

## Story | The Narrative of the God's Redemption

### An Introduction

This morning I'm going to do two couple unusual things: 1) Use stories 2) Not use much Scripture. We're looking at the nature and meaning of stories, which is important if we consider the Bible a single, true story.

### Single Story

Thor Heyerdahl was a Norwegian anthropologist who came up with a controversial theory that South Americans not Asians settled Polynesia. Facing the scorn of his peers, he set out to prove his theory by sailing a large balsa wood raft from Peru to Polynesia. The raft, named Kon-Tiki was made of materials that the legendary Tiki would have used to make a similar trip 1500 years ago. Thor assembles a rather inexperienced crew (who start off on the raft tan, golden Abercrombie & Fitch models but end up looking like bearded, homeless hipsters). They take no modern technology apart from a radio and along the way they face storms, sharks, and all kinds of sea dangers. It's an adventure *par excellence*, and its based on a true story! Intriguing characters, twisting plots, conflict, resolution, and purpose—it's the stuff of a great story. Who doesn't love a good story? We even speak in stories. What if I bulleted Kon-Tiki: anthropologist, sea adventure, you should see it. Not so

compelling, but if I describe it the story, its more compelling. We also learn through story. You remember the story portions of a sermon more than the points (now the goal of preaching isn't mere memory, but an encounter with Christ). Unfortunately, fewer people are reading stories. 58% of adults never read another book after high school. Instead, we want to watch stories. The average American *watches* 34 hours of video a week! We love stories, perhaps too much. Today we are beginning a new sermon series entitled: *Story / The Narrative of God's Redemption*. Tim Keller notes: "Many people think of the Bible as a book of moral teachings with stories sprinkled through to illustrate the teachings. But it's a lot better than that... the Bible is a *single true story with teachings sprinkled through to illustrate the story*." Depending on how you count it, 2/3rds to 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the Bible is narrative, and yet, a majority of Americans can't name the four Gospels. Maybe you've seen Jay Leno's "Jaywalking", where he interviews random people on the street about current events or the Bible? He asked one lady: "Who were Cain and Abel?" Guess how she replied: "Friends of Jesus." Another: "Who was swallowed by the whale?" Guess: "Moby Dick." Now, while you might get those right, I wonder if you could put the whole Bible together as a single story? Do you know now the story answers important questions of life: Where did we come from? What is our purpose? Why is the world the way it is? What will the

future be like? Over the next ten weeks we will cover the whole story from Genesis to Revelation to better understand the story. **[chart]** We will move through the six sub-stories: Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, New Creation. Ill come back to this chart and explain its significance along the way, but we can only do so much on Sundays, so we'll be diving into even smaller narratives each week in City Groups. If you're not in one, this is a great time to jump in. Check the site. Keller says the Bible is "a single true story." A single, true story? We've thought a bit about the single biblical story. Let's look now at the idea of it being the *true* story.

## **True Story**

In the 70s, the government of secular Quebec commissioned philosopher, Jean Francios Lyotard, to write a "report on knowledge." In it he describes postmodernism as: "incredulity (disbelief) towards metanarratives." The French term for metanarrative means "big story." A friend of mine just released a book called Big Story that summarizes the Bible. If postmodernism is disbelief or suspicion of big, sweeping stories, then this pits Christianity against postmodernism. I read Lyotard in seminary, but apparently not closely enough. As it turns out, he is not anti-big story. A metanarrative, it turns out, is more than a big, explanatory story such as The Odyssey, Buddhism, or Christianity. What's the

postmodern rub with metanarratives? James K.A. Smith points out that Lyotard disbelieves: “not of the scope of these narratives but the nature of the claims they make.” What is the **nature of a metanarrative**? Essentially, he says that these kinds of stories *try to prove themselves through appeals to universal reason*. Science, or naturalism, he says is one these stories; it asserts itself as true based on the situated reason of scientists and philosophers. He notes: “the state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as epic.” In other words, **he’s saying the story of Science assumes that it can account for everything based on a universal, scientific rationalist account of the world**. It enthrones Enlightenment reason and throws everything else out. That’s oppressive; it’s what postmodernism can’t stand. Self-righteous, self-legitimizing stories that appeal to universal reason. What about all the pre-modern stories? Tribes, and myths of Fatu Hiva of Polynesia, and Bible stories? Enter Post-modernism. It’s a critique of modernist superiority. So PoMo doesn’t have a problem with big stories, just stories that co-opt reason in *support of their own hyper-rationale view of the world*. So where does this leave Christianity? Does postmodern incredulity toward metanarratives rule the biblical Story out? No, because the Biblical Story isn’t based on universal appeals to reason. It’s based on faith. Its faith informed by reason, not reason informed by faith. You have to trust the story.

