

SOUTHPOINTE'S DOCTRINAL PHILOSOPHY

Everyone loves a good story. This is why things like movies, books, television shows, and video games are so prominent in our culture today. Upon careful reflection, though, one will find that the human connection to storytelling is not at all a recent development in human history, but is instead far-reaching and deeply profound. For human beings, storytelling is an integral part of the collective human experience we call "life." There is one Story in particular, though, that we believe transcends and even encompasses all others. This Story is both ancient and modern, simple and complex, thought provoking and heart-touching. It speaks provocatively to all those who genuinely engage with it. It aggressively deals with life's biggest questions and yet leaves many of them mysteriously unanswered. It is inherently controversial. It's messy. It's often difficult to grasp. But at the same time, it's often profoundly illuminating. This Story is one that many know, but that few actually understand. This Story patiently waits right under our noses, eager for us to open our ears to the tale that it has been telling for centuries. In fact, this is the greatest story ever told. But most importantly, we believe that this Story is true. The Story we are talking about, of course, is the one told in the collection of ancient writings known today as "The Bible." What most people don't realize about the Bible is that it's not just one big book; it's actually a collection of many books written by many different people over the course of many centuries. As we've alluded to, though, it's our conviction that when we look at all of the individual narratives of Scripture as a whole, a metanarrative emerges, a larger story rises to the surface. The Bible, although many books, actually forms one big Story.

If the metanarrative of Scripture were performed as a live play, for example, we think that it would be comprised of 6 equally important Acts. By retelling and summarizing the 6 Acts of the Story of Scripture in the paragraphs below, we believe that the doctrines and theologies we hold to be most essential and fundamental at SouthPointe (things we firmly stand upon as a community of Christians) will clearly shine through. Any doctrine or theological issue that does not play a vital role in the telling of this magnificent Story is, in our view, non-essential. This is not to say that these non-essential doctrines aren't important; but it is to say that Christians can and should be able to freely disagree on these issues and yet still maintain unity despite their differences in opinion.

In order to tell our Story, however, we must make clear what we believe about Scripture itself. To put it simply and succinctly, we believe what the Bible says about itself: that it was written by human hands, but was also inspired and guided by the very Spirit of God; that it is authoritative and useful for teaching, correcting, and equipping the Church, among many other things.¹

¹ See Psalm 119; Jesus' words in John 16:12-15 and 17:17; Paul's comments to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3.

The Story of Scripture

Act 1: Creation: Our story begins before time, before physical space, before anything for that matter. Our story begins with God. This God, we are told, is One who has, does, and will continue to eternally exist in a realm of His own (outside of our ability to comprehend) and also in an inherent, divine community in and of Himself.² This one-yet-many God felt that His eternal goodness and self-communion was worth sharing and therefore, out of love, started the creation process. With His inexplicable power, this God spoke the universe into being. Everything that this mighty God invented, from planets to particles, magnesium to marsupials, was declared "good" in the eyes of the Creator. But God ultimately had an idea that transcended all others; He desired to create beings that were strikingly different than all the other creatures He had made thus far, ones that could actually know and experience His boundless, eternal love and goodness in a personal way. So that's exactly what this God did. He created human beings "in His image."³ God then commissioned them to live on the earth He had created for them in perfect fellowship and harmony with God, themselves, others, and nature, thus experiencing abundantly full life, life as God intended it. With the inception of these magnificent beings, God deemed His creation "very good" and therefore finished the work He had set out to do. God then proceeded to bask in all of its glory, enjoying perfect fellowship with His marvelous creation.

Act 2: Rebellion: One of God's greatest gifts to these humans was free will. He lovingly gave them the ability to either place their trust and be in relationship with Him or to instead place their trust in other things (namely, themselves). Ultimately, these first humans entertained the lies of the Deceiver and eventually gave in to his empty

² We affirm traditional Trinitarian theology: that God exists as one being but who is expressed in three equal persons—Father, Son, and Spirit. Although we realize that the word "Trinity" is not actually found anywhere in Scripture, we see evidence of God's multi-personage throughout (see especially the creation narrative in Genesis 1; the message of the angel to Mary in Luke 1; Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3, Mark 1, and Luke 3; the Great Commission in Matthew 28; Stephen's experience in Acts 7:55; Paul's explanation of the gospel in Romans 8; Paul's comments in Ephesians 3:14-17; the writer of Hebrews' comments in Hebrews 9:14). We also emphasize God's simultaneous transcendent and immanent nature: that God exists and is present both outside and inside of our universe. In other words, He is both King and Father, Great and Good, above us and present with us.

