained in the hearts of men and Noah and his family carried it into the new world.

So in Genesis 12, God plucked a random nomad named Abram out of obscurity and made Him an unbelievable promise. Abram, God said, I will make you great, I will give you a family. I will give your people land and I will bless the nations through you. Later, in Genesis 17, God reaffirmed those promises when He made a covenant with Abraham, taking full responsibility for the covenant onto Himself, when He walked through split halves of animals. It was like 'may this happen to me if I don't keep it.' That's what we call the Abrahamic covenant. The promise. The promise that God would bless the nations through Abraham – and Paul tells us that God would ultimately bless the nations by redeeming them by faith.

8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." (Galatians 3:8).

Now this promise passed from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob and then Jacob (aka Israel) had twelve sons. One of them got sold into slavery in Egypt, but it turns out that God was actually using that tragedy to preserve the promise. A famine in Israel would have wiped out the promise, but Joseph was already in Egypt, storing the grain that would save their lives.

The period of the Fathers teaches us that God has made a promise of redemption.

Eventually all of Israel wound up in Egypt and new rulers came to power who knew nothing of the role that Israel had played in preserving Egypt. And so they enslaved the Israelites and put them to work building the pyramids. This was the period of the exodus. Despite Israel's suffering though, God did not forget His promise and so He raised up an Israelite in the very house of the Pharaoh named Moses to advocate for the people before the Pharaoh.

But the Pharaoh didn't listen and so God sent an avenging angel through all of Egypt slaughtering the first born sons. The only families who were spared were the Israelites, who took a sacrificial lamb,

ritually cooked and ate it, and hid beneath its blood. This was the Passover – a lamb dying in the place of a son, a sacrifice dying to save a life.

That bloody night changed the Pharaoh's mind and he allowed the Israelites to go and not even the Red Sea could stop them. As Charlton Heston knows, God split that water right down the middle and the Israelites walked on through as the Egyptian army took a deadly bath.

The period of the Exodus teaches us that we need a sacrifice. Redemption is going to require a sacrifice.

From there the Israelites wandered through the desert on the way to the Promised Land. But even though God had just given them freedom and was bringing them to a great promise, they started to wonder – 'well, wait, does God really have my best interests in mind?' And they started pursuing other gods.

And so God did a little DTR with His people – He 'defined the relationship' – and He gave them a covenant through Moses to lay out 'this is how to live faithfully in a relationship with a good God.' Here's the things to do; here's the things not to do. If they kept it, they would be blessed. If they broke it, they would be cursed.

Now – this is important – this Mosaic covenant (the covenant through Moses) did not annul the covenant through Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant was still in effect. God's promise to bless Israel and to bless the nations through Israel was still in effect.

And to be frank, the Abrahamic covenant should have motivated the people to keep the Mosaic covenant. Here's what I mean – God had already promised to bless them through Abraham; those blessings were coming. There is nothing that would change that. That should have prompted them to keep the covenant that Moses had given them out of gratitude for those approaching blessings and trusting that God knew what He was doing. They ought to have understood the Law in light of the promise and made it an exercise of faith; instead, they made the Law into an optional checklist to make themselves look good. And just as often as not, they ignored it altogether. And so, instead of receiving the covenant blessings, they got its curses. That generation spent their lives wandering in the desert.

But that doesn't mean that God had forgotten His promise to the people as a whole. He was gracious and He preserved the next generation. He gave them a faithful leader in Joshua who led them into the Land that God had promised. When they exercised faith, trusting in God and not themselves, they were successful, and the twelve tribes of Israel took up residence in the Promised Land. This is the period of the land.

But then what happened in the book of Judges – the downward spiral of sin. They were in relationship with God; but then they turned their backs on Him. And so God in turn rejected them and they were over run by their enemies. But, then, God in His great mercy would raise up a deliverer who would rescue them from all their foes and set them back into relationship with God again. And it would be good for a while and then the cycle would start all over again.

