

I'm glad to be preaching in this second week of a series on the Habit of Scripture. As we continue to work through what we're calling a rule of life, where we are organizing our life around those two principles that I mentioned last week of being present with Jesus and participating with him in the world.

And so this habit of scripture is one of those that is pretty part and parcel of being a Christian. Most of us would think that if you call yourself a Christian, you have some interaction with the Bible. So for this series, starting last week, we're looking at the role of scriptures. What is this ancient book on which we stake our lives, which is filled with all sorts of chaos, nuance, subtlety, plot, and structure?

One of the things that we noted last week was that fundamentally, and this might be the most important thing for us as modern readers to understand about the scriptures, it is a unified story. It tells one story that leads to Jesus from Genesis to Revelation, and with all of its nuance, it tells one particular story. I want to look at why this is important that it comes to us in the shape of a story.

Well, it's Christian Smith, a sociologist out of Notre Dame who wrote a book I've mentioned before named *Moral Believing Animals*. In there he makes the point that we as humans, at our core, are story believing creatures. We operate from story. It is fundamentally how we make sense of reality. In his opening, he talks about how our ancient ancestors would gather around glowing fires and tell stories to make sense of reality. Stories of people who were heroic, villains, and the problem of evil. Our ancestors would sit around fireplaces, making sense of reality.

And then he makes the prescient point that we haven't really changed that much. We may not sit around glowing fire pits, but we sit around glowing rectangles and watch stories come to us of valor with heroes and villains, nuance, plot, and the problem of evil. We make sense of reality based on these stories. If you don't believe me, here are just a few stats. The top three grossing movie franchises in all of history are number three, Harry Potter, which has grossed 9.5 billion; two, Star Wars at 10 billion; and number one, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, which has grossed 29 billion dollars.

We are storied creatures. We love stories. We love narrative. It's more than just entertainment. I really do believe that part of the impulse for these fantastical stories is it's this tapping into something in our heart that there's more beyond this world. So, we go to stories to help make sense of it.

It was Plato, many years ago, who said, "Those who tell stories rule society." A more modern quote from Winston Churchill, at the height of World War II, is, "The empires of the future will be empires of the mind." See, what Plato, Churchill, and all of us understand is that, at our

core, we are shaped and formed by stories. Stories get at us. They communicate truth. They allow us to understand the nuance of the world. We go to stories to make sense of the problems we face and how we can overcome them.

So my main point is simply this: the story you believe will shape the person you become. This series on the habit of scripture is part of a larger year-long initiative in which we're practicing this concept of renewing the mind, which we get from Romans 12. Paul says we are to not be conformed to the pattern of the schematic of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Because the question, if we run and operate off stories, is what happens if we believe the wrong story? What happens if we believe and embody and come to trust a story that doesn't match with reality? If that is the case, if we come to believe the wrong story, well, the consequences would be devastating. The consequences that are downstream from that would have an impact on our lives.

So this second habit of renewing the mind is asking what the stories are that are swirling around in our head. And what does it mean then to take this ancient story, this scripture as truth and ask, "What does this story have to say to reality?"

We define scripture as the divinely inspired library of writings known to us as the Bible that tell one unified story, leading to Jesus. Now, it's important to grasp the idea that the scriptures are really a library. It is a recent invention that allows you to hold a singular bound volume of all the Old Testament and the New Testament on your lap. Even in the text that we'll read this morning, Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah. It's one part of it. The fact that we hold it all in one is a great thing. It's a gift to us in the modern world, but it shaped our minds to think that wherever we open this, it's the same everywhere we find it.

But the reality is you are holding in your lap, if you brought your Bible, a library of texts, some of them are narrative. The majority of it is narrative. The second largest category of the scriptures is poetry, whether that's prophetic poetry or the Psalms or Proverbs, but you hold narrative poetry, apocalyptic literature, didactic teaching, ancient letters, and ancient poems, all of this together in the scriptures, but all of it beautifully one unified story.

I have found and staked my life on this story because I believe it is what most matches with reality. I mean that in a technical sense, and we'll talk a little bit more about how we reduce the Bible to think of it as smaller than reality. But the truth is, I believe the Bible is the story that matches reality best. It is the story that makes the most sense out of life.

