

Stories: Part 3

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[0 : 00] Captures the girl. Defeats the dragon. Gets the bride. And then how do fairy stories end? Where there's an awareness of the need of a relationship with God hardwired into our hearts.

What can be known about God is plain to people. Because God has shown it to them. God's invisible attributes. And namely his eternal power.

They know that there is a God who is all powerful. And that he is eternal. And his divine nature have been clearly perceived. Ever since the creation of the world.

Every single human being knows that. Human beings are always yearning. Are always longing. We are haunted by the Garden of Eden.

We find that it finds its way into every story. We know instinctively as humans there was a great glory bestowed upon us. All of us. Men and women.

[1 : 21] Boys and girls. Every single one were made in the image of God. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We are living icons. Of the living God.

Psalms 8 puts it this way. He says, When I look at your heavens. The work of your fingers. The moon and the stars which you've set in place. What is man?

That you are mindful of him. And the son of man that you care for him. Yet you've made him a little lower than the angels. And you've crowned him with glory and honor.

Human beings are crowned with glory and honor. Why does a woman long to be beautiful? Why does a man hope to be found brave?

Because we remember. If only faintly that we were once more than we are now. God creates us with powers like unto his own.

[2 : 24] God has given to us the ability to reason. And to create. And share intimacy. To know joy. He made us in knowledge and righteousness and holiness.

He gives us laughter. And wonder. And imagination. And above all else. He endows us with that quality.

With which he is most known for. He gives us the ability to love. And so you could not live. Or laugh. Or love.

Or cry. Had God not given you a heart. But we also know that things are not what they were. And things are not what they should be.

And so we see, don't we, That something has gone wrong. In the Garden of Eden, As we saw last Sunday night, We reached. And in our reaching, We fell from grace.

[3 : 23] Something has gone wrong with the human race. And we know it. Or better said, Something has gone wrong within the human race. And so read a newspaper.

Scan the internet. Go on social media. Spend a weekend with your relatives. Pay attention to the motives of your heart. In a single day.

And you will know that something is wrong. Most of the misery that we suffer from in this planet. Is the fruit of the human heart gone bad. The glorious treasure.

Has been stained. Marred. Infected. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, Human beings are glorious ruins.

And sin enters the story. And like a computer virus, It's infected every file. And last Sunday night, We noticed the death spiral. Of Genesis 4 to 11.

[4 : 23] That humanity is in. This spiral of a world where sin enters. And it infects every file on the computer. And we see it everywhere in our world right now.

Everywhere in our city. And if we're willing to stop shifting the blame. For just a moment. And stop trying to force the onus. On some person. Or government.

Or policy. Or race. If we're willing to take a naked and a frank assessment of ourselves. When most of us, I think tonight, Will be honest enough to squirm or dodge.

And admit. That perhaps we fall a little bit short. If we're truly honest tonight. We'll confess that we have it within us.

To be the beast. To be the wicked sister. To be Scrooge. And it's not just the obvious evils, is it?

[5 : 23] Like murder. Racism. Betrayal. Each one of us is fraught with fears. Suspicions. Petty jealousies.

And pride. We are above all else. Self-centered. And that is the very opposite, isn't it? Of what we saw last week about the triune God.

The God of the Bible. How the triune God lives. How the triune God loves. Other person-centered.

And so let me ask you. Have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself?

Well, neither have I. Douglas Copeland wrote in his book, Life After God. He says, Now, here is my secret. I tell it to you with an openness of heart.

[6 : 27] That I doubt I shall ever achieve again. So I pray you are in a quiet room as you hear these words. My secret is that I need God.

That I am sick. And can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give because I no longer seem capable of giving. I need God to help me to be kind because I no longer seem capable of kindness.

I need God to help me love as I seem beyond being able to love. And something has gone wrong and we know that much, don't we? Now, that is where most of our stories take up their tale.

