

I. Introduction

A. A couple weeks ago, I started dropping iconic movie clips into my Friday newsletter – mostly great feel-good moments, such as the one at the end of Apollo 13, where Tom Hanks – playing Jim Lovell – breaks the extended silence after their re-entry. It means they have survived. It's a stand up and cheer moment.

B. By the way, I started that newsletter five years ago, and one of the key reasons was because you are increasingly being shaped and disciplined by the culture and media. I was asked by someone if I thought there were other voices shaping the faith of the people attending Christ Church, and I said, I am not sure I am in the top ten voices shaping people's lives. And so, I started this weekly, one page assortment of observations, spiritual insights, book recommendations, articles I think you should read, whatever.

1. It's free. If you have never received it and want it, give me your email. If you used to get it but think I stopped, check your Spam.

C. Anyway, after sending out some movie clips, people started sending me theirs. And I realized something, when I had previously seen the movie, the clip moved me. I got transported back and loved the clip. But when I had not seen the movie, watching the last 4 minutes didn't do much for me.

D. That principle is in play today as we approach Holy Week. What unfolds over the next seven days is powerful. I would go so far as to argue, it is the most powerful story of all time. It is the most amazing story of all time. It is the come-back story to end all come-back stories. It is the shocking ending to end all shocking endings.

E. I would even go beyond that and argue that the reason we love many of the stories we do is because they reflect this story.

1. This is the one of the arguments Tolkien used to persuade CS Lewis to place his faith in Christ. Lewis had joined Tolkien's book group. At the time he was an atheist. Tolkien had started a group that was reading Northern stories – Norse stories, Viking tales. Lewis had to learn a new language – it might have been Icelandic - to join the group. These guys were too smart by ten to have normal friends.

a) I am in a reading group right now and the leader – who will go unnamed – picked an 850-page book as our next read. I suppose it could have been worse. It could be in another language.

2. Tolkien argued that the reason we love come-from-behind stories – the reason we love heroes, especially those who sacrifice for others – is because God has imprinted us to love that. That is all part of our story. It is etched into our soul.

F. That aside, what I would argue today is that in order to appreciate what is going on here – in order to be moved by the crucifixion, in order to be appropriately staggered by the events of Holy Week:

1. we need to have watched the first 100 minutes of the movie.
2. We need to understand:
  - a) The Old Testament points to the New;
  - b) The New Testament points to the Gospels;
  - c) The Gospels point to Holy Week;

d) And Holy Week points to the Crucifixion and Resurrection – which is the Amen Corner, if you will.

(1) If you've been following the Masters, you know that holes 11, 12 and 13 are the holes that change everything. Sort of like, well, three days that change everything. Good Friday through Easter Sunday is the Amen Corner of the Bible.

G. But in order to appreciate this, you can't just focus on this. In order to appreciate the movie you can't just watch the four minute film clip.

H. The fact is, even if you have read the whole book – even if you have read it thirty times – you are still picking up on stuff you missed before.

I. But if you have not read it, then, well, you really can't get it.

II. So, today, I am going to give you the Cliffs's Notes summary of the story.

A. We are in a series out of John's Gospel that looks at aspects of Jesus. We have covered Jesus as Logos, Man, Teacher, Evangelist, and Rebel. Today we look at Jesus as Sacrifice.

B. To appreciate Jesus as Sacrifice – to understand and be moved by the last four minutes of the story - you have to understand six things.

III. Number one: you have to understand the initial deal, which is spelled out in Genesis 1.

A. On page one of the Bible, we read that God made everything, including us.

1. We were the high point of His creative activity.

2. We were made in His image and given dominion over everything

3. It was paradise – it is described as “a garden,” which stands in contrast to later references to wilderness.

4. We had everything going for us – and virtually no restrictions.

5. The offer God made was: obey and flourish. The caveat was: if you rebel you die.

6. Theologians refer to this as the Adamic Covenant.

7. For a while, it was good. But as you know, everything went wrong. Evil enters stage left. Eve is deceived. Adam rebels and the Fall occurs.

IV. Number Two: The Second thing you have to understand is the Curse and the Promise – this is Genesis 3.

- A. Here we read about everything breaking down. It is here that we read about humanity coming under the curse because of the rebellion.
- B. Because of our sin, the world is broken, our efforts are frustrated, there is division between men and women, we are cut off from God, and we die.
- C. However, amidst the bad news there is reason for hope. God makes a promise. In Genesis 3:15 we are told that He will send a rescuer. The seed of woman will show up to defeat evil and fix our troubles.
- D. We call this the proto-evangelion – if you have been around here you know that I make much of this passage. It is the first hint of the Gospel. It is the first whisper of the plan.

V. Number Three. The third thing you need to see comes from the fourth chapter of Genesis. Gen 4-11. Here we learn that the bad news is really bad – that is, that we are now a mess.

