

November 4-8, 2024 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of ^ Jesus Part 148

Sibling Rivalry: Jesus & His Brothers (conc.)

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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 you 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: Last week we began looking at the next installment of our series building a chronological timeline of Jesus' life. It was the story of Jesus' brothers telling Him that He should go to Jerusalem for the Feast Of Tabernacles. There is a ton of subtext in that story and this week we're going to look at it.

We got started last week looking at what the Bible means when it uses the phrase, "the world". We spent three days doing a deep dive into all the different meanings of that word/phrase in the Bible. We saw that sometimes that word can mean the planet we live on. Sometimes it refers to the entire created universe. Sometimes it refers to the people who live on this planet and sometimes it refers to the spirit of this world- a spirit that rules every society, culture and philosophy of this world. A spirit that stands opposed to the life that Jesus calls us to live. If you're curious about all of that you can go back and read last week's reflections or listen to the lesson from October 27th, 2024. But for today we're going to forge ahead with the story. So let's read what happened:

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)

We are indebted to John who clued us in to the subtext of this story with his narration of the story he's telling (you know when John sort of whispers to us gentle readers that the whole reason Jesus' brothers tell Him to go to Jerusalem is basically sarcasm- they didn't believe He was who He claimed to be). Without John's clue we'd just think Jesus' brothers are looking out for Him. But not so much. This story is all about sibling rivalry. I imagine it would be pretty tough to grow up with Jesus as an older brother- talk about a tough act to follow.

I was born seven years after my closest sibling. My brother was eight years older than me and my sister was 7 years older than me. I was a "surprise" to my parents. And I'm not sure just how pleasant that surprise was for them. I know it was a shock to the family's system when I got old enough to impose my own will. They weren't used to that. My brother (Jorn) and my sister (Connie) were basically perfect children. They hardly ever got in trouble and generally did whatever was asked of them. And then I came along. I'd tell my mom and dad I was going to do whatever they asked but I really had no intention of following through. I frustrated my mom constantly and mystified my dad. I'm guessing there is no shortage of him wondering to himself, "where did this wild kid come from?"

Then I went to school. The same school my brother and sister went through eight and seven years earlier. Both Jorn and Connie got great grades in school and were model children. When I would walk into the same classrooms my brother and sister had been so

perfectly behaved in my teachers all thought they'd get more of the same from me. Boy were they surprised. I didn't do a great job of behaving the way my teachers wanted me to when I was in school. In fact I was almost always in trouble. My teachers would often look at me and ask, "are you sure you're related to Jorn and Connie Gardner?"

And until I had gained a tad of maturity my relationship with my brother and sister was one of sibling rivalry. I made their lives much more complicated. They hated the conflict I brought into their peaceful home. It wasn't until I was in high school that my relationship with my brother and sister turned into friendship and I'm so glad it did. Ultimately my brother and sister extended the grace to me that Jesus extended to His brothers. This week we'll look at that rivalry and also a bit more about what it means to live in "the world" but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on why you think Jesus' brothers might have had a tough time "believing" in Him.

Tuesday Reflection: So last week we spent the whole week looking at the concept of "the world" in the Bible. Today we're going to look at what "the world" thinks about Jesus and by extension, those of us who have chosen to walk with Him. Do you remember what Jesus told His brothers when they suggested He go to Jerusalem for the Festival Of Tabernacles:

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 7:6-9 (NLT)

Jesus says that "the world" hates Him. How did that express itself while He walked this earth? Well we've seen the persecution Jesus often faced. Even His disciples are starting to experience it. It will culminate in His death and a trial where Jesus' own people chant "crucify Him!" over and over. Jesus has to be careful about the situations and environments He puts Himself in as we get closer and closer to the cross. He tells His brothers it's "not His time yet", meaning that if He goes to Jerusalem in the manner that His brothers suggest He will speed up the timeline of His death and there is something He's waiting on. But what is it?

He's waiting on the Feast Of The Passover. It's actually quite uncanny the way Jesus was able to fulfill the Jewish festivals on the day that they were celebrated. The Jews had 13 major festivals in their annual calendar. That's a lot of holidays and that doesn't even figure in personal milestones/holidays like birthdays, anniversaries, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and weddings. What that means is that if you were a Jew living in ancient Israel you were always either preparing for a celebration, celebrating or recovering from a celebration. But the festivals of the Old Testament weren't just given to them for celebration sake. Each of those feasts had at least 3 goals- to remember something great that God did in the past, to give the people something to look forward to and to remind God's people that one day He would once again do what He did in the past.

