

<b>Series:</b> The Story	<b>Reference:</b> <i>Various Scriptures</i>	<b>Title:</b> Your Role	<b>Date:</b> 2.21.2021
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Many view the Bible as 66 independent books with various messages & themes throughout. Rather, it's one book with an introduction, story & conclusion. Today we begin to understand the Story of the Bible. The question being, what's the central overarching theme throughout the Scriptural Story?			

This is the first sermon of four on the Scriptural Story (the Bible). Today we want to understand Scriptures central theme & our role in it. This series will be followed with two more, 12 weeks total to explore God's heart for the nations of the world!

Many view the Bible as 66 independent books with various messages & themes throughout. Rather, it should be viewed as one book with an introduction, story & conclusion. We want to understand that complete Story. Not simply to learn Bible stories, like David & Goliath, Daniel & the Lion's Den, etc. But rather, the overall message of the entire Bible as one book with an introduction, main story & conclusion.

The introduction of the Bible's found in Genesis 1-11. Most of us know the major events in the introduction which begins with the creation account, Adam & Eve, The Fall, etc. Then the story, or plot of the Bible, begins in Genesis 12 & runs all the way through to the conclusion in Revelation 5, which ends the story of the Bible.

The basics to the introduction are...God creates mankind, mankind falls into sin, God deals with sin, mankind grows & multiplies, **until finally we get to the point where in Genesis 6:5 it says...*'The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.'*** This comes just before & is the reason for the Flood. God, as a holy being, can't be in fellowship with sinful creatures - sin & holiness are like oil & water - can't mix. Listen to how depraved these people had become...*'every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.'*

In His desire to be in relationship with us, God had to deal with sin. And one place we see this is through the Flood where Noah & his family remain in the Ark for 40 days of rain. A year later they run aground & God gives them a rainbow saying, "Noah, I'm never gonna do that again on the face of the earth." Mankind then again begins to grow & multiply, and in Genesis 11 God creates the nations at the Tower of Babel by scattering them into various languages...which ends the introduction.

If we were watching this as a play, the curtains would close, God's in heaven, Mankind's on the earth represented in multiple nations - the introduction's over. We'd go out, get coke & popcorn, then return to our seats to resume the play, *The Story*.

So..God sees these multiple different people groups on the face of the earth. Loving every one of them equally, He reaches out. He could've spoken His good news to each people group in their own language, or just made everyone to believe in Him. Instead,

He chose to use people to reach people, perhaps to train us in the process of becoming more like Himself.

He picked one man, Abram (later known as Abraham), and said, “Abram, I’m gonna bless you! I’m gonna be your God, you’re gonna be my people. The reason I’m gonna bless you Abram, isn’t simply so you can say, “Praise God, I’m blessed.” That’s half of it. The other half is, I want you to be a blessing to all the peoples I created out of the tower of Babel. I want to bless you in order for you to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.”

That promise is found in Genesis 12:2-3...*“I will make you into a great nation & I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on the earth shall be blessed through you.”* This promise, or Covenant, God gives to Abraham falls into two very simple basic components - a top line & bottom line.

The top line of the Covenant is, God desires to bless His people. It’s who He is & how He reveals His character & glory....God loves to bless people. But never are His blessings solely for us. We’re not to view ourselves as a bucket collecting blessing for ourselves. Christianity’s not about sitting around enjoying God’s blessing. That’s only half of it. God desires us to emulate Him in blessing others, to pour out what we receive from Him. Instead of a bucket, we’re to view ourselves as a piped vessel being filled & passing along His blessing. God already knows whom He wants to bless through you. Blessing coming in & going out!