³ Because of the holiness (a.k.a. "specialness") of human beings in the Genesis creation narrative, we believe that all human beings are both physical and spiritual beings and carry in them intrinsic value and worth. Therefore, all human beings are precious and loved by God regardless of background, ethnicity, language, giftedness, etc. We also believe that the Genesis creation narrative attests to humanity's need for each other (see Genesis 2).

promises, therefore rejecting God's fellowship and way of life.⁴ God clearly taught these people from the beginning that there are always consequences to one's actions; this situation was no exception. Because of their pride and selfishness, the fellowship and communion that humans once experienced with God, themselves, others, and nature was now corrupted and broken. There was now separation between humanity and God, shame and guilt in their hearts, strife between husband and wife, and extreme difficulty in caring for the earth. After this initial rejection of God by human beings, the cycle of sin continued spiraling out of control, infiltrating generation upon generation in greater and greater ways. The world quickly became a place filled with strife, anger, pride, confusion, greed, and death. The world was no longer as God intended.⁵

Act 3: Israel: Though the world was in shambles, God was still love. From the very moment of initial disobedience, He displayed His grace and already had a plan for redeeming the world; God was not about to abandon His dreams of renewed fellowship with His image-bearers. As a result of His gracious love for humanity, God freely approached a man named Abram (later Abraham) and made great promises to him, saying that He would make him into a great nation and bless him in such a way that he and his descendants would be a blessing to all people everywhere. God planned to build and establish a covenant relationship with a kingdom of people who would serve as His ambassadors and representatives on the earth, leading people back into fellowship with their Creator.⁶ In other words, God's plan was to use people to carry out His will on earth. Centuries later, Abraham's descendants, now quite numerous, found themselves enslaved in the oppressive nation of Egypt. After years of crying out to the God of their forefathers for help, God finally answered their pleas of desperation in a mighty way by delivering them from bondage and leading them toward a plot of land He had promised to give to Abraham and his descendants centuries before. On the way to this Promised Land, however, God first led the Hebrew people to Mt. Sinai in order to officially establish

⁴ We believe in a powerful being of evil that strives to work against God called "Satan" or "The Devil." He seeks to draw people away from God. His character is one of accusation, lying, and deceiving, and his aim is to steal, kill, and destroy (see Jesus' words in John 8:44 and John 10:10; also see 1 Peter 5:8).

⁵ We believe that this corruption and brokenness has run so deep that, even today, we all suffer from the same estrangement in our relationship with God, ourselves, others, and nature. Each of us grow up with the natural inclination toward selfishness and pride and therefore all of us have rejected God's way of life for us and experience the natural consequences of our way of life (see God's curses in Genesis 3; Paul's explanation in Romans 3 and 5; Paul's comments in Colossians 1:21).

⁶ "Covenant" is a major and extremely important theme throughout the Scriptures. A covenant is much like a contract except that, unlike a contract, a covenant is inherently relational. Another word we can use to describe a covenant is the word "promise." The best modern day example of a covenant is a marriage; it's built upon a relationship and yet there are still specific vows, promises, roles, and expectations for each party to live by. "Covenant" is what God desires to have with all people.

the covenant relationship that He so greatly desired, giving them a new identity as His chosen people to carry out His mission for redeeming the world. God declared that this nation of Israel was to be His "treasured possession...a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The Israelites wholeheartedly agreed to God's covenant proposal and, because of this, God instructed them how to live full, abundant lives in the new land He was about to give them.⁷ God continually reminded the Israelites of their covenant with Him by dwelling with the Israelites in the tabernacle (in the Most Holy Place) and then later in the temple. As time went on, though, the people of Israel largely forgot about and misunderstood their identity as God's chosen people. Israel slowly became a nation full of idolatry, worshiping other gods at one extreme and arrogantly separating themselves from other nations out of an ethnic and racial elitism at the other extreme. God called, equipped, and used various prophets and other leaders to call Israel back to Himself, but many of their words fell on deaf ears. Israel's continued disobedience led to civil war, the split of their nation, and their eventual and humiliating exile into a foreign land under the Assyrians and then later under the Babylonians. Throughout both the good and bad times of Israel's history, however, God promised them that there would eventually be One whom He would send to restore Israel to what God intended it to be. This "Messiah" would be One greater than all the prophets, kings, and patriarchs of old.⁸ As the centuries passed and Israel found themselves back in the Promised Land but now under Roman occupation, anticipation for this promised Messiah grew ever stronger.

Act 4: Jesus: At the climax of the Story of Scripture, the most unexpected twist became reality. God, the magnificent, infinite Creator of all things, humbled Himself and became a man—more than that, a baby. Jesus, the Son of God and Promised Messiah, miraculously entered into human time and space by being born of a virgin named Mary.⁹ After a very typical Jewish upbringing in Nazareth, Jesus launched His official public ministry in Galilee, boldly announcing the arrival of God's heavenly, immaterial Kingdom reality.

