

## Welcome

TIM: Welcome, everyone. My name is Tim Basselin. I'm on the preaching team here at Catalyst, and y'all know my partner today, JR. We've finally made it to the end of this series on genres. It's been a LONG series, JR. I thought when you said a series on biblical genres, it would be like 3 weeks. But we kinda dug in and took each one pretty seriously. And we've heard from some of you that it's been a little overwhelming. As we've taken each genre seriously, we've developed tools for understanding each type of literature. And you may feel like you now have a heavy bag of tools you have to carry to scripture every time you crack open the good book.

JR: That's a totally valid feeling, and it's one that I think in some ways is unavoidable when we start to take Scripture seriously. It is, after all, a library. It *does* have a bunch of different genres in it, and - like we've seen this summer - they become incredibly rich when we read them carefully.

But it's a lot. And, partly because it's a lot, when we read these different genres, it's easy to get caught up in the methods, to make understanding the genre the main goal.

TB: Hey. Have you ever heard the joke about seminaries really being cemeteries? People come to seminary with a call on their lives, with a passion for the church and a love for scripture, and then they learn all these methods, these ways of understanding, and they get overloaded with tools, and they lose that passion. Many an excited youth pastor has gone off to seminary and then returned to their home church a rather different person. And that's unfortunate. And that's NOT what we want to have done with you this summer.

Understanding genres and methods of how to read scripture is NOT the goal. As we've said all summer, transformation is the goal. My favorite essay by C.S. Lewis provides a very helpful analogy here. The essay is called "Meditation in a Toolshed." And it's best if we just let Lewis introduce this idea, so here's how he starts this essay:

I WAS STANDING TODAY IN THE DARK TOOLSHED. THE SUN was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sunbeam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitch-black. I was seeing the beam, not seeing things by it.

Then I moved, so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences.

JR: We've given you a bunch of tools this summer to look at the beam of light that is scripture breaking into our dark world. And they're helpful for our understanding, but with all our tools, we run the risk of a being a group of scientists walking around the beam, measuring its width and length and checking the temperature of the air in the light vs outside the light, and we never look along the beam to see all that is larger than the dark shack, all that is beyond us, full of light.

As we conclude our series today, we want to remember that Scripture is an invitation to the God who is beyond our comprehension. Even with all the tools of the whole world gathered and spent a lifetime learning how to use, God is unmeasurable. But.... God breaks into our world, and invites us to see everything by God's light.

Singing together is another way God invites us beyond ourselves. So let's sing together as we begin!

### **Message**

JR: This is the last week of our Summer Series. We've spent the summer exploring the various genres of the Bible. This has all been grounded in our conviction that Scripture is inspired. By that, we mean that Scripture is a gift from God, and its purpose is to invite us into the larger reality that we call the Kingdom of God. A life with God. A relationship with and through Jesus.

God gave us these invitations through real people, people who wrote in particular times and places. So that's why we focused on genres. We want to understand how these texts were heard in the first place.

Ancient writers created biographies and histories, prophecies and apocalypses, folklore and mythologies, letters and legal codes, poetry and wisdom literature.

But again, so much new information can feel overwhelming. It's tempting to grasp onto this new information and mistake it for the goal. To think that becoming an expert in how to read the Bible is the goal.

But our goal is transformation, not information. So today, at the close of the series, we're going to take a page from two good friends who shaped each others' faith dramatically: J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings, and C. S. Lewis, who penned, among other things, The Chronicles of Narnia.

Tolkien and Lewis would invite us to read the Bible not for information but *mythically*.

TB: So, we are using the word *mythically* a little differently than it was used last week. Last week Sue and JR were referring to the genre of myth, which is a type of storytelling. This week, we are trying to get at something different - by myth we mean kind of the underlying truth behind the story, or the underlying truth that sustains all of creation and life.

Let's begin thinking about myth this way by understanding how Lewis and Tolkien thought about myth. Now this is pretty incredible.... it was as Lewis and Tolkien had conversations about myth that Lewis began to move from being an avowed atheist to believing in God.

