

[1]
Life Interrupted: Redeeming the Fractured Narrative
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Derek Bird

Introduction: First I'd like to thank Jeff and his team for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. As a congregation let's continue to pray for Jeff and Ruth as they take this time of rest. They have invested so much into this congregation. So as a congregation let's make sure we invest in them through prayer. Pray that God will "lead them beside quiet waters for his name sake" over the next few weeks.

I am Derek Bird and I teach high school Bible and English at the school across the parking lot.

Our God is faithful and does restore us regardless of the paths we travel and my life is testament to that. Though our narrative may be fractured, he's faithful to take our story and redeem our story. He creates plot twists, and adds new characters. When we look back on the primary conflict, we see sometimes he allows it to happen and sometimes we create it, but when we tire of writing our own stories he tells our narrative the way he intends it to be told.

One of the most fascinating stories I've read in the last year, is about a hermit from Maine named Chris Knight. After he graduated from high school he worked installing security systems and found that this society wasn't for him so one day he drove to the edge of nowhere and walked into the woods and stayed there for over 20 years. He didn't tell his parents or his siblings. He just drove away from everything and lived as a hermit. He lived in the forest through the coldest winters getting up every two hours on the coldest nights in order to stoke a fire so that he didn't freeze to death. When he'd walk around in the winter he'd only go when the snow became hardened or when the snow turned to ice so that he could never be tracked. He lived in a country of 300 million people and didn't have contact with anyone, well almost no one.

He lived near a lake and on the other side of the lake were cabins, and he often needed supplies, so he'd break into the cabins across the lake and take food and supplies for his camp. It's estimated that in the 20 years, his break-and-enters totaled well over a thousand. While he lived in isolation, living the life he wanted, he caused fear amidst this lake community.

Similar to Chris Knight, the hermit, it's easy for us to live a contradictory existence—we can live fractured narratives.

[2]

Main Point: Unless Christ redeems and restores us we end up living a fractured narrative: where we continually try and fail and try and fail. Christ calls us to a different narrative. One where he restores our soul, our purpose is clear, and where our narrative is connected to a larger story...his story.

Focus Passage: Mark 5:21-43

[3]

Point One: Faith in Christ Heals Our Fractured Narrative

³² But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. ³⁴ And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

We start here because Christ's words here suggest so much more than a physical healing. In the NIV this is translated as, "Daughter, your faith has healed you." And in this passage the Greek word used here for *healing* is the same as *saved*. He's restored her physically but he's also restored her soul. This is why he says, "*Go in peace. Your suffering is over.*" You've been healed physically, but your faith in me has also healed your spirit. You've been restored.

Those who have a similar encounter with Christ, more the one on one encounter, where they become isolated from the group and end up in conversation with Christ, end with something very similar. The woman caught in adultery from John 8 (which Ryan referenced last week) he says, "Has no one condemned you? Then neither do I. No go and leave your life of sin."

To the expert of the law, who asks Christ what he must do to inherit eternal life, Christ explains through parable who his neighbor is and then tells the teacher of the law to "*Go and do likewise.*" Go and treat people with the same respect regardless of whether you perceive them as worthy or not.

And this is what Christ does with each one of us when he restores our fractured narratives. He restores us. He redeems us then he says now go. Go and leave your life of sin. Go and think differently. Go in peace.

Living a fractured narrative means living a life consumed (subtly or overtly) by the darkness (the lies) we hold onto. It can look like anything from believing in our own self reliance, to believing the lies told to us along the way. A fractured narrative means we live life where we chase mirages because we believe that if we have more we will be

happier. It's the lies that root themselves deep in the portion of our brain. They start early in our lives and they carry on through our lives. When our fractures control our thought process they tell us we are not loved, not accepted, not forgiven. Or they tell us the opposite: that we have the right to alienate those who are not like us, that we have the right to use others for our own gain. A fractured narrative causes a person come from either a position of power or weakness, rather a position of love and grace.

Just a few weeks ago a young man came to me and said that he has no friends because he's not good enough for anyone to like him. "Why do you believe that," I said. Then he went on to talk about all the rejection he experiences around him. In the end all this was rooted in the fact that his mom gave him up as a child for adoption. "She didn't want me. I wasn't enough for her to want me," he said.

