

## “Long Story Short - The Fall”

Scripture: Genesis 12-35

Graphics: puzzle, sin, Israel, wash, rinse, repeat

Big Truth: The Bible tell us the grand story of God’s redemptive plan for the world. Though Creation, the Fall, Israel, Jesus, the Church, and New Creation, the Bible is sufficient for our salvation. Every person who comes to Panama UMC is called to love God, self, others and the entire creation because God created the universe complete, purposeful, from and for community.

Focus phrase: We are a people of destiny, disobedience, and deliverance.

### 1. Introduction

- A. As you settle in with your **bible-in-hand** this morning, let’s prepare to hear God’s word...let’s pray to begin.
- B. PRAY!**
- C. It’s not very profound of me to say that **each of us has a story**. My life has a story. Your life has a story. In fact, our lives are TELLING a story right now.
- D. During funerals, I often say to the family gathered, “This person’s life tells a story about God’s love, God’s grace for the good times and bad, and God’s hope for everlasting life.”
- E. **Each one of us has a story**. My story includes being raised in a Christian family and playing in the backyard, Boy Scouts, marching band, trips with family and friends, college, an engineering career, a call to ministry, and today, preaching into this camera with 2 other people in the room.
- F. But by me telling you that, do you know everything about me? Not even close, right? And I’ve only told you the good things...not the things I want to hide or don’t want to expose.
- G. Like you, not everything in my life has been good. Certainly not everything in my life has been upright, moral, or holy. That’s a hard thing to say, and may be hard to hear, probably, but it’s true.
- H. Yet, it’s ALL part of my story...and you have YOUR story. And none of us sees anyone else’s WHOLE story. We see what we see. We show what we want to show. We tell what we want to tell.
- I. And, so, we’re often left with a picture of ourselves and others that’s incomplete. Maybe all we see is the bad. Or the good. But, as we ALL know, our stories are filled with all of that and more.
- J. The amazing thing about the Bible, and the people IN the stories of the Bible, is that we have a record of some amazing things that happened throughout history. The grand story of the Bible certainly doesn’t include every word ever said or every person ever used by God. BUT, the Bible also doesn’t try to

hide, cover up, or sugar coat the good, the bad, or the ugly (as Clint Eastwood would say).

- K. The thing that gives me CONFIDENCE in the reliability of the Bible is that it's filled with people and circumstances that are sometimes better, sometimes worse, more messed up...and always much the same while much different.
- L. But WE CAN FIND OUR STORY IN IT...and we can find GOD in the Bible and in OUR story THROUGH IT. And on every page, we find that God repeatedly offers His people, and us, the unearned, unmerited, undeserved, unconditional love of God - no matter the circumstances or struggles or failure.
- M. God doesn't cause all things but God can USE all things for His glory. God's power - the same power that raised Jesus from a grave, can be applied even to our deepest pain, our most scathing shame, and our greatest disappointments, right along with our greatest joys and hope. Hear the good news: Every part of our story can be transformed by God's grace!
- N. We began in this series Long Story Short tracing God's grace all the way back to "the beginning" when God created the Heavens and the Earth. That was chapter one in a 6-part series to understand the story of the Bible. Author Joshua McNall helps us break down the story of the Bible this way: **Creation, The Fall, Israel, Jesus, The Church, and New Creation.**
- O. So two weeks ago we talked about "Creation" and that it, and you and I, were created **complete and on purpose and from and for community.**
- P. Last week, we dove into the story of "**The Fall**". Sin causes damage in our lives, to others, and in the world. Even then, God forgives and invites us to come out of that grave with Jesus, who defeated the power of sin.
- Q. Today, we move from the story of one man and woman in the Garden to the story of **one family and future nation called "Israel"**. To understand the "big picture" of the Bible-story, we need to understand **this family's story**. Their history fills the 39 books of the Old Testament – but don't worry, we won't read them all.
- R. So, here is the question we're asking today: **How is Israel's story my story?** What we'll see is that **people are people**...no matter the time or place...and, thankfully, **GOD IS GOD through ALL time and in EVERY place.** Amen?
- S. **How is Israel's story my story?** Still in the book of Genesis...after the Garden, after Noah and the Flood...moving to Genesis chapter 12.

## 2. Scripture

- A. First, like Israel... **We are a people of destiny.**
  - i. For us to understand the story of the nation of Israel, we must understand the call of **one couple**. This part of the Bible-story begins with an unlikely

man and his wife from a place called Ur. They were **childless** and raising a **nephew** who was **orphaned**. The people around them worshiped lots of pagan gods and didn't care about the One True God of Creation.

