

The Beginning of God's Story Tells the End 'HIS Story' SERIES - WEEK 1 Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. I am so glad you could join us here as we begin a brand new series. As you heard from Pastor Jason this morning we are focusing on ancient and future hymns, and we will be doing that all month long. And in addition to that we are beginning a new series called HIS Story. I love this concept, and I don't know about you but during this time my family and I are in a regular routine of watching something together every night.

And every night the question is, *'Dad, what are we going to watch tonight?'* And one of the things that is really important to our family when we are picking out a movie is the question - is it a good story? That is something we are always looking to find. All of us are captivated by stories, aren't we? We love a good story. We read stories to our kids when they are young, and we continue to indulge in stories as they get older, because there is something captivating about a story that begins with, *'Once upon a time,'* and it ends with, *'And they lived happily ever after.'*

There is something in how God has created us to have an appeal for a really good story. And I believe it is because of this - we all want to be part of a good story ourselves. So when we talk about HIS story, we are talking about God's story. We are talking about God's grand narrative of the universe, from the time of creation all the way to the end of time. And one of the things that we are trying to do this month is to take a look at God's grand narrative.

One of the things that I think we need to remind ourselves of is that the Bible is not just a collection of stories. It is very easy, whether you have grown up going to church, or whether you pick up a Bible and read, to see these episodes of Abraham, of Jacob, of King David, of Samuel and Jeremiah and all the prophets in the Old Testament. Then we have Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament. And when you just read these episodes sometimes you may wonder how does it all fit together?

And one of the mistakes I believe we have made even as we teach the Bible is that we teach these episodes, but we don't teach the grand narrative that begins in Genesis, the first book in the Bible, all the way to Revelations, the last book of the Bible. We don't realize that there is this grand narrative that God is showing us. And it is really a story, not about us; it is a story about HIM. I think so many times we open up the Bible and we make it about us. When we do that we tend to moralize the Bible, and we tend to do things like take verses and stories out of context. But God is trying to tell one cohesive story for us, to teach us something about Him, and to teach us about His plan of redemption for all of mankind.

I believe it is so important for us over these next four weeks to look at the grand narrative. And that is because if we think about where we are at today, as a nation, we

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realize that we are going through a very difficult time. None of us could have predicted this happening two months ago, that we would be where we are today. But here we are. Many of us are just staying in our homes, and our daily routine of school, jobs, and life has just been turned upside down. And I believe it is important to remind ourselves of the grand narrative, because in times like this we can allow the momentary story and these circumstances really become the narrative for us. And the narrative is not this event.

If we think about how God is writing the story of humanity, I would venture to say that what we are going through right now, even though it is at a global scale, would probably fit into a tiny paragraph. And that is important for us to remember. It is important to remember during times like this that we cannot let the details of today determine the grand narrative. We need instead to take a wide angle view and ask ourselves what is really going on here. So I think it is important for us to remind ourselves of this.

The other reason why I think it is important to look at the grand narrative is this - there are no guarantees that there will be a *'happily ever after'* to our lives. The reason why we want to look at God's grand narrative, the reason why we want to look at HIS story is because if we try to live life on our own, if we try to live 'my story,' doing things 'my way,' then we will find ourselves in places that we don't want to be. And we make a mess of the lives that we live.

Even if we have a sensitivity to God, and we want to follow Him, and we want to make Jesus our Savior, one of the greatest dangers we can make as Christians, or people who are sensitive to God, is that we want to live our own life our own way and then have God bless it. And that is one of the most dangerous teachings that is going around today in our churches. And that is when we look at God's Word and we think it says to live the life we want to live, and just ask God to bless it. That is not what we need to do. What we need to do is align our story to His story.

