

I. Introduction

- A. There has never been a religion or a philosophy or a science that sees human life in terms as exalted as Christianity.
- B. I don't know what you see when you look in the mirror, and I don't know what your family or friends think when they look at you, but when Jesus looks at you, he sees a sacred being, a masterpiece, created in the image of God, and therefore sacred to God in a way unlike any other life form or created thing.
- C. Just that part is because you are human. That part is common to us all.
- D. But it goes deeper.
- E. There is a glory to you also because you are you. Because of the one-of-a-kind unrepeatable qualities that you bring to the table.
- F. You are on earth for a reason. You have purpose and value far beyond what you know. God has a mission for you. That mission is yours only. No one else can bring to this world what you can bring. No one can bring the perfect blend of personality, experience, strengths, and weaknesses that you can bring.

II. The Hero's Journey

- A. In literature, there is a kind of story that I want to focus on today. It's a story called The Hero's Journey. It's also called the Hero's Story, or the Heroic Narrative. It's found all throughout literature and myth... every culture has this.
- B. So does the Bible.
- C. The classic Hero's Journey represents a call to adventure, facing challenges and trials, emerging transformed, and making a difference that transcends your own life and times.
 - 1. Technically, according to the standards of literature, "Most of the stories in the Bible are hero stories" (Ryken).
- D. I think there's a reason for that.
- E. I think the reason is that Jesus Christ put you and me and every person on this earth exactly for this. So we could follow the steps of those heroes, AND so we could blaze a trail for the ones coming after us. Because what I want to say today is that God has got a Hero's Journey for you—a life of adventure and faith—and you can embrace it with your whole heart...
- F. Or you can shrink back from it, and live a safe, boring, vanilla life full of artificial stimulants, till the end of your days when you meet your Savior face to face.
- G. So, my talk today is this:
 - 1. **Step Up to Your Own Hero's Journey**
- H. Here is our key Bible passage:
 - 1. *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul..."* (1 Peter 2:9-11)

I. I'm going to take this passage a little out of order, I think you'll see why as we go.

III. Five Discoveries

A. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

- 1. The first part of the hero's journey is in these words: ***"that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."***
- 2. This is The Call to Adventure.
 - a) Moses sees a burning bush, goes to investigate, and finds out it is God. God calls him to go to Egypt and set his people free.
 - b) A humble woman named Esther, an orphan, gets swept up in international politics and intrigue in ways she didn't ask for and didn't want. She doesn't know it yet, but she is going to save her nation, and become one of the most prominent heroes of history.
 - c) Joseph has dreams where he sees himself as a ruler, and doesn't realize it's going to become God's call on his life.
 - d) Mary receives a visit from the angel Gabriel, who says she will bear the Savior of the world.
- 3. In each case, these are people living ordinary lives in what has become to them an ordinary world.
- 4. I am not telling you to expect a visit from an angel or a voice from heaven. But I am going to suggest that you wake up and pay attention to the ways that God is disrupting your comfortable routine and complacency.
- 5. If you're a believer, if you're a Christian, God is calling you to a bigger story than the one you're telling yourself today.
- 6. That call may take a lot of different forms.
 - a) You're feeling increasingly restless and unfulfilled in your current job/career... that's what it was like for me and Margi when we came here from Chicago... a couple of years ago.
 - b) A sense that you were made for more - to use your talents in a new or bigger way... we had that going too.
 - c) An opportunity arises that requires stepping out in faith to pursue (new job, entrepreneurial idea, returning to school, etc.)
 - d) Witnessing an injustice that stirs you to get involved and make a difference.
 - e) Becoming aware of a big need and feeling compelled to step up and help. There's a man in our church who built a worldwide ministry out of discarded pool pumps and bicycles to solve the problem of irrigation and drinking water in third world nations.
 - f) Some of you are going to meet someone who will become a close friend or spouse and transform your life's trajectory. When I first entered ministry, I met a man named Vern, when I was in my teens. I guess he saw something in me, and one day when I was 20, he called me and invited me to co-pastor with him, and the rest is history.
 - g) An undeniable prompting from God to radically re-order your life's priorities.
 - h) A time of searching and questions that leads you to embrace faith.

