

The Biggest Story: The Kingdom Breaks In

Luke 4:16-21; 7:36-50

Often, near the end of a telephone call to my daughter Heather, she ends by asking, “What are you preaching about this week, Dad?” And, I usually say, “I’m trying to decide: Either against sin or about Jesus. Which one would be better?” And, she usually says, “Maybe you could try to put them together into one sermon.”

In spite of that, today, I’m simply going to talk about Jesus. To explain why I’m doing that, let me bring you up-to-date with where we are in our current series that we’re calling “*The Biggest Story*”:

Week 1: There Is a Story -- Pastor Jeff Mattesich took us to Jeremiah 9, a passage that declares to us that God has a plan for the world that he loves that includes a role for all people. “*I know the plans I have for you,*” God declared. Even when you feel you are in exile and your life has no meaning, know that God has a plan that he is working in this world and you (and churches like LAC) are a part of God’s biggest story.

Week 2: What the Story Is -- Jeff Lewis visited us and gave us a breath-taking overview of the entire plan of God that is provided in the Bible – from creation in Gen 1 to re-creation in Rev 21-22. Here’s how we put it in our **LAC Statement of Faith**: *Through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God accomplishes His salvation plan: rescuing His people from sin, making each one complete in Christ, and making all things in His creation new. Our most basic theological convictions are aspects of this gospel.*

Week 3: The Story Begins with One Family – I took us to Gen 12:1-4 and how God chose one man, Abraham, and called him and his descendants to be those through whom God’s good news of salvation would come to the entire world. God’s chosen people were to live distinctive lives that reflected God’s ways to an unbelieving world and, eventually, through Abraham’s family line, blessing would come to all.

Week 4: The Story of Family Struggles – Last week, Pastor Tim Peck surveyed 1/5th of the Bible, the entirety of the messages of the prophets God sent to the descendants of Abraham. God’s people were called to live lives that gave witness to God in this world both through their words and lives – but they kept failing in this calling. Each time they did, God sent prophets to correct them and call them back to him. Pastor Tim put their failures into four categories:

- 1) Unfaithfulness (to God’s commands),
- 2) Arrogance (thinking their superior to other people),
- 3) Oppression (of the vulnerable), and
- 4) Mistrust (of God’s promises).

In other words, Pastor Tim did a whole message about sin – and we saw that, not only were those failures true of the people of Israel but of us all. I was left last week thinking, “We’re still that way. We need help. We need a rescuer who is not as trapped to this kind of failure as all of us are. And that brings us to today’s part of the story, i.e., the heart of God’s good news is that God himself came to this world in Jesus.

Week 5: The Story of Why Jesus came

With the ongoing failures of all people including God’s own chosen people in our minds, we turn today to a very dramatic day at a worship service in Jesus’s hometown, the town of Nazareth. He went into the local synagogue, and delivered the first sermon the Bible tells us that he preached. Essentially, what we find in this sermon is Jesus giving us personally his own mission statement. In the synagogues of Jesus’s day, the preacher stood up to read Scripture and then delivered a sermon based on it. That day, Jesus read mostly from the great prophet Isaiah. This is what he read. **Let’s stand as we read from God’s Word the reading from God’s Word that Jesus read that day:**

Luke 4:16-21

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**”

So, the whole sermon was just one sentence! In the most dramatic way possible, Jesus declared that the promises made to Abraham were to be fulfilled through him! The need for a savior made clear by all the prophets would be fulfilled in him! Everything that the Scriptures had written about ultimately all point to him. That’s what Jesus said. Jesus was claiming that he was the one sent in flesh to bring the good news of God into this broken and sin-filled world. He was the one thought whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Just as the prophets Pastor Tim spoke of last week had foretold, when God’s good news breaks into this world in all its fullness, those in bondage of any kind will be released, those who cannot see or hear will be healed, and those who are oppressed by injustice will be set free. All that is wrong will begin to be made right. As God had said to Abraham in **Gen 12**, “*All peoples in this world will be blessed.*”

But how would this begin? What would it look like when Jesus breaks into people’s lives and fulfills his mission of setting the oppressed free? I have found that the best things to do, when we ask that question, is to read **what follows Luke 4 and see some of what happened when Jesus met people who needed to be saved:**

- 5:12-16 – A man filled with leprosy is healed and is restored to his family and community.
- 5:17-26 – A lame man is healed physically and saved spiritually.
- 7:2-10 – A Gentile military man is blessed and his beloved servant is healed.
- 8:40-56 – An unclean woman is healed and a synagogue leader’s dead daughter is raised to life.
- 17:12-19 – A hated Samaritan is healed from leprosy and applauded by Jesus.
- 19:1-10 – A much-hated Jewish tax collector is forgiven and his life turned around.
- 23:39-43 – A confessed criminal on a cross is forgiven and welcomed into God’s eternal home.

Jesus summarized this well in **Lk 19:10**: “*The Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost.*” People who know and admit they are lost come to Jesus in faith and are saved. And the blessing comes to all who come to Jesus in repentance and faith – leper, Samaritan, unclean woman, Gentile soldier, and convicted criminal.

But not all placed their faith in him and followed him – just as it happens today. What makes the difference? That brings us to **the story of two people Luke records – two stories in “God’s Biggest Story”:**

Luke 7:36-50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.”⁴⁵ You

did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

These 15 verses read like a mini-drama: The setting is, quite clearly (as Luke says three times!), at a Pharisee’s house – the Pharisees usually being a fairly well-do-do group deeply respected and sometimes feared by those in the society. Jesus had been invited to this formal dinner party. Note this: Jesus’s earlier meetings with this group had not gone well. But, I can imagine that he and his followers hoped that this time would be different. After all, a nice uneventful evening at a Pharisee’s home could go far in helping Jesus to be viewed as “acceptable”. If a pleasant social evening could take place at Simon’s house, then those earlier “misunderstandings” associated with Jesus’ touching lepers, pronouncing sins forgiven, and proclaiming good news for Gentile soldiers might be forgotten.

