THE STORY

Prologue – Week 5

You Are a Character in God’s Story

September 3-4, 2016

Appearing on the Big Screen…

1. **Personal:** We want you to read and study the chapter for yourself.
2. **Family:** We want you to talk about God’s Word around a meal.
3. **Community:** Join a Story Group to discuss what you are learning and pray for each other.
4. **Worship:** Attend one of the Oak Hills campuses each week.

Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

*Revelation 1:19 NIV*

God’s **Story** is not **finished** yet.

You are a **character** in God’s **Story**.

You have a **choice** of the **kind** of character you will **play**.

“Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

*Exodus 4:13*

“…Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go.”

*Exodus 7:14*

“Pharaoh hardened his heart.”

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron…

*Exodus 9:12 NIV*

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

*Exodus 10:20 NIV*

The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

*Exodus 10:27 NIV*

…but the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not let the Israelites go…

*Exodus 11:10 NIV*

The Lord said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’”

*Exodus 4:21-23 NIV*

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

*Romans 1:28*

THE STORY

Prologue – Week 5

You Are a Character in God’s Story

Randy Frazee

Oak Hills Church, San Antonio, TX

September 3-4, 2016

**To view The Story Prologue Week 5 sermon video,** [**CLICK HERE**](http://media.oakhillschurch.com/default.aspx?page=3679&item=540)**.**

**Opener**

Well church, next week we dive headlong into chapter one of the Story. There are 4 ways in which you can engage with The Story, 4 environments if you will:

1. **Personal:** We want you to read and study the chapter for yourself. I’m charging you with reading Chapter 1 in preparation for next week – read it and wrestle with it before you come to next weekend’s service.
2. **Family:** We want you to talk about God’s Word around a meal. Our family read the chapter out loud together and talked about questions – there is one for families embedded in the Study Guide. Do this once a week, take a family selfie, and post it to the Oak Hills web page, and we’ll do a drawing once a month and award one of the entries a complimentary family dinner at a restaurant. At the end of the 31 weeks we are going to award a grand prize to one family of a weekend at Schlitterbahn Water Park.
3. **Community:** Join a Story Group to discuss what you are learning and pray for each other. You can start one, we’ll provide the training for you, or you can join one that is starting in your area. Story Groups are starting up this week, discussing Chapter 1.
4. **Worship:** Attend one of the Oak Hills campuses each week. Max and I and our campus ministers will be speaking on The Story every weekend, and our youth ministers and children’s teachers will be teaching The Story to our students and children. So our entire church, clear down to the toddlers, will be on the same page for 31 weeks.

So, engage with us fully, and you’ll not be disappointed.

**Introduction**

If you brought your copy of The Story turn to the Table of Contents and you will see Chapter 1 is titled, “The Beginning of Life as We Know It.” Now, I want you to notice chapter 30 and 31 at the end. There is a huge gap between them. If you have your Bible you will see it by looking at the Table of Contents and looking at the next to the last book “Jude” and the last book “Revelation.” There is a huge gap in time between what takes place in Jude and what is going to take place in Revelation.

John, the writer of Revelation receives a very vivid vision from Christ about what is yet to come. On the bottom of page 460 in *The Story* or Revelation 1:19 Jesus instructs John,

Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

*Revelation 1:19 NIV*

So John gets this vision of “what is now” and he writes it down. The first 3 chapters of the book of Revelation deals with seven churches that were in existence at that time. But from Chapter 4 on, Revelation is about what will happen later. In fact, the things that John sees still haven’t taken place yet. Do you know what that means?

God’s **Story** is not **finished** yet.

Do you know what that means?

You are a **character** in God’s **Story**.

Do you know what that means? It means the same God who was with and empowered the characters of the Bible like Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, Elijah, Esther, Jesus, Peter, Paul and Mary (the original group) is with you and in you and ready to empower you to live your life and accomplish his will on earth. Anybody interested in that?

Here is something you may not have known –

You have a **choice** of the **kind** of character you will **play**.

