

CIC 11-26-2023

Did you enjoy last week's testimonies? I got Teresa's permission to review her story from last Sunday. Let's have a look.

Teresa's testimony of the lost wedding ring.

In about a minute, she lays out a story of God's involvement in her life.

Breakdown of Teresa's testimony:

- Principle - God is the finder of lost things.
- Crisis – lost wedding ring.
- Details – tempted to search the trash and a conversation with God.
- Action - trusted God.
- Resolution – the lost ring is found.
- Principle expanded - If God cares about the little things, how much more the big things.

In the business world, her testimony would be called an 'elevator pitch,' something that can be explained in under a minute. When I asked her permission, she said 'I read a lot of children's stories.' Perhaps her familiarity with quick moving stories for children helped her craft her story.

- My purpose in going over her testimony is to show you a great example of concise testimony. I remember in China, standing on an English corner and being asked to explain Christianity. I had about 45 seconds.
- Obviously, a fuller version is better if time allows. There are elevator pitches in the Bible too.

Peter wrote, 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1Pe 3:15 NIV).' Not only do we need the right attitude toward others - gentleness and respect - we need to be prepared.

Therefore, I have two goals for today's message: 1) I want to help you learn how to craft a good story so that you can share the Good News, 2) give you some background for our Christmas series, which begins next week.

## God's Story, My Story



God's big story has a broad sweep from creation to eternity, called a metanarrative. But today let's focus on the Gospel, the Good News of God's wonderful salvation.

### 1. God's Story.

Just as each of us has a story of God's involvement, the early apostles had their story too.

- The Gospels of Jesus were written by four different men, 'none of whom realized at the time of writing that he would be contributing to a four Gospel collection.'<sup>1</sup>
- Jesus lived his life on earth, but those who witnessed his life and ministry chose to highlight various things.
- God's story is Good News (εὐαγγελιζόμενος).

You may wonder why there are four gospels.

### Why Four Gospels?

**1. To preserve the memory of Jesus.** The first generation of Christians was passing away and they wanted to make sure their children knew the story and its significance.

Often around CIC you hear, 'Tell us your story.' Sometimes, we hear in reply, 'what part of my story do you want to hear?' But if we tell them what we want to hear, it spoils the fun. We want you to edit your story, to tell us what you think is important. In the same way, the four gospel writers had reasons for editing their story of Jesus as they did.

### 2. Individual reasons.

- Matthew – to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish expectations and prophecy.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus: A Guide to the Four Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 27.

- Mark – to state genuine Good News as a contrast to Roman Imperial propaganda. Luke and John explicitly state why they wrote their Gospels.
- Luke – ‘So that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught (Lk 1:3 NIV).’
- John – ‘These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (Jn 20:31 NIV).’

Each of these four chose to omit certain facts about Jesus and retain others. For example

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### **Unique Perspectives of the Jesus’ Story**

- Matthew – 300 unique verses.
- Mark – 4 unique stories.
- Luke – 1/3 is unique.
- John – is mostly unique.

Your story is unique from everyone else. God is a creative God and knows just how to reach us. In fact, it would seem odd if we all had the same story. If a detective sees too much similarity among witnesses of a crime, he knows they have been coached and their statements are tainted; their story is not pure.

Starting next week, we are going to look at the incarnation story through the eyes of three witnesses, Matthew, John, and Luke. We are going to examine why they chose to record Jesus’ birth as they did. Get your phones out and take a picture of these thumbnail sketches:

### **Matthew – the most Jewish<sup>2</sup>**

- Emphasizes fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.
- Contains 60 OT quotations.
- Is a great bridge between the OT & NT.
- Is the most organized: is in five main blocks, like the Torah.
- Was the most quoted by the early church fathers (4 c.).

### **Mark – the most action packed<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus*, p. 12.

- It has more miracles (proportionally) than the others.
- It is the shortest.

#### **Luke – the most socially-oriented<sup>4</sup>**

- Conscious of wealth & poverty.
- More attention to women (13) than any other.
- The only gospel to have a sequel (Acts).
- Luke/Acts is 25% of the New Testament.

#### **John – the simplest and most profound<sup>5</sup>**

- Accessible yet deep.
- The most evangelistic of the four.
- Most theologically rich.
- The most popular & researched Gospel overall.

Together, these four gospels contain all of what we know about Jesus.

Usually, we cannot share Jesus' entire story at one setting. It becomes necessary to edit it down to the most important points for that situation.

I am going to read a portion of early apostolic sermon, listen for the main points like we did with Teresa.

1. Paul gets it down to four points: 'I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you ... <sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared ... (1Co 15:1, 3-6 NIV): Then there is a long list of over 500 witnesses to the resurrection. The main points are:

Paul in 1Cor 15:1, 3-8:

- The Gospel is to be shared, vv. 1, 3.
- Jesus died for our sins, v. 3.
- Jesus rose from the dead and there are eyewitnesses, vv. 4-7.
- This fulfills prophecy,

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<sup>4</sup> Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Adams, *Parallel Lives of Jesus*, p. 12-13.

The first thing any writer will consider is the audience. Just who is going to hear this / read this? Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth who were struggling with the resurrection. Hence the list of 500 witnesses.