That happened with Othniel, with Ehud, with Gideon, with Samson. Every time around the cycle, God in His infinite mercy had compassion on His people and raised up a human deliverer... But it never stuck. The cycle just started over again. Human deliverers were not cutting it; through God they dealt with

Israel's external enemies, but they did nothing about the internal enemy - sin. Clearly a greater deliverer was needed.

The period of the land shows us that we need a capital D deliverer.

Once the people got settled into the land, they asked for a king, instead of relying on God, who WAS their king. In His mercy, He gave them Saul. Then He gave them David. And David was a good king. Mostly. For the most part, he did what a good Israelite king was supposed to do - He walked with God and helped his people to know God. That's job number one – walk with God and help your people to know God. And David did pretty well at that. This is the period of the kings. And through him, God united the twelve tribes of Israel with David as king. God showed Israel what He could do through a people united behind a king who walked God.

Solomon inherited the throne from his father and he ruled over a kind of golden age in Israel. But then when he died, the kingdom split into two – the northern half – called Israel – and the southern half – called Judah. And both Israel and Judah had kings – some of whom were good but most of whom were bad. They had ONE JOB as king of Israel and they did not do it well – many of the kings actually encouraged their people to worship other gods – especially in the North.

The period of the kings shows us that we need a king – who walks with God and helps His people to know God.

And while the people did right in their own eyes, God sent prophets to them to call them back. He said 'guys, stop it. Stop all this injustice and corruption and conniving and idolatry and come back to me' but they just ignored and/or killed the prophets.

And so God sent the Assyrians and the Babylonians in about a hundred years apart to take the North (Israel) and the South (Judah) into captivity. This is the period of the Exile. In that time, Israel was pretty much obliterated, but Judah hung on in Babylon. Some of them sought the Lord in the exile and God had mercy on them. After seventy years, He brought back a remnant, and re-established His people in Jerusalem.

Under Ezra and Nehemiah, they rebuilt the city and began to rebuild their lives and there was something of a restoration in Israel. They realized that covenant breaking had led to the Exile and so they worked to ensure that that would never happen again. And that movement is what grew into the Pharisees that we know from Jesus' time. They put into place laws so that they people of Israel would never even get close to breaking the actual Law of God. That was their attempt at restoration, putting things back the way they should be. And they were right to want to do that.

The period of the exiles teaches us that we really need a restoration.

But here's the thing. Even the attempt to put things back the way they were was a violation of the covenant. Why? Because they were relying on themselves. They forgot to take God into account in their relationship with God (if you can imagine that) and they made religion all about their ability to do right. They put ritual before actual relationship with God. And in the process, they grew proud and legalistic, following human rules rather than relying on the God who loved them in the first place. Theirs was a hollow restoration – nothing more than the appearance of newness.

And so God, in His wisdom, decided it was time. It was time for the climax of salvation history. It was time for Him to keep the promise that He made way, way back in the time of the fathers. We don't know exactly why 1AD was the perfect time to do this work, but we do know this. Galatians 4:4 - in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem all those who were under the Law.

4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,  
5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4).

God came in the person of His Son Jesus to the earth that He created in order to redeem all of His Creation. He walked with God and helped his people to know God. He kept the covenant of Moses by trusting the promises to Abraham, doing the right thing - by faith - at every turn. According to the covenant, He deserved nothing but blessing. But the religious elite hated Him for it. He made them look bad. And so they crucified Him. They nailed Him to a tree and said – ‘anyone who is nailed to a tree is cursed by God – this man is actually a curse.’ (13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." (Gal 3:13 NIV).

On the Cross, Satan struck a blow at the Son of the Woman. But do you know what happened? Jesus crushed his head. Satan thought that he had the upper hand, but this had been the plan all along. Jesus knew that He was coming to earth to die as a sacrifice for sin. His blood would protect all those who hid themselves beneath it. And through His death, He would deliver all His people from the tyranny of sin. Through His death, He would put things back they were when God created everything good. And that's exactly what He did. On the Cross, He said 'it is finished.'