- i) Or maybe you finally get sick and tired of being bored, being addicted, being dysfunctional, or sitting at home filling your crisis of meaninglessness with distractions.
 - j) It could even be a sermon like this one.
- B. The purpose of God on your life is that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.
- a) **In your hero's journey the purpose is so that your life may become an actual experience and undeniable demonstration of the awesomeness of a life with Jesus.**
 - (1) It is not about you living for yourself... though you will feel blessed more than you could ever dream.
 - (2) It is not about amassing followers or fortune or fame... though God can and may bring that to you.
 - b) It is about Jesus. It is about Jesus as the one who called you out of our culture's soul-sucking philosophies — which are nothing but sleepwalking in a hypnotized, demon-bewitched state — out of all that into the uniquely crafted heroic adventure of a life worth living and a love worth finding.
2. It is time for you to begin to listen for the still small voice of God... calling you to the adventure of a lifetime.
3. And immediately you will bump into:

C. THE RESISTANCE

- 1. The resistance stands for all of the reasons you have not to follow the call to adventure.
 - a) God told Moses to go to Pharaoh, and say, "Let my people go." Moses said, "But I stutter." The Resistance.
 - b) God told Gideon, "Go defeat these armies that keep invading your nation and keep you hunkered down in fear." Gideon said, "I'm just a loser from a long line of losers."
 - c) God told his disciples to feed 5,000 people. The disciples said, "We can't, we have no food."
 - d) God told Nehemiah to build a wall. And he got to work... and immediately all the people around him tried to stop him.
 - e) God told Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach the Gospel." Jonah told God, "No."
- 2. **In your Hero's Journey, whether it's from the outside or the inside, the Resistance is there.**
- 3. When the call to adventure comes, it causes anxiety, fear, and resistance. That's one of the ways you know it's from God.
 - a) The heroic choice is letting go of the comfort and safety of the ordinary world to embark on the journey into the unknown.
 - b) Often these calls produce anxiety, fear, and resistance at first. The heroic choice is letting go of the comfort and safety of the ordinary world to embark on the journey into the unknown.
- 4. I want you to think of this part of our verse today:
 - a) **Abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul...**
- 5. I've never heard anybody who really understands what this is saying. Hear me out.
 - a) *To abstain from...* that word means to push away. It pictures an enemy coming at you, but you push it away... The Resistance rises up, but you resist the resistance. You push it away.
 - b) *Push away fleshly lusts...* what does that mean? Not what you think it means. **Lusts is the word for strong desires.** Everybody has desires. Big, little, in between. It is not a sin to want something. It is not a sin to have desires. Having desires is, in itself, a good thing. It's part of your dominion.
 - c) But there are certain kinds of desires we should push away from. What kind? Fleshly desires.
 - (1) What is fleshly?
 - (2) That means the part of your soul that is damaged and broken. **Fleshly means the part of your psychology that is damaged by abuse and evil and sin.** That means the part of your being that desires to hurt yourself and others and push away from God.
 - (3) There is inside of you a set of desires that "wars against your psyche (= your psychology)."
 - (4) **When your Inner Hero begins to raise its hand and say, "I'll go. I'll do it..." Your inner brokenness rises up and begins to pound your Inner Hero into silence.**
 - (a) **Don't let the sin-damaged places of your psychology win the war for your soul.**
 - (5) The fleshly lusts that war against the soul is not the real you. It is not the best you. If you let it, the Resistance will become the foothold for the devil and the death of the Hero's Journey in your life.
 - d) But the good news is that God says you can push that away. I am not saying it will be easy. I am however promising that it is possible. You can do it. You can take back your dominion.
- 6. And you need to. Because once you heed the call to adventure, the Resistance is going to rise up. Expect it. The next stage is...