In every story you have a protagonist and an antagonist. In God’s story, a protagonist is someone who is on God’s side, aligning their life to his will and the story he is telling. An antagonist in God’s story is not on God’s side, working against his will.

Either way, God is going to use you as the character *you choose* in the telling of his grand story, whether you choose to be a protagonist or an antagonist. He is going to use your story in the one story he is telling. If you were with us last week, you know we have put together an app that answers the question, “What is the one story God is telling?”



Go to your App Store and download “sharethestory,” and you’ll see the 5 movements that succinctly tell you where the story starts and where it’s heading. Where it is heading will in fact come about, and we already know how it ends.

**God Uses Everyone to Tell His Story**

Allow me to illustrate this through the great story of the Exodus. The Hebrew people had been in Egypt for over 400 years and the last years as slaves.

Shout it out if you know the answer – Who is the main protagonist in this story of the Exodus? *Moses*

Who is the main antagonist in this story? *Pharaoh*

Let’s start with **Moses**.

As a baby, Moses was miraculously spared from Pharaoh’s edict to kill every Hebrew newborn baby boy by throwing them into the Nile River. Moses was placed in a basket and then placed in the Nile and found by Pharaoh’s daughter. Moses is raised in Pharaoh’s palace where he will stay for the first 40 years of his life.

At age 40, Moses is angered when he sees an Egyptian soldier beating a Hebrew slave. Moses kills the Egyptian, and then flees like a fugitive to the Midian desert. For the next forty years, Moses is minding his own business as a shepherd. He is married to a beautiful country girl named Zipporah and life is simple and good…until one day God pays him a visit in the most unusual form.

He speaks to Moses through a burning bush and tells him he wants him to go back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and to tell him to his face, *say it with me* “Let my people go!”

God is inviting Moses to be a character in the unfolding of his story. In the Upper Story God has a plan for Israel. When God started this nation with Abraham, he promised Abraham that it would be through his seed, and the nation he would build, that the Messiah would come. The Messiah, or Jesus Christ as we know him, would be the Savior of the world. What does that mean? Through faith in Jesus Christ God has provided the only way for us to come back into a relationship with God that was lost through the single decision of Adam that separated us from God. This is the Upper Story that God was writing about Israel. God taps Moses on the shoulder and says, “It’s time for me to make my next move.” According to God’s timetable, he is ready to move Israel from Egypt, where they have been for over 400 years, into the Promised Land. God was giving Moses a chance to play a very important part in pulling that off.

Put yourself in Moses’ shoes. He’s 80 years old, the voice of God is speaking to him out of a burning bush, inviting him to go back to Egypt and do this crazy thing. What would you do? Moses does what I think we would do – he resisted. He says to God, “I think you got the wrong guy.” Not just once but four times Moses conjures up different excuses to give to God. The fifth time he simply said to God (*The Story,* top of page 47),

“Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

*Exodus 4:13*

You are going to see a definite pattern in the Bible. God often selects the least likely candidate to do his work. Moses had been living in the wilderness for forty years; he was a fugitive who was on the run from killing an Egyptian; he really didn’t have public speaking skills; he was 80 years old; plus he had no “cred” with the Hebrew people. Why would they trust Moses who conveniently missed out on forty wonderful years of slavery?

As I think of Moses’ excuses, I find myself concluding he is right! God did pick the wrong guy! But each time Moses gives another excuse, God comes back to him and says, “BUT, I will be with you. Your power will come from me. I will give you the words to speak.”

Moses finally said yes and took on the role of a **protagonist** – on God’s side.

Now let’s turn to **Pharaoh.**

Pharaoh was the big cheese in Egypt. He was arrogant, proud, rich and very powerful. He also saw himself as the Son of Ra – the Sun god – which exposes a major problem humans have had since Adam and Eve – we want to be our own god. We don’t necessarily want to be the god of everyone else, we want to be our own god, in charge of our own life. Here we have Pharaoh who not only wants to be the god for himself, he wants everyone else to see him as a god.

