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November 2016

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## **THE GREAT STORYTELLER:**

### **Setting the Stage**

My sister, daughter and I recently watched the video of a Hollywood movie made in 1968 (almost 50 years ago!), William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. It was marvelous, head and shoulders above the stuff commonly turned out by Hollywood nowadays.

I was impressed by the masterful way that Shakespeare set the stage for the story of the young couple whose love for each other was doomed by the feud and burning hatred their families, the Montagues and the Capulets, held for one another.

Every good storyteller frames and enriches his story by setting the stage culturally and psychologically. Without the appropriate setting, the story is thin and perhaps even incomprehensible.

Stories capture our imagination. They stir our emotions and speak to our hearts. Stories can motivate us to re-evaluate the world and our place in it. They can affect the way we think and the way we act. There has never been a storyteller like God. Think of the story of Abraham taking his son Isaac to offer as a sacrifice; the story of Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt by his own brothers, his tribulations in a dungeon, and his miraculous rise to power and subsequent rescue of those same brothers; the story of Moses and the burning bush, his call to go to Egypt and rescue Abraham's family that had become an enslaved nation.

Think of Jesus: His virgin birth, His baptism, His testing in the wilderness, His call of twelve men to be His disciples, His supernatural ministry (healing the blind, walking on water, raising the dead), and His unmatched teaching and preaching, always embellished and enlightened by His stories and parables.

God is the great storyteller. The Gospel itself, the Good News of God's love and rescue of a doomed race, is the story of God's unimaginable love that led Him to sacrifice His own Son, mirrored, of course, by the story of Abraham and Isaac. This is just one example among scores of how God set the stage historically and culturally so that men could have a grid to comprehend God.

Imagine what would have happened if God had not set the stage in this manner. Alex - "Hey, I heard there is a man in Asia who claims he is God." Carl - "So what? Many crazy people have claimed that." Alex - "But I heard he is healing the blind and raising the dead." Carl - "Aw, come on. You don't really believe that, do you?" Alex - "And I heard he was executed so that we could come to God." Carl - "What? That doesn't make sense. I don't understand."

God had to set the stage by a progressive revelation of Himself, first, to a man, Abraham; then to Abraham's family, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons; then through a nation, the Israelites; through priests and prophets and kings; through a complex moral, ceremonial and civil law; through songs and prophecies and a detailed history; and it all climaxed in the birth, life, death and resurrection of the One whose way was prepared by all of this amazing history. With painstaking care, God revealed Himself, all the while shielding man from His glory and omnipotence in order to protect man's free will. And God carefully orchestrated the recording and preservation of this revelation on skins of animals and rocks and papyrus stalks and paper, starting perhaps as early as 4,000 years ago!

God ordered a man, Abraham, to sacrifice the son that God Himself had given to the man and his wife in a supernatural way. When the man raised the knife to slay his son, God intervened and pointed to a ram with its horns caught in a thicket. So God was identified by a new name, *Jehovah-Jireh* (or *Yahweh-Yireh*), "*God our Provider*," or "*The Lord will provide*." (Genesis 22:14) Two thousand years later, that name is applied to Jesus Christ, *And my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*. (Phil. 4:19)

The Hebrews become slaves (*The one who sins becomes a slave to sin.*) in Egypt (the world) under a wicked Pharaoh (Satan). A deliverer (Moses/Jesus) comes, and with plagues and miracles (signs and wonders), leads them out (salvation), through the Red Sea (water baptism), through a cloud (Spirit baptism), through the wilderness (testing), to a mountain (Moriah/Mt. of Olives), where the law and a covenant is made (Old and New Testaments), to the Promised Land (Israel/the victorious Christian life). It would appear that someone a lot smarter than Shakespeare was at work behind the scenes. Amen?

A young man chosen by God (David/Jesus) defeats a wicked giant (Goliath/Satan), is tormented by an evil king (Saul/Satan) for 13 years (wilderness experience), becomes king of the Jews. One of his Psalms (the 23<sup>rd</sup>), starts, *The Lord is my Shepherd... Jehovah-Raah*. Two thousand years later, Jesus declares, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.* (John 10:11).

The parallels could be expanded on and on: *Jehovah-Nissi, The Lord our Banner.* (Exod. 17:8, John 15:13). *Jehovah-Shalom, The Lord our peace.* (Judges 6:24, Eph. 2:14). *Jehovah-Tsidkenu, The Lord our righteousness.* (Jer. 23:6, 1 Cor. 1:30). *Jehovah-Shammah, The Lord is present.* (Eze. 48:35, Heb. 13:5). *Jehovah-Rapha, The Lord our Healer.* (Ex. 15:26, James 5:15).