If we want to see happily ever after, if we want to see that there is something at the end that is beautiful, we need to understand that it is not about us living our own lives in the way that we want to live them. No, we have to say, *'God, what is the life, what is the story that you are creating for all of us. I want to join that story.'* It really takes us to a fork in the road to say, *'Okay, am I going to let today determine what the story is for my life? And am I going to make my story all about me, or am I going to join His story?'*

So we are going to look at God's story these next four weeks, and at His grand narrative. And that can be summarized with four words - creation, fall, redemption, restoration. Creation, fall, redemption and restoration. From Genesis to Revelations that

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is the grand narrative. God created this beautiful world, and even though He gave man everything they could possibly want, man rebelled. Man fell away. They wanted their own way and they rebelled and sinned against God by doing their own thing. And no matter how much God has tried to pull us back to Himself, we always fall away.

And that is why He sent Jesus to redeem us, to bring us back into His family once again. We are in that middle story right now, because at the end of all time He will restore all things to Himself. So creation, fall, redemption and restoration - each of those four words can be described on a personal level between God, man, Jesus and response. This is what we are hoping to do - at the end of every week, at the end of this grand narrative study, what we want to do is ask ourselves if we are a part of God's story. Is creation, fall, redemption and restoration really the story for my own life? Have I joined God in HIS story of what He wants for me?

I said before that we all love a good story. One of the books I tend to read again and again, probably at least once a year, is the book called 'The Lord of the Rings.' It doesn't matter how many times I read that book there is something about that story that is so captivating to me. It is interesting because when we think about what makes a good story we always begin with, '*Hey, there once was this good land, or this good king, or these good people.*' And then something dark or evil comes into it.

The evil starts to overtake the land, and overtake the people and they are in bondage. Maybe there is a bad ruler in place. And then there comes a saviour, someone to overturn and change the story, to change the narrative. There is a plot twist and somehow the hero of the story rescues the people. And he restores the people and the land to what it used to be, or sometimes into something greater.

That story really explains the book, 'The Lord of the Rings.' It is the same story pattern that follows even things like Star Wars. And all of these stories that we find captivating about our world and populations, it doesn't matter what society they are a part of, there is something about these kinds of stories that are hardwired into our souls. And I think that is important because if we try to come up with our own story we are going to go sideways. God has hardwired us to approach the gospel and realize there is something about that story that we want to be a part of.

So we are going to look at the creation story, because I think we can learn a lot about who God is and who we are from creation. We are going to look at God's creation, and there is a word from this idea of creation that we need to hold onto, and that word is 'Good.' So we want to look at this word good as we study about creation. One of the things that stand out to us from God's Word is that when God created the world He called it 'very good.'

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So we are going to look at God as the author of good, the authority of good, and then the administrator of good. Let's turn in our Bibles to Genesis Chapter 1. We are not going to read the entire chapter, but if you are familiar with the story you know that God creates the world in six days. And then on the seventh day He rests. Every day He is creating something. He creates light, He creates the sun, moon and stars, He creates the earth, He creates the waters, and He creates animals. And finally on the sixth day He creates man and woman.

I want you to see this in God's Word. The last verse of Chapter one of Genesis it says this: "***And God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and morning the sixth day.***" See, when we think about the world that God created we see that God was the author of good. Everything that He created for us, everything that He gave to us, all of His original plans were for a good creation.

The word good in the Hebrew is the word, 'tobh.' And the word *tobh* really carries this idea of something that is pleasant, something that brings pleasure to our lives, something that is beautiful, something that is inherently worthy. So when it says that God looked at His creation and said it was good what He was saying was, '*I created this world that was full of this peace and harmony and beauty and order and design. I created all of this for you, so you as man and woman can flourish here. You can have harmony, you can have a relationship with me, and with each other that is harmonious. You can have a relationship with the creatures that is harmonious. And you have a relationship with yourself that you know who you are and there is no disharmony there.*'

So if you think about the four avenues in which God created harmony - with Himself, between each other, with creation and with themselves, we see that God gave us this world and it was very good. And many times we tend to wonder about why things aren't good today, why something stirs in our heart that is not good, and we find ourselves asking ourselves why things are this way.