Pharaoh was an **antagonist** in God’s story. He was in direct competition with God. You need to understand, this is the part Pharaoh chose for himself to play in the unfolding of God’s story. He would do everything he could to oppose God’s story or at least try to ignore it.

Finally the day comes when Moses stands face-to-face before Pharaoh and he says these courageous words that God gave him, “Let my people go!” And Pharaoh says… “Not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!” Just as we expected, Pharaoh gives Moses a big, fat ‘no.’

In Exodus 7:14 the Lord told Moses,

“…Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go.”

*Exodus 7:14*

Pharaoh is choosing, on his own, the character he will play in God’s story, and God is going to honor his decision. So God, through Moses unleashes his power through a series of ten plagues. It’s going to be a showdown between the Son of Ra and God Almighty. You will note through the first five plagues Pharaoh continues to harden his own heart against God and his story.

Through the plagues of –

…Nile turned to blood

…frogs

…gnats

…flies

…death of livestock

We are told each time, “Pharaoh hardened his heart.”

But, when it comes to the sixth plague, the plague of **boils,** Pharaoh is starting to weaken against his exposure to the power of God. But God is not done yet using Pharaoh to finish telling this story so God intervenes. You may be uncomfortable with this, but there is a shift. Exodus 9:12 reads a little differently –

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron…

*Exodus 9:12 NIV*

Notice the difference. In the first five plagues, who was hardening Pharaoh’s heart? *Pharaoh.* Now, with the sixth plague, who is hardening Pharaoh’s heart? *The Lord.* Keep in mind that Pharaoh chose the character he would play in God’s story. It was in his heart to be an antagonist against God. But now he just couldn’t handle the pressure of it anymore. He had the *heart* to be against God but he no longer had the *stomach* for it. God is saying to him, “Pharaoh, I need you to hang in there with me, and do exactly what you have been doing for five more plagues. I want to clearly demonstrate my power over you so that all people will declare that I am the One True God. And in the telling of my story, I need to get to the tenth plague which is going to give people the clues they need for the rest of history about how to get back into relationship with me. So Pharaoh, I need you to hang in.”

After the seventh plague of **hail** Pharaoh says in Exodus 9:27-28 – “I have sinned…I will let you go.” God said, “Not so fast, Son of Ra, I am not quite done with you yet,” and the Lord hardened his heart and changed his mind.

The same dance takes place with the next plague, the plague of **locusts**. Pharaoh repents at the exposure to the power of God, and gives up.

But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

*Exodus 10:20 NIV*

The ninth plague, the plague of **darkness** really scares Pharaoh. Turns out Pharaoh is afraid of the dark and he cries uncle, but once again,

The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart.

*Exodus 10:27 NIV*

Moses then goes to Pharaoh in person to announce the tenth and final plague, the death of the firstborn sons throughout Egypt, including Pharaoh’s son. Surely, by this time Pharaoh knows that Moses delivers on his promises but Exodus 11:10 says,

…but the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart and he would not let the Israelites go…

*Exodus 11:10 NIV*

The night came for what is now the biggest and most important celebration on the Jewish calendar, which re-enacts this evening’s events, called the Passover. In fact, this has become the biggest celebration on the Christian calendar as well; we don’t call it the Passover, we call it Easter. It’s where the blood of Christ poured off of the cross, and he died and rose again. This is where it begins. On one fateful night, the angel of death roams throughout Egypt killing the firstborn sons of every household that doesn’t have the blood of a lamb wiped over the doorframes of their homes. Only the Hebrews got the memo and by faith they sacrificed a lamb and put its blood on the doorframe of their house, so when the Angel of Death came to their door, he would see the blood and pass over their house. But on that night, every firstborn son, including Pharaoh’s son, died. We are told there was wailing throughout all of Egypt.

