

Hey everybody! So glad to see you!

I love that old hymn, “Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine.” I particularly like that line in the song that says, “This is my story”. Check it out: We all have a story, don’t we? It sort of defines our life. In fact, if you think about it, our life is a story that we are living out every day. And folks what we are going to do in this series is figure out how to live a better story. I take that back. Actually we are going to figure out how to live a great story from the Word of God. Not only that, but today we are beginning a journey through perhaps one of the most beloved books in all of the Word of God, and I am referring to the gospel of John. For the next year and a half or two years, we are going to be on a journey walking with Jesus through this book, verse by verse and chapter by chapter as we look at this story.

I want to set this up by saying this. My little wife, God bless her, Rhonda: This girl loves a story. She can get lost in a story. She loves to read stories in books, and she loves to watch stories at the movies. Now, I’ve got to tell you: I, for one, kind of struggle with the movie thing. There is too much nervous energy going on for me to sit still for two solid hours. However, I go to movies because I want to be with her. I’ve got to tell you, there are times when I actually enjoy a movie. There are times when I can actually sit the whole two hours, but only if the story line is captivating. By that I mean a story that sort of reaches out to you and then pulls you in to the plot of the story. You know what I am talking about.

You have watched movies where the story line was so gripping that you were sitting on the edge of your seat with interest. When the story line was so compelling that you were hanging on every line; you were hanging on every scene, you wouldn’t even think about walking away from that movie, not even to go to the restroom, because the story line was so captivating. But transverse, you have also watched movies that bored you to tears, haven’t you? So have I.

Example in point, last month Rhonda and I went to watch a movie down at the Regal Theatre in the Southland Mall. I want you to picture it, because we grabbed our popcorn on the way in, holding hands as usual, and we go in and take a seat in this auditorium and sit back to watch the

movie unfold. Folks, after forty-five minutes of watching this thing, I thought to myself, this story line is lame. I never even think of the word lame. I never have used that word, but it went across my mind because the story was just stuck. It wasn't going anywhere. It seemed to have no destination, and the story line really didn't even have any importance to it. Beyond that, the main character seemed ill suited to play the part that he was playing. So I was sitting there fidgeting and squirming and shifting in my seat. I can see Rhonda staring a hole through me because I was moving around.

I was thinking: This is so lame. So lame, and so until finally I stood up and I told Rhonda; "Honey, I'm going out to the mall to look around and call me when that thing is over". Oh yeah! So I go out into the mall, waiting for that story to come to an end. But check it out, because as I was walking through the mall, I thought to myself, what an image of people's lives, because many people, if not most people, are living out a story that is just stuck. They are living out a story that really is not going anywhere. It is not taking them anywhere, and they are living out a story that when they look at their story, there is not anything about their story that has any importance to it. In fact, if their story were put into a movie, they probably would walk out on their own story and go out into the mall. Their story wouldn't even garner one star in the ratings, and yet, at the same time, there is something in most of us, if not all of us: even if you are here and you are not a Christian, there is something in all of us that wants to live a better story.

In fact, we want to live a great story, don't we? We want to look at the story of our life and say our story was important. Our story was significant. We want to look at the story of our life and say there was a real, important purpose to our story. We want to that, so here is my proposition today as we launch this series called "This is My Story". Here is what I want you to get. This is kind of what I want you to walk out the door with. Your Creator, God Almighty, wants you to live a great story. In fact, He wants you to live a story that is so important that you jump out of the bed every morning ready to write the rest of that story. Yet, that kind of raises the question, doesn't it. If God wants me to live a great story, then why is it that so many of us don't really have a great story? Our story when we tell it is not so great. In fact, some of us would say, "My

story is lame, at best.” Why do our stories tend to be not so great, even lame? Well, we are going to answer that question and at the same time we are going to figure out how to live a better story; how to live a great story, as we begin this journey into the gospel of John.

Now, for those of you who are joining us online, and at all of our campuses, I’m going to go ahead and warn you that today is going to come across a lot more like teaching than preaching. You have to put your thinking caps on. I say that because today what I want to try to do is to lay a theological foundation for the gospel of John. We will build on that foundation over the next year and a half to two years, as we walk through this book. But at the same time, I do want to answer that question? Why is it that our stories can be not so great; can even be lame? Why is that? I want to give you three reasons why that is the case.

If you have your listening guides, take them out, wave them in the air; and all of our campuses across Dade County wave those listening guides. I love the story that God is writing at all of our campuses across Dade County. God bless you! For all of you joining us online, you lean into this as we talk today. I want to give you three thoughts why our stories are not so great. Here they are.

