



the Story

How the History of the Universe Impacts Yours

The Story

“Once upon a time...” is a classic line in English. It is the best way to begin a story. Stories, of course, are not limited to English; human beings have told each other stories since the dawn of time. The reason we do so is because stories communicate the deepest truths of life. Historian and theologian N. T. Wright says: “A story is the best way of talking about the way the world actually is.” Fictitious or factual, stories have the power of transmitting satisfying answers.

There is a true story that is larger than life: the story of the Bible. On it, we find the answers to life’s biggest questions: Who am I? How should I live? Where can I find love? And so on. In this guide we will dive deeper into the biblical story, in company with the sermon series *The Story*. I invite you to grab your Bible and plunge into the greatest story ever told!

Chapters from The Story

Chapter 1	God
Chapter 2	Creation
Chapter 3	War
Chapter 4	Israel
Chapter 5	Messiah
Chapter 6	Church
Chapter 7	You
Chapter 8	New Creation

How to Use This Guide

Congrats on making Bible study a priority! This is a simple study guide to be used in companion with the series *The Story*. There are five devotional readings on this and each other guide. This is how I suggest you use them:

- Pick a time and place to read the daily devotional. It should take you as little as 10 minutes (and as much as you would like).
- Read it from Sunday—Thursday. That way, you’ll have a couple of days to catch up if you fall behind.
- Make sure you start and end with prayer.
- If you have extra time, meditate and further study the passage of the day.
- Write down your answers, and any other thoughts you may have had while studying.
- Try joining the prayer meeting on Tuesday nights, at Parker Task Force. We will take a few minutes to review the study guide.
- **Pro tip:** pick a partner to study together. You can sync up once a week, or as often as you’d agree on, and remind/encourage each other.

RESOURCES CHAPTER 5

Gorman, Michael J. *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

Johnsson, William G. *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015).

Johnsson, William G. *Jesus of Nazareth: His Message, His Passion* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015).

LaRondelle, Hans. *Christ Our Salvation: What God Does For Us and In Us* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980).

Stott, John R. *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021).

Chapter 5: Messiah

John 1:14⁽¹⁾ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The cosmic war placed God in quite a dilemma. He could have done many things against the challenge, like annihilating the enemy, or start the universe all over again. But there was one thing he could not have done, because it was logically impossible: vindicate his character by force. Since this was a war of ideas, he had to present a *better idea* to overcome the adversary.

So, he came up with a plan. A plan so creative, so unexpected, that his opponent would have never guessed it. He would not just present his case with words; he would not just show it with actions; he would become his case. He would come to earth –the planet where the enemy had got a foothold– and *become* a man, to display before the universe what he is actually like.

God became a baby. He came to the womb of a virgin young lady, and developed like the rest of us. God was pushed through the birth canal. God cried, was fed, and wore diapers. God learned a trade. God was a Jew man. His prophetic name was Emmanuel, which literally means “God with us.” God in our midst! He remained fully God while at the same time he became fully human. In the words of Paul: “For the entire *fullness of God’s nature* [100% God] dwells bodily [100% human] in Christ” (Colossians 2:9, CSB).

Why would God become a man? To show humans, angels, demons, and everybody else, what he is like. John explains: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). Only Jesus, being in communion with the Father since eternity past, can make God known. That is why he told his disciples: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). John described the ministry of Jesus like this: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8); the devil’s main work being a mischaracterization of God. Jesus came to show the character of God. But the backdrop of this reveal is the cosmic challenge raised by the enemy. Here is God in the person of Jesus, clearing up his name before a universe watching.

Moreover, we see the ministry of Jesus consisting of three main tasks: preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and pushing back the forces of darkness through exorcisms. Each of those tasks were a direct challenge to Satan’s dominion. In his preaching, Jesus was dispelling the lies of the enemy (Mark 4:15). In his healing, he was neutralizing the devil’s power (Luke 13:16). In his exorcisms, he was showing Satan that his time was over. Jesus explained the significance of him expelling demons: “if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).

As you can see, Jesus’ main antagonist in his ministry was not the religious leaders, or the Roman Empire. His actual nemesis was the serpent, to whom God promised since the beginning of the conflict that the Messiah would crush his head (Genesis 3:15). It is impossible to understand the mission of Jesus apart from this warfare framework. He came to launch an attack against the kingdom of darkness. In both his life and death, he came to “bind the strong man” (Matthew 11:29); “to cast out the ruler of this world” (John 12:31).

Questions

How can you see these attributes of God in Jesus’ ministry? Love, justice, faithfulness.

Can you mention ten occasions when Jesus refers to or fights Satan in the gospels?

⁽¹⁾ Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are from the ESV.

Chapter 5: Messiah

Luke 23:46 Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last.

Jesus is the definitive display of the character of God. And the pinnacle of such revelation is his passion. The last week of his life was so important that occupies either a third of space in some gospels (Matthew – Luke), or half (John).