I was at a funeral a couple of weeks ago for a good friend of mine who died from cancer. This was someone who very near and dear to my family and I. At the funeral I saw someone who had died before his time from a disease, and there was just something inside of me that thought that life shouldn't be like this. And when we find ourselves thinking that life shouldn't be like this, it is a sign that we are aware of a world that God created that should be good. It should be a world that is filled with order, beauty, design and one flourishing in peace and harmony. Those are the things that our soul knows when that is not existent. So when we find ourselves in places where there is chaos and not order, where there is sin and not beauty, we understand that this should not be.

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One of the things that we need to do is look at God as the author of good. We have to look at everything good in our lives that He has given to us. He has given us His Word, He has given us our relationships, He has given us our families, and God has blessed us so much with His love. Really when we look at God we need to understand that every good thing that we have in our lives comes from Him. We are not the author of good. We are not the ones who have created all the good things in our lives. Every good thing we have in our lives comes from Him.

And when we fail to recognize Him as the author of the good in the world, when we start taking the place of God, I think we really start to rob Him of the glory that He deserves. One of my favorite things I see over and over in Psalms - I think it is mentioned six times in the book of Psalms - is that it says to ***“give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His steadfast love endures forever.”***

When we understand that every good thing that we have in life is a gift from God, one of the best ways we can express that is through our gratitude. What are you thanking God for right now? Think about what we are going through individually, as a nation and as a world. Sometimes it is hard to think about what we should be giving God thanks for. But even in the midst of these trying times there is so much good that God is doing. There are many good works that He still wants to do. And when fear takes over and we think about all the things that could happen, or we look at the evils in the world, and we don't look at the things that God is doing around us, the narrative all of a sudden can be something chaotic and ugly as opposed to something that is beautiful and good.

It doesn't mean that there aren't things in our world that are bad and even the Corona virus could stir us to say, *‘Hey, life shouldn't be this way. We shouldn't have sickness and disease.’* And we would be exactly right. See God created a world that was perfect and without any sickness, without any death, so when we see death and disease and disharmony between our relationships we know something is not right. But those things don't come from God, that comes from us, and that comes from the fall and the curse.

God is not only the author is good, but He is also the authority of good. Let's skip a chapter in Genesis over to Chapter 3 where I want to read for you a couple of different passages. One of the things that Pastor Dan and I are going to do as we are teaching this series is take you through an Old Testament passage and a New Testament passage every week, because we want you to see how the Old Testament and the New Testament complement each other, how they are tied together. And how they are both part of the grand narrative and how they are not contradictory in any way.

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So in Genesis Chapter 3 we read about the fall of man and woman when they rebel against God and His good. Now why do they do it? They do it because they don't believe that God is the authority of good. Listen to this beginning in verse 1: ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”***

See, right there becomes the temptation. God as the author of good also deserves to be the authority of good. He is not only the creator but He is the judge. He not only creates every good thing in the earth; He also is the judge of what is good and what isn't good. And the temptation that Satan gave to the first man and woman was, *‘You can be your own god. You don't have to trust God for what He says. You can do what you want to do.’* And that is the inherent temptation that we all face every single day. Our fallen nature now wants to do what we want to do and not what God wants us to do.

But God is the ultimate judge. Listen to what else is said: ***“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food.”*** Right here we see that she wanted to determine what was good. She wanted to be the judge of what was good. One of the favorite shows that my family and I have watched is the ‘Great British Baking Show.’ There is something about watching people make sugary treats that I absolutely love. One of the interesting things about the show is they always have a couple of judges on there that are very nit-picky over how the contestants make the dishes. And it is always one of those anxious moments when it is one of the judges' own recipes.

So the judge gives each of them the recipe that is their personal recipe and they tell them to make it just like it says to do. And that produces all kinds of fear and anxiety because the person who creates the recipe knows exactly how it is supposed to taste. And when the contestants make this dish, who is going to be the best judge? It is not going to be their palate that is going to test it; rather it is going to be the person who created the recipe that judges it.

One of the things that we have to understand is God created the recipe. He created the recipe for what is good and beautiful in this world. It is not for us to do. When we try to usurp God's authority and say we want to do what we want to do, we mess things up and we create chaos, sin, disorder and disharmony in this world.

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Unfortunately when Adam and Eve wanted to determine good for themselves, they took of the tree, they ate, and they brought sin into the world.