Which is the Bottom-Line responsibility we have to bless others! Not just to those like us, who drink, eat, or dress like us, but all peoples. **Rudyard Kipling wrote a great poem called *We & They* which illustrates how we view others. It goes like this...**

*Father and Mother, and Me,  
Sister and Auntie say  
All the people like us are We,  
And every one else is They.  
And They live over the sea,  
While We live over the way,  
But-would you believe it? --They look upon We  
As only a sort of They!*

*We eat pork and beef  
With cow-horn-handled knives.  
They who gobble Their rice off a leaf,  
Are horrified out of Their lives;  
While they who live up a tree,  
And feast on grubs and clay,  
(Isn't it scandalous? ) look upon We  
As a simply disgusting They!*

*We shoot birds with a gun.  
 They stick lions with spears.  
 Their full-dress is un-  
 We dress up to Our ears.  
 They like Their friends for tea.  
 We like Our friends to stay;  
 And, after all that, They look upon We  
 As an utterly ignorant They!*

*We eat kitcheny food.  
 We have doors that latch.  
 They drink milk or blood,  
 Under an open thatch.  
 We have Doctors to fee.  
 They have Wizards to pay.  
 And (impudent heathen!) They look upon We  
 As a quite impossible They!*

*All good people agree,  
 And all good people say,  
 All nice people, like Us, are We  
 And every one else is They:  
 But if you cross over the sea,  
 Instead of over the way,  
 You may end by (think of it!) looking on We  
 As only a sort of They!*

We're to bless the *them's* of the world, who don't look, eat, or dress like us. Those who may live in different areas of our cities, or the world. But how do we know this?

God said PEOPLES would be blessed through Abraham. The term's already plural, and as that *S* is added, we're asked to view all the people of the world divided up into their various tribes, tongues & ethnic groups. The term's translated as *nations*, but not of political boundaries, rather of cultural/linguistic boundaries.

For example...Pakistan's one nation politically, but in God's eyes, it's made up of 9 different people/ethnic groups (nations) who have different languages, customs, foods & possibly gods. There's the Bhil, Sindhi, Baluch, Pushtun, Shina, Chitrali, Balti, Punjabi & Kashmiri. Every one of those groups calls themselves, US & others, THEM. If the Gospel breaks out among the Punjabi, would they naturally share the blessing of knowing the true God with other people groups around them? Not usually, since people naturally steer away from people different from themselves. Knowing this, God put in one simple word which changed everything for Abraham. He said, *ALL* peoples on earth will be blessed through you. So, Genesis chapter 12 is actually *The Great Commission!* It's the

foundational theme running through God's Word. God's working toward the goal of redeeming people from every tongue, tribe & nation!

Christians usually attribute *The Great Commission* as having been given by Jesus because we read the Bible as 66 independent books, know the individual stories, but have missed the Central Story of Scripture. Jesus didn't initiate the idea of reaching all nations. Missions didn't begin with Jesus in the New Testament. Missions began with Abraham after the Tower of Babel. Jesus simply reiterated what God had already promised Abraham, when God said all peoples would be blessed through him. Jesus reiterated we should go to all peoples, building on God's promise to Abraham by using the words ALL nations.

Let's not miss the larger picture of what God's doing. He wants to use people, including us, to reach the nations! He could do it by Himself, but chose to use us! He created you for a reason, it's our primary purpose in life. God's blessed us to be a blessing to all nations! The concept of God blessing '*All nations*' through us fills the Old Testament. God's a global God & we have a role in His plan! We don't have time to do the Old Testament justice, but let's fly over a few passages noticing the Great Commission in them.

The only thing most Christians know about 1 Chronicles is that it precedes 2 Chronicles, but notice the references to a global application in it... "*Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.*" The Great Commission couldn't be any clearer. God's a global God, passionate about receiving worship from all of humankind.

In Psalm 72:11 we read... "*All kings will bow down to him & all nations will serve him.*" In Isaiah 61:11 we read, "*For as the soil makes the sprout come up & a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness & praise spring up before all nations.*" A simple analogy, as soil causes food to grow, God causes His righteousness & praise to spring up in all nations!

Jeremiah 3:17 says... "*At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.*" In Daniel 7:14, it says, "*And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*" And Malachi 1:11 offers the same... "*My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense & pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,*" says the Lord Almighty. The Old Testament's filled with God's heart to reach all nations!

Now let's look at the New Testament, asking the question, "Did Jesus understand the Abrahamic Covenant to be the foundational starting point for the Scriptures, or...did He say to His disciples, "*The Old Testament's outdated. I'm gonna give you a new*

*revelation...”* Is that what He said, or did He fully understand the Abrahamic Covenant as being the foundational starting point for the story of the Bible?!