So for instance, the Passover was a festival reminding the Jews of when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt. The Passover represented salvation, freedom and redemption to

the Jews. The Passover lamb whose sacrifice provided for the freedom, salvation and redemption of the slaves in Egypt was the star of the Passover feast and reminded the people of Israel that not only had God rescued them once in the past but that He would one day send the Messiah who would do it again. And on the cross- on the day of the Feast of the Passover- Jesus allowed Himself to be sacrificed and in so doing provided the salvation, freedom and redemption that God promised. All of the feasts that Jesus fulfilled- either while He was on this earth or after He ascended to His throne at the right hand of the Father- were fulfilled on the day of that particular feast. Jesus' timing is impeccable as it turns out.

And while this is oversimplifying things a tad there is only one major feast of the Old Testament that Jesus has yet to fulfill- the very one Jesus' brothers were asking Him to attend with them. The Feast of Tabernacles. So what is the Feast of Tabernacles? Well a tabernacle is just a fancy Bible word that means a big tent. The feast reminded the Jews of the years after the Exodus when they wandered in the desert and God dwelled in the center of their camp with them in His own Tabernacle. Even once the Israelites had entered the Promised Land and settled down in permanent houses God still dwelled among them. First in the same Tabernacle that had been the symbol of His presence with His people and then eventually in the Temple of Jerusalem. God's Glory dwelled in the inner most part of the Tabernacle/Temple- a place called the Holy of Holies.

But the people of Israel demonstrated they weren't really interested in living the way God asked them to live. He sent prophet after prophet to warn Israel that if they didn't start walking with Him again He would have to leave (and they wouldn't like the result if God pulled His protection from them). But the people didn't listen and eventually Ezekiel tells about when God's Glory left the Holy of Holies, the Temple, Jerusalem, Israel and ultimately the earth. From that time on God's prophets told of a time when He would return and once again "tabernacle" among us. And it happened on the day Jesus was born. The apostle John puts it like this:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (tabernacled) among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-14 (NIV)

When John says Jesus "made His dwelling among us" the word that he chose to use was the word, tabernacle. It wasn't a happy coincidence- he chose that word on purpose to let us know that when Jesus came to this earth He began the process of fulfilling the Feast of Tabernacles. But it was like an awful lot of God's promises that Jesus fulfilled while on this earth- it was an already-but-not-yet sort of a fulfillment. Yes He began the process of fulfilling the Feast of Tabernacles but that fulfillment is not yet all it will be when Jesus returns and fulfills that feast in its entirety. And you can read all about it on the last page of the Bible:

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place (tabernacle) is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:1-5 (NIV)

On the day the final festival of the Jews that has yet to be fulfilled- the Feast Of Tabernacles- will finally be fully fulfilled. And I can't wait to see that day when God makes everything "new"- including me. I can't wait to be made new and to be done with all the effects of sin in this world and in my own life. And He's going to remake you too. Tomorrow we'll look more at what it means that the world "hates us" but I obviously got sidetracked with a rabbit trail that really took me off on a tangent so maybe what we should do for today is spend some time reflecting on what the already-but-not-yet promises of God look like in our lives.

Wednesday Reflection: So yesterday I intended to talk mainly about how the world hated Jesus and He warned us what that would lead to- the world hating us as well. But I got sidetracked by the Festival of Tabernacles. And I did want to say one more thing about that festival- it occurs in the fall every year sometime in the month of October. Here's what I wanted to add to yesterday's reflection- if Jesus fulfilled every other feast on the very day of that feast (isn't His timing amazing?) then I suppose it's not a huge leap to wonder if He's going to fulfill the Feast of Tabernacles on the day that the feast is observed in October. There's no way of knowing for sure but it is an interesting concept. I wouldn't too surprised if when Jesus does return that it's on the day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Ok so on to the world hating us. Look at what Jesus told His disciples during the Last Supper:

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. John 15:18-19 (NLT)

What does it mean that the world will hate us? Well, have you read about the persecutions of Christians throughout time? Yes it began in the first century but persecution has continued right up through modern times. Not so much in America (although we who call ourselves by Jesus' name sure love to throw that word around when someone in our culture makes fun of us or changes a beloved holiday that we liked the culture that used to surround it or when we stub our toes or when someone does something that makes our lives mildly frustrating or...) but in parts of the world Christians are still dying for their faith. You and I will probably never have to deal with actual persecution.

But that doesn't mean the world doesn't hate us. Why would the world hate us? Because we stand for what Jesus stands for (at least we're supposed to) and we are like salmon swimming against the current of our culture. I mean, think about it, Jesus asks us to live our lives upside down from the way the rest of the world is living. We are to forgive when someone injures us. We are to love our enemies. We are to accept people that we really don't want to accept. We are to live lives of self sacrifice and service. I could go on. The world doesn't like it when you live the way Jesus told us to live. No complaining or gossiping are a couple of areas where you will be hated if you try to follow Jesus' advice. Stop gossiping and complaining about people and your friends who aren't followers of Jesus (and often even those that are) will not like it one bit. What do you mean you won't criticize that person with us? What do you mean you won't complain about the way our culture has changed and we've lost the cultural Christianity we grew up with? You should be as angry as we are and if you don't complain with us you make us uncomfortable.