This is where a lot of us have trouble. When suffering or scientific claims come along, all of a sudden our boat is tipped. Why? Because our first reaction is to trust reason not God. Our impulse isn't to continue in the story; its to eject into metanarrative of Science. At its crux, Christianity isn't co-opting reason to make a power play on your mind. Instead, it's asking you to make a choice, to have faith, to immerse yourself in the story and see if it's worthy of your trust. It's like the five men who followed Thor across the Pacific to prove his theory true. When his crew doubted, he didn't appeal to reason, he upbraided them saying: "Have faith!" The Bible is a story we immerse ourselves to experience its truth, to know the God of the story, to feel his narrative detail. You can't test the authenticity of the Christian story from the shore. You have to jump in, and its there that you find out whether or not it can float.

### **Good Story**

It's a single story, it's a true story worth trusting, but is it a good story? We want a good story. What makes a story good? Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* have to be one of the best fantasy stories. Tolkien meticulously creates what he calls a secondary world, the world of Middle Earth, filled with elves, orcs, dwarfs, goblins, aents, magicians, hobbits, and men. He labors to create a secondary world complete with languages and distinct

cultures. Fascinating. In an essay on his story telling, Tolkien notes that: “a good sub-creator hopes the peculiar quality of the secondary world is derived from reality or flows into it.” But isn’t *The Hobbit* fantasy? Not strictly. Tolkien is concerned with reality. How? The peculiar quality of the world touches down in reality. He describes this intersection as: “a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is...a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, “Is it true?” You see, **what makes a story good is not pure imagination, but its intersection with reality, its ability to narrate a true account of things.** Like a winning lotto ticket, you scratch the surface off of the story and underneath you find something that resonate with reality, something that touches down into real life. It might **capture your desire for joy, your experience of pain, or your longing for purpose.** In *Kon-Tiki*, I found myself turned for joy each time crew members were rescued from death. In *The Hobbit*, where Bilbo, the Dwarfs, and Gandolf are trapped in the trees at the edge of a cliff, fires blazing around them. The great, white Orc and his soldiers barrel down upon them, snapping the trees, causing them to dangle over the cliff. Tension. In the book, theres a similar scene, where before tumbling to their peril, Bilbo exclaims: “The Eagles! The Eagles are coming!” Then in the nick of time the great eagles (called by Gandalf) swoop down to rescue them. In a moment, Tolkien simultaneously captures the humbling

feeling of desperation and the thrilling hope of rescue. He uncovers our real longing for rescue, redemption, and joy. We all get excited at these points. We've all had these moments, where we realize how much we've spun away, how far we've fallen, and how desperate we are for rescue. We know—hope—for something greater than ourselves to swoop down and save us (Isa. 40:3). This longing, Tolkien says, is *the eucastrophe* (good catastrophe)—the sudden happy turn in a story, which pierces you with a joy that brings tears." It's when the story reaches through the pages and grasps your beating heart and seizes your longings. "Weeping may last for the night but a shout of joy comes in the morning" (Ps 30:5). The eucatastrophe, Tolkien points out, is the gospel of Jesus. In other words, all great stories uncover reality, and in uncovering reality, we touch upon the one, true Story; the gospel story. In the Gospel, we encounter, not just an awe-inspiring narrative, but **the sudden, happy turn for all humanity and it hinges on the person of Jesus!** After his death and resurrection, Jesus appears to hundreds of people to retell the story. To his disciples he says: "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Jesus takes the three primary divisions of the Old Testament to say, the story of the Scriptures is about *me*. He reads the story in a Christ-centered way to show that the sad state of

humanity can take a sudden turn for joy *in him*. How? Jesus goes on: “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Christ takes the deepest, darkest sadness—God’s judgment for our sin—and overcomes it to offer us God’s life. He offers us what we are longing for, a sudden turn from sadness, which pierces you with a joy that brings tears. The perfect God sacrificed for imperfect men. What makes a story good is what makes it true; its ability to uncover reality, to scratch the surface of our longings—to be comforted, thrilled, and rescued. A single, true, Story. Hold your nose, jump in, and immerse yourself with us this summer. See if it floats. If you’re already in the story, then keep trusting and keep telling. In the words of Jesus, “You are witnesses of these things” (46-48). Tell the story.