Their friendship was birthed from their shared love of the old Norse myths. They spent a lot of time discussing different cultural and religious myths. They were amazed how similar themes pop up in various myths all over the world. They discussed the role myths played in creating a culture's morality and how they treated one another. And one day Lewis said something about myths being so wonderful, but too bad they're lies breathed through silver. And Tolkien said to Lewis that all the stuff he loved about myths, all the heroism, the self sacrifice, the gods being reborn, that all that stuff was there in the story of Christ, every bit of it, with just this one difference. In Christ, myth became fact. That's such a marvelous way of putting it. All of that truth that pops up in people, cultures, religions ... it becomes incarnate when Christ is born. And with that line, "myth became fact," Lewis turned from atheism to theism. And that line, "myth became fact," kept working on his soul until he turned all the way to Christianity. A love for myth, for experiencing truth in stories, is how Lewis came to recognize the truth of the incarnation.

There is a way of reading scripture that looks for facts, and then attempts to move beyond the facts to something bigger. I don't want to dismiss this way of reading. It's very important for understanding. And all the tools we gave you this summer can be very helpful in doing this. But, there's another way of reading scripture that doesn't just look at the beam of light and study it, but looks along the beam of light. In loving myth and giving himself over to it, Lewis was already looking along the beam of light before he ever believed in the Bible as facts. The larger truths outside of the Bible were what allowed him to see the events in the Bible as real and important.

JR: Knowing this, you can begin to see why Lewis wrote the Narnia series and Tolkien wrote The Lord of the Rings. They believed that myth can shape our imaginations in such a way that we are able to recognize truth more easily. Getting carried along in a story that is true to reality invites us to know what it's like to look along the beam of light and not just at it.

In that essay where Lewis describes the beam of light in the toolshed, he then uses another metaphor. Imagine you see a young couple in love. There is a legitimate scientific explanation for what is happening with the couple, the biology of attraction. Testing the pheromones and mapping the brain chemistry, paying attention to how blood rushes to the cheeks as their pulses increase. We could spend a long time creating a hyper-accurate picture of what happens to a body in love. But you could be THE most knowledgeable scientist in the world about those facts .... And really know very little about love if you'd not experienced it yourself. Again, it's not that the science isn't helpful, but it's not the thing itself.

TB: Ok. admittedly, a beam of light in a toolshed is pretty abstract, but I think most all of us understand something about loving and being in love. That experience is a very good example of what we mean by myth. We don't love only because Jesus came into the world and died for us. Love is actually more basic than that. You know, "love makes the world go round," and that was true before the incarnation.

My understanding of how the world began is that the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, so loved one another that their love overflowed its bounds, and out of that overflow, our world was made .... and as a side note, according to CS Lewis, possibly or even likely many many other worlds, but that's another discussion for another time, so let's get back to that overflow of love, which I believe is the ongoing, driving force of life in this world. This moving, creating, overflowing love is very basic to reality. It underlies and upholds everything. We get glimpses of LOVE here and there in our relationships ... and that's what Lewis and Tolkien meant by myth. It's an organizing principle, it's the truth that's beyond our seemingly disparate experiences of our daily lives. And stories are helpful in tapping into that larger truth, that mythic quality of reality.

JR: We all know that something's greatest strength is usually also its greatest weakness, and that's very true with the scientific method. The fact that it puts us in control is a double-edged sword. So, there's a way of approaching Scripture that uses all the tools of interpretation and reading literature to put us in control. We might call that the Scientific impulse toward Scripture. It looks like expecting the Bible to behave the way *we* want it to behave. It's why a lot of us were a little freaked out by the idea that the Bible has mythology and folklore in it.

Myth, though, is larger than us. It's truth that we get caught up in. Myth carries us away in stories, even and perhaps especially where we can't explain why or how.

Remember, Tolkien insisted to Lewis that Jesus' incarnation is a *true myth*. This means the incarnation is all that stuff we dream about and most deeply understand to be true come into actual being.

[Scripture Slide 1] The opening of John's gospel illustrates this myth breaking into our world. Remember that the Gospels are ancient biographies, meant to convince us that Jesus is the way to life.

But how does one prove that scientifically? So, the opening of John's Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" is mythical. It participates in the myth that Genesis starts with, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Again, for Lewis and Tolkien, this is the power of myth. It draws us beyond ourselves into something much larger!