My hope is that you are taking on that habit of waking up and bringing yourself before the scriptures day after day because it's a complicated

story, a complicated narrative, but narratives give shape to our lives, and the story you believe will shape the person you become.

Look to Luke 4. We're going to pick up the story in verse 14 and throughout this, we're asking the question of how did Jesus view scripture? Because we follow Jesus, we want to have the same posture and attitude towards scripture as Jesus did. We are trying to become like Jesus.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, Luke 4:14-16

So Jesus' fame was growing. He was moving around the countryside. His stature had spread. People were becoming aware of who Jesus was. And did you catch that when he goes to the synagogue, it says that was his custom? It's a passing comment, but it helps us understand when we're talking about regular habits and practices that in Jesus' "rule of life" was the sense of going to worship in the synagogue week after week. What you are doing right now. That's part of why we gather week after week. We saw Jesus do that with the people of God. Therefore, we take on that same custom.

So Jesus goes into the synagogue and as he was teaching there, he seemed to be a pretty good teacher. Everyone was praising him. It comes to the place in their service, much like the one we just had, where someone would read a portion of scripture. So Jesus steps into that role and he's handed the Scroll of Isaiah. He turned to Isaiah 61 and stands to read the scripture just in the same way that someone just did for us.

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Luke 4:17-20a

Now, a comment on that. In the ancient world, the teacher would actually sit and the crowd would stand. So we actually do that in the inverse in modern times. But in the ancient world, when Jesus sits down, it might be a mic drop moment. But it's more, he's taking the posture of teacher.

"The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (vv. 20b-21). So Jesus knows the scriptures. He goes to a particular place. He reads this particular text about his anointing, "the Spirit of the Lord is on me." It's this text that was talking about the Christ, the Messiah who would come one day. Jesus finds that one, reads it, and then sits down. He then says, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Now, notice a couple of things. This is the same word fulfill that was used last week when Jesus said, "I did not come to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them." Here, he uses it again. It says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Notice that for Jesus, the scriptures are a story in search of an ending and that ending is found in him. Jesus views himself as a pinnacle, a climax of what all the scriptures are moving towards. The one unified story of the Bible all leading to Jesus.

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked" (v. 22). So the initial read is that the crowd is actually quite pleased with Jesus' teaching. They're enthralled with this. "Wow, you are the one who was spoken of forever." But then you sense the hesitation. "Wait a minute, aren't you Joseph's son? We know you." How could he be the one? What you watch is for those in the synagogue that day, the story they were bringing into this moment, Jesus is extending on what they knew about it. They're amazed by it, but they have questions. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" But Jesus sees the scripture as ultimately culminating in himself.

Now, maybe you've heard before that Jesus can be found on every page of the scriptures. That's a pretty good sentiment, but what Jesus gets at when he says it's fulfilled in your hearing today is slightly different. It's not so much that you can flip to a random page in Leviticus and find Jesus there, but rather, every page is moving in the direction of Jesus. It's moving the story, this grand narrative towards the very person of Jesus. So, every page may not have Jesus on it, but rather, every page is moving the literary story towards this person of Jesus.

If this whole story that begins with "in the beginning" in Genesis and extends to "forever and ever" in Revelation 22 is then the whole story of reality. The statement that Jesus makes isn't just "I'm the center of this story," but "I'm the center of all of reality." If this story is making sense of the lived experience that you and I have and that the ancient people had, and he's the center of it, then Jesus is claiming to be the very center of all reality. Therefore, to read the Bible is to accept the invitation to live in congruence with all of reality.

Do you see the move Jesus makes here? If this story is about everything, and ultimately it centers around Jesus, then he is the center of everything. So, as followers of Jesus, when we come to this story, we accept the invitation to learn about the very center of all of reality. Now, the problem is all of us come to the text and have a mixed relationship with the center of reality.

All of us have put other things at the center of the story, where it isn't the story that is fulfilled in Jesus. At our core, our lived experience often centers around something different. Maybe it's pleasure, success, religion, wealth, politics, technology, your kids, spouse, roommate, or friend. We can place these things at the center, and Jesus is going to warn these people to say that they might not know they have something else at the center. We have heard the story. They're going to move from being very pleased with him to wanting to throw him off a cliff, which is rather dramatic. And so there's something in this message that Jesus is suggesting that confronts us on what it means to live in this world.

"Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself!" And you will tell me, "Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum!"' (v. 23). It's Jesus way of saying that they want him to prove it. They were questioning, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" He's thinking; surely they are going to tell me to do some miraculous thing to prove the claims that I was making, that I am who I say I am. "Truly I tell you," he continued, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown!" (v. 24).

He says there's these prophets of old, and he's gonna list two here, Elijah and Elisha, who are in the Old Testament, and they were from the people of God, and yet they were rejected by the very people of God. "You want me to prove it, but yet I know that these Old Testament prophets are often rejected for what they said." It's him telling them that they are about to reject him. And then he issues this warning.

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. vv. 25-26

He's drawing on this old story in which the people of God had rejected God. He's making the note that God did not send the prophet to the people of Israel because of their rebellion. So he says, that time when this famine hit and there were all sorts of widows within Israel who needed help. And yet the prophet was sent by God outside of the people of Israel because they had rejected him. He's issuing a warning to those members. He's saying this in the synagogue, which we're starting to understand maybe why they're a little bit furious. Then, he gives another example.

"And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian" (v. 27). So there were two instances in which these prophets were rejected, who God had sent to them. They had rejected God himself. And so God had sent prophets outside the people of God.

Do you see the connection to the story idea? The people of Israel (we relate to this as well), throughout their history, had a vision, a story of who God is, and when the true story of reality conflicted with the vision and the story they had, God sent judgment. There were consequences to that.

And so when that story confronted them, Jesus is hearkening on two examples from the Old Testament and said, "You rejected them then, and you're rejecting me now." Sometimes, this story confronts us. It challenges us. Jesus said that the story was fulfilled in their hearing. Sometimes, if we are following Jesus, he must confront us because we're living by a different story. We're living by a different way of understanding reality.

The story you believe will shape who you become. Is your story, like Jesus is suggesting here, centering on Jesus so that the story shapes you into a Christ-like person? Or does the story you believe about reality shape you into something other than that? Jesus said that there are

times in which I will confront you, and you will reject me. He's pointing right to that. Look at the way that people respond.

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. vv. 28-30

Sometimes, Jesus confronts us, and often, we don't like that. The story that we read here presents two views of how we encounter the story of Jesus. At the beginning, in just the earlier chapter, they were amazed by his teaching. But then, just a few minutes later, when Jesus reminded them of the times that they rejected God and God sent the prophets elsewhere, they were all furious. The story that we come to hold in the scriptures will give us the opportunity to respond with praise or fury.

The story of the scriptures confronts all other stories that we try to use to make sense of reality. You have to catch that. Because that's what the whole idea of renewing the mind that Paul's getting at is about. You have a way of operating in the world made off of all sorts of mental maps in which your brain is wired to naturally drift towards. You have stories that have been shaped in you from your childhood that speak to your meaning, your purpose, and your identity. Usually those are built off wounds or things that happened to you as a child that says you were not valued. You were dismissed. And so that story lodges itself so deep into your core that you begin to believe the lie and live out that reality. It sends your life in an altogether different trajectory.

But what would it look like to open the scriptures into Genesis 1 and hear that you were not necessarily dismissed as a child, but you're a child of God who is created in the very image of God? Well, that's an altogether different story. That says that God didn't create the world out of anger and rage but out of love. Out of love, he created a world that we step into and embody. When this story begins to shape your mind and the way you view all of reality, you begin to actually show up to reality well. Because if your story aligns with the way things actually are, then you operate in a way in which the world was designed to operate.

But if the story you believe grinds against what we understand about the world, you will go against the grain of the universe. And often, when you do that, you get splinters. It hurts. And we have experienced this. Often, we aren't even aware of the stories from which we operate. It's one of the importance of community, of mentors, therapists, and counselors and those around us who can speak into us when we believe these stories. We can't see them on our own because, for us, those stories are just common sense. It's how we've always lived. But often, those stories contradict what Jesus says about you, what Jesus says about the world, and what Jesus says about reality.