But note how Christ responds to the lady who was outcast because of her disorder. He calls her "Daughter". He connects with her at a relational level. He provides her with an identity as part of her restoration. You are my daughter. You are my son. Which means you are a child of the most high. Not enough? Like Jim says to Pam (from the Office) when she questions whether she's deserving of Jim's love. Not enough? You are everything to me. In the same way Christ when he restores our fractured narrative, he calls us sons and daughters reminding us we are everything to him.

Christ is saying that there's a better way to walk through life than moving from mistake to mistake and being overcome by them or moving from success to success and taking ownership over them. (Like the mirror mazes that I used to walk through as a youngster with my brother walking into a mirror was the only way to find out that there was one there in front of me...unless some snotty kid walked through before me or some kid who had just eaten a bag of Cheetos who had only licked his fingers clean).

Faith in Christ heals our fractured narrative and restores us to Christ. Restoration means we arrive at a point where our souls ultimately trust the God who created us—every event, every circumstance, is either intended for God's glory or can be restored and redeemed in a way that brings glory to him.

[4]

Point Two: In order for our narratives (our lives) to be restored we have to have an awareness of our desperate need for Christ. The way we approach Christ makes a difference in the way our narrative unfolds.

Mark 5:22-23

Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, ²³pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live."

Mark 5:24-28

²⁴ Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. ²⁵ A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. ²⁸ For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed."

Both Jairus and the woman approach Christ out of desperation. They do so in different ways, but both are quite desperate. Jairus because he's a parent and there's nothing he can do to save his daughter who's dying. He's willing to do anything he can so he comes to Christ. Though it does not say it, it's a safe assumption he's already had doctors come by the house and do what they can for his daughter. He's desperate as any parent would be in this situation. I can identify with Jairus to some extent, as our oldest son Carson was born with what doctors called a "musical heart". As he grew they monitored it and at two or three they had concerns enough that they wanted to send him to Victoria to see the pediatric cardiologist. I can remember waiting and feeling completely helpless as I sat there with my wife waiting for results.

And for the woman who's been bleeding for 12 years, it says she's consulted doctors and according to Mark's gospel the issue had gotten worse. She's paid them everything. Her condition left her unclean according to Jewish customs so her approach to Christ is one of embarrassed desperation. She approaches Christ and hopes to receive healing and go away unnoticed.

In both cases Christ understands their desperation but does not get drawn into their panic. With Jairus, he goes with him but then stops for the woman. And with the woman, he takes what she wanted and heals her but does not do it in a way that she wants it to happen. He draws attention to her, when she wanted none.

How we approach Christ makes an enormous difference in our faith walk. If we approach him with the desire to control the situation, then he can't fully heal our fractured narrative. There are a number of ways we retain control over our narrative.

- a) We bury the uncomfortable parts of our story, so that people can only know the parts we only want them to know. The issue here is that no matter how far we push a difficult event down, it affects us in ways that we can't control or perceived. Others around us can see that there's something off or something not quite right, but we think we're doing a good job of repressing the issue.
- b) We are also good at controlling our narrative by way we approach our faith. More and more I hear labels placed before who we are as people of faith. We do it to

ourselves. We are Conservative Christians. We are liberal Christians. We are Calvinist Christians. We are Arminianist Christians. We are Feminist Christians.

What the labels indicate is that we desire to approach Christ not out of desperation but out of the way we desire for him to fit into our narrative. When we are anything but a disciple of Christ, we are simply writing him into our story. This is not his place in our story. He is our author, and that is the only place that truly works for him.

His claims make it thus. He claims to be Truth. He claims to be the way. He claims (according to Luke 10) to have been there when Satan was cast out of heaven. He claims to be God. So we have to ask ourselves if we are using him or being used by him. The one we end up disillusioned on day down the road, the other we end up pounded by life but never beaten, never defeated. Are you desperate? Because as a disciple, it's essential to recognize the urgency of today.

Anyone who's ever played a game of street hockey or pond hockey knows that once you've thrown your stick into the center when choosing teams, you've lost all control of what team you end up on. In the same way Christ calls us to throw our sticks into the center so he can choose where you're most needed / he's called us to throw cast our selfishness aside and watch as he creates in us the person he intends us to be.

In the first song (42) off Mumford and Sons latest album they seem to echo this sentiment when they say, "Who do I turn to when there's no choice to make... What if I need you in my darkest hour? What if it turns out there is no other..."

