

November 13-17, 2023 Edition

Following The Year^(s) Of Jesus Part 98

Jesus & Two Desperate People God's Wonderful,
Confusing, Amazing & Frustrating Grace

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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 are talking about Jesus' encounter with two very desperate people but before we do that I want to make sure we are on the same page when it comes to what this series is about- walking in the footsteps of the Rescuer (Jesus). We talked a couple weeks ago about Jesus' baptism and I talked about how important our baptism is/ will be and how just as the Great Rescue of mankind began with a baptism (Jesus') our individual rescue will always include a baptism (ours). Then we looked at the temptations of Jesus- round two of the great battle between God & Satan- and saw how powerful the scriptures are when it comes to not just defending against the devil's attacks but actually going on the offensive and launching our own counter attack. I heard from several of you how thought provoking it was to realize that we have such a powerful weapon at our disposal.

And the scriptures are powerful, however, they will only be as powerful in your hands and heart and lips as the rest of your life attempting to follow Jesus is. Are you following me? That's good if you are following my reasoning but the MUCH more important question is, are you following? Jesus I mean. Are you following Him? Because unless you take what you learn in the scriptures and apply those truths to your life the words in the Bible will never give you the advantage against the devil that we would like to have. In fact, using the words of the Bible as a sort of talisman to ward off evil without putting the truths contained within its pages will probably do you more harm than good. So what's the point? The point is to study and reflect the scriptures and ask yourself what it would look like for you to do what they say. When we do that we start putting together what the apostle Paul called the "full armor of God":

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil... Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Ephesians 6:10-18 (NLT)

A soldier's armor works together. Each piece is important in its own right but when all the pieces are combined it helps create a powerful and confident soldier. But take away one (or more) pieces and the soldier will be much less confident and powerful. Paul talks about the belt of truth. The belt is the piece of armor that sort of held everything up. Without it a soldier's clothes and weapons would be dragging on the ground- think that might slow you down? He also talked about the body armor of God's righteousness. What's righteousness you ask? It's when everything is "right" in the world and you stand confidently before God, other people, reality and even yourself. It's when you are living according to your values and ethics. Want to take away a soldier's confidence? Take away his/her body armor. That's why in Paul says:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:19 (NIV)

Paul also talks about the shoes of peace that come from the good news or "gospel". In other words, remember just how far Jesus went to rescue you (which is what the gospel is- the

story of how He left Heaven and came to earth to live and die and rise all so He rescue you). By remembering that you will have the kind of stability that will allow you to stand while others are being knocked down. Next the shield of faith (do we really need to talk about the importance of a soldier's shield?) and the helmet of salvation. The helmet of salvations reminds us of the fact that we've been "saved" or rescued. When we doubt our salvation it's as if we're doubting the power of our Savior (or the Rescuer). Never let the devil convince you that he can knock you out of Jesus' hand. Not a chance.

And finally Paul talks about the sword of the Spirit (our only weapon) and the communication link of prayer. I wish I had more time to really get into all of this but I don't. Suffice it to say this- the power of your prayers and your ability to wield the sword of the Spirit will be directly related to how well you do at wearing/putting on the rest of the armor that Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter 6. I know it was a lot to take in so let me tell you exactly how you can make sure you're wearing and putting on the armor (your defensive protection against the devil) so that there will be some actual power behind the scriptures used in your day to day life- you follow Jesus. You use the scriptures to discover Who He is and what He did and then you ask the question, "what does that mean for me in my life?" It's the single question we're going to be asking over the next 3 months in this series. We are going to look at how He lived His life, how He saw God, how He treated other people, how He took care of Himself and how He dealt with reality and nature. Then it will be up to each one of us to figure out what walking in His footsteps will look like so that we know who we should live our lives, how we should see God, how we should treat other people, how we should take care of ourselves, how we should handle our emotions and how we should deal with reality and nature. What then? Then this:

Follow me and be my disciple. Matthew 9:9 (NLT)

Can you hear Him calling you? What would following Him even look like in your life? He can't wait for you to start figuring it out...

