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Following

The Year^(s) Of [^]Jesus Part 147

Sibling Rivalry: Jesus & His Brothers

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: This week we're going to look at an interaction Jesus had with His brothers just before He leaves Galilee for the last time and heads towards Jerusalem and His inevitable sacrifice. If you've been with us during this series you may remember that for the last few months Jesus has been becoming increasingly short of patience as the stress of what He knows is coming grows within Him. He's becoming frustrated with the religious leaders, the crowds and even His own disciples. And now we see that His brothers are piling on as well. So let's read the next story in the chronological story of Jesus' life:

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him. Jesus replied, "Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come." After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee. John 7:1-9 (NLT)

There is a lot going on in this very short interaction between Jesus and His brothers. We're going to spend most of our time this week looking at what Jesus means when He talks about "the world" because it's one of the more confusing and nuanced concepts in the gospels. So let's get started.

If you've read the gospels then you know Jesus talks an awful lot about "the world". But the way He uses the word can get pretty confusing if we are paying attention and trying to figure out what He means. Jesus' brothers start out telling Him, you should "show yourself to the world". And Jesus refuses because He says, "The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil." But what is Jesus talking about when He talks about "the world" and what are His brothers thinking when they tell Him to show Himself to "the world"?

The Greek word that we find in the Bible for "the world" is the word, *cosmos*. And it is used in a variety of ways in the Bible. Do you recall the times I have talked about how difficult it is to translate Greek words into English because the Bible uses one word (like faith, humility, etc.) to describe multiple English concepts? "The World" is very much like that. That one Bible word is used to define several different concepts. The first is to describe the entire created realm:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1 (NIV)

Notice how the Psalm differentiates between "the world" and "all who live in it". So in one sense you and I (who live in the created "world") are separate from the concept of "the world" in this context. So one way that "the world" is used in the Bible is to describe the visible universe that

the Bible says God created from scratch- and notice that it all belongs to God. But that's not the only way the word is used in the Bible. And here is where things start to get a tad confusing if you're sitting down trying to nail down what exactly the Bible means by "the world":

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 (NIV)

What does Jesus mean when He says that God so loved "the world"? Is He talking about the visible created universe that we can see all around us? No. So what is He talking about? He's talking about the people of this world. So sometimes "the world" is talking about the people who live on this planet. And what's kind of fascinating about this whole thing is that it's the people (who live on this planet) who messed up God's perfect "world" that He created and we broke. But when we broke the planet God didn't give up on us- instead He "gave" us a Rescuer who would redeem what we've done to break "the world" (and ourselves) so that we wouldn't be lost but could find life through Him.

That's not the end of the meanings associated with "the world" but it's enough for today. Maybe you and I could spend today reflecting on why God would send His only Son to die for a bunch of ungrateful, stubborn children who broke (and continue to break) His good world.

Tuesday Reflection: So yesterday we began looking at what Jesus meant when He used the phrase, "the world". We saw that sometimes in the Bible "the world" is talking about the created universe and sometimes it's talking about the people who make live in "the world". I guess that would mean that the world lives in the world, huh? Kind of confusing. But the different meanings don't end there. We read perhaps the most famous passage of scripture in the entire Bible yesterday- John 3:16- and we saw that God loved the world so much He gave His one and only Son to save us. We also saw in the very next verse (John 3:17) that Jesus didn't come into "the world" to condemn "the world" but to save "the world" through Him. As if it wasn't difficult enough for us to figure out what each passage is saying when it uses the phrase, "the world" but now we are finding two different definitions of the same word in the same passage. But wait- there's more!

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life- comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (NLT)

So which is it? God so loved "the world" that He sent His Son to die for it and now here we are being told by John (the same guy who wrote the gospel of John and that we just read his explanation of why God sent Jesus in John 3:16-17) that "the world" is bad and that we should not love "the world". Why would John tell us not to love something in the book of First John that He said in the gospel of John that God loves so desperately that He willingly sent His Son to die for it? I know that was a confusing sentence so go ahead and

read it again. Do you see my dilemma? The same author tells us not to love something that He has also told us God loves to His very core. Why the confusion?