D. THE GRIND

- 1. This is the Road of Trials. This is where the real work happens. **In your Hero's Journey, the Grind is where the excitement wears off, and you face the day-to-day labor required to actually live out your quest.**
 - a) Noah built an ark. It took him 120 years.
 - b) Moses led the people to the promised land. It took 40 years.
 - c) Ezra rebuilt the temple of Jerusalem. It took 20 years of slow labor, and 52 days once they were motivated.
- 2. This is why our text says: "*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims...*"
 - a) *Beloved...* that's the Bible's name for a saved person. For a member of the family of faith. If you are saved, this is you... you are beloved.
 - b) *I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims...* this is what I've been preaching about for the last two messages. A sojourner is a temporary resident. A pilgrim is a traveler. That's what we are. Heaven is our home. Heaven is our permanent residence. Heaven is where we can finally feel that we are finally where we belong.

- c) We are travelers. We're on a journey. We don't settle down here. We keep moving. There will always be another hill to climb, another fight to fight, another person who needs Jesus.
- d) This world is temporary.
- e) So any losses we feel here, however painful and horrific they may be, they are temporary too. Jesus is inviting you to a secret way of looking at your life. He is inviting you to live with the feeling that you've got nothing to lose. Maybe that's why he said, "Whoever loses their life for my sake, and the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).
- 3. The thing that people don't realize:
 - a) **In your Hero's Journey there's not a lot of glamour most of the time.**
 - b) Do you know who a real hero is? A mom or a dad spending hours and years changing diapers, making breakfast, teaching lessons, driving to youth group in church, praying for their children, going to work, putting food on the table, and building a family on the Word of God. That is a Hero's Journey by definition. And 90% of that is the grind and the grit.
- 4. The Grind is where you encounter the repetitive tasks, the setbacks, the tedium and fatigue that can slowly drain your motivation and zeal for the journey. It's the long stretches between the heroic leaps. It's filled with unglamorous effort and routines.
 - a) Like Frodo and Sam trudging through Mordor's wastelands, the Grind weighs you down with weariness and causes you to question if the cost is truly worth it.
- 5. But it *is* worth it, because this is the stage where flashy bravado gives way to ironclad persistence that will ultimately emerge as victorious.
- 6. And the Grind is the place where the next part of the journey becomes real to you:

E. THE GRACE

- 1. *"who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy..."*
- 2. If you step out on the heroes journey, you're going to make a discovery. You're going to discover that the grace of God is never far away.
- 3. **In your Hero's Journey, you're going to discover that the grace of God is more real and more present than you ever thought before.**
 - a) The grind of Ministry wears Elijah down and he wants to give up. So God sends an Angel who literally gives him a sandwich and a nap. There's THE GRACE.
 - b) Moses can't get over his insecurity. So God provides a helper named Aaron to be his right hand man. When the need is there, the grace is there.
 - c) For Paul, the grind made him a punching bag, for what he called his thorn in the flesh. For him, the grace came in the form of a promise. My grace is sufficient for you, my power is perfected in weakness.
 - d) For you, it might be a mentor. It might be that you finally found a church you were looking for.
 - (1) It might mean the love of your life comes walking into the back of the Bible study as you're teaching it.
 - (2) It might mean you get a pay raise. It might mean you finally get some needed rest. Or an answer to prayer. Some kind of win to show you that the struggle is worth it.
 - e) I had a special moment of grace last week. My brother and his wife go to a church in Chicago. They met a man who has been serving in the church for many years. I don't remember him. But my brother texted me a picture and a note that says: "This is Bob Schwartz. You led him to the Lord in the early 80s at NSGC. He teaches Sunday School at our church. Back in the day he started a church in Rogers Park with Dan Fritz. Thought you would like to know."
- 4. The Grind in every hero's journey is punctuated with moments of special grace that prove you are making a difference.