I showed a clip from Monty Python & The Holy Grail last weekend where Arthur stops to speak with a couple of serfs. At the end of that clip the serf yells out, "Help! Help! I'm being repressed!" That clip cracks me up because it reminds me of what I sound like when I start complaining about the way western culture "persecutes" me. They changed my holiday! Help! Help! I'm being repressed. I sometimes wonder what Christians throughout history (or in dangerous parts of the world to this very day) think about American Christian's claims of persecution. I have a feeling it's not favorable. But Jesus told us persecution is something we should expect:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. Matthew 5:10-11 (NIV)

Notice what Jesus says there? We are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Over the last 2,000 years many Christians have experienced that but in America most of us who suffer from "persecution" are usually ridiculed or ostracized (but almost never killed) more for obnoxious' sake rather than for righteousness' sake. There's a huge difference. We're not blessed for persecution we bring on ourselves. I hate to even use that word in regards to what western Christians experience. But for the moment let's leave what us western Christians have to deal with when it comes to our culture's treatment of us. Yes we are discounted and made fun of. Yes we are ridiculed and we can even lose some benefits if we walk with Jesus. So how does He expect us to deal with those that are "persecuting" us? Well I could spend some time talking about Jesus' words regarding love for enemies, praying for those who want to hurt you and doing good to those who want to harm you. But instead for brevity I'll just leave you with Peter's words to a group of Christians who were actually being persecuted. Christians were losing their jobs, their homes, their families, their freedom and sometimes even their lives. And what does Peter say should be the response of Christians when we find ourselves being persecuted? I'll leave you with this to reflect on for the rest of today:

Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night. Philippians 2:14-15 (MSG)

Does this pretty much describe how you relate to a world that is laughing at you and changing your culture so it's almost unrecognizable to what you grew up with? I know, ouch. So let's you and me spend some time reflecting on how we're doing at dealing with a world that Jesus told us would hate us and yet He told us the only way to deal with that hatred is through the love, acceptance and forgiveness of God.

Thursday Reflection:

This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am writing to the "twelve tribes"-Jewish believers scattered abroad. Greetings! James 1:1 (NLT)

Reflection: (Well I ran out of time to type up fresh reflections for Thursday and Friday so I grabbed some that seemed to go along with the week's theme): Today we begin a brand new lesson series that we will be in for about 26 weeks looking verse by verse at the only book of the New Testament that is considered to be "wisdom literature". Wisdom literature is a category or style of writing that is basically a practical explanation of the doctrines of God. In the Old Testament books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are considered wisdom literature. In the New Testament only the book of James belongs to this genre. The book of James is believed to be the first book of the New Testament to be written. It is a practical description of what a life of following Jesus should look like. It's obvious that it was written by a man named James but there are several "James" mentioned in the New Testament- which one wrote this book?

Well, the apostle James who was the brother of the apostle John was killed by king Herod in Acts chapter 12 so it couldn't be him. There is another apostle named James (the son of Alphaeus) but most scholars agree that it wasn't this James that writes this letter. There's a third James found in the pages of the Bible. The first time we read about him is in Matthew 13:55:

Then they scoffed, "He's just the carpenter's son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers-James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas.

Here we learn that one of Jesus' brothers was named James. We also learn something pretty interesting in John 7:3-5:

So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him.

So we know that one of Jesus' brothers was named James and that Jesus' brothers didn't believe that Jesus was Who He claimed to be. Then we are told by the apostle Paul that after Jesus' resurrection He made several appearances to different people/groups:

He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have

died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 (NLT)

So after His resurrection Jesus appeared to quite a few people and groups... one of which was His brother James... you remember him, right? The guy who didn't believe that his big brother was actually The Son of God? I wonder what that little reunion was like for James... awkward! Good thing big brother Jesus is the King of Forgiveness... but what I wouldn't give to be a fly on the wall for that little family reunion.

James doesn't let guilt and shame paralyze him though. In fact, James becomes the leader (sort of like the lead pastor) of the Jerusalem church. The very first church in the history of mankind. The most influential church during most of the first century (especially the early years of the church from AD 33 1/2 to AD 70 after which the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome). James was the leader. James was a mover and shaker. James took following Jesus to a whole new level.

