

Pastor Keith Miller
Farewell Sermon
Calvary Baptist Church
November 21, 2004

Sermon Title: Redemption: God's Epic/Our Story

Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Big Idea: We belong to God's fellowship of the Redeemed.

Audience: Mixed

Purpose: To help my audience understand the role they play in God's story of redemption.

Hook: The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (beginning @ 2:40-2:50 on DVD)

Frodo is at his wits end, he is ready to give up on the task that he has been assigned: to destroy the ring. He realizes his path is one of danger and despair, he feels the weight of the monumental task of destroying the ring on his shoulders. It's at this point in the story where he feels that he just can't go on.

Listen to Sam's speech again, but taken right from JR Tolken's own pen,

We shouldn't be here at all [Sam says to Frodo], if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually--their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on--and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same--like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in!

I wonder what sort of tale we've fallen into?"¹

Sam assumes that there is a story; that there is something much bigger going on here than they even realize.

¹ *The Lord of the Rings*, p. 696.

This is a question that would be a great help for all us if we wondered it for ourselves: *“What sort of tale have I fallen into?”*

My dear brothers and sisters, there is something much bigger going on here than this farewell sermon, this church, your family, food, my grandmother’s triple bypass surgery, life, death, presidential elections.

There is something much, much bigger going on in this world and you and I are just a tiny but very significant part of it. In his book *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton wrote, *“I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story teller.”*

There is a story that is being told; the title of that story is **redemption** and its story teller is the God of all creation.

It started before creation and its conclusion will be for many, eternal condemnation in the lake of fire, but for some of us, it will be a never ending climax of eternal delight in the presence of the God.

Every Epic includes certain characters, certain hero(s), and often they include certain songs that capture the theme of the story. In our passage we discover certain elements that are a part of the story we find ourselves in...

The first being...

YOUR ROLE (1:26-29)

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Paul begins by exhorting his readers to consider their calling (present imperative). He tells them to “think about the circumstances of their call.” *Not many were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”*

One of the things that I loved about Lord of the Rings was that two little creatures known as Hobbits were commissioned to do the most important and task of the Epic – destroy Salomon’s ring.

Hobbits were reclusive creatures, they were regarded as foolish, weak, and poor in comparison to the rest of middle earth – the least likely to succeed in finishing the task Sam and Frodo were called too.

In many respects, the Corinthians were like the Hobbits. In the world’s eyes they were regarded foolish, weak, and poor. What Paul means by placing the Corinthians in these categories is that in the realm of respect, influence and honor, the Corinthians came up short.

The point Paul is making here is not so much that the Corinthians lacked respect, influence, or honor in the world’s eyes, but that God is not interested in people because the world considers them respectable, influential, or honorable. These categories had nothing to do with God summing the Corinthians into the society of His own people.

In fact God does the opposite, look at v. 27, who does God chose? ***“God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are...”***

What Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand and what we must understand is that God has the sovereign freedom to choose to love those regarded by the world as insignificant for the purpose of putting to shame the world.

Think about it, we put so much value on the wealthy, Actors, Athletes, musicians, presidents, that we regard them as something higher than the average Joe. God does not use the value system of the world in who he summons into the society of His people. That means that God did not see something in you that created in Him a desire to have you on his team.

The point is that God is not looking for the most gifted, popular, attractive, socially elite, highest educated people to play a role in the Epic He is telling. No, God will often chose what the world deems insignificant to be apart of the most life impacting and eternally significant society in the universe – the society of the people of God!

God has been in the business of calling those who the world considered incompetent into His society of the redeemed like...

- An old has-been named Abraham
- A stuttering 80 year old shepherd name Moses
- A prostitute by the name of Rahab
- A daughter of an incestuous relationship named Ruth
- David: a shepherd boy made King who had his share of serious moral failures.
- Joseph: a poor carpenter from a dumpy rural town the size of a football field.
- Marry: a poor teenage virgin from the same dumpy town.
- All of whom make up King Jesus' gene pool.

Why does God do this? Look at v.29, "*so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*"

God removes any possibility to boast that somehow there was something in us that God needed in order to accomplish His task. Why? "*So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*"

But there is more to the Epic we find ourselves in. Let's look at our second point, for without him we are nothing...

OUR HERO: Jesus Christ (v. 30)

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

It is in this passage we discover the Hero in God's Redemptive story: Jesus Christ. Can you see it here, can you see the point that Paul is trying to make? This grand Epic that God is telling is not about you or about me. We are only a small part of God's redemptive story.

The main character, Jesus Christ, stepped into time and space to be made sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. It is Jesus who single handedly defeated Satan through the Cross and it is Jesus Christ who destroyed death by being raised on the third day.

