
Your Life's Main Character (Acts 10:34-38)
1/8/2017 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Throughout human history, people all over the world have been fascinated by stories. Even today you can see that clearly by how many people love TV shows, books, movies, video games, and so on. They can give us compelling series of events, deep character development, causes and effects that we can really get ourselves invested in.

I've always found it fascinating how the make-up of a story really fits with our experience. Most stories follow some main character which allows us to see who that person is and why they do what they do, how they look at the people around them. This fits in very much with our own experience. Each of us has a pretty good grasp on who we are, why we do what we do, how we look at the people around us.

Then stories also have supporting characters, people that we don't know as much about. We have to really judge them by their actions because we don't get that inside view like we do with the main character. And in a similar way, we don't get that inside look into the people around us. We only get to see their actions and hear what they say.

Today, however, as we remember Jesus' baptism and see how he has been declared the Chosen One, we want to ask ourselves a supremely important question: who is Your Life's Main Character?

Is it you? Are you Your Life's Main Character? Many, probably most of us, see this as the answer. After all, we just made that connection before. Our own selves are most similar to a main character in a story because we can read our own minds, just like we often get to read the mind of the main character.

But does that make us the main character of our lives? A main character is not just someone you know a lot about. A main character is also the one in a story in whom we become most invested. The plot of the entire story often revolves around what the main character does and wants to do. The main character is someone whose side we join, and who we want to see win.

So with those thoughts, let's ask it again, are you Your Life's Main Character? Again, many, probably most people, would say, "Yes." But where does that leave us? If I am the main character of my life, if you are the main character of your life, where does that leave us?

First off, it leaves us living a lie. With main characters, we can often be so invested in their perceptions, that we become blind to their actions. If I am my life's main character, then I am likely to see myself as always in the right, even when I'm in

the wrong. Think about it, how often in a story has the main character done something wrong, but you didn't even realize it? The main character can murder a bad guy and we don't even blink an eye at it, because he was the good guy and they were a bad guy.

In a lot of stories these days, the main character is often even a criminal, or even a serial killer, but we hear their side of the story. We get invested in their struggles. Then, suddenly, we are rooting for them even when they are doing wrong.

And how often don't we see that in other people? People are so invested in their own selves, their own "character," that they become blind to their actions. How many times have you seen someone do something wrong, but they refuse to acknowledge it and blame everyone else for their shortcomings?

But this is just a natural result of seeing ourselves as the main character. We become blinded to what we are actually doing. Instead of focusing on our actual actions, we judge ourselves based on our perceptions. We don't focus on what we have actually done, but we say, "I was too tired." Or "I was stressed because of work." Or any others in a long list of excuses.

But in the same way that a good story about a murderer can get us to buy in and root for that main character, we buy in to ourselves and root for ourselves, even if an honest look at ourselves reveals that we aren't anywhere near as good as we think we are.

Looking at ourselves as the main character of our lives also puts us at odds with God. When my life becomes all about what I am doing and what I want to accomplish, we make even God a supporting character. Suddenly, I am not here to serve God but he is here to serve me. When I have bought into myself, God's concern that I do what is right becomes less important, and instead I care much more about proving to myself that I am the good guy, the one who is always in the right.

We begin to think that God too will see us the way that we see ourselves. In spite of our sins, we say, "God will understand that it wasn't me, it was that person's fault!" We think that just because we have bought into ourselves and just because we are rooting for ourselves and we understand why we are living the way we are living, we think that God, the great Judge, will simply look at us and say, "I like you. Not guilty."

But just as Peter discovered in our text for today, so too we learn, that God does not show favoritism. He doesn't care what you look like. He doesn't care who you are or how "important to the story" you are.

As Peter says, "God accepts from every nation the one who *fears him* and *does*

what is right." God will not be swayed by our excuses or by how exciting our own story is. God will not buy in to the story of the murderer. God will not be swayed by the life circumstances of thief and the liar. God will not root for the self-centered people who see themselves as the main character. God judges people based on whether or not they fear him, and whether or not they do what is right.

Dear friends, this is where we must recognize that we are not our life's main character. The main character of reality has and always will be God. Life is all about what God does and what God wants to accomplish. Life is all about how God will win. We are merely supporting characters that God has added to the story, and it is his side that we ought to be joining, not him joining our side.

Since we are supporting characters, it is not our perceptions of things that matter, but what we actually do. That is why Peter tells us that God does not show favoritism but instead looks for those who "fear him and do what is right."

A quick note here: the Bible often talks about fearing God. When you are afraid of something, how often do you think about it? ... If you are afraid of a person, do you pay attention to what they say or just ignore them? ... When we fear someone or something, we have a huge respect for them. We pay excessive attention to what we fear. God wants us to have that complete and total respect for him.

But compare that fear God demands with how many of us live our lives. We know that there is an almighty God who has told us that he gives people what they deserve. And we so often, for whatever reason and excuse, we often have done what is wrong. We so often have failed even to fear God, to even respect him enough to take what he says seriously. God condemns everything we know as sin and tells us that sin damns us to hell and yet how often do we think so little of failing to love our neighbor, or how often do we not even pay attention to the fact that we have again put ourselves before everyone else. So many of our sins we simply ignore as a nonissue, in spite of how seriously God treats those sins.

We have reason to be terrified of God, because we have failed to fear him, to respect him, and we have failed to do what is right. We have reason to fear God because we have selfishly seen ourselves as our life's main character, instead of God.

But this is where we return to that main character: God. Because God has sent the Chosen One, the Messiah, the Christ, to be our Savior from our sins. God has named Jesus Christ as our life's main character. Jesus is the one who has perfectly feared God, who always does what is right. Jesus was the one whom God anointed with power and with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the one who traveled throughout his life doing good and healing any and all who were under the power of the devil, that power which makes all of us see ourselves as the main character. And Jesus has the

power to heal us from Satan's power too.

God has announced his Chosen One, the main character of our lives. And we through faith have the opportunity to buy into him. Through faith, we watch to see what he does and wants to do in the world and in our lives. Through faith, we invest ourselves into him and join his side.

Through faith, we learn to put aside our view of ourselves as the main character, and instead put the Chosen One in his proper place in our lives. No longer is our life all about justifying our own actions and proving how we are in the right. Instead, we can learn true fear of God, true respect for him and for what is right. Instead, we can learn to do what is truly right, that is, accepting God as my life's main character.

When we recognize ourselves as supporting character's in God's story, that selfishness doesn't hold the sway over our lives that it once did. Now we can take an honest look at our actions, rather than only at our perceptions. Now we can take our neighbors words and actions in the kindest possible way, rather than judging them by just mere appearances. With God as our life's main character, we are free to acknowledge what we have done wrong, to admit our sins and to turn from them.

When we recognize Christ as our life's main character, we recognize that even our salvation depends not on us but on the Chosen One. Jesus Christ has taken away our sins. He has been declared God's Christ, his Messiah. He is the one we can lean on. He is the one we can trust in.

Dear friends in Christ, the Chosen One, through Jesus' baptism, God has announced to us our Savior, the Savior of the entire world. May God give us wisdom, to see him as our life's main character. May we buy into him. May we join his side. And may we watch for the end when he wins. Amen.