- A. Genesis 1-11 is referred to as Universal History. It's a report on everyone and everything – it is broad in scope. Genesis 1-3 is creation through the fall. What we learn in Genesis 4-11 is that the evil that has crashed the party is everywhere and massively debilitating.
- B. In Genesis 4 – 11 we read about Cain killing Able and the Tower of Babel. Our take away is that wickedness and mayhem are wreaking havoc up and down the food chain. What we learn is that sin is not a surface wound. The world is a hot mess AND humankind needs help. We cannot fix ourselves.

VI. Number Four. The fourth thing you have to understand to get the story – to appreciate why the crucifixion is so profound - is found in Genesis 12. This is what theologians refer to as the Abrahamic Covenant.

- A. In Genesis 12 we shift from Universal history to the happenings of one family. The rest of the old Testament – from page 17 to page 1,404, is all about Abraham, Sarah and their descendants. It is about the Jews.
  - 1. When Genesis 12 starts, Abraham is a semi-nomadic shepherd wandering around the Fertile Crescent. God intervenes to make him an offer. Follow me – leave this place (the land of your father) – and follow me, and I will: 1) give you land; 2) give you descendants (remember, at this point, and for a while later, Abraham and Sarah do not have children); and 3) I will bless the entire world through you and these descendants. (Eventually it becomes clear that what is happening with Abraham here has something to do with the promise made in Genesis 3 to send a rescuer).
  - 2. Theologians refer to deal struck by God and Abraham as the Abrahamic Covenant.
- B. From that point on - Genesis 12 – half way through the book of Acts - we watch as Abraham and Sarah (initially called Abram and Sarai):
  - 1. Struggle to have a son – first they wait, then they adopt, then they have a child via Sarah's maid – Hagar. The birth of Isaac (whose name means laughter, because Sarah was so old by the time that she conceived that she laughed when she told she was going to have a baby). But this will be the first of many supernatural births.

2. We read that and then watch as Isaac and his wife have twins – Jacob and Esau. And then we follow Jacob’s 12 sons as they become the twelve tribes of this growing family that becomes a nation and then – much later under David – becomes a Superpower.

C. The story of this family’s rise is what is covered in the Old Testament.

1. The story does not unfold in perfect chronological order. The 39 books that make up the Old Testament employ three different literary genre – history, prophecy and wisdom literature. So it’s a bit confusing.

2. But what we learn starts with what happens to them.

a) The Old Testament after Genesis 11 – after the universal part – unfolds in ten sections: Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest, Judges, United Kingdom, Divided Kingdom, Exile and Return

b) We initially follow Abraham’s descendants on their climb – from Abram and Sarai to Solomon.

c) After Solomon dies, it all breaks down. The nation splits into two groups. The Northern ten tribes get captured by the Assyrians and are never heard from again. The southern two tribes are taken into captivity (into exile) for 70 years. They live in Babylon. Jerusalem is destroyed – including the Temple.

d) Towards the end of the Old Testament, the Persians defeat the Assyrians and the Persian king lets the Jews leave Babylon and move back to Jerusalem and rebuild it. Which they do. It’s not much – the temple is a small kid’s fort. Nothing like what they had.

e) It is all very confusing and depressing. They thought they were God’s people, but now they seem abandoned.

f) But, even as the Old Testament ends, there are still prophets saying, “God is going to keep his promise to you.”

g) It looks like the whole deal with Abraham is a bust. That the Jews are washed up. Yesterday’s news. But, at the very end of Malachi - the last chapter of the last book – there is a note saying: the deal is still on, the next thing you will hear from Heaven is when Elijah returns saying, “Get ready!”

D. Alongside all of that – in addition to giving us the rise and fall of Abraham’s descendants - there are other things we learn in the Old Testament because they keep popping up.

1. One of them is that people really are a mess. We got that in Genesis 4-11. There is nothing in the rest of the book to lead us to change our mind. The human race is full of people doing lots of things wrong, including the Jews who keep bailing on God.

2. A second thing we learn is that God is faithful – even when people are not. He keeps taking them back.

3. A few other things we pick up on from the Old Testament are big that they become their own point.

VII. Point Five: Substitutions are allowed

A. In Gen 1 we got the initial terms of the deal; in Gen 3 we got the rebellion, curse and promise; in Gen. 4 we saw that humanity really was a mess and will require outside help; in Gen. 12 we look at God’s deal with Abraham. Point five is: Substitutions are allowed.