Tuesday Reflection: Ok... so lesson number one in following Jesus (for us in our study that is...) revolves around Jesus and two desperate people He meets one day:

Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said. "Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live." Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition. Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?" His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. Then

the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over." While he was still speaking to her, messengers arrived from the home of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. They told him, "Your daughter is dead. There's no use troubling the Teacher now." But Jesus overheard them and said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith." Then Jesus stopped the crowd and wouldn't let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and John (the brother of James). When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw much commotion and weeping and wailing. He went inside and asked, "Why all this commotion and weeping? The child isn't dead; she's only asleep." The crowd laughed at him. But he made them all leave, and he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples into the room where the girl was lying. Holding her hand, he said to her, "Talitha kourm," which means "Little girl, get up!" And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what had happened, and then he told them to give her something to eat. Mark 5:21-43 (NLT)

In this one story we learn several things about God's Grace that I think are important for us to remember. The first thing we learn is about how confusing and frustrating His sense of timing and His patience can be for us. Put yourself in Jairus' place for a few minutes. He's in a HUGE hurry, right? His daughter is suffering from an acute condition and time is everything for him right now. He probably wasn't sure that Jesus would come to his house (Jesus had made an enemy of most religious leaders for reasons that will become painfully obvious over the next few days) but when He agreed to come I imagine Jairus was now filled with a frantic, frenetic energy. Then Jesus stops and starts asking who touched Him. Can you imagine? "Who touched You? Who didn't touch You? There are people EVERYWHERE Jesus!" Jairus must be wondering why it matters who touched Him? Is He 10 years old and riding in the back seat of mom and dad's car with a sibling sitting next to Him?

But Jesus cares. He cares and is willing to stall a few precious minutes because He's got information Jairus doesn't have. First of all He knows that it doesn't really make a big difference if they're technically too late getting back to Jairus' house. For Jesus there really is no difference in difficulty level between healing a young girl's fever and resurrecting her from death. But He also knows that if He just lets the woman who "touched" Him fade away without an interaction with her she is likely to develop a sort of supernatural kind of belief that what healed her was some magic clothing. Jesus knows that stopping for a few precious minutes will mean the difference between her simply receiving a healing and her receiving a life transforming interaction where she becomes a life long (heck... an eternity long) relationship with THE RESCUER. So for Jesus this was the more time sensitive interaction.

I think that must happen all the time with me (and maybe you too?). Where God's sense of timing doesn't seem to be in line with mine. I am frustrated and worried beyond belief because of God's patience. Isn't it fascinating how often God's patience tries our patience? We don't understand why He's delaying and it seems like malpractice for Him to wait. I don't have all the answers for you (I don't have all the answers for myself either) but I have come to believe with all my heart that when God's timing doesn't sync with mine then there must be information that I don't have. I have come to believe (on my best days at least) that even

when God's timing seems to run out in this world during this life that it doesn't mean that anything is over for ever. In our story that we read today, Jairus' daughter was resurrected and Jesus' delay just led to a more amazing story. But what about in our lives? When His delay seems to lead to a black hole of THE END? Then He asks us to trust that nothing is over just because it seems to be on this side of eternity. I often have to repeat one of my favorite sayings to myself over and over until it either starts to sink in or I am able to fall asleep in the arms of Jesus:

It's all going to be ok in the end. If it's not ok, it's not the end.

I'm so thankful for that promise even if it's not a direct quote from the Bible- I believe its truth is found over and over in the scriptures. So let me ask you, how do you handle the frustrating and confusing timing of God in your own life?

Wednesday Reflection: The second thing we learn about God's grace is that it is constantly reversing reality (as we see it anyways). He was constantly turning social and cultural convention on its head which is exactly what He does in the story of Jairus and the sick woman. Think about it for a minute- Jairus is the ruler of the synagogue in town. That basically means that Jairus would have been like the mayor of the town and the pastor of the only church in town. Not only that, he was probably wealthy and extremely well respected. Oh yeah... and one more thing- he was a man (which was a pretty good thing to be in the first century if you wanted to be catered to). The woman is sick (in the first century they thought if you were sick then you must have done something wrong and God was "thumping" you for it), she's poor (she spent everything she had on doctors trying to get better) and she's a woman. Social and cultural convention would have said that not only should she wait to be helped after Jairus but why bother helping her at all? There was a saying in the first century- if God is being mean to you why shouldn't I be mean to you as well?