My friend, Ford Wilson, a lifetime missionary in Mexico, wrote a 400-page book, The Trinity as Revealed in the Old Testament, showing, among other things, that in the Old and New Testaments Jehovah and Jesus are called by the same titles and names, with pages of Bible references: The Beginning and the End, the Alpha and the Omega; the Final Judge of All; the Truth, the Amen, the Light; the Creator; King of kings, Lord of Lord, King of Glory; God, Jehovah, I Am, Lord, Adonai; Rock, Stone, Foundation; Savior, Redeemer; Author or Fountain of Life; Shepherd (King) of God's people; Husband, Bridegroom of God's people.

Our God is the Great Storyteller as well as the Author and Producer, and the Star, of this play in which we are living. You and I have the opportunity and privilege of reading and studying the Book He so painstakingly constructed where our amazing God is revealed in a thousand subtle ways. Thank you, Lord!

## **BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR**

Robert Morris recently had a succinct teaching about God's final judgment, and it is important that we be absolutely clear about this subject:

When this life is over, we all, everyone on earth, will stand before God to be judged. We will be judged for what we believe and for what we do.

We will stand before either The Great White Throne, which is the fate of those who reject Jesus Christ, to be condemned and judged for degrees of punishment according to all the things they did on earth: *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it....and I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.....And they were judged, each one according to his works.....And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.* (Rev. 20:11-15)

Man's every act on earth is recorded in the "books" that will be opened on that day, and there are degrees of punishment in hell: *For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.* (Eccl. 12:14)

Note Jesus' warning to the cities where He lived and ministered during His time on earth: *Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum....if the works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained to this day."* (Matthew 11:20-24) Jesus warns the little towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, where he performed miracles of healing and deliverance from demons that in the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon and Sodom than for them. If it will be more tolerable, it means there will be degrees of punishment. Right? What does this say about people in our land where there are churches and Bibles and television and radio preaching but who choose to live rebellious, immoral, addicted lives of degradation rather than turn to the Savior who suffered to purchase their freedom?

**BELIEF – determines where we will spend eternity, heaven or hell.**

- *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (John 3:16)
- *For whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* (Romans 10:13)
- *And he (the Philippian jailer) brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”* (Acts 16:30-31)
- *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* (Eph. 2:8-9)

**BELIEF must be demonstrated and proved by a changed life:** There is a very significant point that Jesus made at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that sobering point that belief in Christ must be demonstrated. Jesus said, *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven.* (Matt. 7:21-27) The little book of 1 John seems to have been written as a litmus test to show people whether they have truly received the gift of salvation. John says, *These things were written so you may know you have eternal life.* (1 John 5:13) John says that there are three tests that indicate that a profession of Christianity is true or false: The test of belief (2:22), the test of obedience (1:6), and the test of love (4:20). He brings all three tests together in 5:1-5.

The Apostle Peter, likewise, felt that people should not be casual and blasé about their salvation, and in the first chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter he says that “brethren” should *make their call and election sure.* (2 Peter 1:1-11)

**BEHAVIOR – determines how we will spend eternity, whether reward or punishment.**

- As mentioned above, for those who are lost there are degrees of punishment in hell.
- For those who are saved, there are degrees of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.* (Romans 14:10, 12)

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God... (2 Cor. 5:10-11)* (Note that it is no casual thing for believers to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to have our Christian lives evaluated. Paul said that it will be a time of terror.)

*For no other foundation can one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.* (1 Cor. 11-15)

To sum up: At the end of this life on earth, every person will go before the righteous God for a final judgment. There are two places of judgment, The Great White Throne for the lost; and the Judgment Seat of Christ for the saved. **You and I determine which of these judgments we attend. It is determined by whether we bow our knee and receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.** (John 3:16-21) Someone will have to pay for our sins. When Jesus died on the cross, He took all our sins on Himself. He paid the price for our sins. If you refuse to let Him pay that price, then you will have to pay the price. God has turned all judgment over to Christ. He is the One who will be on the throne. *For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son.* (John 5:22)

Those who have received Christ will be rewarded for their acts of love, obedience and service. So Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 what we should do: *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

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## **FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS**

- The great crisis in life is the surrender of the will to God: not just believing in Him but bowing down and surrendering your life to Him. God never crushes a man's will into surrender. He never begs and pleads, He just waits. Have you surrendered your will, your life, to Him? Are you going to do that or not? When will you decide?
- To be born again means that I see Jesus, I see God. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* (John 3:3) Can you see Him?
- Am I trying to stop sinning or have I stopped sinning? *Whoever is born of God does not commit (practice) sin.* (1 John 3:9) To be born of God means that I have the supernatural power to stop sinning. Have you stopped doing those things that hurt your conscience, or have you beaten your conscience into submission?