Because in John chapter 3 the reference to "the world" is talking about the people who live in "the world" (confused yet? Just wait- it gets even better ;o) and in the book of First John "the world" is talking about the culture/customs and mindset of the kingdom of this world- a kingdom that stands in opposition to the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. So I guess John is telling us that we should love "the world" but we should not love "the world". Clear as mud, right? Why am I pointing all of this out? Because if you're reading through the Bible trying to wrap your mind around what it means whenever it references "the world" then without knowing all the different meanings the Bible has for "the world" you'd be lost. I know I was when I was trying to figure out why I would be told to love "the world" and yet also be told not to love "the world". So currently we've identified 3 different meanings when the Bible uses the phrase, "the world". Are there more? You betcha. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate He was asked if He was a king? Look at what Jesus tells him:

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."
John 18:36 (NLT)

Jesus is indeed a King- but His Kingdom is not part of "the world". One of the biggest issues the church has had over the last 2,000 years is what happens when Christians start confusing Jesus' Kingdom with "the world". We are told over and over that while we have to live in "the world" we should not let ourselves be defined by "the world". Right now we who are followers of Jesus are called to live with one foot planted firmly in "the world" (this place we currently reside) and one foot planted firmly in the Kingdom of God/Heaven. That's why Jesus gives us this warning in the Sermon On The Mount:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21 (NLT)

One day when Jesus returns and sets everything right the kingdom of "the world" and the Kingdom of God/Heaven will once again be perfectly merged. Jesus will fix what broke when sin entered the world and there will be no difference between the spiritual and the physical. And so He warns us against putting too much of our efforts towards the things of "the world".

Have you ever heard someone use the word, secular? It comes from the latin word for time and yet it has come to be defined as anything that is not in the spiritual realm. That's kind of weird, isn't it? We could spend some time discussing how the Bible suggests there is not to be a separation of the spiritual and the secular but we don't really have time for that today. So let's focus on the word "secular" which is basically that a word that means we are focused solely on the here and now. Secularism in our culture is anything that is set apart from the spiritual. Why would we get that impression? Because we can see stuff that is all around us in "the world" but we can't really see the spiritual realms, can we?

What is Jesus saying to us about where to store up our treasures in this verse? He's advising us to look beyond what we can touch and see into the spiritual realms which, according to Jesus, is just as real as what we can see and touch. But those of us who live "secular" lives focus only on the here and now. I guess you could say that secularism is time-ism or now-ism. Secularism is living only for the here and now.

Now I'm not bashing the concept of secularism in our society (which has a different meaning- kind of) but when we focus only on what we can see, we are in essence saying we are living only for the here and now. Anyone who lives ONLY for the here and now is living a secular life. Jesus warns us that that way of looking at things is missing the (MUCH) bigger picture. We're missing that this life we are currently living is just the beginning of the beginning. Jesus is saying it just doesn't make logical sense to put all of our eggs in the here-and-now bucket to the exclusion of the next "world". A world you and I will live eternally in.

So I think that's a good place to stop for today. What should we reflect on today? Maybe spend some time reflecting on whether you're storing up treasures on earth to the exclusion of storing up treasures in heaven. There's nothing wrong with saving for retirement. In fact the Bible advises us to plan for the future and save our money so we are ready for whatever might come in a future we have very little control over. But if all we do is save for our future in this world we are really making a very poor investment decision. So how do we store-up-treasures-in-heaven? What does that look like? Great question- let's reflect on that today shall we? What have you been doing in your life to store-up-treasures-in-heaven?

