

THE NEVER-ENDING STORY

Genesis 45:1-15

If someone were to ask me to suggest something they could do to enhance their understanding of the gospel, I would tell them several things. I would tell them to learn something about the history of biblical times. I would tell them to learn the basics of theology. Finally, I would suggest they learn something about literature. So much of the bible is literature. Understanding how stories function will most definitely assist in your understanding of the scripture.

I want to focus on this last piece this morning- the understanding of the scripture as story- because we're presented with a story. Some years ago, there was a movie called "The Never-Ending Story." If you haven't seen it, it's a cute little movie.

The movie is about a boy who finds a book. As he starts to read the book, it begins as just a simple fantasy story. In the story he meets a number of fascinating creatures. All of these are trying to escape something they can't describe. They call it, "the nothing," None of them know what the nothing is, but whatever it is, it's destroying their world.

The book starts out as just an ordinary story. However, as the boy continues to read something strange happens. He becomes a part of the story himself. Eventually he discovers that this story is the source of all stories. As the movie progresses, we eventually learn what the nothing is: illiteracy. The nothing is growing because people have stopped reading. When people stop reading, stories cease to exist.

The boy who is reading the story, however, becomes the savior. He's the hero. His mission is to keep the story never-ending. As long as he continues to believe, he keeps the story alive. As long as he continues to use his imagination, he keeps the story alive. As long as he reads, he keeps the story alive.

Stories are powerful things. They can communicate thoughts, ideas, concepts and feelings. Stories can entertain, instruct, or both. Stories can create a whole new world for us.

Every major religion today has its sacred writings. However, so far as I know, the nation of Israel was the first to use the power of the story to communicate truth about God. Take the story of Joseph. Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers. He becomes the slave of a man named Potiphar.

Potiphar's wife tries to tempt him, and when he refuses her advances, she falsely accuses him of being the aggressor. He is imprisoned for a crime he hasn't committed. While in prison he meets the cupbearer and baker, who have offended the Pharaoh and been tossed into prison. He interprets dreams for both men: the cupbearer is to be restored; the baker is to be killed.

Some years go by, and the Pharaoh himself has a dream. The cupbearer remembers Joseph and tells Pharaoh about him. Joseph is brought forth from the jail cell and interprets the dream. The interpretation helps to save Egypt from a famine. As a result, Joseph becomes an important man in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh.

When the famine finally hits, his family comes to see him for help. Initially, they don't recognize him, but he reveals himself. Moreover, he forgives them their sins, and has them move to Egypt. He reveals that God has been working all along. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Let's consider another story. Consider Moses. He was born as a slave in Egypt, but is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. He learns the truth about his identity and he kills an Egyptian for mistreating a Hebrew. He is exiled for his crime.

After a time, God calls him. He is chosen by God to deliver a message to Pharaoh. The message is, "Let My People Go". At first, he's not recognized. Pharaoh ignores him, but he becomes God's great prophet- God's "high official". Through God's hand, he delivers God's people from slavery and brings them to the promised land where they are redeemed.

Now, if there are any budding theologians in the crowd, I'm going to make you cringe a bit. I'm about to tell the story of Jesus. For the record, we all need to understand, there is no comparison between Joseph and Jesus. Joseph is mortal; Jesus is divine. However, there are some literary similarities in the story if not theological similarities in the characters.

Like Joseph, Jesus is unjustly accused and unjustly punished. Whereas Joseph is condemned to prison, Jesus is killed and if you follow the Apostles Creed, he descends into hell. Joseph is "resurrected" from an earthly prison. Jesus is resurrected from death.

Joseph sits on the right hand of Pharaoh; Jesus sits on the right hand of God. On the road to Emmaus Jesus is unrecognized and reveals himself. Just as Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

Joseph forgives the sins committed against him by his brothers. Jesus forgives all sin committed by everyone- including us. Joseph saves his family from death by famine. Jesus saves us from death by sin- all of us .

God has been working all along in both stories- really, God is at work in every story. Here's the good news. The story doesn't end. We don't have to let the story end, because we can tell it. We can't be Jesus. We can't do the things that he does. However, we could be like Joseph. Joseph is just a man- albeit an important one.

Neither you nor I can save people from their sins, but we can use what power comes your way to help preserve life. If we let God work through us, people will recognize it. We can choose to see the hand of God working even when times are bad. Even when times are difficult.

We can see Jesus working in our own lives- Jesus working through our lives. The story doesn't have to end. It goes on and on and on. It can be recreated again and again. It's always at work in the background. At least at the human level where Joseph operates.

You are a part of this story too. You may not realize that, but you are. The only question is, are you going to tell the story, or are you going to let your part of the story die? To be clear, I'm not talking about telling the story with your lips. Tell the story with your life. Tell the story by how you live, as well as by what you say.

As for Jesus, his story never ends either. Jesus is still active, forgiving sins, making himself known, saving souls, inspiring individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit. He sits at the right hand of the Father for eternity. So long as we are here to tell the story, and more importantly, so long as Jesus is here to tell the story, the story never ends.