Yuval Harari wrote a book called *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. He is not a believer, so I would take a little bit of issue with some of the ways he talks about humans, but he wrote:

Homo sapiens is a storytelling animal that thinks in stories rather than in numbers or graphs, and

believes that the universe itself works like a story, replete with heroes and villains, conflicts and resolutions, climaxes and happy endings. When we look for the meaning of life, we want a story that will explain what reality is all about and what my particular role is in the cosmic drama. This role makes me a part of something bigger than myself and gives meaning to all my experiences and choices. Harari

So he's saying the same thing that I was saying at the beginning. We function off of this idea of story. But I love the way he begins because the problem is most of us believe we're more rational than we are. We believe that we just take in the data points of reality and then consciously weigh the good versus the bad. We make a nice pro and con columns, and then we think we are thinking through it rationally and totally unbiased. We just come to it and say, "Well, I weighed this and this, and this is why I believe what I believe."

The problem with this is you weren't created like that. You were created as a loving, desiring being. And you live far more from your desire than you do your rationale. We like to think that the reason we make these choices is because we are a thoughtful person, but we are far more of a desiring, loving person than a rational person.

This idea of rationality is really a product, not of the scriptures or even of human progress, but it is a product of the enlightenment, in which we began to think; therefore, we are. That was Rene Descartes's claim. If I think, that's the core of my existence. But I believe we shouldn't have taken to Descartes claim; we should have stuck with Augustine who understood from a biblical worldview that we're desiring beings. We are loving beings, and we operate more out of what we desire and what we love.

Now, what shapes your desire and love more: information and facts or stories? Stories move us; stories shape us. That's the reason you watch that documentary, whatever it is, and you hear that story. It moves you. It sticks in your mind more than what I'm doing right now by just communicating with facts and information. Stories shape our loves and our longings. They shape us at our deepest core.

Because we're searching for stories to make sense of the world. So we do that in things like progressivism, conservatism, socialism, activism, careerism, hedonism, and all of these sorts of "isms" that float around the surface. We live in an ism-laden world, one that's ideologically charged where we're battling these ideologies. However understand that all of these ideologies are simply stories about reality. They're trying to claim that this is how the world works. Progressivism—We will figure it out. Get out of the way and move all the obstacles; we'll achieve what we need to achieve if you give us enough time. Conservatism—No. There's a way back then where that was better. We need to conserve this core, and that will make sense of that. These are stories that are trying to make sense of the data points of reality. What would it look like to allow this story to be the animating piece of reality?

Jesus' invitation is often to just say, "Come and follow me. Try out if this story makes sense of your lived experience." What I have found over and over is that this story often correlates with reality. It locates not the problem with the world out there, or over in that group, or that ideology. It says that in Genesis 3, the problem was your choice. You sat in the garden, and God created this beautiful world that you could partake in the way it works. Or you can seize control and make your own choices. We often make our own choices, thinking we know what's right and wrong instead of submitting to God. We elevate our self.

Have you ever made the wrong choice? Has that ever shaped your world? Has other people around you made choices that impacted you and sin was there. It was their choice. It's the same story over and over again. So then if the story that scripture says is reality, it also communicates that you can't actually save yourself because you're part of the problem.

What we need is someone from beyond who is able to understand this about the world and is there to enter the story and actually reset it to right. What if this Messiah, the Savior was to come, someone from outside and beyond, and they could set the worlds to rights. They could restore our relationship with God, and could restore our relationship to who we are.

So this seems to make a little bit more sense because history is just a long collection of stories of humans trying to figure it out, sometimes with good intentions, oftentimes not. And where have we arrived at? Well, the 20th Century was the most violent in human history. We haven't figured it out.

We see headlines where there is more unrest and war in the Middle East, more pain, more hurt. What if there was a different story? What if that story that we've been longing for was fulfilled in the very person of Jesus? What if we looked to Jesus and said, "Maybe this is what this is actually about."

But the problem is most of us, to get a little more practical, don't read the Bible that way. We don't come to it and think of it as a grand story in which we have to understand it through. Here are three views that, at least as a kid, I grew up thinking about the scriptures. I don't know where they developed from.

Moral Encyclopedia

First, we often come to the Bible not as a grand story, but we look at it as a moral encyclopedia. We think through what friendship is like. I was always enthralled with encyclopedias. My parents had a big set of them. And so I'd find, let's say, friendship. I'd go to the F and read about friendship.

A lot of us encounter the scriptures that way. We think of the Bible as a moral encyclopedia. What does it mean to love? So you look in the concordance in the back, and you look for the verses with love to read what the Bible says about love. You pluck those verses out and think that's what the Bible says about love. It's not a bad impulse. You want to live biblically, but it isn't the way the Bible was designed. And so it gets us in all sorts of trouble.