- ii. This couple's lives were forever changed when the Lord, the God who created the Heavens and Earth, **unmistakably spoke to them**. Genesis 12, starting in verse 1:

*“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Genesis 12:1-4a (NRSV)*

- iii. Let's unpack this incredible scene.
  - a. First, God said that Abram was to **leave behind three things**: His **country**, his **relatives**, and his **father's family**. That meant that Abram was to start a whole new household. The one problem was that he and his wife Sarai had no children!
  - b. And where were they to go? **They were to go to a place that, “God will show them...”** at some point. Abram was clueless about his destination, which probably made this decision even harder!
  - c. Abram had to **leave behind all he knew** for the things only God could give them. God promised to **make him a great nation** that will bless him and others. God said, “leave behind what YOU know because of what I KNOW about you!”
  - d. God had a **destiny** for Abram and Sarai. It was a plan for a childless man to become known as “Father Abraham” thousands of years later. A few chapters later in Genesis, God sent Abram outside to count the stars because **he would have more descendants than the stars he could see**. These promises would become a reality through the supernatural birth of a son. Again, this must be hard for a childless man to grasp!
  - e. The most powerful part of this scene comes in Genesis 12:4a: **“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...”**
  - f. Abram did it! He was available for God to use. He set aside whatever confusion he faced, the debate in his mind, his doubts, his comfort, all he had known, and maybe his pride, to do, “as the Lord had instructed.”
- iv. Some of you know my story. And I would never dare to put myself in the same bucket as Abram, but God calls each one of us to step out in faith to

be people of godly destiny. Mine was to leave an upwardly-mobile engineering career to follow a call to be a pastor. Yours is different, but God is no less IN IT. Over the last 17 years, I realized this call was not only about my **career** but my **character** as a follower of Jesus. Over and over again, God calls and tells me to leave behind things I cling to in order to receive more than I could have ever dreamed.

- v. God has his eye on YOU today, too. You're called to belong to Jesus Christ. **We all are people of destiny.** It may not be to become a pastor. (Although, let me say – it might be! Pray about that!) Your call may be more about your character. It may be more about leaving behind what you cling to in order to receive only what God can give to you.
  - vi. What are you holding onto that God is asking you to let go right now? Is it your fear? Is it your comfort? Is it your plans? Is it the desire to go back to the way things were before this pandemic? God's destiny for your life waits for you and it's to simply follow where he leads us.
- B. Well, this story continues with Abram and Sarai making a mess of things. Their story is like ours in that. See, even though we are people of destiny... **We are also a people of disobedience.**
- i. Last week's look at sin and fallenness gave us a precursor to what happened next with Abram and Sarai. They took off for an unknown destination and God led them into the Promise Land.
  - ii. From that point, a famine in the Promised Land sent them to Egypt. Abram got scared and lied about Sarai's identity. She was quite beautiful and Abram was afraid that those in power might kill him to take her, so he said she was his sister.
  - iii. Pharaoh took Sarai as his wife and when the truth came out, they were kicked out of Egypt. As trouble dawned on this family, things got worse between Sarai and Abram. They got impatient waiting for God's promise to have a child. That's when Sarai got an idea: she left Egypt with a female servant and she had an idea, which is recorded for us in **Genesis 16:1-2**:  
  
*“Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram, “You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.”* Genesis 16:1-2 (NRSV)
  - iv. What a scene! Sarai gave Abram a “hall pass” and said he needed to sleep with Hagar, her servant, in order to have a child. Can you imagine THAT conversation?

- v. But, they went ahead anyway, thinking they could fill God's promise **their own way, on their own timetable**. This isn't as crazy as it may first appear. In this ancient time and culture, this was a common solution for the problem of barrenness. **But this is clearly NOT God's plan** for Sarai and Abram. They were **called to trust God**, not the culture around them or their own wisdom and plans.
- vi. Hagar did indeed conceive a child, and named him Ishmael. As you can imagine, Hagar and Sarai began to fight. Hagar thought she was better than Sarai. They have "words". As the two women of the house fight, Sarai turns to Abram and basically says, "This is YOUR FAULT". So, Ab and Sarai, too, began to argue and finally Abram tells Sarai to just **deal with it**.
- vii. Sarai told Hagar that she wasn't going to be disrespected; "not in my house!" and she treated her so badly, that Hagar eventually ran away to the wilderness. Though God had mercy on them all, this hostility was still present over a decade later. (PAUSE)
- viii. While destiny called this family to start this adventure with God, **brokenness threatened to undo them**. We can all relate. Every one of us has some kind of conflict or brokenness that leads us to disobey God's best intentions for our lives.
- ix. For me, I tend to want other people's approval and I have high expectations for myself and others that can lead to burnout or resentment. That's some of my story.
- x. What's yours? How have you ever disobeyed God's call on your life? Anyone else have porous boundaries? Struggle with anger? Is your disobedience a hidden addiction that's become just 'who you are'? A grudge or pride? Is it well-masked selfishness? Money mismanagement? Are you wasting time on social media, trapped in a game of comparison and competition? **The possibilities for disobedience are almost endless**.
- xi. Here's the good news. Even after this soap-opera in Abram and Sarai's life, **God didn't give up on them**. They were the least likely couple to bless multitudes when God first called them, and they basically made those odds a lot WORSE. But **where sin abounds, God's grace super-abounds**.
- xii. God returned to Abram after that season, and Abram again answered. God called him to a blameless life **again**, and in that process established a **covenant** with him. He gave them **new names - Abraham and Sarah**. The Lord even cared for Hagar and Ishmael.
- xiii. God is SO good! Praise God that their story is like our story, for like them and Israel...