The best way John could get this across was to write it in the form of a poem - a chiasm (remember when you taught us about those, Tim?).

TB: Yeah, hopefully y'all remember this poem by George Herbert - Easter Wings. The structure of a chiasm is abc, cba. Much of the Psalms are written in chiasm, and here in Easter Wings, Herbert uses this structure to help us feel the way sin restrains us and salvation sets us free. It's worth returning to and reading again.

[Read Easter Wings- with visual on screen]

We are all familiar with the beginning of John's gospel, this beautiful, lyrical, mythical vision of Jesus. Interestingly, John ALSO uses this chiasmic structure, just like the Psalms.

JR: Let's read the opening poem together, and we'll show you the chiasmic structure. You'll see that the emphasis of the poem is how God, through Jesus, makes us all God's own children:

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' "

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another.

For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us. -- John 1:1-18

Like with Easter Wing's pattern that looks like wings, John 1 does something similar here, but with mountains. Did you catch that bit at the end about Moses? Moses received the Law by going to the top of a mountain. Which made sense in the ancient worldview. God was up there, so if you wanted to break into the world of the gods, you had to go up there. (Like Mt. Olympus, right?)

So Moses went up a mountain, peeked his head into God's reality, and came back with the law. John uses that at the end of his chiasm to create a visual punch to his story about Jesus.

The Word starts with God - the Word is with God and IS God.

Then the Word is narrowed to become a human. So the Word comes down to Earth. But then by the end, the Word has risen back to be with the Father, near the Father's heart.

It's an upside down mountain. John wants us to see that the *opposite* of Moses' journey is happening here. This isn't a human trying to poke his head into God's world. This is God erupting into our world.

TB: John is mirroring the myth of creation that JR and Sue talked about last week. He begins with this great mythical vision, something bigger and beyond what we can see or express, and then that myth, that deep reality (or as Lewis calls it in the Chronicles of Narnia, the Deeper Magic), becomes actual flesh! The myth isn't just something we imagine and hope for, the Myth literally breaks into our world - the Word became human and lived among us. The Word came to us to show us how to become God's children, so we could join him near the Father's heart.

JR: John carries this theme throughout his Gospel story. In the other three Gospels, Jesus is constantly working miracles - casting out demons, healing - pretty much non-stop.

In John, however, Jesus only does seven miracles. And John doesn't call them miracles. He calls them *signs*.

Because remember, John has an agenda with his Gospel: he wants you to believe this true Myth that Jesus is the Word made flesh, come to make us all children of God.

So out of all of Jesus' miracles, John chooses seven as *signs*. Moments that point at the kingdom of God breaking into the midst of our world.

TB: Only picking 7 signs, and being very specific about which ones and why is how John invites his readers to not just look at Jesus, but to look along the Light.

JR: All the signs are amazing, but my favorite is the sixth sign, the sign of the man born blind. Jesus and his disciples encounter a man who was born without sight. Jesus walks up to him, spits in the dirt, wipes the mud he makes on the man's face, and tells him to go wash in a spring. When the man does, he can see.

This causes *quite* the stir. The man runs around telling everyone Jesus healed him, and they're all amazed because they all know this guy and his family.

Long story short, the guy gets dragged in front of the religious leaders. They hate that Jesus is getting all this good press, and they want the man to discredit Jesus, to tell everyone he's a false teacher.

The guy shrugs his shoulders and says, "Look, I'm no theologian." Which is true - since he was born with a physical deformity, he wouldn't have been allowed to receive theological education or worship with the community.

SO anyway, the guy says, "I can't tell you all the Bible verses that support or condemn this guy, but here's what I know: I was blind. Now I can see. That tells me this guy has to be from God!"

This guy - who literally had never seen Jesus - could see Jesus better than the religious leaders who allegedly knew God better than anyone.

TB: The religious leaders were bringing all their tools of religious training to look AT this beam of light that was Jesus. They were trying to figure out what Jesus was, and all their tools of interpretation led them to describe Jesus in a way that was fundamentally flawed. This man born blind, though, was looking along the light. He had a completely different experience of who Christ was.

That's a powerful reminder of exactly what we've been talking about all summer: it's entirely possible to be an expert in the Bible and miss God entirely. It's easy to get caught up in examining the beam, when God invites us to really see.