Book of Virtues

The second one, which is close to the first, is I came to understand the Bible as a book of virtues. That there were all of these disconnected stories that had a moral at the end of them. So I'd read about David and Goliath or about Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat. I'd read these stories, and they had morals, and often the morals were good, but it taught me that the Bible is this disconnected thing in which we're patchworking all these pieces together.

Then I wouldn't quite understand because there are other times, as I got older, I'd read stories in Genesis and I wouldn't know what to do with all the sex scandals. I didn't know what the virtue or the moral of that story, other than, maybe, don't drink a lot of wine because you might do something weird. I don't know. But we've come to read the Bible as a book of virtues.

Textbook

Then lastly, one of the other ways I came to think of the Bible was that it was just a textbook or a manual. Again, well intentioned that it was saying something, God has given us the scriptures, and so they must have something for us to understand. But a textbook functions differently than a story. In a textbook, I go to this chapter to learn about this particular topic, and it fragments the story.

The scriptures are stories with nuance and plot that aren't always prescriptive. Sometimes, it's just descriptive of what's happening and what took place. So when you see a story like David, you think, David is known later as a man after God's own heart. That's a really good story. But when I understand him literarily as a story, I recognize that it isn't that when David had the affair with Bathsheba that's what I'm supposed to do. That's descriptive. It's not prescriptive. And so then you see the story arc about God redeeming this man who was a mess, who made all sorts of horrendous mistakes, more so than most of us. What we learn when we think of it literarily is God is a God who redeems people. David needed something beyond him that could shape him and bring him into who he was. See, the function of the scriptures is not as a book of virtues, an encyclopedia, a textbook, or a manual. It's a story. It's a different story than the stories that you and I often hear.

Sometimes, we reduce the Bible to one of those three categories because, honestly, it makes it a little bit more palatable and something that I can control. I can control a book of virtues with disconnected stories because I can just skip over Leviticus. That book's crazy. I can skip over 1 Kings, which is wild. There's all sorts of stuff in there, and we can control it. But story is something you have to wrestle with. It's something you have to look at. It's something that will challenge you. It's a story that will provoke you to think differently about the world. It'll shake us out of our apathy. It'll rattle us out of our complacency. A story is something different.

Eugene Peterson and his book *Eat This Book*, which is a great but difficult read, identifies that one of the problems that we have is when we come to think of the Bible as story, we think of it as smaller than reality. So he says this helpful quote.

As we cultivate a participatory mindset in relation to our Bibles, we need a complete renovation of our imaginations. We are accustomed to thinking of the biblical world as smaller than the secular world. Tell-tale phrases give us away. We talk of "making the Bible relevant to the world," as if the world is the fundamental reality and the Bible is something that is going to help it or fix it....What we must never be encouraged to do, although all of us are guilty of it over and over, is to force scripture to fit our experience. Our experience is too small; it's like trying to put the ocean into a thimble. What we want is to fit the world, as revealed by scripture. We want to swim in this vast ocean. Peterson

Most of us reduce the Bible to something smaller than. Then like trying to pour the ocean in a thimble; we try to squeeze it in. And what is that posture doing? It's assuming that we have the vantage point of all reality. And scripture can then find its way to wiggle into ours. But Peterson's point is, what if the world of the Bible is a far bigger reality than what we've come to believe? Then, it's not us fitting the Bible into our understanding of the world. It's us trying to make sense of reality by going to the scripture and swimming in that vast ocean. The Bible is a story that's much bigger than ours. When we get this wrong, when we reduce it and cram it into our own way of living, this becomes problematic because we can make the Bible do all sorts of weird, crazy things. Often, we do it without realizing it, but we have to come to see the Bible as that larger story.

Let me get one step even more practical. N. T. Wright, in his book, *The New Testament and the People of God*, uses a great metaphor for how we are to both understand and embody the story of the scriptures and then begin to live it out. Because that's our ultimate aim is to not just know the story but to allow the story to situate itself within the core of who we are, so much so, that we begin to live that out. He says, "Consider the scriptures like a Shakespearean play. Every Shakespearean play has five acts." He labels these five acts as follows:

Act One: Creation

Number one is creation. God, in his goodness, created the world out of love and of beauty. And it's this explosion of the very person of God in which the world takes its shape.