Number one: Our stories are not so great because we cast the wrong main character. We cast the wrong main character. Now, with that in mind, we step into the journey of the gospel of John. Verse 1: It begins like this: “In the beginning.” Stop right there, because the book of John begins like a story, doesn’t it. I mean that phrase “In the beginning” reads like “Once upon a time”. Folks, the fact is, the entire Bible from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, is a story, and here is what you need to know at the outset of the story. It is the story of God. To put it in the vernacular, it’s his story; it’s His story. But what I love, love, love, is that we can find our story in God’s story.

In fact, listen to what verse four says: It says: “There once was a man.” That reads like a story. It’s like once there was a man; once upon a time there was a man. Child of God, your story begins the exact same way. It begins with “Once upon a time there was a man named you.”

“Once upon a time there was a woman, a girl, named you.” And your story began the moment that God brought you into this world. The moment that God made the decision to give you life, and to bring you into this world, your story started.

Here is what I want you to walk away with today. God wants to take your little story, and my little story, and write our little story into His big story, so that our little story becomes a great story that has everlasting significance, and purpose, and meaning. I tell you what: hold our story right there for a moment, and let’s go back to the story of John. This is John the Baptist by the way. Because Jesus gave a synopsis of John’s story. He kind of summed up John’s story in Matthew 11:11. Listen to what he said:

Jesus said: ‘I tell you the truth. Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.’ Now folks, that is a remarkable synopsis of a man’s life. Jesus was basically saying that John the Baptist lived the greatest story ever lived. By the way, one day when your story is over, you will stand before God and He will give the synopsis of your life. He will summarize your life. We need to be thinking about what that summary is going to sound like. How He is going to sum up your story. Isn’t it amazing that you will hear some believers who lived a great life, and kind of blew it? You say, “Oh yeah! I knew that guy. He’s the guy that did this or that. That’s kind of a story of their life.” We want to live a great story, like John lived.

Let me tell you: John the Baptist lived a great story because he knew two great truths about the story. I want to give them to you. God is the main character. Amen? God alone is the main character of His story. Listen to verse one. The Bible says, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Folks, there is the main character of all of history. It is God. Have you ever seen those bumper stickers: “History is His story”. I know that is cheesy, but it is true. History began with God and history will consummate with God. That is why John begins his book like this, in verse one: “In the beginning.” Those are the words with which God began history. That takes us all the way back to Genesis 1:1, which says: “In the

beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And John begins his book by taking us back to the beginning when God Almighty created the heavens and the earth. John’s point is this: From Genesis 1:1 when God created the heavens and the earth, all the way to Revelation 22:21, at the consummation of the ages, as we head into eternity, and everything in between, it is the story of God alone, and God is the main character in the story.

Can I give you three reasons why God is the main character? He is the main character, number one, because God created the set of the story. God created the set for the story. Listen to verse 3: “Through Him, (that is through God) all things were made, and without him, nothing was made that has been made.” Translation, God made the set. It is called the universe. God dreamed up the set. God is the architect of the set, and God built the set for the story. By the way, we are going to come back to this verse right after Easter. I’m kind of saving that for Easter, because that is just loaded. We are going to come back and unpack that after Easter.

But at all of our campuses, listen: Not only is God the main character and created the set, God is the main character because he created the supporting cast – us. Listen to verse four. It says: “In him”. In other words, residing in God “was life.” I love that, because this thing that we experience called life, came out from God. That is why verse 4 says: “In him was life.” You say, “Meaning what?” Meaning biological life as we know it exists in God, and God is the One who produced life. Mankind cannot produce life. Man can reproduce life from existing life, but man cannot produce life out of nothing. Only God can do that. That is a law of physics. It is impossible. It is called the law of biogenesis. Life can only come from existing life, and only God can produce life. That is exactly what He did in Genesis 1. He produced life, because life was in Him to begin with. So God created the set, and God created us, gave us life, the supporting cast, and here is my favorite part:

God entered into the story.

Listen to verse 1: “In the beginning was the Word.” Stop there, because the gospel of John uses that term “the Word”, *logos* in the Greek, to refer to Jesus. Jesus is called “the Word”, and John’s

point is this: John says if you wind history all the way back to the beginning “in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth”, if you go all the way back to the beginning and the Word, Jesus, was there when creation happened. Why is that so? Here it is: Listen to verse 1. “In the beginning was the Word, (talking about Jesus), and the Word was with God.” That is so explicit. That is a translation of the Greek phrase: *proston theon*. Here is what it means: The Word was face to face with God”. It literally means that the Word, Jesus, was connected to God. Not only was the Word *proston theon* with God, but it also means “the Word was God”. You say, “Meaning what”? Meaning God entered into His own story.

Listen to verse 14: “The Word became flesh”. In other words, God stepped onto the stage of His own story and He took on flesh. He became a human being, God did, in the form of Jesus, so God again is the main character in the story. I want you to hang with me on this, because a lot of people imagine that there are two main characters: God and Jesus. It is kind of like God is the main character in the Old Testament and Jesus is the main character in the New Testament. Not true! There is only one God. “Hear ye O Israel. The Lord our God is one.” Folks, Jesus was God.