2. Peter was summoned by the Holy Spirit to a Gentile's home. His sermon has many points. This is the sermon when the Good News broke out from being an exclusively Jewish. Listen for the main points: 'This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after John began preaching his message of baptism. <sup>38</sup> And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> "And we apostles are witnesses of all he did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a cross, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him to life on the third day. Then God allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> ... to us whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses ... <sup>42</sup> And he ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven through his name (Acts 10:36-43 NLT).'"

Peter in Acts 10:36-43:

- The Gospel is to be shared, v. 42.
- Jesus died for our sins, v. 39.
- Jesus rose from the dead and there are eyewitnesses, vv. 40-41.
- Jesus is Lord of all, v. 36. Not just the Jews.
- Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit, v. 38.
- Jesus did good and healed many, v. 38.
- Jesus is going to judge everyone, v. 42.
- Jesus fulfills prophecy, v. 43.
- Sins are forgiven through belief in Jesus, v. 43.

Scholars say this is one of the earliest examples of the early apostolic message.

- When Peter says, 'everyone who believes in him will have their sins forgiven' the Holy Spirit makes an appearance. 'Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message (Acts 10:44 NLT).'
- Paul's sermon is different than Peter's because of the audience.
- God's Story is the Good News, our story is of its impact on us.

Let's move onto our story.

## 2. My Story.

There are several imperfect types of Christian testimonies ...

- The avoiders – those who never tell the story.
- The lateral passers – those who bring the person to the pastor or church to run the ball.
- The exploders – those who just won't shut up and try to tell EVERYTHING.
- The fuzzy shapeshifters – those who are unclear about the core beliefs.
- The superior judges – those who act as if they are now perfect.

God's story is Good News! You can retell it with a smile. God has given you a story too. Some experiences that you can share.

Faith has two sides, a knowledge side and an experience side. Jesus said, 'we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen (Jn 3:11 NIV).'

- Knowledge and experience go hand in hand to help us to decode our lives around us. As children, we learned something was hot by touching it.
- When I was a child, I remember a man who brought his daughter to our church for prayer one Sunday evening. He pastored a church in town who did not believe in miracles or prayer – that was his knowledge. But, when faced with a very sick daughter, he swallowed his pride, and reexamined his knowledge, to visit a Pentecostal church for prayer. He wanted to experience healing. I do not recall how that one played out. Knowledge and experience should grow together as we spiritually mature.

The apostles simply shared their experience with Jesus and what they thought it meant. John wrote, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life (1Jn 1:1 NIV).'

People are so distracted now; you must get to the point ASAP.

- It is okay if you just plant a seed. The Holy Spirit will water it and make it grow in due season.
- Jesus said, 'One sows and another reaps (Jn 4:37 NIV).'

Here are some ways to share your story:

**1. Before / After, Lk 15:24.** The prodigal's father said, 'This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found (Lk 15:24 NIV).'

This method is best with a big contrast. If your story lends itself to a before / after snapshot, learn how to tell your story well. For example ...

The leper in Luke 5 told his story well.

- I was sick, now I'm well.
- I was diseased, now I'm healthy.
- I was an outcast, now I'm accepted.
- I was defiled, now I'm as good as new.
- I was left for dead, but now I have a future.

Not everyone's story lends itself to a simple before / after outline. I was 5 or 6 when I became a Christian. I don't remember a lot of evil in my heart beforehand.

Another way to tell a story is ...

**2. The Bridge, Jn 5:24.** This is one of the simplest ways to share the gospel: 'Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life (Jn 5:24 NIV).' This story is of a road that goes over a cliff; it needs a bridge.

- Recently, I heard someone say, 'I don't think I would be alive today, if it wasn't for Jesus.' Perfect testimony for using the Bridge. My life trajectory was off.

Every story follows predetermined formula. Some stories are so well written that you don't see the formula, but others are so poorly written that you can see the structure.

Formula of most stories: (Ray, put up the points, but I am going to go through them after I have stated them in a list-manner).

- Ideal / perfection. Things are good at the start. 'Once upon a time there lived an old man and women in a cottage in the woods.'
- Crisis. Whether it is a lost wedding ring, a near divorce, an out-of-control addiction, something breaks our assumption of the ideal state.
- Details. The storyteller adds details, such as, it was lost outside in the yard, my wife was Googling 'divorce lawyers,' or I was spending \$1,000 a week.
- Action / turning point.
- Resolution / return to an ideal state. Then Jesus came into my life – the ring was found, I learned to love my wife again, I was slowly delivered from my addiction.

Let me leave you with one more method to share the Good News.

### **3. Romans Road.**

- Ro 3:23 – All have sinned.
- Ro 6:23 – Eternal life is a free gift. ‘wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.’
- Ro 5:8 – God demonstrated His love for us by dying in our place.
- Ro 10:9-10 – We trust and surrender our life to Him for salvation. ‘Declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’
- Ro 10:13 – Our salvation is assured. ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Even the Romans Road lends itself to a story. For example ...

- I was so insecure that I tried to find my identity by doing x, y, z.
- Someone told went through the Romans Road with me and now I know who I am. I am a sinner saved by grace and I have peace with God and myself as a result.

### **Conclusion.**

God’s Story is the Good News, our story is of its impact on us.

We have just come off our mission’s convention and I encouraged you ‘to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Jesus everywhere (2Co 2:14 NIV).’

Share your story, it could have great impact in bringing eternal life to your family and friends.