

Looking for the Big Picture

One of the great problems that we have as Christians is that we narrowly focus on the events that make up our daily lives rather than seeing these events in their broader perspective. If I were to ask you to think of the past week, month or year and all the things that have happened at your church, in your family, at school or at work, would you only focus on what actually happened or would you want to take some time to meditate on the bigger picture of what God may be intending to teach you in those situations? e.g. How can I learn to be more patient, loving and compassionate; can I see my own sin that may be contributing to this difficulty?; how can I think of this event in a way that will help me, by grace, to grow in my own likeness to Christ? Far too often we only see what we don't like in a given situation and fail to try and focus on the big picture.

It can be the same in our interpretation of scripture. We often focus on an event only as it's given in a particular passage without looking at the bigger picture of all that God is doing in the lives of his covenant people. The bigger picture is often called the meta-narrative. When we go to a book of the Bible, we have to ask a number of basic questions such as: 'what type of book is this? (a prophetic book, a wisdom book, gospel, epistle, etc.). What is the literary genre? (narrative, poetry, oracle, parable, etc.) What is the immediate historical context? What is the redemptive-historical context? (which shows us a particular passage in light of the history of redemption).

All great works of literature contain the following major narrative elements that make up its storyline: Introduction, Conflict, Resolution of the conflict, followed by the Conclusion. The Bible, by necessity, must have a storyline as well. A proper understanding of the meta-narrative of the Bible will show that the storyline is one of continuity rather than discontinuity; a narrative with a connected whole rather than disconnected and disjointed parts. In our attempt to interpret scripture correctly, we must start with the biblical truth that God is sovereign over all his creation, therefore there must be continuity throughout the scriptures. God is a God of order and harmony. The scriptures, then, must reflect the character of God. Thus, the storyline given to us in scripture is generally seen to be: Creation (introduction); Fall (conflict); Redemption (resolution of the conflict); Consummation (conclusion).

Where do we in the twenty first century fit in this biblical storyline? Clearly we await the

consummation as we find ourselves between the first and second advents of Christ; a time between what theologians call, ‘the already and the not yet.’

As we seek to grow in our knowledge of scripture, we want to look at the events that make up a verse or a passage in light of the immediate context as well as the meta-narrative. In much the same way, we want to seek to understand the events that make up our lives by looking—not only at the immediate—but looking at the big picture to try and determine what God may be doing in the moment that will affect our lives for good as we await the return of Jesus Christ. Only God knows perfectly the ways in which he has ordained that our temporal losses will become eternal gains. May God help us to seek to address the events of our everyday lives—not merely and only looking at the immediate—but seeking to look at what God may be doing in the big picture.

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