

The Story of Your Life

Various passages

April 16, 2017

Introduction:

Back in the 1950s NBC aired a popular television show called *This is Your Life*. Since I'm a nice guy, I won't make you date yourself by asking who used to watch it, but for those of you who missed it let me tell you how the show worked. During the show the host would surprise usually a well-known celebrity or public figure by presenting them a narrative story of their life. This personal history would be reinforced by the unexpected arrival of bygone friends and family members who would add their own personal memories about the honored guest.

Well, this morning we are going to something similar to what they did on *This is Your Life* because I am going to tell the story of your life during the next half hour. But this isn't going to be quite like the television show. Nobody will be singled out to come up front because I'm going to tell the story of everyone's life, not just one of you. Also, you will be glad to learn there are no ex-girlfriends or former grade school teachers hiding behind a door ready to come out and enthrall us with an embarrassing story from your childhood. So don't worry about that! Nor do I want to talk about your accomplishments in your career or school or with your family. That's not my focus this morning.

Instead, I want to tell the story of your life from a completely different perspective. I want to tell you the story of your life from God's perspective. While each of us have lived different lives from an earthly point of view, from a heavenly perspective our stories are all basically the same. The story I'm going to tell this morning is as true for me as it is for each of you. It's the story of your life as told through the Easter story. The story of Jesus' death and resurrection is God's way of saying to each of us, "This is your life."

Now you might be thinking, "Whoa, have you gone cuckoo-cuckoo for Coco-Puffs, Pastor Rob! The Easter story is about Jesus, not me. That took place 2000 years before I was born: how can the Easter story be my story?" True, you were not physically present for the events of Easter, but yet Easter is still very much about you because you are the reason for it. What happened to Jesus happened because of you and me. And because you and I are the reason for what took place on Easter, we are not merely readers of a historical story but we are part of that story. The Easter story is also our story.

So this morning, I want to reflect on Easter not as a fascinating historical event, but as a personal story of the truth of God's love for each and every one of us. The resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning tells us not only about Jesus, but it also reveals something God wants us to understand about ourselves.

So let's begin by actually reading the Easter story together. If you would, please turn open in your Bibles with me to Matthew 28:1-8. If you don't have a Bible, you can find this passage in the Bibles in the pews in front of you on page 835. **"Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake, for**

an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.' So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples."

As we reflect on the Easter story, my goal is to help you discover within it the story of your own life. Within this one event of Jesus rising from the dead on Easter morning, we can see reflected in it three parts of our own story - the story of who we were, the story of who we are, and the story of who we will one day be. So let's begin first by considering how the Easter story shows us who we were.

1. The Easter story shows us who we were

Now the funny thing about the first Easter morning is it doesn't start with soft pastel colors and the enchanting scent of lilies. Rather Matthew 28:1 tells us that a couple of women got up during the wee hours of the morning and went to visit a corpse in a tomb. Sounds a bit more like the beginning of a story about Halloween rather than Easter, but that's how God started the Easter story, so who am I to argue with him?

Anyhow, these two women, both by the name of Mary, go to a tomb expecting to find the body of Jesus. Now before we go any further, we need to answer the question that usually comes to our mind when we hear that somebody died. "Well, how did he die? What was the cause of death?" Pretty normal question to ask, right? Well, there are two ways to answer to that question in regards to Jesus.

The first answer is that Jesus died as a result of being crucified on a Roman cross. Jesus found himself in a bit of hot water because the religious leaders at the time didn't think too highly of his radical teaching. In fact, they got so angry with Jesus they decided to inform the Roman government that he had been making some claims to the effect that he was king of the Jews. Now the Roman government didn't look too fondly upon those who claimed to be king and usually individuals who fancied themselves as royalty found their reign came to a quick end once they were nailed to a cross. Well, Jesus did claim to be a king, just not the kind the Romans assumed. Jesus wasn't claiming any human throne; rather he was claiming to be a heavenly king, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But the Romans weren't about to take the time to parse the details; Jesus claimed he was a king and that was enough for them. Within hours, the Romans executed Jesus by nailing him to a wooden cross.