This is why Paul begins verse 30, “*He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus...*” What’s the point? God called the insignificant things of the world into His Son. How did He do that? “*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 Cor. 5:21)

One commentator translates verse 30 this way: “**It is a gift from him that you are in Christ Jesus.**”² I like that, we did not insert ourselves into Christ, God did.

To be “**in Christ**” is to be joined to him. It is the same idea the apostle John has when he uses the word “abide” as it is linked to Jesus. The idea here is that the Christian find’s his/her residence in Christ.

For both John and Paul, to be in Christ is to find your identity in Christ and in His Church. For Paul, it is in Christ that we become a new creation, for we read in the Bible that “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*”

To be in Christ is to be engrafted into the society of God’s people. Paul is very clear here: “**It is a gift from God that you are placed in Christ;**” you were not placed in Christ because you had something to offer His kingdom; God called you simply because He called you.

But that’s not all, God made Jesus “*our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*” In other words Christ becomes for us what we did not have nor could have produced: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.

I want you to see something very significant in vv. 27-28 and v. 30: Notice how Paul crafts his words in vv. 27-28 and v. 30.

Paul shows us in these three verses why God takes the nobodies of the world into the society of God to make them somebodies.

- God chooses **what is foolish** and makes **Christ their wisdom**
- God chooses **what is weak** and makes **Christ their righteousness**
- God chooses **the low and despised** and makes **Christ their sanctification**

² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians;” p. 188.

- God chooses **the nothings of this world** and makes **Christ their redemption**

Isn't that great! What we learn from these verses is that

- Yes you were foolish in the world's estimation but that's ok because Christ is your wisdom. Yours is a relationship with one by whom and for whom all things created exist.
- Yes you were not a person of influence in the world's judgment but that's ok because Christ is your righteousness, and you stand in a place of influence for you are now an ambassador of the King of kings and Lord of lords and priest of the Creator of the Universe.
- Yes you were low and despised in the world's judgment, but that's ok because Christ is your sanctification – you have access to the throne room of God which is a place of privilege. Your identity is Jesus Christ – you wear His name.
- Yes you were considered nothing in the world's judgment, but that's ok because Christ is your redemption – you stand as a child of the King of the Universe, yours is a position of dignity in Christ you are an heir of the King.

Paul's point is clear, when you experienced new birth in Christ, you were joined to Him through faith in his death, burial, and resurrection; Christ became your all and all. But that is not the end, your union in Christ is not only a historical event in your life, but a life long walk with Him.

It is what Jesus meant when he said, ***“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day... Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”*** (John 6:51, 54, 56).

This is what it means to be a Christian: to abide in Him in such a way that he becomes the source of your life and breath. You cannot be a Christian if you do not abide in Christ; for it is only through abiding in Him that He becomes your life, your wisdom, your righteousness, your sanctification, and your redemption.

Jesus makes his point very clear in John 6, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”***

Please understand me, I am not saying that you must first abide in Christ to receive eternal life. What I am saying is that God places you in Christ which is the same as abiding in Christ; it is all God’s doing.

Which leads me to our third point, since it is God who calls the foolish, weak, the despised and the nothings of this world into his society of the Redeemed, we have only one thing to boast in and this is the song we sing as we live out the story God has called us into.

OUR SONG (v. 31)

One thing we learn from God’s story of Redemption is that you and I are not the center of God’s story, God is, this is why Paul writes in verse 31, ***“Therefore, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’*** This is the song of redemption and the song of every breath we take, step we make, word we speak.

Verse 31 is taken right from Jeremiah 9:23-24,

Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."

So what’s Paul’s point? God’s story of redemption is not dependent on our wisdom, on our strength, or on our riches, for it is dependent on Him and Him alone.

Our role in this great Epic is to be used of God through the power of God in His Son for the glory of God. Therefore Christ becomes our boast. Why? Because there is nothing in ourselves worth boasting in except in the One with whom we are identified.

If we are going to boast in anything we must boast that we know Him and are known by Him because Christ has made us ***the righteousness of God*** through his death, burial, and resurrection.

What does it mean to boast in the Lord? I think it means that we all we do and say is an effort to show how great and beautiful our God is. Boasting in the Lord is exulting in Him by magnifying His glory.

William Farley in his article, "God's Highest Passion," defines God's "glory" as...

"His multifaceted perfection put on display. It is, among other things, His incomprehensible love, His infinite hatred of evil expressed in His wrath, His tender mercy, His amazing grace, His love of justice, His boundless wisdom, and His iridescent holiness." Farley further suggests that "God glorifies Himself by loving and exercising each of these traits."³

The purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is the echo of all of Scripture. Boasting in the Lord is exalting in God's multifaceted perfections: His love, His infinite hatred of evil expressed in His wrath, His tender mercy, His amazing grace, His love for justice, His boundless wisdom, and His iridescent holiness: all of which were demonstrated and expressed at Calvary.