Jesus' church started off as a Jewish sect of Judaism. Gentiles were allowed to join Jesus' church but they were expected to follow Jewish customs and the Old Testament Law. The apostle Paul was the first one to seriously and successfully take the gospel of Jesus into the gentile world. As He did Jesus made it known that the gentiles were not required to follow the Jewish Law in order to become/stay a follower of Jesus. As Paul started teaching this to the converts to Jesus throughout the Roman empire it caused some ruffled feathers back at home- in Jerusalem (the birthplace of Christianity). Many Jews believed that in order for a gentile to be saved they needed faith in Jesus plus obedience to the Jewish Law. It became such a kerfuffle (yes... I used the word "kerfuffle" ;0) that in AD 50 there was a special meeting in Jerusalem with the leaders of the church to settle this question once and for all.

You can read all about it in Acts chapter 15. The apostle Paul and his coworker Barnabas were there along with the apostle Peter, the apostle John and James- the leader of the Jerusalem church and the brother of Jesus. James chaired the meeting which says something to me about what kind of leader he had become. I mean, think about it- there's a meeting that included St. Paul, St. Peter & St. John (arguably three of the most influential Christian lives ever lived) and none of them were in charge of this meeting. James must have been a pretty amazing guy.

How do I know that the James of Acts chapter 15 is Jesus' brother? Look at what Paul says in Galatians 1 when he tells the story of his first trip to Jerusalem after his conversion:

I saw none of the other apostles-only James, the Lord's brother. Galatians 1:9 (NIV)

Is it possible that James of Jerusalem wasn't Jesus' brother? Possible but doubtful. It seems pretty obvious that Jesus' brother was the leader of the Jerusalem church and the writer of this letter to a suffering church around the world. A church that had been plunged into trouble and persecution. James writes to Christians everywhere to explain to them how to live a life following Jesus during times of intense trials and troubles.

More tomorrow about James and his credibility when it comes to living the life Jesus calls us to.

Friday:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. Whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything. James 1:2-4 (NLT)

Reflection: Have you ever read something in the Bible and thought, “now how am I supposed to do that with what’s going on in my life? Obviously the writer didn’t anticipate what I’m going through when he wrote that!”? That’s probably never true... but with James it’s actually a pretty comical thought (even if it is a completely natural one).

James was the pastor of the Jerusalem church during a time of really intense suffering there. There was a famine that caused such poverty that the apostle Paul created a Go-Fund-Me for the Christian’s living in Jerusalem (ok- the famine predated GoFundMe by a couple thousand years but that’s basically what Paul did reaching out to other churches urging them to share with the Jerusalem Christians to help ease their burden/suffering). There was also an intense persecution of Christians that broke out during this time by the Jews of Jerusalem. People were losing their jobs, their financial future, their homes, their families and in some cases even their lives. In fact, James was killed by people who wanted him to reject Jesus and tell his congregation to abandon the faith. When he refused he was tossed off the top of the Temple. Not quite dead yet he somehow got to his knees and started praying for forgiveness for those who were killing him. Enraged they finished the job with stones and clubs. Now let’s read the first part of the book of James again:

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. James 1:2-4 (NLT)

Does that change the way you see this passage. When James tells you and me how to react when “trouble” comes our way he isn’t asking us to do something he didn’t do. He’s asking us to do something that he had committed his life to. Something he had learned by watching his brother. Handling trouble and pain with grace and mercy and courage and faith. James had nurtured the art of developing soft callouses. If you remember the devotionals from two weeks ago we talked about the 5 habits of highly effective follower of Jesus. These were the 5 shared characteristics of men and women who were identified as powerful people of faith in their churches. Those habits were Bible reflection, practicing community, investing in others, practicing generosity and developing soft callouses. I should have added at least one more to that list- prayer. As I went through the book of James in preparation for this series that’s the one category that James talks about that doesn’t fit into the list of 5. We’ll talk more about prayer next week but for now, developing sensitive callouses.

What does it mean to develop sensitive callouses? It’s something James spends an awful lot of time on. By the time we’re done with this series I imagine of all the 6 characteristics of

highly effective followers of Jesus, develop sensitive callouses will probably be the one James talks about most. So what does that mean? What does it look like to develop sensitive callouses? It means developing a way of looking at and handling trouble and pain when it comes your way that doesn't crush you and doesn't turn you into a stone- hardened and impervious to this life and the people who live around you. James invites us to live a life where we aren't surprised by trouble when it comes our way (Pollyannas are often crushed beneath the weight of trouble and pain if they think they are/should be immune to the troubles of this world). He also invites us to live our lives in such a way that we aren't turned into sour pussies who let the gloom and doom of this world turn them into a hardened shell of a person who can't see anything good in this life.

How do we do that? Well we'll be looking at that question over the next few days- but it starts with being willing to see the world as it is (both good and bad) and then learning how to handle trouble when it comes.