But, then! Oh, no! A woman everyone knows to be a “sinner” barges into the house. She’s wearing one of those perfume flasks around her neck that only prostitutes wear! The only description of her in the narrative is that she was from the town and had “lived a sinful life.” She rushes over to Jesus, weeps, wets his feet with her tears and pours out the perfume oil on his feet.

This is just the kind of thing that everyone hoped would NOT happen. Can you imagine being there at this distinguished home and having this happen – with all these sounds of weeping, sights of impropriety and smaller of perfume? And, of course, the Pharisee host, Simon, noticed.

Simon really didn’t even give Jesus a chance to explain. I think he’d been expecting this Jesus to slip up like this. Letting a sinful woman touch him and kiss him. It was everything that seemed to be unseemly. So, Simon judges Jesus. “He’s no prophet!” Simon thought. “No man of God would allow a woman like this to enter into his life and even touch his feet!”

Let’s not be too harsh with Simon. Would any of us think differently? But, let’s be clear that Jesus did think differently. Simon didn’t speak his thoughts, but Jesus knew what he was thinking – as Jesus always does. Let me ask you now: **Which one do you think characterizes the way you think about Jesus – Simon or the woman?**

So, Jesus tells a story. In it, he tells of two debtors. The first owed about 20 full months’ wages and the second only two. Still, the point is that both had debts and neither had any means of repayment. So, both were in deep trouble. But, in the turning point of the story, both are given some good news. The creditor decided to forgive both of the debts.

Jesus then directly asked Simon, “Which of the two would love him more?”

And Simon, the Pharisee, almost begrudgingly, replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debts forgiven.” “Well said!” Jesus remarked. And then, Jesus delivered the “hammer blow.”

See v. 44, “Then Jesus turned toward the woman and said to Simon...” Jesus’s words are direct. “I came into your house, Simon, and you didn’t even welcome me. You just analyzed and evaluated me.” Jesus lets Simon know that he’s just as much in need of rescue as this woman even though he may consider himself much better than she was. Simon was so much like the people talked about last week, people who thought they were better than others and not simply recipients of God’s mercy and grace.

But the woman was open, transparent and desperate for the help she knew she needed. **The woman longed for the forgiveness of her sins – for acceptance and a place to belong – for a chance to begin again. And, that’s what she got.** Jesus’s words to her, though brief, are clear and powerful: “**Your sins are forgiven (v. 48).**” “**Your faith has saved you (v.50).**” “**Go in peace (shalom) (v.50).**” Shalom – it’s that beautiful word for life as it was meant to be lived. Jesus promised her the beginning of a new life.

Don’t miss this: These two were the two “debtors” in the Jesus’s story and there were two “debtors” in Luke’s story too. **One went home saved. The other remained in need of salvation.**

The Takeaway

I preached from this story when I first came to Lake. **Pastor Albert Tate**, now Sr. Pastor at Fellowship Church in Monrovia, and I studied this passage together. When we were done, he asked, **Pastor Greg, what**

going to be the takeaway from this sermon. This sound like one of those “believe in Jesus, tell others about Jesus and love like Jesus’ kind of sermons.” I said, “Well yes. That’s what it is.”

1. **Believe in Jesus** – Like the woman believed in Jesus. That flask of perfume oil the woman wore was a symbol of the woman’s trade as a prostitute. When she poured it out at the feet of Jesus, it was a declaration that she was turning over every part of her life to Jesus. She was saying, “I will no longer live for myself. I give my past to him and receive his forgiveness. I give my future to him. Wherever he leads, I will go.”

Please know today that, whatever is in your past, Jesus already knows about. There is no person who has gone beyond Jesus’s capacity to love. There is no one whose sins are beyond the reach of his grace. He came to enter into your life – to forgive your past and offer you a new future. Don’t just analyze Jesus. Don’t just come to church to learn more intellectually about Jesus. Pour out your life to him in faith. He will forgive your sins. He will give you a new life – a life of shalom.

2. **Tell Others about Jesus** – Jesus entered into the life of those that no one entered into. He showed us how to live in this world as witnesses. Once we have fallen before him in repentance and faith as the woman did, we have a needed message to tell others about, i.e., Jesus is ready to forgive their debts too if they will come to him. Those who receive this good news become those who tell others good news – not in pride or self-righteousness but in gratitude. People won’t know unless we who have experienced Jesus are willing to go and talk about our experience with him.
3. **Love Like Jesus Loved** – Did you notice that Jesus didn’t begin his conversation with the woman by saying, “Go, clean up your life and then maybe you can come back and talk with me.” No, he entered into her life right where she was. He didn’t leave her where she was but he started where she was. We have to do the same. For those who have embraced a way of life that we find awful, we need to have the eyes and heart of Jesus to see a person made in God’s image, one for whom Jesus died, and a potential brother or sister in Christ. When we try to give witness about Jesus to a person we don’t love, we will only condemn. But, enter into a person’s life as Jesus did, long for the best for that person and, often, the day will come when you can tell them that “Jesus came to seek and save the lost. I know because... I’m one he found.

I’ll now ask Pastor Scott White to come up to introduce and dedicate some of our people who are following the call of Jesus to live in this way...