You say, “Rick, how does that work? You know, Jesus is God. How does this Trinity thing work? Well, I want you to put your thinking caps on, because one of the best ways to understand God is to understand us, ourselves, because the bible says we are made in the image of God. We are like God, and one of the ways we are like God is that we are a trinity. Just look at me for example – not that I am anything to look at – but anyway, look at me a moment. I am Rick Blackwood. I am one person, and yet the Bible clearly teaches that I have three dimensions. I have a body on the outside, But my body is not all there is to me, because on the inside I have a soul. Soul is from the Greek word *psyche* and is the word we get psychology from. Your soul is your psychological being. It is that part of you that can think, and feel and reason. That’s your soul. But I’m not just a body and I’m not just a soul. There is something inside all of that. I have a spirit, a *neula*, which is the part of me that can relate to God. So there is Rick the body, Rick the soul, and Rick the spirit. But it is all Rick, one person.

God is the same way. God is one God. "Hear ye O Israel, The Lord our God is one." But He exists in three dimensions. God is One,. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, but all God, all one person. Listen to this: In eternity past before Jesus came, before He left heaven, the Godhead was joined together, like body, soul, and spirit are altogether. In eternity past it was altogether. It was proston theon, face to face, all connected. But when Jesus left heaven, that union, that unity, in the trinity was broken. It was dissolved when Jesus came to the earth. That happens to you when you die. When you die, your trinity is broken up, because your body goes to the grave, and your soul and spirit go to be with the Lord.

But John's point is simply this: Jesus was God, and as such, God is the main character in this story. Folks, here is what that means to you and me. Here is what it means: We are not the main character in our story.

Let's say that: "I am not the main character." One more time: "I am not the main character." Now folks, John the Baptist was able to live a great story because he lived that truth. Listen to verse 19. This was John's testimony when Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, the priests and Levites asked him who he was. "He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely: "I am not the Messiah". Translation, "I am not the main character in this story. I'm the supporting cast. I'm not the main character in this story.

Folks, here is why our stories can be lame. Sometimes we may not mean to, but because we find ourselves in every scene in the story, aren't you in every scene in every story of your life? You are always there in the story. I'm always in my story. I'm the one character who is always there. Because of that we tend to cast ourselves as the main character in our story, because we are the one cast in every set. Here is how you know you are casting yourself as the main character. You know you are casting yourself as the main character when you live your life as if the story is about you. You cast yourself as the main character when you live your life like the story is all about you, and everybody else, including God, are the supporting cast for your main character. Your plans and your desires and your ambitions and your goals are the plot of the story and

everybody else, including God, are the supporting cast to make your plot happen. When you are the main character, you concern yourself with you. If it's me, it's me. Here is how you know if you have cast yourself as the main character. You are always wondering, "What do people think about me? Are they recognizing me. Are they giving me the recognition that I deserve? How are they treating me? I'm the main character in the story."

That is really called self absorption, and it is a lame way to live, because folks, no matter how witty and charming and slick and cute and handsome and smart we may imagine ourselves to be, we were not designed to enthrall ourselves with ourselves for long periods of time. Let me say that again: We were not designed to enthrall ourselves with ourselves for long periods of time. We can't handle that. In fact, when we do that, when we enthrall ourselves with ourselves and play the main character, we are playing a role that really only God is able to play. He is the only one that can handle that. The camera is on Him all the time, so He is the only one that can play the main character.

Let me give you an example. How many of you know who McCauley Caulkin is? Remember him? He is the little boy that played "Home Alone". Remember him? He played a great role in "Home Alone". He played that role very well, but I don't think McCauley Caulkin would play the role of Thor very well. Now, Chris Hinsworth can play that role. He can handle it, but I don't think he could play the role of "Home Alone". Folks, the point is, you and I don't play God very well. We don't handle that very well. In fact, when I get absorbed with Rick Blackwood and I start worrying about my plans and what I want to do and worry about what people think about me. Do you know what happens to me? When I start looking at the little bit of stuff that I've been able to eke out in my life; do you know what happens when I get absorbed with Rick Blackwood? Here is what happens: I get weary of Rick Blackwood! I get tired of that guy when I get absorbed with him. But let me tell you this: I never get weary of Jesus. Never!

I never get weary of praising Him. That is why I can say, and I want you to be able to say, "This is my story, this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. This is my story, this is my

song, praising my Savior all the day long.” Talk about a great way to live. Get your eyes off of you and put your eyes on Him and live a great story.