We were tailored to this end: to magnify the God of the universe in how we think and how we live. We were created for boasting: boasting in the God of the Bible; pride is a perversion of what we were created to do.

From Genesis to Revelation we see that God is zealous for His glory. One theologian writes...

"From beginning to end, the driving impulse of God's heart is to be praised for His glory, from creation to consummation his ultimate allegiance is to himself. His unwavering purpose in all he does is to exalt the honor of his name and to be marveled at for his grace and power. He is infinitely jealous for his reputation."⁴

In other words, the banner that flies over every act that God has performed and will perform is found in Isaiah 48:11, ***"For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."***

A.W. Tozer, known to our generation as the great evangelical mystic, was right is writing,

"Since He [God] is the Being supreme over all, it follows that God cannot be elevated. Nothing is above Him, nothing beyond Him. Any

³ William P. Farley, "God's Highest Passion," *Discipleship Journal*, May/June 2001, 24-25.

⁴ John Piper, "Is God For Us or For Himself?" (Wheaton College Chapel Address: October 23, 1984).

motion in His direction is elevation for the creature; away from Him, descent. He holds His position out of Himself and by leave of none. As no one can promote Him, so no one can degrade Him. It is written that He upholds all things by the word of His power. How can He be raised or supported by the things He upholds?”⁵

Self exaltation is not a sin for God because He is the highest being. The reason self-exaltation is sin for us is because we are creatures and to cherish, praise, or exalt in ourselves or anything we do is Idolatry.

The aim of all that exists is our Triune God and the purpose of all that exists is to glory in the Him and Him alone; to do anything other than that is Treason against the God of the universe and the penalty is eternal condemnation.

In a book that changed my life as to how I think, live and preach, Edwards wrote a statement that floored me and turned my life upside-down,

No notion of God’s last end in the creation of the world is agreeable to reason, which would truly imply any need, insufficiency and changeability in God, or any dependence of the Creator on the creature for any part of His perfection or happiness.

Though it be true of God’s glory and happiness... are infinite and cannot be added to, and... are perfectly independent of the creature; yet it does not hence follow, nor is it true, that God has no real and proper delight, pleasure, or happiness in any of His acts or communication relative to the creature.

God has a regard of Himself, as His last and highest end, in this work; because He is worthy in Himself to be so, being infinitely the greatest and best [of] beings. Everything else, with regard to [their] worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly are nothing compared to Him.

All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God’s works is included in that one phrase, The Glory of God.⁶

⁵ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961), 40.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory*, by John Piper (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998),

When I read this for the first time, I felt like Neo in the movie the Matrix: waking up to a whole new reality. I never heard it quite like the way Edwards described the purpose of my life. I remember my eyes were suddenly opened to what I believe is thematic in all of Scripture.

What I realized the day I read that statement by Jonathan Edwards and what I have been trying to show you throughout my ministry here at Calvary is that we exist for the glory of God. This is the great theme of God's epic story we call redemption.

The reason why God put His Son on the Cross as a payment for your sin is that you might be enjoy glorifying Him – this is what you were created for! All the joys of and pleasures of life serve to this end: work, intellectual development, friendships, conversations, marriage, sex, parenting – all for the glory of God.

The song we sing is a boasting in the Lord: living and thinking in such a way that puts on display God's multifaceted perfections in your life and mine.

CONCLUSION

God's Epic story of Redemption is the story of how mankind was created for the purpose of glorying in God. How Adam and Eve messed things up for us all by eating the forbidden fruit which resulted in a terrible disease called sin that has infected the entire human race.

God remedies this problem by promising a redeemer to come and die for mankind: that redeemer would have to be God himself in the person of His Son Jesus Christ and He strategically places and uses individuals throughout history to make this possible.

The redeemer is finally born: Jesus, comes to the earth born in an animal's trough, lives 33 years, and dies as the perfect sin sacrifice on a wooden cross on Golgotha. Jews find this message unacceptable because "cursed is anyone put on a tree, and Gentiles find this message to be the ludicrous, for how could God take on human flesh.

Through this act of dying and then rising from the dead, God calls the foolish, the weak, the low, and the nobodies in to His society of people called the fellowship of the redeemed and makes them wise, righteous, sanctified and redeemed in Christ for the purpose of using them to do great things.

This is the small but significant part you and I play in this story.

The average human being is given 650,000 hours to live on this planet. You were designed to live within the society of God's people. You were designed to play the role of God's redeemed in His story of Redemption. Every minute of life is a gift from God to live for Him, don't waste it.

The Bible tells us that ***God has highly exalted His Son and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.*** (Phil. 2:9-11)

One day our King will return; every knee and every tongue will bow to Him as Lord. On that day, will you bow as one who belongs to the fellowship of the redeemed? I hope so.