Wednesday Reflection: So far this week we've been looking at what the Bible means when it talks about "the world". We've seen that "the world" can mean the created and visible universe, the people who live in the created/visible universe and the culture/customs and thinking of the people who live in "the world" (especially the antagonistic attitudes our culture often has for God's way). We looked yesterday at how Jesus told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of "this world" and we read where Jesus advised us to invest in things that will build up our treasure in Heaven (where it could never be lost or taken away) instead of focusing solely on "the world" to the exclusion of thinking about what comes next- which by the way will outlast what we experience in this world by an infinite amount. I used a quote by Steven Curtis Chapman yesterday without giving him credit. The quote was, "this life we are currently living is just the beginning of the beginning." It's from the song, The Glorious Unfolding and it's talking about how short our time on this earth really is. I'd like to say this life we're currently living is just a drop in a bucket but that would not do justice to the difference in time between this world/life and the world/life to come. Heck, it's not even just a drop in the ocean- it's more like the life we live here on this side of eternity is just an atom in the universe. And that probably doesn't even do justice to how much bigger and expansive the next phase of our existence will be.

We also talked about secularism- not the same definition our culture uses which is anything that is separate from the spiritual realms but rather how a person views time.

Jesus advises us to not forget to build up treasures in heaven while we're busy working on making enough \$\$\$\$ to live our lives. It's really a very poor investment choice according to Jesus. Then in the book of Hebrews we're told this:

Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others. Be careful that none of you is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Hebrews 12:15 (PHI)

The word used in this verse for "godless" is the word that is also translated as "profane". What does that word mean to you? I can't separate the word from profanity so I've always figured it was using four letter words. But is that what Esau did? Well, maybe he did do some cussing in his day. Heck, of course he did. But that's not why the Bible warns us not to be like him. In fact the Bible's warning here is very similar to Jesus' warning in the Sermon On The Mount when He tells us not to make the poor investment decision to put all of our eggs in the basket of "the world" and instead to remember to store up treasures in Heaven- you know, the next world.

So how is the warning for us to be careful or we'll live a godless/profane life in "the world" like Jesus investment warning? Well, what did Esau do? He traded his birthright- one of the most important rights that a firstborn son enjoyed. It entitled him to all the benefits of the firstborn son. He got the lion's share of the inheritance when dear old dad died and it gave the first born authority over all of his brothers and sisters who came behind him in the birth order of his family. It was a huge deal in the ancient world and Esau traded it for a bowl of stew. He claimed he was going to die without the stew but that was probably a childish belief.

And that's another aspect of secularism- a way of life where you ignore the immensity of eternity and rather than storing up treasures in heaven we instead focus solely on building up treasures in this world. Not only is it a poor investment decision but it's really a pretty childish thing to do. Children are probably the greatest exempt of secularism because they can't fathom how delayed gratification can possibly ever be the right choice.

I remember once when Jonathan was about 2 or 3- we were running errands together and we drove by a McDonalds. Jonathan was already very fond of the Golden Arches and when he saw them he grunted something that sounded like "shrench shries!" I knew exactly what he wanted and that sounded pretty good to me too so I told him, "yes. After we make this next stop we'll get some shrench shries." He scowled at me and held out his hand and asked me, "which one is my middle finger?" I can remember thinking to myself, "surely not..." but I like seeing where these things go so I pointed out his middle finger and he immediately held out his hand to me with his middle finger (and only his middle finger) extended to me. I asked him where he learned that and he said, "from my mom!" "Oh realllllly, well I don't know what your mom told you but that's a very rude thing to do. It's like cussing with your fingers." He was not a cusser and didn't seem to like it when other people cussed and so this bothered him. Anyways, when I got home I told Judy that Jonathan had been sharing some of the things she'd been teaching him. When I told her what happened she laughed and said they were talking about what each finger was for.

The thumb was for giving a thumbs up or hitchhiking (but she told him he should never hitchhike). The first finger was for pointing, the third finger was the ring finger and the fourth finger was the pinky used to show manners while sipping tea. He realized she left one finger out and she told him that was a finger people used to express displeasure. She even claimed she told him never to use that one but there was obviously a break down in communication.