C. We are a people of deliverance.

- i. Finally, after lots of adventures that you can read about in Genesis, God delivered on his promise to Abram and Sarai. There's finally a baby! Look at what happens to this dysfunctional, disobedient couple in **Genesis 21:1-3**:

*“The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.”* Genesis 21:1-3 (NRSV)

- ii. God kept his word, doing exactly what he promised!
- iii. Their son was named **Isaac**, which means (and I love this), “Laughter”. Artist Michael Card says that “they called him laughter, for he came after, an impossible promise came true.” The childless couple had a baby at last. The child-less “father of many nations” finally had a baby. God specializes in **supernatural deliverance**.
- iv. To make a long story short, Isaac grew up and married Rebekah. They had two boys, Esau and Jacob. Jacob had an encounter with God where he was renamed **Israel**. He ended up having 12 boys who grew up to each lead one of the 12 tribes of Israel. From one of those tribes, the Tribe of Judah, from an unlikely and un-expecting couple, a child was born in another supernatural birth to an unwed mothers...and his name was... (wait for it)... **Jesus**. We'll get to him next week.
- v. God delivered on his promise to Abraham and Sarah...and again and again throughout the Old Testament until, at just the right time, God would send THE Deliverer, Jesus, to rescue and restore every person who welcomes him into their life.
- vi. My story today is a story of deliverance. Your story can be a story of deliverance when Jesus is in your life as deliverer.
- vii. God does this over and over again, and no matter who you are or what you've done, God brings this gift of grace to you.
- viii. You and I, Abraham and Sarah...we're people of destiny, disobedience, and deliverance. That's our story.
- ix. This morning, we've only covered **one story**, and there are 38 more books in the Old Testament about Israel. Here's why: Israel's story is kind of like the directions on your shampoo bottle. The instructions on the back of the bottle say, “Wash, rinse, repeat.”
- x. In every story in the Old Testament, one of these three things are taking place: God is helping people in **discover their destiny**. Or people are **disobeying God's call**. Or, God is **graciously delivering them yet again**. That's the pattern. It's as predictable as “wash, rinse, repeat.”

- x. Israel's story, over and over again, continues until Jesus comes and the message expands to people outside the nation of Israel...to us. The story expanded from one family and one nation to all people in every nation.

### 3. Conclusion

- i. You are invited into this story of God's grace today. You may be thinking "there's no way" I can be included into God's story. Maybe you have a recurring voice in your head that says, "I'm not good enough." Or maybe "If you only knew my failures... I'm disqualified."
- ii. That's exactly why we read the Bible...and why we understand the big picture. The Bible doesn't hide messed up people like Abraham and Sarah. The Bible tells us how God chose to use them in spite of their mess.
- iii. You are a person of destiny, disobedience, and deliverance.
- iv. God knows everything about them, and about me and you...and He still calls to us to love Him and others...and calls us for a purpose. In fact, God seems to specialize in taking messed up people with a bent toward disobedience and calling them to follow him.
- v. Consider these words from 1 Corinthians 1:26-29: *"Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 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; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God."* 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NRSV)
- vi. This is your invitation today. God doesn't call people because of their resumes, their paychecks, their holiness, or anything else. He calls us to make ourselves available to Him.
- vii. Two parts of our intentional discipleship plan here at PUMC are having a **life of openness and a life of obedience**. Both of those are a sign to God that you are available and willing to be used for His purposes!
- viii. Will you make yourself available to God today? Make yourself available to His grace and love? To make THIS story (God's story) YOUR story even more today than before? He calls us to that again today!
- ix. PRAY!
- x. I encourage you to join us for Bible study this week on Wednesday morning or Thursday evening. Bring your best questions to stump the Pastor's wife...she's up for it! See you there...