Now that's the historical answer to what caused his death. But that answer doesn't tell us the whole story. The far more important spiritual answer to the question of what caused Jesus' death concerns you and me. This is where the story of our life and the story of Jesus begin to intersect.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 5:6-8. That's on page 942 in the pew Bibles. This is where we find the real cause of death: **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

The real cause of death is you and me. Jesus died because of our sins. Let me explain how this works. God is a righteous and holy God who must judge sin. He can't just turn a blind eye to it and pretend it didn't happen. In order to be just, all who sin against him must be punished.

Now our problem is that we all sin. The Bible says "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Of course, I doubt many of us need a Bible passage to tell us that. Have you ever lied? Did you ever steal something? Have you lusted after someone else? Have you been envious of what other have that you don't? Has your speech ever been characterized by swearing and gossiping and putting others down? I could ask those sorts of questions all morning but if we are honest we know we've been less than perfect. Every one of us, be it in big or small ways, have sinned and we all know it.

So therein comes our problem: everyone has sinned. We've all disobeyed God in thought, word, and deed. Now this might not be such a big deal if after we die we just stop existing and that was the end of the matter. But the Bible tells us that after death, each man must stand before God for the deeds done in the body. And because God is holy, he can't tolerate even a hint of sin, and since he is also just, he must punish the sins done against him. That leaves us all in a pretty bleak position!

Now God could have left it at that and allowed all of us to get what we deserved, but he did something rather surprising instead. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to live the kind of righteous, sinless life we should have lived. Unlike anyone else in the history of the world, Jesus lived a perfect life, obeying God 100% of the time. As a result, Jesus didn't need to be punished for sin because he never committed any. But God allowed Jesus to take our place and be punished for our sins. All the wrath of God which you and I deserve for all the sinful things we have done was poured out upon Jesus on the cross instead. On the cross, Jesus acted as our substitute, taking our place, with our sin being counted as if it were Christ's.

So then, this is where the story of Easter starts - the death of Jesus for all the sins that you and I have ever done. When we look into the tomb we see in it the story of who we have been and what we deserved: we're sinful people who were worthy of God's righteous judgment and wrath

2. The Easter story shows us who we are

But moving on now to our second point this morning, the Easter story not only shows us who we were, but it also shows us who we are right now. Let me explain how.

When the two Marys arrived at the tomb that first Easter morning, they had a bit of a surprise. They were expecting to go and mourn over Jesus' body; instead they found the tomb was empty. Then they saw an angel sitting at the entrance of the tomb who tells them starting in v 5, **"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you.'** So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples."

The women arrived expecting to mourn, but instead they left with hearts full of joy. Why the change? That's easy: because Jesus was alive! God had kept his word and raised Jesus from the dead. Through the resurrection, God demonstrates that he will fulfill his promises to redeem his people for the power of death. The Easter story is God's grand declaration that he loves the people he created so much that he would die for them and then rise again from the dead.

So the Easter story is also our story because it tells us who we are: someone deeply loved by God. In fact, the whole point of the Easter story is summed up in what is arguably the most famous verse in the Bible: John 3:16. Jesus says there, **"For God so loved the world, that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."** Wait. Why did God give his Son? Because God so loved the world, that why. He loved the likes of you and me. In spite of all of the sins we have done - the pride, the selfishness, the lust, and hateful thoughts and words - God loved you so much that he sent his Son to die in your place so that one day you might be raised up from the dead to new life just like Jesus was that Easter morning.

Perhaps that's a surprise for you some of you this morning. Maybe if you were to come up here and tell the story of your life this morning, you wouldn't have said that you are loved by God. Some of you might have instead told a story of rejection, of being teased and ridiculed all of your life. Others of you might have told a story of feeling discouraged, depressed, and feeling worthless because of your experience of abuse and neglect. Your story, as you've lived it, doesn't seem to be a very happy tale. But that's not the story of your life from God's perspective.

God's story of your life is so much different. He loves you, right here, right now, regardless of your past. He cares for you and he wants you to know him. He wants to free you from a life of sin and rejection and forgive all of your sins so you can enjoy a relationship with the God who made you and loves you more than anyone else. That is the true story of your life right now. You are a person loved by God so much that he sent Jesus to die so that anyone who believes in him and come to know and love him in return.