All that to say, children don't really get the concept of delayed gratification. They want what they want now and if you ask them to wait- well I'd beware of that middle finger because even if they don't show it to you it's probably what they're thinking. It was Jonathan's problem when he was 4 (he has since learned to appreciate delayed gratification to a MUCH greater extent than his dad has and I'm quite proud of that boy) and it was Esau's problem as well. The difference is, Esau wasn't 4 when he traded his birthright for a bowl of stew. He was a grown man. And the fact that he was willing to trade something as insignificant as a bowl of stew for the most important thing in a young Jewish man's life (as long as he was the firstborn) shows an immaturity that is shocking.

But that's another way of looking at secularism. When we live only for the here and now not only is that a poor investment decision- it's childish. I guess in some ways it's sort of like extending our hands towards God and asking Him, "which one is my middle finger?" I know, that's an outrageous claim and I guess it's not exactly the same but I was hoping to get all of us thinking seriously about what living only for the here and now is saying to God.

Be that as it may, we do know that God wants to see us mature. He wants to see us living our lives in a way that says we understand that this world that we currently live in is in the process of passing away but we ourselves are not. Oh sure, our physical bodies that were short-circuited when sin was unleashed into this world are wearing out but death and decay will not have the last word in our lives. You will live forever. There's no getting around that. So put away the childish, immature view that this world is all I'm living for and start making wise investments in the world to come by storing up treasures in heaven. It's a lot to take in and it's a lifelong process of coming to grips with the concept. But the good news is we don't have to do it alone. God wants to help. But we have to let Him or His advice just goes through one ear and then out the other. If you're a parent you're familiar with the concept. If you're not then why not ask your parents about it- I'm sure they'll have plenty to tell you. But for today I want to leave you with this:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

What are the "behaviors and customs of this world"? Secularism. There's nothing wrong with the physical world. I mean it's unravelling (which is why investing only in this world makes such little sense) but God doesn't intend for us to run from the physical world but to learn to live in such a way that we don't ignore the world-to-come while also learning to live in the physical world as we find it. So why don't we spend some time reflecting on

what it means to “let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think”. What would that mean? I don’t have all the answers but I know that one thing God’s transformational process will do is lead us from immaturity to maturity so we’re not making decisions based on our child-like brain.

Thursday Reflection: Next week we’ll spend more time looking at Jesus’ words about “the world” but for the next two days I want to just focus in on Jesus a little bit. We are currently in a series looking at the unprecedented impact of Jesus’ life on our world. So we are going to look at how Jesus’ teaching changed the world more profoundly than any other teacher who has ever lived. Let’s start here:

Once a religious leader asked Jesus this question: “Good Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Luke 18:18 (NLT)

What I want to focus on today is this phrase, “Good Teacher”. I always thought that the religious leader was being polite sort of like when someone used to say, “now look here my good man...” But it’s so much more than that. The word “good” in the Bible doesn’t just mean “ok”. In the Bible the hierarchy of adjectives doesn’t go good, better, best. It goes better, best, good. And there’s nothing beyond good. Like English grammar teachers will tell you every chance they get, “there is no such thing as ‘gooder’”.

The religious leader was right. There is no teacher that has ever surpassed Jesus. Think about this- crowds flocked to Him in such numbers that one time He had to get into a boat just so everybody would be able to hear Him. Short people would climb trees just to get a glimpse of Him. There’s story of a sick guy whose friends cut a hole through a roof just so they could get near Jesus. People gave up careers, gave up money, and gave up reputations just to be His students. On the other hand, when He preached His first public sermon it made some people so mad they tried to stone Him. His family thought He was crazy one time so they tried to take charge of Him and take Him home to silence Him. A lot of teachers’ only goal is to get bigger crowds... His teaching was so radical that often He would say something that would cause most of the crowd to leave Him. His teaching was so explosively controversial it got Him killed.

Even as a young man of 12 years old His understanding was so deep that He amazed the religious scholars of Jerusalem:

Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple, sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. Luke 2:46-47 (NLT)

After His death (because of His teachings) something strange happened- His followers claimed He wasn’t dead at all. That God had raised Him from the grave. These peasants with no formal education banded together and began a community based on His teachings:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NLT)

What were the apostles' teaching? Jesus' stuff. What they had learned from Him. And that teaching continued to turn the world upside down! The community of believers in Jerusalem that devoted themselves to Jesus' teachings grew RAPIDLY. The religious leaders of Israel thought they had stamped out Jesus' teachings by killing Him but now there were all these rumors swirling about His resurrection and ascension and His peasant followers were causing an uproar in Jerusalem.