⁷ See God's words in Exodus 19 and His subsequent instruction on how to live in the chapters that follow. The Ten Commandments weren't so much rules to follow as they were declarations of Israel's identity.

⁸ We believe that Jesus perfectly and completely fulfilled all of the covenant promises and messianic texts of the Hebrew Scriptures (See God's promise of blessing to Abraham in Genesis 12; Moses' instruction in Deuteronomy 18; God's covenant promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7; the Branch of the Lord in Isaiah 4 and 11; the Immanuel prediction in Isaiah 7; Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52-53; The Righteous Branch in Jeremiah 23; Daniel's vision in Daniel 7; Micah's prophecy in Micah 5; the coming King in Zechariah 9). However, we also believe that He often did so in surprising and unexpected ways.

⁹ We also affirm traditional, orthodox Christology: that Jesus was both fully God and fully man (see Thomas' remark in John 20:28; Paul's poetic hymn in Philippians 2:5-11; the writer of Hebrews' introduction in Hebrews 1:1-4), He lived a perfect life (see the comments in Hebrews 4:15), and that He came to rescue and redeem the world (see the angel's explanation of Jesus' name in Matthew 1:21; Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees in Matthew 9:13; Jesus' remark to Zacchaeus in Luke 19:10). We believe that all four gospel accounts confirm these things in their different presentations of Jesus.

Whereas the Old Testament kingdom of Israel had specific physical borders and boundaries, the Kingdom that Jesus declared was all-encompassing, spanning the entire globe. Jesus came to announce that the mysterious otherworldly realm in which God had always dwelled was now breaking into our own time, matter, and space in ways it had never done before. Jesus essentially came to proclaim that heaven was invading earth. More than simply announcing the Kingdom, however, Jesus ushered in God's Kingdom reality through the way He lived His life (through His ridiculous love for the "sinners" and the oppressed and also through His intentional discipleship of twelve young men). As soon as Jesus' movement became threatening in the eyes of the religious establishment of the time, the Jewish leaders persistently sought for a way to capture and kill Jesus. Ultimately though, Jesus willingly gave Himself up to the Jewish and Roman authorities and was put to death on a Roman execution device known as the cross. Jesus, though appearing to have been defeated by the religious and political leaders of the time, was actually strangely victorious. For it was out of His great love for humanity that Jesus, who had lived the perfect human life, became the perfect sin offering for us, paying the debt for all of humanity's sin for all time. Therefore, Jesus' sacrificial death brought reconciliation to the once broken relationship between God and man. The Temple was rendered irrelevant and a New Covenant between God and His people was now in place. But the story doesn't end there. Just a few days after Jesus' death, the tomb in which His lifeless body had been placed was found empty. The disciples themselves, who had abandoned Jesus at His arrest, were now claiming that they had witnessed not only the empty tomb but the fully alive, resurrected Jesus. Death, the ultimate consequence of sin, had been defeated; God's ultimate plan of redemption was now in full swing.

Act 5: Church: The very first followers of Jesus couldn't help but live differently and radically after following Jesus and experiencing His resurrection firsthand. For no other possible reason than their conviction that they had indeed witnessed their beloved Rabbi raised from the dead, the first disciples began to boldly proclaim that Jesus was, in fact, who He said He was: the promised Messiah and Savior of the world, God incarnate. For those earliest followers, Jesus' life and death (and then life again) fundamentally shifted the way they understood reality. They felt compelled that this new understanding about God, themselves, others, and the world around them had global implications for all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. Following Jesus' lead, the earliest disciples began making more disciples of Jesus as they traveled throughout the known world, baptizing them and teaching them how to obey and follow Jesus' way of eternally abundant life. All of this newfound boldness and courage by Jesus' disciples, however, was only the result of the arrival of the Spirit of God. No longer dwelling in a temple made by human hands, the God's Spirit and Essence, as Jesus had previously promised, was now taking up residence inside of human hearts, leading and guiding them as the Jesus movement began to spread. One of the most intriguing parts of the Story of Scripture is the fact that Act 5 is still happening right here, right now. God's Story is still being played out in our world today and He is constantly inviting more and more people to step onto the stage to play a role in advancing His Kingdom reality on earth.

Act 6: Renewal: Although Act 5 is still in full swing today and God's work is not yet complete, we believe that the 6th and final Act of this Story has already been clearly announced and described. At a point in time that is unknown to all, God, in the same way that He once invaded humanity history in the form of the man Jesus, will indeed invade human history once again. This time, however, it will be in His full glory and it will be, as John describes in Revelation, to bring justice to this world and to make all things new!¹⁰ We have confident hope that one day the Garden will be restored on earth, the effects of sin will be totally erased, and that we will once again experience complete fellowship and communion with our Father, life as God originally intended.

¹⁰ See John's vision of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.