God made the promise to bless the nations by faith and Jesus brought it to completion. He is the sacrifice. He is the deliverer. He is the King. He is the restoration that we need and when we receive Him by faith, we get swept up into the story of redemption and we are redeemed.

Are you redeemed?

Is Jesus your sacrifice? Is Jesus your deliverer? Is Jesus your king? Is Jesus your restoration? If not, then receive the promise of blessing that God made to Abraham all those years ago. Believe in God and you will be made right with Him.

And that's important. Because there's one more stage in salvation history that has yet to happen. Creation, Fall, redemption – glory.

When we trust in Jesus, following Him, He walks with us through life, so that we can truly say 'surely goodness and mercy will follow me, all the days of my life' – but that's not all, is it? We shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

If you have trusted in the Lord, then He is preparing a place for you in His eternal presence that will put all of this to shame.

Listen to these words from Revelation 22:

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. (Interesting isn't it that a tree in the Garden brought death, but now this tree here at the end brings life).

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.

5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

(Rev 22:1-5 NIV).

And then back a chapter:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:1-4 NIV).

Glory. No more tears, no more pain, no more cancer, no more sin. Just glory... in the presence of God.

That's the story of redemption – Creation, Fall, Redemption, Glory – all by faith in the risen God. That's the story that the Bible tells.

Now listen, what does that mean for us?

Well, first, can you find yourself in that story? Because we belong to it, every one of us. Every one of us is created by God. Every one of us falls. The question is, what will you do about it? Keep going on, hoping for the best? Or follow Jesus, our sacrifice, deliverer and King?

Second, keep this story in mind whenever you read your Bible and let it influence the way that you understand whatever it is that you are reading. Let the big story of salvation shape how you interpret the smaller units.

Sometimes we pull stories out of context and draw lessons for ourselves and that's ok - but it can quickly turn into moralism. The story of Christianity becomes – 'be better, be kinder, be more generous.' No kidding, I found these stickers in the cupboard back by the piano in the hall. Be loving, be generous, be a worker. Being a Christian means being a better person.

One of my preaching profs, Bryan Chappell, calls these 'the deadly B's.' And I understand why. I read the Bible's stories out of context and tried to earn God's love by 'being better, being kinder, being more generous' but I could never BE good enough. And that scared me. I inherently understood God's holiness and knew that I could never match it.

But that's not the story of the Bible, is it? The story of the Bible is grace, freely given, to be received by faith, the way Abraham received the promise way back in the beginning. And that understanding changed my life.

Now that doesn't mean that 'be kind, be generous, be helpful' is not Christian behaviour. It is, but the gospel changes why we do it – not to earn God's favour, but because He's already given it. We are kind and generous and helpful because God has already been kind and generous and helpful to us. So keep this story of redemption on the back of your mind whenever you read Scripture and it will help you to understand God's Word in light of His grace.

To close, let me leave you with an image. I think many of the ladies here have charm bracelets, right? And you have little charms on it that represent different things that are important to you, don't you? Charm bracelets are great for husbands – you always know that's a good gift you can give ;) But each of those charms tell a story, don't they? For Julie, this is Ben, this is Anna, this is hubby, this was my first marathon, this is my love for nature – and your charms tell different stories too. But zoom out a bit and you realize that that whole bracelet tells a story too. Julie – an active mom who loves to run outside and sit in the sun.

The Bible's like that too. Each of the little narratives tell a little story – Joseph and Daniel and Samson and Peter – they all tell us something very important – but they also contribute to an even bigger overarching story – a creator God, who loves us so deeply that He was willing to redeem His fallen creation and promise them glory. That's a pretty incredible story. And that's the story of the Bible – the story of a Father, rich in compassion and abounding in steadfast, forgiving love.

17. 2 Th. 2:16-17 - Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.