But there is one more part of the story we need to tell this morning. We've seen how the Easter story has shown you who we were - a sinner deserving of God's righteous judgment. And we've seen how Easter shows you who you are - a person loved by

God such that he would go so far as to send his Son to suffer and die on your behalf so that you can be forgiven. So now we need to come to the end of the story, which will tell us in our third point who we are to be.

3. The Easter story shows us who we will be

After Jesus rose from the dead, people had a choice to make. Would they believe what they had seen and heard? Jesus had risen from the dead. He had conquered death. Jesus said that only through faith in him could a person find forgiveness of sins and eternal life. So the question that faced the two women at the tomb that morning is the same question that faced the disciples when Jesus appeared to them and is the same question that faces you and me: Will you believe Jesus? Will you believe Jesus died in your place to pay the penalty for your sins on the cross? Will you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead? Will you believe God's promise that he will one day raise you up from the dead into new life with him in heaven?

Your answer determines how your story ends. The Easter story tells you that you've sinned and fallen short of God's righteous requirements: that's who you were. And the Easter story tells you that God loves you so much he sent Jesus to die for you: that's who you are. But the Easter story doesn't tell you who you will become any more than the guests on *This is Your Life* could have the story of their future told. Who you will be depends on how you respond to Jesus. But I do know that there are only two possible endings to your story: it either had a tragic ending or ends quite literally with the words, "...and he lived happily ever after."

The tragic ending of the story involves you rejecting Jesus and continuing to live life on your own terms. After a life pursuing selfish pleasures with no regard for God or his will for you, you will one day die. Then in an instant, the God you spent your whole life ignoring will no longer be ignored. You will stand before God the righteous Judge and he will cast you out for his presence to suffer in hell for all of eternity as punishment for sin. That's the tragic ending that awaits those who reject Jesus.

But your story doesn't need to end that way. Jesus' death and resurrection provides for us another ending. Here's how this story ends: You believe Jesus died for you and so you accept the forgiveness of sins that he offers. You turn away from living a life of sin and start living for God out of love and thankfulness for all he's done for you. Then after you die, God raises you up from the dead. You stand before the Lord and Creator of the Universe, not to be judged for your sins - because Jesus has already paid for those - but to be welcomed into heaven by your Heavenly Father. There you'll spend eternity with the God who loves you and live, "happily ever after."

I can't tell you how your story will end, but I do know from what God has said in the Bible, those are the only two ending available. Physical death is not the end of our story. Like Jesus on Easter, we will each be resurrected from the dead, but whether we are raised to enjoy new life with Jesus in heaven or suffer eternal death in hell is the part of your story that is yet to be told. How your story ends depends on whether accept Jesus in faith or reject him.

Conclusion

So let me close this message by encouraging those of you here this morning who are concerned about how your story will end. Maybe some of you here know all too well the story of your life so far - a life of sin and rebellion from God. Perhaps you think because of all the terrible things you've done God won't have anything to do with you, that you've sinned too deeply for too long for God to forgive you.

But God says through the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning that he loves you. God so loved the world that he sent his Son to die for each and every sin you've ever done or ever will do. He's paid the penalty for your sin so you don't have to. Now all he asks of you is that you simply believe it. God says in John 3:16 that **“whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.”** Believing is a simple thing - it means you take God at his word. You trust that what he says is true and then you act upon it. If you believe that Jesus really died for your sins, that he was raised from the dead three days later, and that through him you can have forgiveness of sin, then act on that this morning. Tell God you want your story to end well. Tell him you don't want to perish in hell; you want to have eternal life in heaven with the God who created you and loves you more than anybody else.

If that is you this morning, why don't you let him know that right now? In just a moment we are going to close in prayer. If you have never accepted the free gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, I can't think of a better time to do it than on Easter. This morning you can be certain that your story will have a happy ending by simply turning from a life of sin and embracing the Lord Jesus. Let's bow our heads together now and if God has spoken to your heart, why don't you pray with me this prayer to him...

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2016.