That leads me to another passage I want us to read and that is in Romans Chapter 1. Romans is a great book about the grand narrative of the gospel. And in the very first chapter of Romans Paul is trying to make the point that we are all sinners. Starting in verse 18 it says this: ***“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world.”***

See, here is what Paul is trying to say. All of us can look around the world, we can look at the order, the beauty, and the design of the world and say, *‘Something made this. Something designed this. We live in a world where there is design. So there has to be a God who is good, and who has created the sun who gives us life, who causes the rain to fall on our crops. We can plant a seed into the ground and it produces all kinds of vegetation.’* Those are wonderful things. We can look at creation and understand that there is a good all powerful God who did all this. The problem is that we can look at that and say, *‘You know what? I don’t want Him. I want to do what I want to do.’*

This passage says that we suppress the truth when we don’t want to submit to God and His authority. It also says this in verse 21: ***“For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”***

Here is what happens - all of us have to have an authority. If we reject the authority of God we will make either ourselves or something else an authority. And that is because God has created us as worshippers. We have to worship something. And one of the most dangerous decisions we can make as human beings is when we reject the authority of God and we begin to worship ourselves. We begin to say, *‘What I create as good is good. Therefore it has to be good for everyone else.’*

Just recently we celebrated some birthdays in our family. And we have a rule in our home that when it is your birthday you get to pick the meal and you get to pick the activities. It is your day to be the king or queen of our family and the rest of us have to go along with it. It doesn’t matter if the movie they pick to watch isn’t a movie we want to watch, we all have to submit to that. And at the end of the day the person whose

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birthdays it is thinks it was a great day because everything that they wanted to do was done.

And that is fine if you want to do it for one day, but imagine if all of us lived that life every single day, wanting to be the author and the authority of determining what is good. What happens is it creates angst, and it creates disharmony amongst everyone else around you. So we need to go to God and ask Him to show us what is good. We are to honor Him, but when we rebel against God and claim the authority ourselves it creates things in our world like sin, darkness, pain, and disharmony. Remember God wants good, and He wants harmony in our lives. He desires harmony with Him, harmony with each other, harmony with creation and harmony with ourselves. But every time we reject His authority as judge and creator of our lives that is not what we produce.

And that leads us to the third point which is God is the administrator of good. Sadly, the reality is that God's authority and His authorship of the good of this world has been rejected by every single one of us. None of us chooses to do what is good on our own. We might choose our own good, but remember our own good is a skewed view of good. Our own good is a bad recipe. And it not only brings sickness to us, but it brings sickness and darkness of everyone around us.

So what do we do? See, the creative order shows God created something good and beautiful but we rebelled against that. But what is beautiful about God is that He doesn't leave us in that state. Pastor Dan will talk a lot more about the Fall next week, but here is what else God does for us - God is good at re-establishing His good in our lives even after we rebel.

There is another passage I want us to look at and that is in the book of Titus. Titus is a small book with only three chapters toward the end of the New Testament. But there are a couple of verses here that are profound. In Chapter 3 and verse 3 it says this: ***“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”***

Right there is the gospel. God is not only the author of good and the authority of good, He is also the administrator of good. He brings good news. I love those words, 'good news' because that is what the gospel means. He brings good news to us because when we rebel against His authority, when we rebel against Him as our judge and our

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creator, He doesn't leave us alone. He finds us in the midst of our rebellion and says, *'I still want you. And though you can't come to me by your own righteousness, by creating your own good, I will bring my good to you.'* And He did that in the person of Jesus Christ. He sent Jesus to live a good life, a life in harmony with the Father, a life in harmony with all mankind, a life in harmony with all of creation. And by doing so, He created a path for us to find the good once again in Him.

See here is the problem we read in verse 3: ***"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another."*** This is one of the most accurate descriptions of any person who does not have a right relationship with Jesus Christ. That sounds harsh, but it is true. And when we choose to do our own thing, when we choose to live our own life doing our own good by our own definition, verse 3 of Chapter 3 in Titus is exactly what we get.

