

God's Story

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On the one hand, this is a special day. Ten years ago in April we had our very first Sunday gathering as a church. Forty of us entered a little coffee shop on Congress called *The Hideout*, got some coffee, and made our way to the small performance theatre located in the back. The seats squeaked, the light was dim, and if you came in late you had to walk right past the stage and up the lone, center isle. Of course that wasn't a problem because Austinites are never late. We had two city groups, no money, and a lot of dreams about how we could become *a church that so believed the gospel we made our city better*. The city groups multiplied, occasionally dying and being reborn, and we grew baptizing people in Barton Springs as they came to repentance and faith in Jesus, rejoicing in sins washed away and being dressed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. As an imperfect people clinging to a perfect Savior, we had our fair share of failure, struggle, suffering, and heartache. But we kept going. In three years, we moved three times. Our next gathering spot was on 6th Street, where we used the two cleanest named venues—*The Parish* and, across from *the Chuggin Monkey*, we dropped our kids at *Friends*. This season was marked by significant growth in mission and in numbers. Our Sunday gatherings were particularly sweet. When *The Parish* got bought out, we reluctantly moved just south of downtown to the Highball, next to Alamo Drafthouse. Kids met in wildly decorated karaoke rooms. We added elders and deacons, started City Seminary, Music for the City, gathered and scattered as communities of light in our neighborhoods, and then moved to the Ballet about seven years ago, where we had an explosion of children, formalized mercy ministry to the marginalized, and helped plant Redeemer Roundrock, Church 22 Montreal, and City Church Dublin, changing our vision statement to renewing cities socially, spiritually, and culturally with the gospel of Jesus. We're still baptizing, still discipling, still sharing the incomparable news about Jesus, still seeking to be *the kind of church that makes the city better*. To those of you who have been with us over the years, and the new additions—thank you. Thank you for persevering. Thank you for serving, especially when you are exhausted. Thank you for your faith, hope, and love. Thank you for clinging to Christ. God sees your sacrifice, your service, and he is pleased [leaders stand]. Now, when Joshua reviews Israel's history he has to cover, not just ten years but hundreds of years. As he recounts their history, he marks off the time of the *Patriarchs* (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob); the *Exodus* (Moses, Aaron, Egypt), and the recent *Conquest of Canaan*. *And here's where we begin to see that our 10 year anniversary isn't so special*. Joshua gathers all of Israel, high to low, to give them direction before he dies. Notice where they gather, "And they presented themselves before God" (1). Translated literally, "*before the face of God*." They gathered not to adore Joshua's face but bask in *God's face*. No cult of personality here, only the community of YHWH—the God who was, who is, and who is to come. So Joshua recounts their story as God's story, a history of what God has done not what they have done (v3ff): *I took your father Abraham, I gave him Isaac; I gave him Jacob and Esau. And when you were enslaved in Egypt, I sent Moses; I plagued Egypt; I brought you out. And in the conquest, I brought you to the land, I delivered; I destroyed; I drove them out and gave them into your hand: it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant* (12–13). The conclusion? We are ordinary; God is extraordinary. We are ephemeral; He is eternal,

powerful, sovereign. Life is not a story about you, or me, or a single church; it is a story about God. And when we get this, and it's a progressive thing, we begin to order our story around God, to prioritize worship, fellowship, service, mercy, justice, evangelism, discipleship, church planting. We begin to choose God over ourselves. We fall in line with the meaning of history. How does that happen in a person? When Joshua challenges Israel choose this day whom you will serve, they choose YHWH. He replies "[You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins](#) (19). God's holiness precludes us from serving him. We need to be brought out of our sin and placed into a holy state, like the priests, to serve him. And if you look back through the history, you'll see little *redemptive twists*: Abraham and Sarah decades of infertility, God gives them Isaac. **Life out of death.** Israel hopelessly enslaved by Pharaoh; God brings them out. **Freedom from slavery.** Balaam ready to curse Israel, and God forces him to bless them. **Blessing instead of cursing**, freedom instead of slavery, life out of death. *Do you see him bringing out? Is there a sin God needs to bring you out of? Call on him. He wants to put a redemptive twist in your story.* What does history tell us? God in control? Absolutely. But it also tells us God is a Redeemer. He uses his power to redeem when had no obligation to. Consider their origins. Abraham wasn't a noble patriarch waiting to act; he was a moon-worshipper. He'd ordered his life around another god. But God being rich in mercy brought him out, out of idolatry and out of Ur, to change the course of history. See God was cutting a redemptive path through man's sorry history to populate a new city in a new land. Years later God would intervene in Israel again to bring a people out. Jesus standing, on a mountain speaking with Moses and Elijah, and they "[spoke of his departure which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem](#)" (Lk 9:31). What departure? The Greek word is—exodon—a play on words with the *exodus* rescue, the bringing out of the people of God. Except this exodus is fulfilled through an inversion of power, a redemptive twist, where the Son of God *suffers to bring us out into freedom from sin, and dies to give us life, is cursed so we can be blessed.* Blessed how? To stand before the face of God, behold his beauty, sovereignty, redeeming grace. The proper response? Joshua puts it well, [Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness](#) (14). Baptized in an ocean of grace, the right response is to serve him, sincerely (from the heart) and faithfully (all our lives), to order our lives around Jesus. To value his worship (Sundays), his people (City Groups), his mission (mercy/justice/evangelism). To live not just for ourselves but for others, for the city so others can be brought out and reach the final city, the dwelling place of God with man ([put Rev 21:1-4 up](#)), where there will be no more tears, only joy. Today we celebrate Jesus because the story of God is the story of Christ, merciful, sovereign, redemptive. Could our stories be about anything less? In the words of the theologian, Dr. Who "We're all stories in the end. Make yours a good one." Let's make our story his story, not only for ourselves but for the sake of the city.