A kingdom has been overthrown. Paradise has been lost. Evil holds sway. And it's gathering on the borders of the land. Frodo in Lord of the Rings.

He makes it out of the shire with his life and the ring of power. But the nine black riders cross the river on a Midsummer's Eve. And they're hunting down that little hobbit with deadly intent.

[7 : 36] The future of Middle Earth, if you've never watched the film. Everyone stands on the edge of a knife. The Titanic is going down. And not everyone is going to make it.

Sorry if I've ruined the film for you. Cowboy Woody has been taken hostage by evil Sid next door.

The Bible says the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

But every great story has a rescue. A rescue story. Have you thought about that? Jack will come to rescue Rose in the Titanic.

William Wallace will rise up to rescue Scotland in Braveheart. Luke Skywalker will rescue the princess and then free the peoples of the universe.

Aslan the lion comes to rescue Narnia. Buzz Lightyear comes to rescue Woody in Toy Story.

Captain Miller will rescue, saving Private Ryan.

[8 : 45] Why does every story, every great story have a rescuer? Why does every great story have a rescuer? Because it's echoing a greater story.

And a greater rescuer. And so the pursuit of mankind. The rescue begins. The quest. On the day that Adam and Eve reached and fell.

They ran off, didn't they? They hid in the bushes. And God comes looking and he says to Adam and Eve and every human being since. Where are you? And so begins the long and the painful story of God's pursuit of human beings.

Though we betrayed him. Though we fell into the hands of the evil one. God does not abandon us. Rescue is his plan. First with Noah.

And then with Abraham. And then with the nation of Israel. God is looking for a people who will turn to him from the heart. God is looking for a people who will be once again his intimate allies.

[9 : 59] And so God takes one man, Abraham, and turns him into a nation. And there are so many twists and turns, aren't there, in that first book of the Bible. In the book of Genesis. That by the second book of the Bible.

The book of Exodus. We find God's people in slavery. In exile. And in deep, deep trouble. And the book of Exodus. In many ways is the archetype. Where God goes to war.

Where God goes to war with the Egyptians. To set his captive people free. 400 years they've languished in a life of despair.

There's blood and hail and locusts. And darkness. And death. Plague after plague. After plague. After plague. Descends on Egypt. Like the blows of an unrelenting axe.

And Pharaoh releases his grip. But only for a moment. Do you remember? As they come out of Egypt. The fleeing slaves. They are pinned with the Red Sea.

[11:00] In front of them. But Egypt. Coming behind them. Hurling down after them. In their chariots. And what does God do? God drowns those soldiers.

That army. That Egyptian king. In the sea. Every last one of them. And the Israelites stand on the other shore. In shock. And joy.

And the Hebrews proclaim. That the Lord. Is a warrior. The Lord is a warrior. That God is a warrior. Who's come to rescue us.

But about one day later. They are complaining. They're like Brits abroad. They don't like the food. And they don't like the water. And the journey of freedom.

Is too hard. And they want to go back to Egypt. We were better off in slavery. They say. And the dilemma. Of this great rescue story.

[11:57] Is that we don't know. Whether we want to be rescued. We are. Enamored. By our. False stories. We happily believe.

The fake news. We trust. We trust. In the false gods. Of our culture. Knowing they're false. But doing so anyway. We are so. Bound up.

With our self-centeredness. And our addiction. And the evil one. Has no intention. Of letting his captives. Walk away free. And so he seduces.

And he assaults. And he deceives. Whatever it is. To keep us in darkness. And the prophets. Of the Old Testament. They show this. Again. And again. And again. We're like a man.

Who's so corrupted. That they no longer know. Their own name. They're like a couple. Who are so bound. To an affair. That they cannot break free. The human race.

[12:58] Is captive. In the worst possible way. We are captives. Of the heart. In the words of Hosea 3. Verse 10. God says.

Their hearts. Are always. Going astray. Their hearts. Are always. Going astray. And so.