The answer returns... "Let me restore you. Let me redeem you..."

[6]

Point Three: At Our Core We Desire Life to Happen a Certain Way. Part of Allowing God to Author our Narrative is Learning to Ultimately Trust in His Authorship.

[7]

³⁵ While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now."³⁶ But Jesus overheard^[a] them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."

What's interesting to me is that Mark does not indicate Jairus' response to this. I know ways I've responded when things don't go according to the way I think they should. I'm upset. I often try to reroute to the beginning so that I can understand where things went wrong. I do this so I can assign blame. I can only assume that Jairus did the same. But it doesn't say he blamed Christ. It doesn't say he blamed the lady with the blood issue. He likely was in shock and couldn't respond, but then Christ provides him with hope. There's another way. And he not only gives him his daughter back but also a taste what happens when the spiritual supersedes the physical. He gives him a taste of what happens when the physical bends to the spiritual and not the other way around.

Sixteenth century English pastor and poet John Donne, understood this concept when he penned the words "One short sleep and we wake eternally / And death thou shalt die."

And it's not just with matters of life and death that we struggle with interruptions. We learn this lesson from this narrative. Sometimes it's a health issue. Sometimes it's a bad day at work. Sometimes it's a struggle with a child. Sometimes it's not getting what we think we deserve. You fill in the blank. But I think in all circumstances Christ says, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith." Then we become part of what he's doing. This means that we move forward in a way that he determines.

Then question becomes do we trust him enough to adapt to his plan even when we can't see what his plan might be.

I saw this concept illustrated in a mediocre movie I sat through a few weeks ago. The movie's theme was one its only redeeming qualities. In *Passengers* Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence are on their way to another galaxy to as part of planetary expansion because earth is getting too crowded. The problem is it takes 120 years to get to the next inhabitable planet, so the passengers are placed in hibernation pods in order to make the long trek. Long story short, their ship hits asteroids and is damaged and results in malfunctions, one of which has to do with Pratt's pod opening up 90 years too early.

The it takes him a lot of time to adjust when he finally comes to terms with the fact that he can't go back and reenter hibernation, he begins to understand that he needs to live out his life according to his new reality and stop mourning the loss of his old reality. And that's just what he does.

In the same way we are called to live out a reality where faith supersedes the physical, which means we trust Christ even when our story doesn't seem to make sense.

The fact that we want life to be perfect adds validity to the fact that we were created for more than a physical existence. It's in our spiritual DNA to desire perfection. It's one of our soul's deepest cries. Human nature wants to take this and make it happen in the here

and now. The redeemed soul recognizes that the perfect comes when the imperfect eventually dissipates.

Conclusion—One of the most often quoted lines from Shakespeare comes from Macbeth. His tragic narrative is not void of goodness and insight. But the tragic hero, after listening to representatives of darkness, ends up in a place where he realizes that they have provided him with enough truth to lead him in a direction, but they have lead him to his own demise. At a point where he realizes he can not win a battle he started, when he realizes his ambition for power has create a goal that was nothing more than a senseless mirage, when he hears of his wife's death he says this,

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

This character who's taken everything (all power and wealth) says that life is void of purpose.

And this is the essence of what I'm speaking of today. If we can arrive at a place in our narrative where we feel like it's lacking purpose, it's not that life is void of purpose, it's that we've been writing our own story and we cant ever write it in a way that ends with us finding meaning.

[8]

The only way we can find true meaning and purpose is to recognize we are not the author of our life story. God is. But he's not pushing us aside to take the keyboard from us. We have to arrive at a place where we are desperate for him. We have to arrive at a place where we understand he's in control, even when there are interruptions. We have to ultimately arrive in a place where we trust Christ with our souls.

We recently celebrated the birth of the Messiah, and in a few months we will be celebrating the death and resurrection of this same Messiah—the King. We celebrate Christ because as he hung from the cross to restore our narrative, he spoke the words, “My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?” Up until a this year I understood this to mean our king was calling out of base, raw emotion, but this is not the case. He's quoting scripture when he says this. He's quoting psalm 22 when he speaks these words, which means everything really. Right down to his last breath, he's setting an example for us. No matter how broken, how fractured things seem to be, we must never forget the answers are found in the word of God.