Removing Cultural Oppression From Scripture

Myron Bernard – Youth For Christ
Understanding the Dominant Narrative

Our lens affects our reality. Our brain fills in the gaps with misinformation.

#UYWI
Narrative - “What’s the Story About?”

- **The Dominant Narrative** = “What most people say the story is about”
  - Guided by Cultural Dominance / Majority Culture
  - Our Biblical narrative has been traditionally examined through the lens of white evangelicalism

- **Problems:**
  - Relegates other theology to 2nd class or “less true”
  - Eg – “Black Theology” or “Liberation Theology” instead of just “Theology”
  - “Approved” Theological Study was only conducted by educated white males coming from relative amounts of power and privilege.

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Jesus is _______

- Asian born (60% of the world)
- Multi-racial (Tamar/Ruth)
- From Scandalous Past (Rahab)
- From Teen Parent (Mary age 13 – 14)
- Shameful Birth
- Poor (Joseph & Mary’s temple offering)
- Political Refugee (Fled to Egypt)
- Immigrant (Returns to Nazareth)
- Called a Drunkard / Glutton
- Called Mentally Ill
- Homeless
- Outlaw
- Despised & Rejected
- Innocent Victim
- Forsaken by Father
- Victim of Violence
- A wounded healer

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In urban ministry, why should we avoid resorting to culturally dominant narratives?

1. Jesus chose to align and primarily identify with those called the least

2. Culturally dominant narratives are incomplete, or sometimes just false

3. They can create distance between Jesus and everyday people

4. Jesus used narratives “from below” when he taught to challenge convention and cultural dominance

In the poorest of the poor we see Jesus in distressed guise.

Mother Teresa

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On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

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But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

- 1 Corinthians 1:27-29
Common problem lenses when reading God’s word

- **Domestification** – “Taming the Wild Beast”
  - Making the scriptures fit our lens.
  - Judges 19
- **Hyper-Personalism** – “It’s All About Me.”
  - Viewing the Bible as a personalized letter vs something for the group
  - Both/And - Jn 3:16
- **Reductionism** - “Bumper Sticker Bibles”
  - The Bible is full of mystery and difficult questions. It’s okay to wrestle and allow kids to wrestle with it.
    - Let’s not oversimplify.
  - Romans 1 & 2
- **Isolationism** – “Just Me and My Tribe”
  - God is more for my people than for others
  - “Are you for us or against us?”
Common problem lenses when reading God’s word

- **Heroism – “Superheroes and Villains”**
  - Overlooking significant sin in our Biblical Role Models
  - Makes stories mythical instead of accessible
  - Abraham, Moses

- **Moralism – “God’s Little Instruction Book”**
  - Viewing the Bible as set of behavioral rules – what we think God wants
  - “What good must I do to inherit eternal life?”
  - Overly prioritizes obedience over Unconditional Grace and a transformed heart

- **Dualism – “Split Personalities”**
  - Dividing reality into spiritual vs material
  - We tend to regard spiritual things as “good” or more important and physical/material problems as less important
  - Feeding 5000
So how do we do this right?

- **Bible as Story**
  - Who are the Untold Voices in the story?
  - What is their story? What’s the theme of the story for them?
- **Examples:**
  - Abraham’s theme?
    - Hagar, Ishmael, Sarah’s themes?
  - David’s theme?
    - Bathsheba’s theme?
  - Judges 19
    - Where is Jesus in this story?
Questions, Thoughts, Comments?

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