Again, we're not saying the religious tools were what kept the religious leaders from seeing. Later, Paul, who was a religious leader trained in the use of Scripture, uses all those same tools correctly to understand the light better and to be able to look along the light and help churches know what they were seeing.

Reading the Bible mythically reminds us that there is no singularly correct interpretation of the Bible, because no interpretation is big enough to comprehend God. In fact, reading mythically reminds us that God's story can be found everywhere. In the beginning was the LOGOS and the LOGOS was with God and the LOGOS was God... There is no single expression of this great MYTH. This truth of the universe needs thousands and millions of expressions. Truth can be found anywhere, which is why we have the saying that ALL truth is God's truth. We need literature and plays and movies and biographies and family stories and walks in the woods and missions to Mars and so much more to help us get at capital T Truth.

JR: But... when we state it like that, it sounds like just anything can be truth and you can have your truth and I have mine, and we can't critique anyone's truth cause it could all be from God.

TB: But that's not what we are saying.

JR: You see, the danger of the rational/scientific method, of looking at the beam of light, is that we inevitably try to control the outcome, to understand truth in very narrow terms.

TB: And the problem of the mythic understanding, of looking along the light, is the danger of just accepting anything and everything as truth. What then can we do? Is there no objective truth?

JR transition to this text and move toward the HS role in leading us to objective truth.

In fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged.

"There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.' -- John 16:7-15

Community is vital to seeing God's light. The other big trap in all of this is that we privatize our reading of Scripture. This wasn't really possible when Scripture was first written - churches had *at most* one copy of all the books. Most people were illiterate, so Scripture *had* to be read (and heard) in community. Discussed together.

TB: Obviously, that's not the case anymore. We all have Bibles in our pockets - in multiple translations! This is awesome, but it *does* make it really easy to treat the Bible as an individual book.

JR: But the Bible was designed to bring us into community with each other. That's a big part of why the Bible never talks about a personal relationship with Jesus. What the Bible is concerned with is a new way to be in the world, a way to live together that Scripture most often calls the Kingdom of God.

In those verses we just read about the Holy Spirit? When Jesus says YOU, he doesn't use the singular form of the pronoun. If we were reading the Texas translation, he'd be saying, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide y'all into truth."

The Spirit brings us together, and we see the light of God's kingdom *together*.

TB: Just to clarify once more. We aren't saying that the methods of how to read genres are bad. Obviously, we're not saying that. We spent a whole summer talking about them. What we're saying is that they're not enough on their own. They're not the full reality. One final analogy may help.

Using the methods of interpretation are like following recipes to create a great feast. You need to know the technical stuff. You need to measure the flour and the liquid in order for the bread to have a chance of being decent. But imagine you knew all that and created the entire feast... And then you just threw it all away because you had no guests to serve. The tools for cooking are necessary for cooking well, but what's the point if the family doesn't gather and people aren't laughing late in the evening and raising a glass to toast? We need to know how to look at the light and study it, but never at the expense of being able to look along the light and experience the invitation to a fullness of life!

JR: Friends, this summer has been a wonderful journey. I hope you've enjoyed our journey through these genres of Scripture. In so many ways, we've barely scratched the surface, but every time, we find the true myth of Jesus himself bubbling up through these biographies and histories. We've found through prophecy and apocalypse a Jesus who wants to transform our present political and social concerns. Through legal codes and letters, a God who wants to transform how we live together. Through poetry and wisdom literature a God who invites us into the heart of a mystery. And through folklore and myth, a God who wants us to see ourselves as part of a better story.

Scripture is an invitation to see God, to know the kingdom of God.

### **Communion + Examen**

[Communion Slide] Friends, Taking communion is a mythic activity. If you try to understand it only by examining it with tools or explaining its theology, you're going to miss it. It is a myth that stretches out over a couple thousand years, and more. It stretches over countries and continents and into eternity. It is something to participate in, to look along, not just something to look at. And as we look along this beam of light, just as when we look along the beam of light that is scripture, it transforms us. Christ invites us today into this great myth, just as he did his disciples 2000 years ago, saying, "This is my body, this is my blood. Take eat. Do this in remembrance of me."

JR: ASDF

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### **Assignment + Blessing**

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