In the middle of the night Pharaoh summons Moses and said “Go!” At this point, Pharaoh is a totally broken man and the Lord has accomplished what he told Moses he would, even before he set food out of the Midian desert and started out for Egypt back in Exodus 4:21-23:

The Lord said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, “Let my son go, so he may worship me.” But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’”

*Exodus 4:21-23 NIV*

Let’s just say it folks. This is the God Who Is; not necessarily the God you want. The God you want, the one you conjure up in your own mind, isn’t strong enough to save your life. The God Who Is, who is utterly just in everything he does, who is telling an unstoppable story, is the God who actually IS. He is the God you are invited to worship.

Here is what you are going to see over and over again as we go through the upper story of God: God uses everyone to tell his story, both *protagonists* and *antagonists*. The choice is yours which role you will play, and so will be the outcome.

Moses chose to be on God’s side even though he felt unqualified and God accomplished his plan through Moses and freed the children of Israel. Moses lived a full and long life and died in peace in a relationship with God and he has been in his presence ever since.

Pharaoh on the other hand chose to be against God. God saw this determination in his heart. Pharaoh didn’t have the stomach to see God’s plan through to the end, but just as God gave Moses the strength to fulfill God’s will, he intervened in Pharaoh’s life and hardened his heart. Pharaoh’s dreams drowned in the Red Sea and today he is eternally separated from God. But, make no mistake, God used Pharaoh just as much as he did Moses to tell his story.

**Conclusion**

God’s story isn’t finished yet. That means that you and I are characters in his story, and we have a decision to make. What character are you going to choose to play in his story – the protagonist or antagonist? The choice is yours and so will be the consequences.

I strongly encourage you to choose God’s side. You will not feel qualified for what he calls you to do. Whether it’s something so small as to be faithful to your family, or something so grand as to confront a modern-day pharaoh, you will feel unqualified for the task, but don’t let that hold you back. This is where God does his best work. He loves to show up when his people are called to do mighty things. He says, “I will be with you. My power will be on your side. I’ll give you the words to speak.” And then, when you are successful in this venture you courageously said yes to, everyone, including yourself, will say, “Where did this come from? There had to be something behind this because there’s no way something like that could come from this person.” And God will get the credit and the glory because he showed up in your life and did the miraculous and courageous thing.

However if you have chosen the part of an antagonist up to this point, please know the Bible teaches there is a point of no return. Ministers all the time say, “It’s never too late to turn to God.” Actually, the Bible teaches there is a line you can cross where you can no longer turn back to God. That should scare you. It’s meant to. Romans 1:28 –

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

*Romans 1:28*

If you haven’t been a character on God’s side up to this point, I encourage you to change roles before it is too late. I don’t know where that point is, but we see in the life of Pharaoh, there is such a point. Don’t hold on living your own life, thinking at the very end you’ll say a quick prayer and change it all. Don’t play with fire.

**Closing Story**

An elementary school was preparing to put on a great Christmas pageant for parents. All the important parts, the roles of the protagonists, were given to the brightest students. The smartest girl was chosen to be Mary; the smartest boy played Joseph. The next smartest groups played the three kings, the angels and the shepherds.

There was only one part no one wanted, the role of the antoginist, the innkeeper. They gave the part to a boy in the class who was a little slower than the others but had a big heart.

As the day for the big pageant approached, the boy playing the innkeeper began to worry. He couldn’t imagine telling Mary and Joseph there was no room in the inn. What was he going to do?

Finally, it was curtain time. Parents, relatives and friends packed the auditorium. They proudly watched the story unfold as their children played their important roles.

Meanwhile, the innkeeper grew more and more anxious. The pressure mounted as Mary and Joseph approached. He didn’t know what to do.

When Mary and Joseph knocked, suddenly he threw open the door and exclaimed, “Come on in, I’ve been expecting you.” With that the crowd cheered and clapped and the play came to an end.

Folks, that is how it’s done. That is how an antagonist changes teams and never regrets the decision.

*PRAY*