After doing ministry for around 3.5 years, Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. His disciples thought the time to crown him was here, especially after the multitudes welcomed him like a king. But they were confused when his master made a scene in the temple the same day. They were bitterly disappointed when, a few days later, Jesus was apprehended, went through a mock trial, and executed on a cross.

The cross is of the most vicious instruments of torture invented by humankind. It would inflict the worst imaginable pain, without letting the person die. The victim would be in a conscious, torturous state for days, raising himself up for a few seconds to breathe, but self-inflicting excruciating pain while doing it. When the pain was intolerable, he would go back down to rest –but without being able to breathe. He would be on that agonizing cycle until, utterly exhausted, he couldn’t continue to rise, and he would die of asphyxiation. And yet, that was not Jesus’ cause of death. Everybody was surprised when he died just hours after crucified. Whatever killed Jesus was worse than the physical, excruciating pain (see tomorrow’s study).

Who killed Jesus? There were different actors involved, and all of them bore responsibility. First, he died because he was betrayed by a close friend (cf. Psalm 41:9). Judas Iscariot delivered him to the Jewish authorities. Second, Jesus died because of the envy and fanaticism of the religious leaders. They felt threatened and humiliated by Christ (cf. Matthew 23:27). Third, Jesus died because of the ineptitude and cowardice of Pilate. Only he could condemn him to the cross, and only he could release him. Pilate wanted to do so (Luke 23:20) but also to satisfy the crowd (Mark 15:15). He chose the latter. He condemned an innocent man.

Going beyond the obvious actors, Jesus was executed by his own desire. The cross did not take him by surprise; he kept telling the disciples about it (Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; 10:32-34). He categorically said: “¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:17-18). He was not suicidal; he did not take pleasure in giving up his life. He prayed continually to avoid the cross (Matthew 26:39-44), but there was a reason strong enough for him to choose it. Even beyond his choice, Jesus died because it was the eternal plan of the Trinity (1 Peter 1:19-20). Lastly, Jesus was killed by Satan and the powers of darkness. They instigating the whole thing following their own instincts, not understanding God’s plan (1 Corinthians 2:8). Judas was possessed by Satan when he betrayed Jesus (John 13:27). Satan bears the most responsibility.

The actors that played on his death are summarized by Peter: “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23). Jesus died according to God’s plan, was delivered by the Jewish leaders, and executed by the Roman authorities under demonic influence.

In the cross, we observe the God who created the universe dead. That is a mystery of the highest kind. God stopped breathing, his heart stopped pumping blood, his mind shut down. Why would he do that? The next two studies will tackle that question.

Questions

What surprises you the most from the death of Christ? What saddens you the most?

Chapter 5: Messiah

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

The death of Jesus can be understood from many perspectives. But a good place to start is what Jesus had to say about his own mission. He said: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). He was not trying to start a revolution or set up a new government; he came to seek the lost. Who are they? People exceptionally bad? No, he considered the entirety of humanity “lost.” He explained: “I did not come to judge the world but to save *the world*” (John 12:47). His mission was to provide rescue for the lost, who is the entire world. And how would he achieve that? By giving up his own life: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). His end goal was to give his life for many. What does that mean?

As we studied in a past lesson, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). You, I, and everybody else who has ever sinned (which is everyone except Jesus) deserve to die. But God, who is merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love, did not want to let go of his creation. He could have created a new creation, even exactly like us. Yet his covenantal love for us was so strong that he did the unthinkable: he died in our place. As Paul says: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

In the cross, Jesus experienced the death that you and I deserved. Not only the physical death but also the spiritual death, or “second death” as is referred in the Bible (Revelation 20:14). That death is described as “the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9), meaning eternal separation from God. Death is also called “a curse.” The curse of the Law is physical death and eternal separation from God. Now, this is the astonishing reality of the cross: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” He rescued us from the curse –by becoming the curse himself! The most traumatic aspect of the cross is not what physically happened to Jesus: torture beyond words. The darkest aspect of it was the spiritual reality: God becoming the curse in the cross. Elsewhere Paul says: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus became sin! Not just a *sinner*, or *sinful*, but *sin itself*. In the cross he became what God hates the most: sin. That is why he felt the abandonment of his Father, and cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). In the cross, as he turned into a curse, into sin itself, God abandoned him. He entered alone into an infinite pool of darkness. That is what killed Jesus.

He did that to redeem us! (Galatians 3:13), to make us the righteousness of God! (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus compares his sacrifice with a serpent (a symbol of Satan) and the means to provide eternal life: “14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

In the cross, Jesus paid the penalty of our sin; both the physical death and the second death (eternal separation from God). He made that available for all who trust his sacrifice. But you don’t only get a clean slate; you don’t only get the record of wrongdoings erased. You come to be *in Christ*. And *in Christ*, you are loved, accepted, reconciled, adopted, justified, redeemed, transformed, and the inheritor of eternal life.