But Jesus turns all of that upside down. Jairus is in a HUGE hurry and he must have been blown away when Jesus stops to deal with this woman like she's an actual important human being. The way Jesus treated people was so surreal. His grace reverses the way the world works. It turns everything upside down:

You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:25-28 (NLT)

You've heard the phrase, put your money where your mouth is? Jesus is putting his behavior where His mouth is with this lady. He's demonstrating to the people who will carry on His mission after He's ascended to His throne in Heaven that everybody's welcome, nobody's perfect and anything's possible. That we are all equal in God's sight. Over and over we will see in the life of Jesus these paired polarities... you have a powerful, successful insider and a weak, broken outsider and yet over and over Jesus is drawn to the outsider. It's not that He doesn't care about the insider- He does. He just knows who needs Him the most. We're

going to see as we go through the story of Jesus' life these upside down twists and turns. We'll see with the cross- the way up is down. The way to get power is to relinquish power. The way to be clothed in the righteousness of God is to admit you have no righteousness of your own. The way to live is to die. The way to be fulfilled is to seek the fulfillment of others. The way to be happy is seek the happiness of others.

I could go on...

Jesus doesn't come to people on the basis of value or status. Although maybe that's wrong... or rather upside down. He seems to be drawn to people who need Him the most. In a crowd Jesus is drawn the most to the people who are the most messed up and have messed up the most. It doesn't matter if you have been the worst person you know... if you are in a room with Jesus He will be drawn to you. And we see that Jesus puts His behavior where His mouth is... He shows constantly with His life what He teaches with His words.

And people didn't get it... that's just not the way the world works. But Jesus had little time for the way the world "works". I mean, the whole reason He had to come was because the world was broken. His miracles are a sign of what He was doing in the spiritual realms- putting things back together. I was taught growing up that Jesus' miracles were a "temporary suspension of the natural order". I no longer believe that. Jesus' miracles were not a temporary suspension of the natural order but a temporary reinstatement of the natural order of things. It was Jesus' way of showing us that in Eden- before things were broken- there was no sickness, no pain, no hunger and no death. Whenever He performs one of His miracles it's like He's poking a hold in the shroud of death that had covered this planet and let a little of the light of Heaven's reality shine down. It's as though He's saying, "all this around you- the sickness and pain and hunger and death- that's not reality. That's an illusion and one day I'll usher in a Kingdom where things are once again the way I intended for them to be all along. Until then- let me show you what My Great Rescue is all about."

But not all of Jesus' miracles revolved around sickness, pain, hunger or death. Maybe the greatest miracles He ever performed were all about how He treated the humans who everyone else had given up on (including themselves). The way He treated those people wasn't a temporary suspension of the way things are supposed to be but a reinstatement of how things are supposed to be. And if you and I are going to follow Jesus then we will be engaged in trying to put the world right all around us... by living life as it should be... not as it seems to the world it is. How can you join Jesus today and wage war on the way things are by treating people the way people are supposed to be treated?

Thursday Reflection: The third lesson we learn from this story about the confusing nature of God's grace revolves around the concept of "faith"- God's grace is ALWAYS more than we bargained for. In other words, when you come to Jesus for anything you will always get more than you ever dreamed you would get (maybe not exactly what you were asking for when you came but still...) and He will always ask more of you than you ever dreamed of giving. We see this lesson at work in both Jairus and the sick woman from this week's story.

What does the sick woman want when she comes to Jesus? She wants to slip in and slip out all stealthy-like. She doesn't want to engage Him. She doesn't want to interact with Him. She

doesn't even want Him to know she was ever there. What she wants is basically a drive-by-healing. So she sneaks up to Him in the crowd and reaches down to touch His robe because she believed that if she did that she would be healed. But why? Why would she think that? Because of this strange prophecy about the Rescuer written almost 400 years before this interaction occurred. A man named, Malachi wrote this about the Rescuer:

But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. Malachi 4:2 (NLT)

What in the world does that mean? Is the Rescuer going to be a chicken? Healing in His wings? Why would that make her think if she touched His clothes that she'd be healed? Because, by the time Jesus arrives on this earth the Rabbis and religious leaders of Israel had a custom- they wore these truly beautiful prayer shawls. They were white with blue symbols and tassels on the edges of them. These tassels were called the "wings" of the prayer shawl. Basically, Malachi is saying that when the Rescuer comes there will so much healing in Him and around Him that even the tassels of His prayer shawl will drip with healing. That's why this sick woman figured she could be healed just by touching the tassel on the edge of Jesus' prayer shawl and not have to bother Him or engage Him in any way.