Let me give you a second reason why our stories sometimes are not so great. Our stories are not great because we don't know the story line of history. Here it is. Listen to verse 9: “The true light that gives life to everyone was coming into the world.” God Almighty was stepping onto the stage of His story. Why? Because, verse 10:”He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, (us) but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, he to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Folks, that phrase “children of God” takes us to the story line of history. Let me give you a quick rundown of the storyline. Here it is.

In Genesis 1:1: God in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. It was like God was setting the stage for His prized creation that He was going to create. Once God got the universe created, and once God got the stage set, He then created His prize creation, us, human beings, made in the very likeness of God, being a triune being, body, soul, and spirit, like God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a being who would be able to have a relationship with God to the point that you would be God's daughter. You would be God's son. You would be His little girl. You would be His little boy. That was the story line.

But as that story unfolded in Genesis, chapter three, those children broke off their relationship with their Creator, their God, their Father, as they were led far away from God by a devil of an angel named Satan. Folks, the rest of the story after Genesis three is God Almighty working hard to restore the relationship with you and me. The rest of the story after Genesis three all the way to Revelation chapter 22 verse 21 is God on a mission to restore a relationship with His prized creation.

History is the story of God on mission. That mission is to bring people who are far away from God into a close relationship with God to the point that they become the children of God. Listen to verse twelve again: “Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed on His name, He

gave the right to become the children of God. That is the story line and it begins in Genesis one and that story got incredible as time went along. In the gospels God stepped onto the stage, entered into a conflict to rescue you.

In fact, Don Miller wrote a book. It is kind of the inspiration for this series. I don't know him, but he wrote a book called "Blue Light Jazz". In that book he gives the definition of a story. Let me tell you what he says a story is. "A story consists of a main character who wants something and overcomes conflict to get it." Let me say that again. A story consists of a main character who wants something and overcomes conflict to get it. Folks, what a description of the Bible. The Bible is the story of a God, who is the main character, who wants something so desperately, and mainly that is to have a relationship with you, a personal one on one relationship with you, and God wanted that so desperately that He entered into a conflict with Satan to rescue you, So when you embrace Christ as your Savior, you actually become God's son. You become God's daughter, giving everlasting life so you and God can have a relationship. That is the story line, from Genesis one all the way to the end, that is the story line.

Here is what you need to know as a believer. God wants to write you into His story. God wants to write you, your story, into His story. Example in point: Listen to verse four. "There was a man sent from God, John the Baptist." Get it: This guy named John got written into God's story. To put it into the vernacular: John landed a part in the story. John passed the audition and landed a part in God's story. Do you know how he got written into God's story? He made God's mission his mission. Folks, you can do the same thing. You can get written into His story. In fact, once you become a child of God, you have a part in His story. You were not meant to sit in the theatre and watch history. You were made to have a part in history and make history. You weren't made to watch history. You were made to make history with your God. You are not the main character, but you, like John the Baptist, are the supporting cast. You are the supporting cast.

What we want to do in the coming weeks is to help you find your part, like an audition in a way, so you can find your part in the story and then live out your story. Listen, when you play your

part in the story, your story goes from zero stars to Academy Award style. I'm not overstating the case, because if you will live out your part in this story, one day you will appear before Jesus Christ, God Almighty in the flesh. You will ascend a throne. Can you imagine this moment? He will call you by name and you will look at your story. You play your part in this story, you will summarize your story like this: "Well done, good and faithful servant." You have a great story. That is what you want Jesus to say at the end of it all. You want Him to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." My job, our job, in the coming weeks is to make that a reality; to find your part in the story.

I want to give you one more thought before we close. Hang with me! The reason why our stories are not so great is because we don't see the entire story. We only see a piece of it. Listen to verse 4 again. I love this: "In Him, that is, in God, was life." That word life is a translation of the Greek word zoe, and zoe doesn't just mean biological life. That's a part of it. But it also means everlasting life. You see, the story of God is everlasting. The story of God is not like a filled frame. It is like a filled strip. The story of God doesn't just roll from Genesis to Revelation. It rolls out forever and ever and ever. And listen: When you take your little, tiny life, which is like a filled frame in the scheme of things. Eighty or ninety years is all you get, but if you will take your filled frame and connect it to God's filled strip, your life will not end in eighty or ninety years. Your story will not stop in seventy, eighty, or ninety years. But if you will connect on to God's everlasting life, your life, your story, will go on forever and ever and ever in that perfect, unimaginable relationship with your Creator. That is what you were meant for. That is what you were designed for. You were not designed to live for eighty or ninety years. You were made to live forever.

How does that happen? How do you access eternal life? How do you go from a filled frame to a filled strip? Here it is. "But to all that did receive Him, to those who believed on His name, He gave them the right to become children of God." You see, you can become a child of God today. At all of our campuses, you can become a child of God today. For those of you who are watching

online. You can become God's son, God's daughter today, at this moment, by receiving Christ as your Savior.