If I can put it like this. The challenge. That God faces. Is that he's seeking. To rescue a people. Who have no idea. How captive they are.

They have no. Real idea. How desperate they are. And so. We know. Don't we. That we long for Eden. We saw last week.

That God has put eternity. In our hearts. That is the way. That you are. But we hesitate. To give ourselves. Back to this God. In abandoned trust. Because we have been.

[13:56] Captivated. By. Our sin. And our rebellion. But we're captivated. By the enemy. And so then. We have the story.

Of a hero. The hero. Of the rescue. Let me tell you. Where God is going to get us to. Jeremiah 24. Verse 7. God says this.

I will give them a heart. To know me. That I am the Lord. And they shall be my people. And I will be their God. For they shall return to me.

With their whole heart. In many ways. It's a great theme sentence. Of what the Bible is all about. If you want to know. What the Bible is about. You couldn't do better. Than Jeremiah 24. Verse 7. That I will give them a heart.

To know me. That I am the Lord. And they shall be my people. And I will be their God. For they shall return to me. With their whole heart. It's the most beautiful. Of love stories. Jesus said.

[14:53] As the Father has loved me. So have I loved you. Now remain in my love. John 15. Verse 9. And so that is what he's aiming at.

Now how will this happen? And here again. We see the echo. In so many of our stories. There is one who is born.

into the story. Galatians 4 verse 4. When the fullness. Of time had come. God sent forth his son. Born of a woman. Born under the law. To redeem those who are under the law.

So that we might receive adoption of sons. And because you are sons. God has sent his spirit. The spirit of his son. Into our hearts. Crying. Abba Father. So you are no longer a slave.

But a son. And if a son. Then an heir through God. The son of man. came to seek. And to save that which was lost.

[15:53] This is at the heart. Of the Christian faith. And it always has been. That God has entered into the story. And look with me at the Nicene Creed. For a moment. That we confess together.

Look what it says. Eight lines down. For us.

And for our salvation. He came down from heaven. Was incarnate from the Holy Spirit. And the Virgin Mary. And was made man. For our sake. He was crucified. And upon his pilot. He suffered death. And was buried. On the third day. He rose again. In accordance with the scriptures. He ascended into heaven. And is seated at the right hand. Of the Father. And he will come again. In glory. To judge the living and the dead.

And his kingdom. Will have no end. He becomes one of us. In order to save us. He enters our world. Miraculously.

[16:51] The virgin birth. His parents are told. You shall give him the name Jesus. Why? For he will save his people. From their sins. He spends 30 years.

Living in obscurity. In the middle of nowhere. He knows what it's like. To be a human being. He knows what it's like. To have frustrations.

In the workplace. To be bored. In his job. He knows what it is. To have family. Strife. He identifies. With his people. And then he emerges. Into the limelight.

So come with me. To Mark chapter one. Mark chapter one.

In verse nine. He steps into the limelight. In many ways. His baptism. Is his ordination. It's the beginning.

[17:51] Of his public ministry. It's the beginning. Of his public work. He's baptized.

By John. In the Jordan. Verse ten. When he came up. Out of the water. Immediately. He saw the heavens. Being torn open. And the spirit. Descending on him. Like a dove. And a voice.

Came from heaven. The voice of the father. You are my beloved son. With whom I'm well pleased. But look at verses. Twelve to thirteen. And hear the echoes.

The spirit immediately drove him. Into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness. Forty days. Being tempted. By Satan. And he was with. The wild animals.

And the angels. Were ministering to him. Where was Adam. Tempted. Sorry. Where was Adam tempted. Where?

[18:51] In a garden. Where is Jesus tempted. Verse twelve. In a wilderness. Adam has everything going for him. Creation is on his side.

Jesus is in a wilderness. In the wildness. With nothing going for him. How long were Israel. In the wilderness. Do you remember? How long are.

Is Jesus. In the wilderness. Verse thirteen. Forty days. How did. Israel. Do. In the wilderness. Succeed or fail.

