

Discipleship Moment

Text: Acts 17:10-12

I have always loved stories. Since I was young, I loved hearing my parents read me stories. And as I got older, stories grabbed my interest even more. I remember, my junior year in high school, I took a Greek Mythologies class. As part of that class, we had one of the professors from the University of Kansas, who had recently finished a new translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey, come to our high school and perform portions of the Odyssey. He performed it like an ancient poet would, he had a small, animal hide drum and a short stick which he beat steadily as he recited a large portion of the Odyssey. The drum resonated in the auditorium as it slowed down and sped up, intensifying the pacing of the poem. I was hooked. When I took my faith seriously and started taking the Bible seriously, my love for poetry and story found a better place to give its attention.

We all love stories. Whether we know it or not. If you like reading novels, you like stories, if you like watching movies, you like stories, if you like researching your family history, you like stories, even if you like to keep up with politics and the political drama, you love stories. And these stories shape how we understand ourselves. The stories of cowboys and outlaws shape how (particularly white, midwestern) Americans see themselves, their work, and their politics. Our family stories shape our identity, my family (the Andersons) moved to Maryland from Glasgow, Scotland to avoid religious persecution (they were Anglicans) and served in the Union Army despite living in Maryland. This shapes how my family sees themselves. No doubt you have similar stories that shape you.

This weekend we heard from Pastor Ben about how Scripture holds not only eternal truth, but temporal wisdom. Wisdom for our everyday life. This is so true. But it is difficult, because Scripture is not a textbook, devotional book, manual on how to live, or anything like that. We oftentimes read the Bible like this, but the Scriptures are not these things. In fact, it is quite dangerous to approach the Scriptures looking for answer in science, sociology, or even moral teaching. Because we approach these books of the Bible with a 21st Century mindset and ask 21st Century questions of the text. But the Bible is not a 21st Century book. It is a collection of stories, histories, poetry, proverbs, law codes, and other kinds of writing that were written over 2000 years to a particular people: the Israelites, in a particular place and time: the Ancient Mediterranean world.

That's not to say that the Scriptures don't have moral, science, psychological, or other truths. It just means that the way Scripture was written was not to address these things. The Bible is a story. It starts with "In the Beginning..." (Gen. 1:1) and ends with "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). It begins and ends much like a story. "In the beginning..." and essentially, "The end, come, Lord Jesus!" So, Scripture does not give us truth or wisdom like science or philosophy textbooks, or like a moral teacher might give truth or wisdom. Instead it tells stories and gives prayers and examples of law codes, etc. Scripture is a big story, and it is by hearing the story over and over and over again that our identity is shaped, and we gain wisdom.

Scripture gives us wisdom much like family stories do. And it can captivate our attention like the best movies. We can point people to Scripture not by saying, "Well the Bible says that having sex outside of marriage is a sin." Instead we can capture people's attention by Jesus' example of selfless love, and how God always keeps his promises, and how promises or agreements actually allow us to operate in a healthier way. God enters into formal agreements, called covenants, with the Israelites all the time, and he always keeps his word. He wants his people to know that he will never leave or forsake them. And sexual relationships (and family relationships) are best when they are protected by this same kind of selfless love that never breaks its promises. That's why it's wiser to wait until after marriage to have intercourse and start a family. That is much more captivating to a 21st Century person.

That particular piece of wisdom is not spelled out in Scripture like a moral teaching, instead the stories and histories show us how God operates in the world, which gives us wisdom concerning how we can operate in the world. That is much more compelling. And it is much more difficult to learn and share. I sometimes wish the Bible was simply a moral textbook. But it's not. God, in his wisdom, has given us the stories, prayers, histories, law codes, and letters of Scripture in order to give us wisdom by shaping our identity.

So, this is what we see, Scripture, although it is written to particular people in particular places, it holds truth that still gives wisdom and captivates today. The Scripture has power to bring us to life and get us to realize God's work in our life. It gives us eternal truth and temporal wisdom. Read the story, be shaped by the story. Share the Scriptures.

Going Deeper

Use this resource to start conversations about this week's sermon for your personal devotions, with your family, or with your Life Group. You can use one question per day or all at once.

1. What are your favorite stories (books, movies, family history etc.)? Why do you like these stories? What about them makes them exciting or captivating?
2. How do these stories (books, movies, family history, etc.) shape our identity and change the way that we think about ourselves?
3. How is Scripture like these stories? How is Scripture not like these stories?
4. Click on [this link](#) and watch the Bible Projects video on the overall story of the Bible. How is this way of telling the whole story of Scripture different than what you've heard? How is it the same?
5. Pray that God would give you wisdom to know the story of Scripture. Go to bibleproject.com and check out their videos on the Bible, and be captivated by the story of Scripture.