The answer's found in Luke 24:45, but to best understand it, you have to understand context. He's almost completed His life on earth, suffered, died, risen from the dead & now He's with the disciples, NOT holding hands, sharing sappy thoughts, or singing around a campfire. Rather, we find Jesus in teaching mode reviewing the Scriptures. It says, *“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.”* Jesus is meeting with His disciples just before He ascends into heaven, to give them marching orders - His last command, their first concern - the most important thing. If you were on your deathbed & your kids were there, wouldn't you tell them the most important thing they need to know? Of course & Jesus did.

If only they had an iPhone to video the incarnate living God explaining the Scriptures! These are Jesus' last instructions while on earth with limited time before returning to the Father. You have to wonder...How many themes did Jesus want to convey?

We may've thought a bunch were important, sanctification, justification, grace, mercy, holiness...maybe 15 to 20 major themes. He didn't - Jesus said only two. If Jesus can take the entirety of Scripture & break it down into two themes, shouldn't we be intimately acquainted, and teach them to others? *This is what he said...“He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer & rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance & forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”* What are the two themes?

Here's the first...*“The Christ will suffer & rise from the dead on the third day,”* which means forgiveness of sins, freedom from the penalty of death, a relationship we can now have with God, referring to the top line blessing of the Covenant. He continues...*“Repentance & forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* referring to the bottom line of the Covenant, our blessing of others. Jesus broke the entirety of Scripture down into top-line/bottom-line components. If ever someone asks, “What's the Bible all about?” You have a short, quick answer...“Two things. Firstly, God wants to bless you in Christ. Secondly, He wants to use you to bless all people groups on earth with the message of Christ.”

Can't be that easy, right? Let's test it...there was an expert in the law in Matthew 22 who walked up to Jesus & said, *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”* (V36) He seemed to expect one answer, but Jesus gave two! The first...*“You shall love the lord you God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.”* Referring to the relational blessing of the top line of the Covenant. And the second's like it, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”* referring to the bottom line! We're blessed by God, don't we want the same for our neighbor? I don't just want my neighbor well fed, and to have justice. Above all things I want them to come to salvation knowledge of Jesus! It's as though Jesus said, “I can't break the Scriptures down into one command, but, I can do two!”

If you look at the Ten Commandments, the first four commands deal with your relationship with God, referring to the top line of the Covenant. The next six deal with our relationship with others, referring to the bottom line. Top line/Bottom line...running the entire way through Scripture like railroad tracks, allowing us to read God's Word as one book!

When Jesus was opening their eyes to the Scriptures, to which *Scriptures* was He referring? The New Testament had yet to be written, so He referred to & taught missions to His disciples from the Old Testament, proving two things. First, He'd suffer & rise from the dead on the third day, which had already occurred by this time. And second, repentance & forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to *All Nations*. Jesus was proving the Great Commission from *the Old Testament*. Which means The Great Commission was 2000 years old then & over 4,000 years old today. God's desire to reach all nations has been there from the beginning....it's the very heart of God & He wants to use us to accomplish it!

Let's peek at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 5:9, the conclusion, to see the final result! Realizing the context of this verse is that it's a song sung by the elders. If the elders are singing, it's important. It says...*"And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll & to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from EVERY tribe and language and people and nation.'*" God made a promise in Genesis 12 to use people like us to reach all ethnic groups (all nations) & fulfills that promise in Revelation 5:9 - everything in between is mission! What God set out to do in the beginning of the Bible, using us, God pulls off at the end of time, through us!

This tells us God intends to use people like us to reach all nations! The Bible's meant to be read as one book...with an introduction, story & conclusion. Each time we go to the Scriptures, we should be seeing God's heart for the world & the big picture of how God wants to ultimately use our lives!

That's the end of the story. Maybe you didn't know God's plan was to impact nations through you, but that's why we want to discover...how God wants to use us! So, as you read your your Bibles, begin to be cognizant of that phrase *All Nations*. As you do, the Holy Spirit will begin to open your eyes even more to your central purpose in life, that you're blessed to be a blessing with the Gospel of Christ to all peoples...