- B. Just to be clear: sin = death, but an innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free.
- C. This is a really big point and it shows up over and over. Let me share three big ones.
1. One of the first place this emerges is in Genesis 22, where Abraham is given the crazy, unthinkable, scandalous command to take his son – his only son. The one he loves, Isaac, and go to a certain mountain several days away, to tie him up, place him on an altar and sacrifice him.
  2. But... at the last minute God says stop and a substitute sacrifice – a ram – is provided.
  3. This is the first place where we learn that, although sin = death, substitutions are allowed. An innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free.
- D. A second place where we see this is the Passover, which coincides with Easter.
1. Jesus is marching into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, as the Jews had done every year for over a thousand years. They were rehearsing this big moment – when they had escaped from Egyptian slavery.
  2. God had heard their cry, sent Moses – you have the ten plagues, the last of which is a visit by the angel of death, who passes over the Jewish homes where the blood of an innocent lamb had been painted – signifying that a substitutionary death had already taken place. An innocent third party had died so that guilty people could go free.
- E. The third bit place where we see the idea that Substitutions are allowed, is the creation of the Sacrificial System
1. Instructions for this are given by God to Moses at the same time he gets the Ten Commandments. What the Jews are told is that they are to have priests set aside to staff an altar – initially this altar will be in the Tabernacle (which is a tent) but later it will be in the temple.
  2. And these priests will oversee this elaborate system by which guilty people come to the temple and say, I have sinned, and according to who they are and what they have done, they will be told to bring a certain kind of animal. And in a ritual their guilt will be transferred to the animal and then the animal will be killed on the altar.
  3. And this will go on over and over and over throughout years and decades and centuries to drive home the point that:
    - a) God is holy
    - b) Sin is a capital offense.
    - c) We deserve to die – but substitutions are allowed.
- VIII. Which leads us to point number six: Jesus is our substitute. He is THE substitute. He is the final, perfect substitute. After his death, there is no need for any other sacrifice.
- A. The New Testament points to Jesus. More than that, it points to the last week of his life – to Holy Week. And Holy Week leads us to the Amen Corner – to His sacrificial and substitutionary death for us.
- B. In their own unique way, the Gospels all open alluding to the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of the story.
1. Matthew opens with a genealogy to take us back to the Old Testament players; John opens with the claim that Jesus is God and Luke opens with Elijah

learning that His wife is going to give birth to John the Baptist – who is the Elijah character promised back in Malachi .

- C. And then as we read we get all of these other clues.
1. John the Baptist refers to him as the Lamb of God – a clear Passover reference.
  2. In the days leading up to his entry into Jerusalem for the Passover he keeps saying that he is going to Jerusalem to die.
  3. He times his arrival into Jerusalem to coincide when the unblemished sheep would be delivered to Jerusalem.
  4. At the Last Supper, he changes the event – the ceremony that the Jews had been rehearsing for over a thousand years – he makes it about himself. He goes off script to say:
    - a) This bread is my body, this cup is the new covenant in my blood
- D. And then we get to John 19 – which was read, which tells us about his death in our place. It is the final twenty minutes of the movie, but it only makes sense if you have paid attention to the first one hundred.
- IX. Please understand, there is more – so much more;
- A. When we go back and look, we realize that the wording of the promise made back in Genesis 3 – where God said he’d send someone (the seed of Woman) was actually a statement about the virgin birth;
- B. We can go back and see that the ways the prophets spoke about the Messiah link together three ideas: he is a king, he is a military leader and he is a suffering servant – is a combination that makes no sense until meet Jesus.
- C. When we go back, we realize how Jesus perfectly fulfills all of the prophecies made about Jesus – prophecies made and in print hundreds of years before he was born – such as:
1. Gen. 12 – that He’d come from the line of Abraham
  2. 2 Samuel 7 - that he’d come from the line of David
  3. Micah 5:2 – which says he will be born in Bethlehem
  4. Hosea 11 - that he would spend time in Egypt
  5. Isaiah 53 – that he’d be crucified
  6. And a couple hundred more.
- D. When we go back we see how the call to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac was just a foreshadowing of what a different Father would do with a different precious Son.
1. Abraham had to travel for days to get to spot God had sent him, because he had to get to the same spot where Jesus would die 2,000 years later.
- E. When we go back we see how the incarnation makes such perfect sense – we are being sent a perfect sacrifice. He is fully human, so he can represent us. He is fully God so He can die for more than just one of us.
- F. When we go back we see all these ways where Jesus is completing the story.
1. Jesus is not just the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on the mountain but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God taking his son up the

mountain and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.”

2. He is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us.
3. He is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, his blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.
4. Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob, only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.
5. Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.
6. Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.
7. Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.
8. Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people’s victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.
9. Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn’t just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn’t just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.
10. Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.
11. Jesus is the true and better Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us. He’s the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread.

X. You have never seen a story like this. You have never seen such an intricate storyline – such an amazing maze of pieces that end up fitting together.

XI. Men and women, Jesus is the Sacrifice. He is not just the Logos, Man, Teacher, Evangelist and Rebel. He is the sacrifice. For God so loved the World that He gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have ever lasting life.

XII. In light of that – in light of the fact that Jesus is the Passover Lamb – we have decided to celebrate communion again this morning.