F. THE TRANSFORMATION

- 1. I'm going to say something that you may not understand today. Maybe you're too young. Maybe you're too broken. Maybe you carry too much anger. I understand. Sometimes there are truths we just have to grow into.
 - a) **In your Hero's Journey what matters most is not the victory you achieve, but your transformation into the glorious person you were meant to become.**
- 2. Not the business you start. Not the changes you affect in society. Not the guest appearance on Joe Rogan's podcast or even the awards and trophies and houses and friends, you may acquire. All of those are good things and I'm hoping and praying they can be part of your story.
- 3. But there is something far more important and that is who you become along the way. And that is something that will never happen if you play it safe and avoid the Hero's Journey.
 - a) Esther was queen in name but she became queen in her very being when she passed through the Grind with Grace and actually saved her people.
 - b) But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...
- 4. **IDENTITY: But you are a chosen generation (genos eklekton)...**
 - a) Your branch of the family tree is radically different from what it used to be. The evils, the brokenness, the addictions, the dysfunctions in your history no longer define you. Gen A, Gen Z, Millennial, Buster, Boomer... you are lifted out of that generation and placed into a new one. You are a new spiritual species under the watchful, loving care of a Father who believes in you more than you believe in yourself. You are not who you used to be. This is the transformation from **AVERAGE to OUTSTANDING.**
- 5. **ROYALTY: A royal priesthood (basileion hierateuma)...**
 - a) By being a priest, you have access and connection with God in heaven above, 24/7, wherever you may be, whatever you may be doing, and whenever you may need it. By being a *royal* priest, you realize that you have access and connection

and power and authority and meaning more than words can describe. You have spiritual agency far beyond your realization... you have dominion over the realm of your life. This is the transformation from **VICTIM to VICTOR**.

6. **AUTHORITY: A holy nation (ethnos hagion)...**

- a) What defines you is not your earthly ethnicity, but your heavenly citizenship. Your homeland is heaven, your accent is heavenly, your blessings are heaven sent, and your direction is heavenward. You don't fit in today's culture. You see the diabolical con for what it is, and you've shaken off the shackles. You've been pulled out of the web of lies that this world believes, lies that are breaking hearts left and right. This is the transformation from **conformity to AUTHORITY**.

7. **DIGNITY: A distinctive people (laos eis peripoiésin)...**

- a) The older Bibles say "peculiar." You don't fit the societal mold anymore. And if the societal mold is producing record rates of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and self harm, I'd say that's a societal mold nobody who's thinking about it actually wants to be squeezed into. With Jesus, the engine under the hood of your soul runs on a different technology, fueled by a different energy, and with far more power than before you were saved. This is because you have been scooped up in the strong embrace of a Father who treasures you and makes all things new. This is the transformation from punching bag to DIGNITY.

- 8. The hobbits who return to the Shire at the end of the story find that everything is the same. But they are different. Radically different.

IV. Conclusion

- A. This is the ultimate treasure you gain from the journey. It's not just an object or artifact you've obtained, but the molding of your very character into the image of Christ. The petty insecurities, selfishness, and fear that once controlled you have been conquered. Your dysfunctions have been shed. Your addictions conquered. You have become the heroic person God knew you could be all along.

B. **So, Step Up to Your Own Hero's Journey.**

- C. One last thing, and I want you to listen to me carefully.

1. **PLEASE EMBRACE THIS TRUTH: YOU ARE THE HERO OF THE STORY THAT IS PATHWAY CHURCH.**

- D. Last weekend there were 4500 people who one way or another were part of our weekend services. In my mind that is 4500 heroes. In my mind that is 4500 people who will one day shine forth in heaven's glory, and have someone point to you, and say, "I am here because of something you did, something you said, something you prayed, and something you gave. I am here because of a price you paid to point me to Jesus, the one who paid the ultimate price for me. Thank you for giving me the Lord."