

01-11-15 – God’s Word – John 1:1-5, 11-14

Welcome to the Forever Family Devoted to: God’s Word

One lady said after studying the life of Moses, “I know Moses so well now he doesn’t even look like Charlton Heston.”

As Pastor Jerry explained last week, we are embarking on a seven week series called, “Welcome to the Forever Family – Devoted to:” This is originally taken from the book of Acts, but also every morning he sends out the Good Morning email, and the seven things we are devoted to are listed in the opening banner on that email. It looks like this ... <screen>

Last week he covered the first topic, “Being Filled with the Holy Spirit.” That is a key to everything else. This week I will cover, “God’s Word.” This is a particularly important topic to me. I have such a love and appreciation for the Word of God, and I think its study, understanding, and application is critical to a fruitful Christian life. In fact, the reason I went to school to be a pastor was because of my perception that most in the church of Jesus Christ are not where they should be in the Word. I call it Biblical anemia.

We hear every week a message from the Word. We hear that we need to be “in the Word.” We hear how important it is to be a part of a Bible study group and to do daily devotions, but how many actually do these things. I know you all are an exception, but in the general church, I would say there is minimal participation in these things. So I will endeavor today to spark you on to deeper Bible knowledge.

Let me start with a little personal testimony...

I came to faith through a Bible study in the Word – in the book of Revelation actually – that was heavy. I bought a Bible so I could read for myself what was being taught and try to get a handle on this ominous book. I was also disciplined by my work friend, George who was new to and excited in the faith. Another co-worker, Pete and George and I would get together to discuss my questions and faith in Christ. At some point after saying the sinner’s prayer about 100 times, the words traveled from my head to my heart. That was when I was truly saved (I believe). I was always a very introverted and quiet person, so this all took place over time, gradually, but it happened and I have never been the same.

I spent a year or so growing by reading the Word – over and over – different versions – seeking explanation – asking questions. George said new believers should be locked away in a closet for a couple of years with their Bible until they came back to some sense of reality – That was me.

God gave me the gift of music and worship. We formed a group called Earthen Vessels and played worship music for any church or group who needed it. Soon into this ministry, I started to feel like we needed to share something from the Word of God during our music segment. I began to share the Word – more like teaching segments rather than preaching. It supported our song choices, etc.

I felt that I should pursue some certificate or something that would back up that I may be somewhat qualified to do this if questioned. I began a correspondence course in Biblical Studies to earn my certificate. Soon after that, I was diagnosed with cancer and everything came to a screeching halt in my life. However, the Word of God was always central to my life during this time.

Several years later, still involved in the music ministry – in fact, I’ve been the music director of this church since 1990 – and still constantly studying the Word, I began teaching Bible studies here at our church. I was so burdened by the lack of real knowledge of the Bible and it’s concepts, that I sought the Lord as to how I could help with this. After much prayer and fear, I entered the Nazarene Course of Ministerial Study in 1999 and was ordained in 2007. I learned how to study the Word better, how to prepare sermons, how to dig deeper into the truth of the Word, how things are all connected and how to teach people the Word of God in all its fullness. So I was not called to preach necessarily, but to teach. The preaching is just part of the job ☺ I have been teaching Bible studies for 20 years here and at the Lab and preaching since 2000 here and in other churches – completely out of character for me (the old me), but in line with who God is continuing to make me in Him. The music ministry just goes without saying. I keep trying to find someone to take over, but God keeps me doing this for some reason.

The thing is that I have learned by Bible study who God is, what His plan is for humanity, how everything fits together and who Jesus is from the Word. Actually, Jesus has shown me who He is in the Word because He is the Word and the Holy Spirit is the one who prompted humans to write down this Word.

READ: John 1:1-5; 10-14 (NLT)

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.

The New is in the Old contained, and the Old is in the New explained. – Graham Scroggie

There is continuity in the Bible. This is not like any other book you will find. Many pick and choose verses randomly asking God to speak to them. This may work sometimes, but it is NOT the suggested method of studying and knowing God’s word for your life. We used to have a plastic loaf of bread with Scripture verse cards in it. Every night someone would pick a verse card out and we would read it together and pray for our meal time. Well that’s cute for kids, but that can’t be our end-all devotional for the day if we want to grow in our knowledge of the Word and our relationship with Jesus.