## **EMOTIONAL ADDICTIONS**

I saw a documentary on PBS about a mountain climber who watched his two best friends fall to their deaths from a mountain the three of them were climbing in Alaska. He almost froze to death that night, and lost part of his nose and some fingers and toes, and was rescued by a team who risked their lives to save him. A year later he again had to be rescued from another mountain. He now has a wife and new baby. He was asked how he felt about putting other men's lives at risk and also risking the loss to his family if he were killed while mountain climbing. He said, "That's who I am," and that he had to be true to himself. In other words, his fun, his thrill, his endorphin rush outweighs all other considerations and is worth sacrificing his life and the lives of strangers and even his family. I think that is called idolatry.

It seems to me that this emotional addiction to excitement is behind a lot of things in American life: from drugs, to risky sex, to sky diving, to high risk adventure travel, and gambling, to ever higher roller coasters. It might even explain why many Christians want a big show in their church services. But 95% of life, including the Christian life, is normal, mundane, every-day living. It is going to work, driving in traffic, paying the bills, being faithful to your spouse, studying your Bible, striving to know and obey God, praying day after day without seeing any answers. It is perseverance, without flash or excitement.

On the other hand, Christianity is not boring. Read the Book of Acts. Imagine being in an ongoing vital relationship with the Creator! But the church has in some cases reduced Christianity to an intellectual pursuit, *having a form of godliness but denying its power*. No wonder young people are bored. They are not being challenged to give their lives to Christ in a radical commitment, to risk their lives in the inner city or in the Muslim world or wherever God leads them. And since there is in the heart of young people this universal desire for adventure, they look for alternate ways of expressing their manhood.

A friend of mine has recently gotten involved with prison ministry and has seen God do some exciting things. But he returned from a recent seminar completely exhausted and said he had learned that ministry is hard work. Yes, it is! It is exciting and fulfilling and rewarding.....and it is at times drudgery with nothing to show for it. Christian service is by faith, and the results usually remain hidden until judgment day. If we will not put our hands to the plow and keep plowing and plowing, the harvest will be meager. Are you and I willing to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord?

## **CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART** (From my Priceless Files)

God entered into a covenant with Abraham, and the sign of that covenant was that he and "every male among you" was to be circumcised. Boys were to have this done when they were eight days old. (Genesis 17:10) Moses told the Hebrews that this act was to be the physical sign of an inward reality – that they were to circumcise their hearts and repent of their stiff necks (Dt. 10:16). Colossians 2 connects circumcision to the cross and our dying to our old nature.

About 30 years ago Doris and I became acquainted with a dear couple in Ft. Collins. They were going through the fire of testing. The wife was a nurse at the big hospital there. She told us that she always assumed that circumcision was a quick, painless procedure. One day a team was performing this operation on a little boy and she decided to watch them. She slipped into the room and was shocked by what she saw. Without any anesthetic the doctor started cutting the foreskin with a pair of scissors. The infant screamed, flailed, lost his breath. Tears ran down her face as the procedure went on and on. God initiated this practice! Our friends felt that they better understood how painful it is to cut away the flesh of our fallen nature.

Many assume that the circumcision of the heart is a painless procedure. I just got acquainted with a mature couple who are going through an interminable season of suffering. Every aspect of their lives has been touched: their children, finances, health, friendships. They understand the process, the purpose behind it. But at times the agony is so terrible that they become confused and disoriented. They weren't given any anesthesia and refuse to anesthetize themselves. Even as Jesus refused to accept the wine and drugs that were proffered to Him at the cross.

If the purpose of Christianity is to make us comfortable, none of this makes sense. If the purpose is to make us Christ like, then it takes some painful surgery. God never did explain to Job why he was going through such an ordeal. All He ever really implied to Job was, "Trust Me."

Perhaps someone needs to receive this encouragement today. James says to, *Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials*, for God is at work with His sharp scissors. Our condition is far more desperate than we imagine, and God's love is far more extreme. Trust Him.

## **POST FISHING REPORT**

Last month I reported on the heart attack I had while fishing on the Grand Mesa. (I have been instructed by my doctor to temporarily give up mountain fishing, as well as participation in the Iron Man Triathlon and wing-suit flying.)

I'm getting along fine, taking a slew of pills daily for the first time in my life, and going to physical rehab at the hospital three times a week. I received a part of my bill from the hospital - \$88,000, and nearly had another heart attack. Thank God for Medicare and a good supplement or I would be standing on a sidewalk with a cardboard sign, "Will Preach for Food."

Thanks for your many prayers, calls, cards, and emails!

God Bless  
Glenn

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