Act Two: The Fall

The second act, the fall. Here, we see the devastation of sin in humanity. It's Adam and Eve at that tree in which they're choosing: Will I follow God, or will I follow my own heart? And they choose to follow their own heart. And that's emblematic of the choice that you and I make over and over again. It's not that it's an isolated thing, but rather, it's something that we do. And then, from there, is this ripple effect of sin.

Act Three: Israel

Act three is Israel. God, though, does not leave the story. Rather, he comes to Abraham and says, "I will bless you and your family, and you will be a blessing to all the nations." So it's now this movement in which

God is still active in the story. He did something with this people who would carry the message. What he did for this one group is emblematic of what he will do for all people. And as the story extends, God's inviting everyone into the people of God. This is act three, Israel. We find over and over again that Israel can't quite figure it out. They're constantly looking to other stories. They're constantly wanting to be like all the other nations and operate from those kinds of stories and ways. God kept telling them that they were called to be different. They were called to live by a different story.

Act Four: Jesus

Act four is Jesus, in which God sends the Messiah, who sets the world to rights. Jesus enters the scene.

Act Five: The Church

And act five is church. So Jesus came, and he established this new group of people called the *Ekklesia*, the called out ones, the church. It is this people who embody this new story and live into that reality here and now.

But here's where Wright's metaphor is really helpful. He says, "We live in this five-act play, but the reality is we don't have everything for act five." There is nothing in the New Testament about what it means to follow Jesus with an iPhone. We're going to have to figure that one out on our own. There are parts and ways in the modern world that the scriptures don't speak of because the nature of the written word is that you speak to a particular people in a particular time. And so, it is transcendent in time in which we can come to understand the scriptures in a way that helps us to navigate act five, but we don't have the script to act five. So, how do we follow Jesus?

Improvisation

Wright's point is that we must function like really good improv actors. Because what's an improv actor? If you were to give an improv actor a four-act Shakespearean play, they would know they need a fifth act. And so, how would they know how to operate in the world? They would immerse themselves in acts one, two, three, and four. They would come to know the story so well that the improv moves they make in act five make sense and are coherent with the whole story.

An improv actor can't come in and all of a sudden start saying, "I'm the authority. I know how this story works." No, they are bound by the authority of acts one, two, three, and four. The scriptures are our authority because they give shape to how we understand life in this moment. So you and I, as disciples of Jesus, in some way, are like improv actors. We're holding to the authority of scripture. We're trying to make sense of what it means. And that's why that question of what would Jesus do if he were me in my situation in life if he had my social standing and context and passions and desires and personality and all of those

different things? That's the question that I'm constantly asking as a follower of Jesus. What would Jesus do if he were me? What would Jesus do if he were you?

And then we try to make sense of it. And so we encounter difficult things of trying to imagine what Jesus would do if he had an iPhone. How would he interact with that? What would Jesus do if he had your job, your vocation, your calling? What would Jesus do if he were a plumber, an electrician, a software engineer, or a kindergarten teacher? How would he live that out? Because Jesus wants you to live your life. Jesus had his life, and he already lived his, and you have your life.

What would it look like for you to understand this story in such a way that it gives shape to your daily living? Like an improv actor, the call for all of us is to immerse ourselves into this story. To allow this story, to begin to deconstruct all the areas of my heart in which I've staked my life on other stories to say that this is the true story that matches with reality. And how do I come to saturate my mind and my imagination in this story so I can make sense of life, and I can improv my way with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We don't do this alone. That begins to inform how I live into this particular moment.

We encounter the scriptures daily so that our minds can be renewed to the true center of reality, which is Jesus Christ. This is why we come back to the scriptures day after day, submitting ourselves to this story so that we can come to make sense not only of the reality out there but also of the story within us. Then, in there, we allow the story to reshape the deepest parts of us so that we slowly, with the work of the Holy Spirit and following Jesus, become more like him.

Our Choice

The choice is before us. We can be like the crowd early on that said yes to Jesus. Or, often, we chase him out of town to the brow of the hill, and we want to launch him off the cliff because it's just too hard.

We can seize the role of the playwright and believe that we know how act five should go, or we can do the slow, tedious, decades-after-decades-long work of saturating our minds in the scriptures to allow that to become the way in which we view reality. Jesus invites us to live in congruence with reality.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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