Sometimes it’s OK to just open the Bible and whatever your eyes fall on is God’s word for you, but it may have it drawbacks... For example (and you probably heard this before) – a person seeking guidance opened the Bible and put his finger on a verse from Matt. 27:5 that said, “Judas... went out and hanged himself.” Confused with this direction, he flipped to another section and read Luke 10:37, “Go and do likewise.” Totally baffled, he tried once more and turned to John 13:27, “What you must to, do quickly.”

Jesus was the Word of God, is the Word of God and will forever be the Word of God. We have to truly understand the Word of God in order to truly understand Jesus. Don't you want that for your life? The Bible is not a go-to book for proverbs of life, nor is it a book to seek guidance through its wisdom although you can gain wisdom from it. However, this is not its purpose or God plan for it to you.

The Bible is so much more. It is God's Story. It's not a story about God, but it is God's story to us.

"It is no accident that the Bible comes to us primarily by way of narrative – but not just any narrative. Here we have the grandest narrative of all – God's own story. That is, it does not purport to be just one more story of humankind's search for God. No, this is God's story, the account of His search for us, a story essentially told in four chapters: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. In this story, God is the divine protagonist, Satan the antagonist, God's people the agonists (although too often also the antagonists), with redemption and reconciliation as the plot resolution." (How to 2, Fee/Stuart, p. 14)

CREATION:

Our God is not a hidden god who people are seeking and have to try to find, or even who finally, Jesus reveals to us. Our God is right there at creation, and His story proclaims, "In the beginning God..." He is the Creator of all that is. He is: before all things, the cause of all things, above all things, the goal of all things, and the origin of all things. Humanity is the crowning glory of the Creator's work. He created a people made in His image, with whom He could commune, in whom He could delight, beings who would know the pleasure of His presence, love, and favor. We were created to live in fellowship with God, created to be dependent on our Creator for life and existence. We can read about this in Genesis 1-2. **Gen. 1:26-27 - Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground." So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**

FALL:

This second section of the biblical story is extensive. It reaches from Gen. 3 to Rev. 22. This part of the God story tells us that the humans God created decided they would rather have godlikeness than creatureliness with its dependence on God. They chose to be more Godlike than to be his creatures. They chose independence from God their Creator (bottom line). As a result – rather than to be dependent on God and enjoy His presence and favor, we chose to be independent and reap the wrath of Almighty God. It was a tragic and colossal fall.

We lost, big time, in this exchange...

FIRST – we lost our vision of God and His nature and presence and character. Later on in history, humanity would blame God, "Why have you made me like this..." "Why are You so cruel?" Humanity became idolaters in an attempt to draw closer to a god they didn't know. Paul said it like this...

Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. (Rom. 1:22-25 – NLT)

The problem is that if He has become hidden to us; it is because we have become slaves to the god of this world.

Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God. (2 Cor. 4:4 – NLT)

SECOND – The fall caused us to distort the divine image in ourselves. “ Instead of being loving, generous, self-giving, thoughtful, merciful – as God is – we became miserly, selfish, unloving, unforgiving, and spiteful.” (How to 2, Fee/Stuart, p. 16). We joined the dark side and aligned with God's enemy instead of our Creator.

THIRD – The fall caused the loss of the divine presence in our lives and our relationship and fellowship with God. We started out in communion with God, but forfeited that for alienation, loneliness, and pain. We once had a purpose in this creation, but now we drift through life looking for answers and consolation. Our broken fellowship with God then translated into broken relationships in our human lives as well. Look around – the divorce rate among church people is just as high as the world. We are a people who no longer understand what relationship is with each other.

“The Bible tells us that we are fallen, that there is an awful distance between ourselves and God, and that we are like sheep going astray (Is. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:25) or like a rebellious, know-it-all son, living in a far country among the hogs, wanting to eat their food (Lk. 15:11-32). In our better moments, we also know that this is the truth not only about the murderer or rapist or child abuser, but also about ourselves – the selfish, the greedy, the proud. It is no wonder people think God is hostile to us; in our better moments we know we deserve his wrath for the kind of endless stinkers we really are.”
(How To 2, Fee/Stuart, p. 16-17).

