



GOOD NEWS: BEAUTY IN BROKENNESS

Joy Sees Beauty When We Feel Broken

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

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Scripture: Luke 2:1-20

Summary

Every person's life writes a story for others to read. Undoubtedly, this story embroils some level of conflict, brokenness, and trial. The real story of the genuine Jesus is not the cozy and warm story we often see; it contains dramatic struggle and a dark spiritual battle. The lesson this week helps us to see the value of brokenness to redefine our story by appealing to our impulse to find beauty in the ashes of struggle. And as you will see, the Good News has never been better.

INTRODUCTION

Re-Writing Popular Stories

I'm going to start today by re-writing some popular stories that most of us probably know. After each re-write, I want you to tell me (yes, this is audience participate today, so look sharp!) if I made the story better or worse. We'll start with a Christmas story:

Rudolph

A reindeer named Rudolph has a regular nose and helps Santa deliver presents with no hiccups in the plan.

Is this a better or worse story than the one you are familiar with?

Spiderman

Once upon a time, a guy named Peter Parker lived in a world without villains, crime, death, or spider bites. He was a guy.

Is this a better or worse story than the one you are familiar with?

The Lord of the Rings

Once upon a time, there were some happy Hobbits.

Is this a better or worse story than the one you are familiar with?

Good stories involve conflict, brokenness, and trial.

We know a good story involves some level of conflict, brokenness, and/or trial. We know this is true intuitively in the stories we listen to, read, or watch. Without it, we would be bored. Without it, we would feel like we had wasted our time in even listening to this story.

We tend to define what a good story is in our lives differently.

In our own lives though? In our own lives we define “good” and “bad,” “better” or “worse” in our stories very differently. While you or someone you know or love is in the middle of brokenness, trial, or conflict, it doesn’t feel good at all. In fact, it feels *wrong*. We often find ourselves wondering – could this be God’s plan? How can this possibly be the story God is writing in my life? Did I do something wrong? Did I get off track somewhere? Is this what God intended?

TRANSITION TO TEXT: How God wrote His own story

It’s almost Christmas. This season is FULL of stories being told: *Frosty the Snowman*, *The Nutcracker*, and for believers especially, the very real story of Jesus’ birth. I am going to read this story to you all today, my paraphrase of Luke 2:1-7, and as you listen, I want you to have a very specific question in your mind: what can we learn about how *God* writes a good story based on the story He wrote for Himself?

TEXT PARAPHRASE: Luke 2:1-7

Once upon a time, a pagan leader demanded that all people, including the Jewish people who this leader did not respect or support, report to their hometowns for a census so they could all be held accountable to pay their taxes to him. Everyone was going. So, Joseph loaded up his pregnant (not by him, but by God) fiancé and traveled 70 miles from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David. While they were there, away from their home and people, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Questioning God

This isn’t pretty, is it? It’s full of broken systems, inconvenience, and just messiness. When we step back and think about it, the same question for God arises with His story as we ask of our own:

Why this way, God?

If you can do anything, if you could create any story you wanted for your Son, why this?

Real Life Example

There is a woman who wrote of her struggle trying to start her family. For years, she struggled with God: why? Why is this so difficult? Why is this so broken? She felt far away from God, not understanding why this was happening to her. She wondered: did I do something wrong? Has God left me? Then she was angry with God: I did everything right! I’ve been following You, I’ve been as faithful as I can be—why aren’t You giving me this good thing? Then she would question herself: does God think I wouldn’t be a good mother? Was this never meant to be? Then she was back to questioning God – if You are good, if You are powerful, if You love me, why aren’t you writing a better story for my life?

Has anyone ever asked questions like this? To be honest, I have. Maybe Mary and Joseph did too, there with their new baby and the farm animals: if this is Your Son, what are You doing?

Questioning can feel wrong – they put us in a posture to grow

This question can feel wrong. It can feel unfaithful, ungrateful, to look God in the face and ask: what are You *doing*? But the truth is, this question—God, what are You doing—puts us in a posture to *grow* if we let it.

God is doing something

Because: God *is* doing something. He is doing something beautiful. He is doing something beyond our understanding. He is writing a story that is beautiful not by avoiding brokenness, not by leaving us in brokenness, but by what He will accomplish *through* this brokenness.

Here are some other bad re-writes of popular stories:

Rudolph's nose makes him so embarrassed he goes into hiding; Santa can't find his way; Christmas is ruined.

A guy named Peter Parker gets bite by a spider, turns radioactive, spends life in basement.

Frodo puts on the ring; evil wins; the world is destroyed.

It is not brokenness that makes stories good, but what happens through it.

Rudolph finds out, through his trial, his unique giftedness and contributes to the very society that tried to outcast him.

Peter Parker takes his great power and adds great responsibility to it.

Frodo goes on adventures he never would have imagined himself capable of having, and saves the whole world, all while making a set of friends along the way.

Real Life Example

The woman who wrote about her struggle with God in the face of brokenness around having a child, ended up, five years later adopting a child. And, she said, that within the first five seconds of seeing her new son's face, five years of questions were answered. Five seconds to turn five years of brokenness into the most profound beauty she had ever experienced. What was God doing? Giving her a son. *This* son.

Back to Jesus' Story

Let's look at Jesus' story again (Luke 2:1-20, NIV). This time, as you listen, I want you to listen with this specific question in mind: what is God doing with all that brokenness we found earlier? How is He making what is broken, beautiful?

The Birth of Jesus

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register.*

***4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.*

***6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”
13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”
16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The Broken Beauty of the Gospel

God came as a baby and in human form. God came humbly. He announced the birth of Jesus to the lowest run of society, in a far-off field, at night. He was born to an unwed teenage girl in a home for animals. It wasn’t pretty.

But that wasn’t the end. Through this brokenness, our God told a story where He loves us so much that He will not remain distant. He will not remain separate. He will go to any length. Through this brokenness, our God wrote a story where the road to love is low, where the messengers of love are the small and unexpected. Through this brokenness, our God invites us to a story where we do not need to clean ourselves up; we do not need to meet secret qualifications. No, it wasn’t pretty, *but it is beautiful.*

Application

There are two practices I want to give you as we end our time together this week. We are going to try it now, together, in hope that throughout this season you can try this in your real life outside of this place.

The first practice is to *recognize and remember* how God has brought about beauty in your brokenness before. So, right now, we are going to take just a short moment of silence to contemplate and maybe even write down a word or symbol that represents a time in your life where God has taken something broken and made it into something beautiful.

The second practice is to *ask and hope*. Identify a situation in your life or world that is broken. Maybe you’re right in the middle of it. We have remembered that God has come through before, maybe not in the way we would have preferred, but always in the way of love and beauty. So, we ask, right in the middle of this situation: God, what are you doing? We ask, how can I join you in what You’re doing? And we hold on to the hope that we have: Jesus has come to be with us, right in this moment, right in this story, Immanuel, and will turn our mourning into dancing. Our brokenness into beauty. Our grief into joy.