So they arrested Peter & John and hauled them before the Sanhedrin (the ruling council of Israel made up of Pharisees, scribes and the priesthood of the Jews). The Sanhedrin was third most powerful group in all of Israel (after Rome and King Herod) and represented the best and brightest minds that Israel had to offer. They brought Peter & John before them to question them about what they were doing. This would be like if the IRS hauled you in front of them to answer questions about what you were doing to their tax code (unless you're a tax accountant in which case you would identify a bit more with the Sanhedrin- not because being a tax accountant would make you a bad person but because you went to school to be trained just like the guys on the Sanhedrin).

They expected Peter & John to be terrified and just do what they were told. They told Peter & John to stop preaching and go home. Peter & John declined. They argued their point- a couple of fisherman who had no formal training debating the ruling council of Israel. Do you want to know what happened?

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (NIV)

The smartest, most educated guys in ancient Israel debated with a couple of fisherman who probably never made it past what we'd consider to be elementary school and Peter & John reduced their accusers to silence. The Sanhedrin never knew what hit them. The only thing they could figure was that Peter & John were able to do what they did because they had been with Jesus- the single greatest teacher Who ever lived. So I guess the question for us to ponder today is, would people say the same thing about us? Do people take note that you have been with Jesus? Not to put too much pressure on you (or me ;o) but Jesus' teaching should not leave us unchanged. Maybe we need to do what the earliest followers of Jesus did and devote ourselves to the teachings of the greatest teacher Who ever lived.

Friday Reflection: We talked yesterday about how Jesus' teachings transformed the uneducated into courageous, powerful men and women who changed the world. But it wasn't just the uneducated that Jesus' teachings transformed- it was also the educated. As time went by and Jesus' church grew in Jerusalem even Pharisees and priests started to become believers. The most famous of these was a guy named Saul (who would eventually become Paul after he met Jesus on a dusty road in Syria). Paul is widely believed to be one of the most intelligent people that has ever lived. And he was educated in the best school in Israel- the Gamaliel school for Pharisees. It was like the Harvard or MIT of first century Israel and Paul was the star pupil. Take a look at something that Paul wrote about Jesus years after he became a believer:

In him (Jesus) lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Ephesians 2:3 (NLT)

Paul didn't say that about Gamaliel. Paul didn't say that about himself. Paul believed Jesus was the fountainhead of "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." That's pretty high praise coming from one of the smartest people who has ever lived. Paul recognizes Jesus as the Master of the intellect, above him and everyone he's ever known in every way. That's one of the amazing aspects of Jesus the Teacher. The simplest person in the world can understand Him, can get Him. But the smartest person in the world can never plumb the depths of everything Jesus said. Early church fathers had a favorite saying that the Gospels are a river in which a gnat can swim and an elephant can drown. And as a matter of historical record, no thinker has ever come anywhere close to the impact of this Man, Jesus. HG Wells (the famous sci-fi writer) said this:

I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as an historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history.

I asked you a few times last week but I'll ask again- Who is this guy? How did He do what He did? The book containing His teaching is the best selling book of all time and of every year/month/week/day in the history of books. It has been translated into 2257 different languages. Next closest? Don Quixote. Any clue how many? 60. The Bible has sold over 5 billion copies to date. The next closest? Again- Don Quixote with 500 million copies sold. This book containing the teachings of Jesus has impacted every continent, every culture, every city in every century for the last 2,000 years. It's impact is impossible to define.

And now you and I have unprecedented access to this book. We can buy hard back or soft cover versions. There are literally dozens of different translations- one for every educational level including comic book level. This book transformed people into courageous, powerful men and women 2,000 years ago and it will still do it today- if you do what Jesus teaches. And who is this Jesus? Just the greatest teacher Who's ever lived who is irrevocably the very center of human history.