PJ sent me this ... *The Bible tells us that one of the signs of the last days, among other things, will be false teaching. And the only way we are going to be able to detect false teaching is by knowing what the Word of God teaches.*

*Paul prayed for the Philippian Christians that their knowledge of God's Word would grow. He said, "**This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent**" (Philippians 1:9–10). (From Harvest Daily Devotion for 1/9/2015 – Greg Laurie)*

REDEMPTION:

Section three is kind of an insertion into the general narrative of the Bible as a whole. Here we see the God of judgment and wrath because of our sin, reaching out to His creation in mercy and grace. Here He prompts all to turn from the sin life and follow Him once again. He does not just want us to surrender as guilty, but to turn from the past patterns and turn from the dark side to Him, where he can provide joy, peace, and a meaningful life (shalom).

This is also the longest section in our story. It tells us of our God reaching out to His creation in compassion, offering them a covenant of His love and forgiveness. It is shown by his deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the giving of His gift of the Law to show us His ways and what He is like, while we were being reshaped into His likeness again. We would have to keep covenant with Him by allowing Him to reshape us. But – the story tells us that we rebelled over and over again. We looked at the Law as a means of God taking away our freedom rather than giving us a way to freedom in Him – we rebelled.

As the people moved from being shepherds to farmers, they lost faith that their God could be with them anywhere and in anything. So, they began to worship agricultural fertility gods of the people around them to gain good crops.

God brought them prophets to redirect them including Samuel, who anointed for them King David – a man after God’s own heart. Through David another covenant was given them. One of his offspring would rule over God’s people forever. However, this plan goes bad again. So God sends them prophets, singers, sages, etc. So God curses His people and there is exile, and more separation, but God still provides a ray of hope for them/us that we see in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

There would be a new Son of David and an outpouring of God’s Spirit into the hearts of His people that would finally transform us into His likeness once again. This final blessing would include not only the Hebrew people but all people everywhere... **John 3:16 – “For God so loved the WORLD that He gave His one and only Son that anyone who believes in Him would not perish but have Everlasting Life.”**

The best part of the story is that this final son of David is none other than God Himself (Jesus the Christ). He is the Creator, and came to us in our likeness to draw us to His likeness by faith. He came among us and finally gave His life for us and defeated death by His own resurrection. He conquered the gods that defied Him in all our human failings and took upon Himself the full weight of the guilt and punishment of the “creature’s” rebellion.

Here’s the heart of the story... “A loving, redeeming God in His incarnation restored our lost vision of God, by His crucifixion and resurrection made possible our being restored to the Image of God (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), and through the gift of His Spirit became present with us in constant fellowship.

For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the first among many brothers and sisters.

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

“This is God’s story, the story of his unfathomable love and grace, mercy and forgiveness - and that is how it also becomes our story. A story that tells us we deserve nothing but get everything; that we deserve hell but get heaven; that we deserve to be wiped out, obliterated, but we get his tender embrace; that we deserve rejection and judgment but get to become his children, to bear his likeness, to call him Father. This is the story of the Bible, God’s story, which at the same time is also our own. Indeed, he even let his human creatures have a part in writing it!” (How to 2, Fee/Stuart, p. 19).

We just went through the entire O.T. and most of the N.T. 😊

CONSUMMATION:

This is the final section of the God Story, but it hasn’t ended yet. It is still awaiting fulfillment. It is the Revelation story. It is the conclusion of it all. All that God has told us and revealed in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus was going to be fully realized at some point in the future. Our story is different from all other stories, because ours is filled with HOPE. There is a glorious end. We know how it ends.

Jesus told Martha at the death of her brother, Lazarus, ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even if he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.”*** Then He proceeded to validate what He had said by raising Lazarus from the grave. Then He verified these words by His own resurrection from the grave.

Jesus told the religious leaders, ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”*** For this they condemned him and killed him, but because He is life, and the author of life, the grave could not hold Him. This was the beginning of the end of death for all who believe and the guarantee of all who are His, forever.

Revelation tells us of the end of the enemy, God’s antagonist, and all who bear his image and likeness. It tells us of when God in love will restore the creation (Eden) as a new heaven and a new Earth. This is the grand story of the Bible – God’s story. This is how we need to read the Bible, God’s Word. We need to see how each book fits into the entire story. This is how we are to enter into the story of God and find our place. We belong to God and are a part of His story.

Each individual book of the Bible fits into the overall story. There are many genres represented. Each gives a better idea of its meaning and alignment in the story. It takes some work, some investigation, some resources to better understand this wonderful Word of God, but it’s worth it and will transform your life and your view of life and of God, the Creator of Life.