

OUR STORY
Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-17
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In Philip Yancey's The Bible Jesus Read, Yancey raises three questions that people often ask: 1) Do I matter? 2) Does God care? And 3) Why doesn't God act?

Those are the kinds of questions the Hebrew children might have asked --in Egypt --in the wilderness --in Babylon

The same questions we ask during
--the Holocaust --the killing fields -- 9/11 --Iraq --Ethnic wars --refugee camps --AIDS in Africa --Christian persecution in Sudan, India, China.

Such events can raise those three questions, but are they the right questions?

How do you read the Bible? Do you look **AT** it? -- Or **THROUGH** it, like a lens through which you try to understand God, the world, and our role in it?

I. OUR STORY

Christopher Wright takes the position in his work entitled, The Mission of God, that we should read the Bible through a missional hermeneutic. He states that it all begins with three realities:

God—the named one who willingly reveals God-self to us,

God's story—a real-life drama from creation to consummation. Post modern deconstructionists notwithstanding, this is the ultimate Big Story,

God's people—those God chooses to co-manage God's mission. (I Peter 1:9)

A panorama of the Big Story includes:

Babel—they spoke one language, but could not understand each other (Genesis 11)

Abram—all ethnē will be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-3)

Incarnation—God spoke love in the language of humanity (John 1:1-14)

Pentecost—each heard the Good News in her or his own language, and the spread of the church in the first century is history (Acts 2)

John—those from every tribe, clan, language around the throne (Rev. 7:9-10)

And now we know the rest of the story—from the Mediterranean to Europe in the West and China in the East—to North America, and in the 20th Century we have seen the church explode into a global context.

II. SHIFT OF BALANCE

What a story to tell! The majority world church now resides in Latin America, Africa and Asia:

—In **Latin America** evangelicals and Pentecostals soared from 50,000 to 64 million in the 20th Century

—In **Africa** there were 8.7 million Christians in 1900, now in 2008 there 417 million

Protestants, African Independents, Roman Catholics and Anglicans. There are Episcopal dioceses in America now serving under African bishops.

—In **Europe**, immigrant churches from Asia, Latin America, and particularly from Africa stand out as some of the largest, most vibrant churches in all Europe. Africans now refer to Europe as “the dark continent.”

—In **Asia**, Korea is the second-largest sending country in the world. From Korea's various denominations, they now have upwards of 19,000 missionaries serving in 180 countries. ---Indonesia's Christian population has reached 15-18% of the 230 million people in that land.

—China dominates our news, economically and politically. But what is happening in the church is unstoppable. Official estimates of believers in China are at 35 million. On-the-ground observers say the total may range between 60-80 million.

All these movements are very missionary in outlook and commitment, and their approach does not look like anything in the West. We are in a new apostolic era! Western methods with strategies, budgets, and long-range goals have been jettisoned. The wind of the Spirit blows where it will, and they follow. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light!

III. OUR ROLE IN THE FUTURE

Has the church in the West forgotten its story? Has the culture crept in and induced spiritual amnesia? Are we the ones now sitting in darkness? What will it take to awaken us?

In The Eagle and the Raven, a documentary narrative about Sam Houston and Santa Anna, James Michener recalls an experience when he was just a lad. A farmer at the end of the lane had an aging apple tree that had lost its energy to produce. Early one spring he took 8 rusty old nails and hammered them into the trunk of the tree. In the autumn a miracle occurred: the tired old tree produced a bumper crop. Michener asked the old man how that happened. The reply was, “Hammerin’ in the rusty nails gave it a shock to remind it that its job is to produce apples.”

Even churches like yours need to be reminded how easy it is to be lulled into a kind of “active complacency,” guarding past successes, and unwittingly becoming a compliance church that expends money and energy maintaining its reputation.

Don’t forget OUR STORY, It’s not about us, it’s about God, and God’s mission locally, globally and cosmically.

CONCLUSION

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the KGB released a film that had once been classified. The title was *Redemption*. Toward the end of the movie a little babushka was walking the streets after dark and encountered a Soviet soldier. She asked him, “Where is the church?” He retorted in disdain, “There is no church.” To which she countered, “What good is a street that doesn’t lead to the church?”

When an Orthodox priest told a group of us that story, my question was, “What good is a church that doesn’t lead to the streets?” As the hands and feet serving the mission of God, is there any other option for the church? Don’t forget our story. Today we engage in an act of worship that forever keeps the words of our Savior fresh in our minds and hearts: “As oft as you do this, do it in remembrance of me.” And memory fuels our continuing role in living out our faith, locally and globally.

Amen.