

TUTORIAL

1.1

The Master Storyteller

To engage with the real and relevant issues of God's inherent right and desire to communicate with man.

The first and final word

The capacity of words, spoken or written, to actually contain truth, has widely been brought into question in the last few decades. Whether there *is* even such a thing as Truth - an overarching Truth - has been hotly debated. We live in a world where, in many places, absolutes are no longer popular. As individuals, and as a society, making definitive statements that our ideas should be listened to is no longer a comfortable position to hold.

These debates are not just academic - maybe because people have too much time on their hands - the denial of absolute Truth has already profoundly changed and seriously reshaped many societies. In part, the move away from belief in an absolute and unalterable truth has resulted from what is essentially a reasonable challenge; the question was asked, 'Who has the right to say what is true?' and 'Why should your version of things, or mine, be the accepted one?'

Today, more than ever, that challenge must be met with a relevant and adequate response. A premise of all that will be said here is that there is an answer, and that it is more than adequate. Someone does in fact have the right to be speak and to be heard, and that Someone is God. Because He spoke truth, there is Truth, and it is Truth that can be communicated in human language, in real words, and can be clearly understood. As the source of everything - the world, us, our ability to conceptualize and to communicate - He is the One worthy of being listened to. Everything we see around us in the natural world; animals, plants, people, the earth and its environment – in fact all of the foundational elements of the reality in which we live – are created by an all powerful, all knowing, personal God. The Jewish and Christian Scriptures - what we call the Old & New Testaments - were written by real people, in real words, using real languages, and they communicate what God wanted to say. The Bible is God's Word.

When you honestly dig down to what is underneath the reality in which we live, you will find God. Starting with any other foundation than God - or perhaps trying to deny the evidence completely and imagine that there is nothing other than a physical reality - eventually leads nowhere, no matter how simple or how sophisticated a description is given along the way. The logical end to beginning without God, is that there is no Truth, no words that really mean anything of value, no one who can really say anything, no one who can understand. But the good news is that God has spoken. He has spoken Truth into the world, and His words are our source of Truth. So because God has spoken Truly, we also are able to speak truth and to say things that are valuable, meaningful and powerful. It is possible for our words to be worth listening to, if they are founded in what He has established as Truth.

This aspect of God - this speaking truth, telling it like it is - that's not just something He chose to do at some point - a whim. It's not just a nice, agreeable side of God. In fact, this speaking, communicating, relating aspect of God is so essential to who He is that it is not possible to talk accurately about God if it's not consistent with this aspect of who He is. It's also not possible to speak accurately about the world and us within the world without acknowledging this foundational characteristic of God - as willing Communicator.

Speaking truth is part of who God is, but we should not understand that to mean that He is forced or compelled to speak by anyone or anything outside of Himself. God is completely and ultimately free. The concept of freedom, and even our ability to understand it - freedom to decide anything, to believe, to act, to speak - is founded on the fact that God is completely free. And so God, acting from His character and being, freely chooses to speak, to communicate, to tell His Story.

His account of creation - the only first-hand account, as He was there - says that He spoke everything into existence. The Bible says that Creation itself is a kind of speech - a story about God.

Genesis 1:3 *Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Hebrews 11:3 *By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.*

Later, when God came to the world in the person of Jesus Christ - both God and man - He was called The Word - an identity which expresses so eloquently God's desire to communicate with us.

John 1:1 *In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He existed in the beginning with*

God. 3 God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. 4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

The creation of the world, its history since creation and our existence today as part of that history, has the idea of *Story* at its core. God's Story. It is a narrative which revolves around the Word - His birth, life, death and the events beyond that. God is the Master Storyteller, because it is who He is in His very being. He initiated the Story, and we are there as part of the story, but the Story is His and it is ultimately about Him. He began it and He will take it to the conclusion that He has decided on. The first and final Word are His. He *is* the first and final Word.

Who's listening?

It comes as no surprise that as the all-powerful, personal Creator - the Master Storyteller and Narrator of Truth - God also fashioned beings who are able to listen to Him. What would be a surprise is if He had created the world then left it to chance that someone who could listen would eventually come into being. But God did not leave it to endless chains of blind chance, through countless millennia - He expressly fashioned a living being with the ability to listen and understand.

God created, and His creation is the setting and the context for Him to tell His story to us as human beings. But we are not simply passive listeners, because He intentionally made us like Himself - in the sense that we are free. He made us and gave us freedom - the ability to listen, to hear, to understand His Story - and incredibly He also gave us the capacity to respond: to be able to know Him, to love Him, to obey and to worship Him. Of course the other side of this gift of freedom is that we also have the capacity to turn away and to refuse to listen, even to the point of telling our own stories, and to make ourselves the focus and heroes of those stories.

As a race, of course, that is what we have done and what we continue to do. In fact, not listening to God is a defining feature of our identity as a human race. As a group, it's who we are in our very being. We've turned not listening into an art form - we do it well, and we do it with enthusiasm - and we delight in our chosen role of not listening to the One who made us and gave us that capacity. On the whole, we have become obsessed with talking so loudly that we hear only our own voices.

A commitment without limits

God began by creating a place for us so that the very reality of the place itself expresses important things about Him every single moment. He followed-up by making us exactly as we needed to be to hear and know Him and then He

gladly offered, and continues to offer, to be our Story Teller - to write us into His grand, sweeping narrative - and even to collaborate with Him in it.

When we decide to tell our own distorted versions of His Story, our real potential is wasted and our victories are hollow. Our inventions harm as much as they help, we worry that many of the things we've made are actually devouring the world that He made to be our safe haven. We suffer from the lack of Him and search desperately for what prove to be inadequate replacements. And in response to our predicament we either shake our fist at God or perhaps we even stop listening altogether and try to entertain ourselves into spiritual oblivion.

But here is the most incredible part of the whole narrative: God's commitment to speaking with us remains unchanged. He is saddened - he takes no delight in the terrible consequences of our rebellion - but He is not put-off at all by our arrogance. It might seem reasonable for Him to simply leave us to suffer the consequences of our chosen path, but instead, the unspeakably holy and powerful Creator actually doggedly pursues us - His lost race of Listeners. He uses every means available to draw our hearts and minds to Himself.

His pursuit of us - His rescue effort - is at the heart of His Story. It is what He is about, who He is and what He does. His incomparable love and mercy, demonstrated in the face of our rebellion, is a theme that dominates the entire Story that He so urgently wants us to understand. This unprecedented rescue effort brought Him from all that is rightfully His as God, down into time and space, to earth, into the limitations and weakness of a human body, and ultimately it took Him to death, to the very depths of Hell. Now that's a story that must be told. This book is all about those who've been rescued, telling God's story to others in such a way that they will be compelled to listen, and hopefully, will choose to become active participants in telling His Story themselves.



DISCUSSION POINTS

The Master Storyteller

1. Do you agree with the statement that “absolutes are no longer popular” in our society? Give some examples from your own experience.

2. In what way do you think that creation is revelation (“a kind of speech”)? What are some of the things that the world around us tells us about God? Do you feel that, in general, you are conscious of God communicating through Creation?
3. Why do you think God gave us as humans the capacity to listen and understand his communication – his Story – while at the same time giving us the freedom to reject, to not listen?
4. How does it make you feel on a personal level to think about the absolute commitment God makes to communicate with us? On a daily level, are you conscious of His presence and desire to interact with you?



ACTIVITIES

The Master Storyteller

1. Spend at least an hour somewhere in natural surroundings (without any electronic devices active) simply being conscious of and enjoying the reality of God “speaking” through Creation.