Fail. How does Jesus do. In the wilderness. He succeeds. He is. The true. And better Adam. He is. The true. And better.

Israel. Where they fail. He succeeds. Where they fall. He stands. Can you hear the echoes? And then what do you expect.

[19:51] To see. Well as you go through Mark's gospel. You see that this man. Has mastery. Over. The devil. Over creation. Over sickness. Over death. So come with me to John.

Chapter four. And verses thirty five to forty one. Where they're in the middle of a great storm. And Jesus stands.

And he says verse thirty nine. Peace be still. Verse. Sorry. Verse thirty nine. Peace be still. The winds cease. There's a great calm. Verse forty one. And they were filled with great fear. And said to one another.

Who then is this. That even the wind and the waves. Obey him. His power of a creation. And then in chapter five.

He meets this madman. He meets a demoniac. Look at verse. Three. This guy lived among the tombs.

[20:49] And no one. No one. Could bind him anymore. Not even with a chain. And then verse. Four. At the end. No one.

Had the strength. To subdue him. So you're meant to see. No one could bind him. No one had the strength. To subdue him. The man is out of control.

And then look at verse fifteen. And they came to Jesus. Saw the demon possessed man. The one who had the legion. Sitting there. Clothed. And in his right mind.

He disarms. The devil. He has power over creation. He has power over the devil. And then look at the rest of the chapter.

When Jesus crossed again. Verse twenty one. In the boat to the other side. There's a great crowd around him. A leader of the synagogue. Comes to see him. And says. Verse twenty three. My little daughter. Is at the point of death.

[21 : 57] She's twelve years old. We find out at the end of the story. That she sadly. And tragically dies. There is no one can comfort the family. But Jesus comes.

And he says. And look what he says in verse forty one. He takes this dead girl by the hand. And he says to her. Talithicum. Which means little girl. I say to you. Arise. And immediately.

The girl gets up. And begins walking. He reaches into death. And he pulls out the little girl. In the middle. There's a story of a woman. With an issue of blood.

She's had it for twelve years. The same length of time. That little girl has been alive. And Luke tells us. She spent all the money on doctors. But it's been to no good. No help at all. She's unclean. Unclean. And she touches Jesus' garment. And she is made clean. And when Jesus teaches. Mark tells us that.

[22 : 55] Jesus taught with authority. Not like the religious leaders of the day. And they say. No one ever taught like this man. He demonstrates his power. He shows. His mastery.

He lives the life. Of a real man. He is the hero. He is the last Adam. He is truly man. And truly God. But I don't know whether you've noticed. The hero.

Must often die. To win the freedom of his beloved. So think of Braveheart. If you've not seen it. You're seeing kind of all. Kind of how culturally relevant I am.

You know. But think of William Wallace. It's a great film. Lovely for children. He's slowly. And brutally tortured. For daring to oppose.

A wicked king. He's executed. And yet his death. Breaks the grip. That darkness has held over Scotland. Think of Aslan. He dies upon.

[23 : 53] The stone table. For the traitor Edmund. And for all of Narnia. Think of Maximus. In gladiator. He dies in the arena. To win the freedom of his friends. And all of Rome.

They are pictures. Aren't they? Hints. Echoes. Unknowingly. Of a greater sacrifice. The son of man. Came to give his life. As a ransom for many.

God warned us. Back in the garden. That the price of our mistrust. And our disobedience. Would be death. Not just physical death. But spiritual death. To be separated from God.

And life. And all the beauty. And intimacy. And adventure forever. By an act of our free will. In Adam. We became the hostages. Of the kingdom of darkness. And death.

And so we need rescuing. Jesus tells a story. Doesn't he? So familiar to us. That sheds light on his coming. That if a man owes a hundred sheep.

[24 : 47] And one of them wanders away. Will he not leave the ninety-nine. On the hillside. And go and look for the one. It's a rescue. And so historically speaking.