I think one of the dangers that can happen is when we don't ask ourselves who we really are. We don't give an honest assessment of ourselves because we just don't like to do that. We like to think we are a pretty good person with maybe just a few problems over here. But the reality is that no one is good. The Bible says that no one is good, not even one. So when we think we are a pretty good person, with just a few issues over here to deal with, it is kind of like saying, *'I have a pretty good car I would like to sell you. It is great. It is a wonderful car. The problem is it doesn't have a good transmission.'* That doesn't make sense to say something is good when something is broken inside of it.

So one of the things that we need to understand is for us to truly accept the good that God wants to give us we first have to begin with what is bad inside of us. We ourselves are not inherently good; only God is good. And if we want His good we must come to Him with all of our bad, all of our brokenness, all of our pain. And then we need to say, *'God I have rebelled against you. I have sinned. I have done whatever I have wanted to do, but I want the good that I can only have through Jesus Christ because I cannot create good on my own.'*

That is what creation tells us. God not only created this beautiful world, He has also given us the possibility of new creation, or re-creation in Christ. That is the gospel. So at every point along the way - creation, fall, redemption and restoration - what we want to do is point to Jesus, point to the grand narrative and ask ourselves where we are joining Him. If you begin this story with yourself by thinking you can get to God in your own way doing your own thing, you are not beginning at the very beginning. It is almost like opening up the book in the middle and trying to figure out what is going on. We have to begin with God, we have to begin with His authority, His authorship of what is

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good and realize there is something broken in the world, something broken in us and God is the only one that can help us find our way. And He will do that in the person of Jesus.

I have a couple of questions to leave you with and then we are done this morning. Question one is - how can you show gratitude to God for the good He has given to you? Right now in the midst of all this chaos we are going through how can we show gratitude for the good He has given us? Every one of us can write down some things we are thankful to God for. In fact after this sermon it would be great to sit around a table as a family and talk about what we are grateful for. What are we grateful to God for this morning?

The second question is - how can you submit to God's authority today? How can you submit and honor His authority by saying you are going to stop defining something good that is not good? What are you calling good that God calls bad or considers evil? And how are you going to submit that to Him?

The third question is - have you accepted His ultimate good in the person and the good news of Jesus? Maybe you are sitting here and you have never made that decision to follow Him. No matter how dark things are, no matter how broken you feel, the invitation to accept Jesus as your Savior is there. It is real because He came to this earth, He died on the cross for you. He took on your sins, your shame, your guilt and your punishment for you. And He rose from the dead so that you might have new life, so that you might have His good. If you have never done that, we would love for you to reach out to us. We would love to have a conversation with you if you have questions about how to find the good life, the good news, and the abundant life that we can have in Jesus Christ.

Before I close things out this morning I want to just thank you again for joining us. As you know Easter is next Sunday so this is a holy week for us as followers of Jesus. And this Friday we are going to be doing something very special. We are going to be holding a Good Friday service, obviously by live streaming it, and we would love for you to join us as a family. We are going to air it this Friday at noon and at 7pm through our Facebook and through our You Tube channel.

And one of the things that we want to do is remember the cross, remember the death and the sacrifice of Jesus. The service is only going to be about thirty minutes, but we want to invite you to sing, to reflect, and to worship with us. We are also going to be observing communion, so you can come by the church office and pick up the elements to celebrate communion this Friday. And then of course we have Easter next Sunday and Pastor Dan is going to be continuing our series on HIS story. Thanks again for joining us. Let's close in a word of prayer.

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Jesus, we love you and we thank you for bringing good to this world once again. God, everything that is broken in this world is because of us and not you. Help us, God, to give thanks to you because you are good, your steadfast love endures forever. May that be the cry of our hearts this morning. May the creation story and the re-creation opportunity show us what kind of God you are and show us what kind of need we have. Father, we turn to you and ask that anyone sitting in their home this morning that is feeling anxious about the sin and the brokenness and the evil and the chaos around them, who feel a sense of fear, I pray God that you would surround them with your peace. I pray that you would show them that in you and through you they can have the hope of eternal life and hope for this present day. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.