Questions

What does the cross of Christ mean to you?

Could you define the words in the last line? Accepted, reconciled, adopted, justified, etc.

Chapter 5: Messiah

Colossians 2:15, NIV And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

The cross of Christ accomplished many things. At the human level, it achieved our salvation. At the cosmic level, it defeated Satan and vindicated God's character.

Let us remember the accusations of Satan. He said the Lord was not fit to rule the universe, that his character was not truly righteous. He said that God was keeping his best to himself. Because Adam and Eve doubted the character of God, they fell into sin, and Satan gained authority over this world. How would God clean up his name and regain earth?

He came down. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). In the life of Christ, we see the glory, the loving character, of God. In his death, God's giving nature shines brightly, while Satan's seizing nature is exposed.

In the passion week, Jesus spoke about this dual reality. He said: "³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32). Pay attention to his words: the ruler of the world (Satan) would be cast out. How? By force? No, by Jesus being lifted up. As Christ was lifted up, Satan was cast out. That's why Paul says: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." How could Jesus have disarmed the principalities (demonic forces) in the cross, if he was the one being executed? Because in letting them do the worst to him, they were displaying who they really were. They became a sad and brutish spectacle before the entire universe. In the cross, both the character of God and the character of Satan are in full display. God was vindicated, while at the same time Satan was exposed.

After the cross, there was no shadow of doubt that Satan's was a liar and a murderer. That is why, before the cross, he had access to God's throne (Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1), but after the cross he is not seen anymore (cf. Revelation 4-5, etc.). John shares what happened *after* Christ ascended back to heaven: "⁷Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—*he was thrown down to the earth*, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Revelation 12:7-9). John Stott explains: "As the Christ had been snatched from earth to heaven, the dragon was now hurled from heaven to earth."⁽²⁾ Satan was defeated in the heavenly court. He was also barred from presenting accusations against God or his people.

More fundamentally, God's righteousness is in full display in the cross. He is able to remain just in punishing sin, while also loving humankind by bearing the sin on himself. Paul explains: "²⁵[to Christ] God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness... ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26). According to Paul, the cross not only justifies human beings, but it also reveals he is *just*. The cross is the definitive evidence in the cosmic conflict of God's good character.

Questions

Explain in your own words: what does it mean that Satan was defeated in the cross?

(2) John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 248.

Chapter 5: Messiah

1 Corinthians 15:16-20 ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The single most important thing about Jesus is his resurrection. If he did not rise from the dead, he was clearly wrong about himself. He could not have been sent by God, much less be divine, and everything that Christians believe about him is a farse.

Paul encapsulates the importance of Jesus' resurrection. He explains: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." If Christ died but did not rise, he could not have died for our sins; he was an impostor, or a deluded man. There is no better reason to listen to him than to the thousands of other lunatics that believe that are divine. The resurrection is at the bottom of the house of cards of Christianity. If you take it down, everything else falls too. In that case, we are living an illusion, "we are of all people most to be pitied," we are believing an old wives' tale. As you can see, Christianity is not based on moral principles, compelling stories, or even the Bible! Christianity is based on the historicity of the resurrection.

How can we be sure of Jesus' resurrection? We can do it with what apologist call "the minimal facts" case. There are three undeniable facts about Jesus' resurrection. Believers and unbelievers can agree on them.

First, Jesus did die. Everyone agrees on that; for it is not only registered in the Bible but in extra-biblical accounts. An atheist historian, Bart Ehrman, says "One of the most certain facts of history is that Jesus was crucified on orders of the roman prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate."

Second, his tomb was empty. When the stories about Jesus' resurrection started to circulate, his enemies did not say: "Go look at the tomb! See his body!" No, instead they came up with the lie that their disciples stole the body. All parties agreed that there was no corpse on the tomb. The Talmud, a sacred Jewish book, states that version, proving the tomb was empty.

Third, his disciples thought to have seen him. They did not dream about him; they saw Jesus —the master that was crucified on Passover, and whose body they buried in the tomb— they saw him alive and well a few days later. Non-Christians come up with wild theories: the disciples lied, they experienced collective hallucinations, they confused Jesus with his twin (?!), etc. But the simplest, most likely explanation is that Christ was raised from the dead. He rose historically, physically, literally, bodily, truthfully. He is alive! "In fact Christ has been raised from the dead." And he became the "firstfruits," the first of many more risen people.

The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. It tells us not only that he was who he said he was. The resurrection becomes the assurance that death is a defeated enemy. That the devil has been disarmed, for his master weapon is now useless. "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Christ is alive! By his resurrection he "destroyed death" (2 Timothy 1:10). That is why we can have hope.

Questions

List down all the things that Christ achieved in his death and resurrection.