Jesus is betrayed by his followers. Handed over to the Romans. By the Jewish religious leaders. And crucified. But there's a much greater story going on. Isn't there? Unfolding. In that death. Christ gave his life. To defeat evil. To pay the price. For our betrayal. He has delivered us. From the domain of darkness.

And transferred us. To the kingdom of his beloved son. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of sins. He gives himself. So that we might be free. He becomes poor. So that you might become rich.

He takes our curse. So that you might know his blessing. He takes your death. So that you might know life. And this is echoed. Isn't it? In so.

[25 : 44] So many films. On Friday night. As a family. We watched the film. Inside Out. I don't know whether you know it. It's a very profound film. It's about kind of.

Emotions. Inside of little kids. It's quite good actually. And so. Through a series of events. That are too long to explain. And the character of joy. In Inside Out.

Is stuck with Bing Bong. In the place. Called Memory Dump. Both characters. Risk being lost.

Forever. And disappearing. So all joy. Will be gone. For this old girl. But Bing Bong. Selflessly.

Gives his life. So that joy. Will be rescued. If you. If the kids have seen it. If you. If you know the film. Awesome. On it. And so. It is just.

[26 : 41] A faint picture. That we see. Again. And again. And again. Don't we. Of somebody. Giving their life. So that someone else. Will live. Little Jesus.

Gives himself. So that we might live. The life. I live. In the flesh. I live. I live. By faith. In the son of God. Who loved me.

And gave himself. For me. In a film. When. A person dies. To win freedom. For others. What happens. There's a hush.

Often. They might be screaming. But there's a hush. On the screen. People are speechless. When William Wallace. Dies in Braveheart. When Maximus. Dies in Gladiator.

When Boromir. Dies in Lord of the Rings. And something. Of immense. Significance. Has happened. In the film. There's a hush. There's a silence. At the cross.

[27 : 40] At the death. Of the Lord Jesus. A centurion. Points. To the man. On the cross. And said. Truly. This man. Is the son of God. There's a silence.

Saturday. But Sunday morning. At first light. The stone. Guarding the tomb. Of that crucified man. Is rolled away. And there are folded. Grave clothes. Because death.

Because death. Has been defeated. And the price. Has been paid. And the dead. Has been satisfied. And the victory. Is won. And the people.

Are redeemed. And the serpent. Has been crushed. And the dragon. Is defeated. So he gets the girl. The bride of Christ. He is the victorious king.

In Narnia. When they arrive. The children are told.

[28 : 33] Two very different stories. About Aslan. The lion. And they're told. One story by the white witch. And the other. By Mr. Beaver. And they have to work out.

Which is true. They have to pick a side. And so tonight. You have to look. At the stories. That you live. The stories that you see. The story that you've been told tonight.

And you have to pick. A side. Are you going to live. By the greatest story. Which story. Are you going to believe in. Which story.

Are you going to live by. One final illustration. The saving private Ryan. There's this remarkable. Film really. About them. Pursuing this soldier. Private Ryan. And Captain Miller. Who's led the search. For him. Is dying on the bridge.

[29 : 30] And he says. To Private Ryan. He says. Earn this. Earn this. Scene cuts to the end. Of Private Ryan's life.

And Private Ryan. Is at Captain Miller's grave. It's a really moving scene. And he says to his wife. Tell me I'm a good man. Tell me I'm a good man.

It's a brilliant film. But it's the exact opposite of the gospel. It's the exact opposite of the Lord Jesus. Tonight. You begin the Christian life.

By admitting. I'm not a good man. And I'm not a good woman. And I don't deserve. Lord Jesus. What you've done for me. I don't deserve. That you entered.

Into this story. To rescue me. Tell me I'm a good man. It's the exact opposite of the gospel. The gospel says to you. For God so loved the world.

[30 : 31] That he gave his one and only son. So that if you tonight. Will believe in him. You will not perish. You can be rescued. And have a general life.

Let's pray.