And she was at the same time both right and wrong. She was right that she would be healed simply by touching the tassel on Jesus' prayer shawl but she was wrong the she could do it without engaging with Him:

A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. For she thought to herself, "If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed." Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition. Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my robe?" His disciples said to him, "Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, 'Who touched me?'" But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. Mark 5:25-33 (NLT)

Why does Jesus stop? Why does He force her to come forward? Because He knows two very important things about her. The first is that if He allows her to carry out a drive-by-healing she's always going to have the belief that she was healed because of the miraculous power of a prayer shawl instead of entering into a life transforming relationship with the Rescuer of all mankind. So Jesus asks her to step forward and publicly engage with Him. Not because He needed that public interaction but because He knew she needed it. It's why He continues to ask us to publicly interact with Him to this day. He asks us to gather together in communities (we call them churches) and engage with Him and other followers of His on a regular basis. It's why when we get baptized we do it in public rather than in our bathtubs where nobody can see us. Not because He needs the public engagement but He knows we need it. This lady came to Jesus for a drive-by-healing and she leaves with much more than she bargained for- not just complete healing but also a brand new relationship with the Rescuer.

Then there's Jairus. He comes to Jesus hoping for a fever cure but he ends up getting a resurrection. He gets so much more than he imagined when he came to Jesus. But he is also asked for much more than he bargained for. When he is told that his daughter is dead he thinks it's all over. But Jesus says something really interesting to him:

Don't be afraid. Just trust me. Mark 5:37 (NLT)

He tells Jairus that it's not over. Nothing is over when Jesus is involved. Jairus thought he'd just have to trust Jesus enough to publicly ask him for help when it was probably going to be the worst possible thing he could do for his future as a religious leader in his town but now he's being asked for much more than that- trust Jesus to take Him back to his house and see what can be salvaged from this situation.

And he does. And it changes everything for him and his family. We'll talk more about the end of this story tomorrow but I hope you'll spend today thinking about what you hope to get from Jesus and what you're willing to give Him in return. Because if you come to Jesus (and I hope you do) for anything you will always get more than you could have imagined- even it's not exactly what you were asking for- but Jesus will also ask more of you than you ever dreamed of giving. And what I've learned is that in the end it's always worth it. In the end you always get more than you give when it comes to Jesus.

Friday Reflection: The last thing we learn about God's grace from this story is that it's relentlessly tender. One thing about Jesus that I always have to remind myself of is:

God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. Romans 2:4 (NLT)

What we see in this story and in every other story that Jesus is involved in while on this earth is that He is firm when He needs to be but when we need tenderness there is Nobody more kind and tender than the Rescuer. When the sick woman comes for a drive-by-healing Jesus won't let her just slip away unnoticed. Why? Because of His overwhelming tenderness. Yes, He's firm with her by requiring her to go public with what she was thinking and what she did but why would she have been so hesitant to come forward in the first place? Because according to the first century Jewish religious custom she should have never been in the crowd in the first place and she should never have DREAMED about actually touching any part of the Rescuer- not even His clothing. Why?

Because of what she was struggling with. Her sickness did more than just make her physically ill. It also isolated her physically, spiritually and socially. According to the religious culture of first century Israel she lived in a state of perpetual uncleanness. That meant she couldn't touch anyone else without also making them unclean. It would have been much worse than just her physical sickness. But she ignores all of that convention and decides to touch Jesus praying He is Who she believes Him to be. And as soon as she does- POW!- she's healed! So now she knows a couple of things that nobody else knows- number one she KNOWS that Jesus is the promised Rescuer, right? Before she THOUGHT that if she touched the tassels on His shawl she'd be healed. She's been healed so now she KNOWS Who Jesus is. She also knows another important detail- she just made the Rescuer unclean with her touch. If this

guy is like the other religious leaders she's ever known He is going to come unglued when He finds out what she did. Thank God that He is nothing like any other religious leader she's ever known. Instead of a lecture (or worse) this is what the Rescuer says to her:

*Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."
Mark 5:33-34 (NLT)*

Daughter... what a beautiful thing to say. Can you imagine the relief that flooded through her when she heard that name come out of the Rescuer's mouth and the tenderness in His reply? "Go in peace..." Not, "YOU'VE MADE ME UNCLEAN?!?!?! WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?!?!? HOW COULD YOU DO SUCH A THING?!?!?" One thing I know about Jesus is this- if you need Him, He wants you to come to Him. Doesn't matter what you've done or how you've ended up where you are. He will be firm with you when He needs to be but He will never crush you when you are beyond hope.

Now Jesus turns to Jairus and continues on with him to the daughter that reportedly has died while Jesus was taking time to deal with the sick (well... not sick anymore I guess) woman. When they get to the house the mourners are already there making a scene. It's just how they handled death in that culture. Jesus tells everyone that the girl isn't dead- just sleeping. The people laugh at Jesus and He asks Jairus to kick everybody out except Jairus' wife and Peter, James and John. Then Jesus goes into the girl's room and this happens:

Holding her hand, he said to her, "Talitha koum," which means "Little girl, get up!" And the girl, who was twelve years old, immediately stood up and walked around! They were overwhelmed and totally amazed. Mark 5:41-42 (NLT)

Now I know this is an amazing story but there's something beyond the resurrection of this little girl that I want to focus on (but go ahead and be amazed for just a minute by the resurrection, ok? Have you ever wondered why the men and women who hung out with Jesus for three and a half years who had no power, no education and no money were able to change the world to such an extent that here we are 2,000 years later still going strong as followers of His? Maybe it's because they hung out with a guy that caused sentences like that [the dead girl stood up and walked around!] to be written. So ok... be amazed at that sentence but now let's look at something else...). When Jesus says "talitha koum" and it's translated in our English Bibles as "little girl, get up" that is technically correct but you don't get the full sense of what's happening here. "Talitha" was a pet name for a daughter (for a son the word used would have been, "taley"). Yes, technically it means "little girl" but not just any little girl. This is what a parent would call their dearly loved little girl. It was like a parent today calling their little girl honey or sweetie. Then there's the word, "koum". Technically it does mean "get up" but it's not what it seems on the surface. If someone fell you wouldn't tell them to "koum" (get up). There was another word for that. Koum was used first thing in the morning when awakening someone from sleep. Those of you who are parents WISH you could just say "talitha koum" and have your kids immediately stand up and walk around instead of begging for just 5 more minutes, don't you? I guess we don't have the same touch Jesus did, huh? I know... understatement of the century. Anyways, what I'm getting at is this-

when Jesus says, "talitha koum" He's just saying what every parent would say to their little girl every morning after a long nights sleep. For Jesus a resurrection was no more trouble than waking someone up in the morning. And just like any good parent when she wakes up He advises that she eat something. Maybe that's where we first learned that breakfast was the most important meal of the day?

The relentless tenderness of God's grace. This story is just a hint of what the Rescuer came to do. He came to wage a war against not just the serpent and not just against sin but also against the horrible effects of sin on this world and on the people who live in it. A war against isolation, prejudice, injustice, sickness, pain, disease, heartache and ultimately death. Want to follow the Rescuer? Do you want Him to unleash His power, presence, wisdom and knowledge into your life? Then follow in His footsteps. What would your life look like if you joined Him in the war He's waging on the things I mentioned above? It's going to look different for all of us. Eventually He will have you majoring in one or two of those things. For me and Judy we feel strongly we've been enlisted to help Him wage a war against religious isolation and prejudice that impacts the hurting ones who need Him the most. What will your enlistment papers look like? What job will He give you? It may not be apparent at the moment so just start trying things and the Rescuer will lead you into the place where you are most uniquely qualified to join Him in the Great Rescue which continues to this very day.

And when your time on this earth is done do you know what you will hear one day when He returns to take His children home? You'll hear very clearly the voice of the Rescuer say, "Talitha/Taley koum!" He will say, "it's time for you to wake up." And what will happen then? According to the book of Revelation then will come the great feast. Just like the little girl in our story who is given breakfast after "waking up", you will be fed after you "wake up" too. I can only imagine.