

Feb. 27- March 3, 2023 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of[^] Jesus Part 61

Turn The Other What????

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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:

"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! Matthew 5:21 (NLT)

Reflection: This week we will be talking about revenge... but before we do that I think we should review a little bit here. What have we learned so far from our study on the Sermon On The Mount?

First off that the sermon on the mount is an explanation of what God's kingdom would look like here on earth. Jesus is inviting people to pray this amazing prayer...

May Your kingdom come and what You want be done here on earth as it is in Heaven.

Jesus begins this history shaping message with the beatitudes. Blessed are the meek, poor in spirit, those who mourn, etc. What's the deal with the beatitudes? They are not so much a prescription for how to live life as they are a surprise statement about who is blessed. The poor, the hungry, the powerless... basically the outsiders are blessed. Why? Well not because it's good to be poor or hungry or powerless but because now, even the powerless are invited to join in the blessed life of God's kingdom. Nobody had ever told them they were blessed before. They are blown away.

Now Jesus moves on to the next section of the Sermon on the Mount... a discussion on salt & light. He tells this ragtag group of outsiders that they are the ones who will fulfill God's promise through Abraham that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.

But this group of misfits aren't there yet. They aren't currently living lives that will be salt to a decaying world and light to people stumbling in the darkness. So what Jesus does in the rest of the sermon on the mount is describe what a life that is filled with salt & light will look like. This is not an invitation to life as usual or the way that makes sense to us. This is a radical, new way of looking at life that won't make any sense at all to the people trying to live it or to people watching those who are trying to live it. Many will misunderstand. So Jesus explains what it will lead to...

There are all these groups of people who think they know how life is supposed to go. They will look at me and misunderstand. They will resist me, persecute me, eventually they will arrest me, put me on trial, and kill me. And do you know how I will respond? I will love them. I'll love even the ones who resist me the most.

And then when I am resurrected and ascended to heaven, you my little ragtag group of misfits... you will carry on my way of life. They will misunderstand you. They will resist you, persecute you, and many of you will be arrested, put on trial and some of you will even be killed. And then do you know what you will do my little band of powerless outsiders? You will love them all. Even the ones who are killing you. You will learn how to handle your anger, your greed, your lust... and the world will be a different place because of it.

Now you may be wondering... what's in it for me? Why should I do that if the people I'm doing it for don't appreciate it? Because this isn't just about the people you're doing it for. Salt & light are valuable and rare commodities in this world and when you choose to develop a life that brings freshness to a decaying world (salt) and light to a world stumbling in darkness guess who benefits the most? You do. You will become a person you never dreamed you could be. It won't be easy but you can't put a price on looking in the mirror every morning and being proud of who you are becoming.

Prayer: Father, It's not easy to live my life the way Jesus teaches me to live it. Give me the strength and courage it will take to move beyond just managing my anger so I can live a life that makes you proud to be my father. In Jesus Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.. Matthew 6:9-13 (NLT)

Reflection: We are going to focus on the Lord's Prayer next week, but for today I want to look at one specific part of that prayer:

forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sin against us.

Have you ever noticed those two little words that Jesus slides in there? Just as. What does that mean?

Well... I think it means that we are praying that God will think, feel & act towards us the way we think, feel & act toward the people who hurt us.

So... are you sure you want to pray that part of the Lord's prayer?

I'm not sure at all. I'm working on this but to be honest... this is one of the hardest lessons God has to teach me. Maybe it's the hardest lesson for you too.

Think about the person who has hurt you the most. Maybe it's someone who was incredibly close to you and they betrayed your trust. Maybe it was someone who you knew a long time ago and they did something to you that is really hard to let go of. Maybe it's not even someone you know personally (for the Jews it was generally "the Romans" that they hated... maybe for you it's a particular group of people like democrats or republicans or pastors who show clips of Monty Python movies in their lessons).

No matter who it is, Jesus says it's important that we work on not only how we treat those people but how we think and feel about them. I'm not going to sugar coat this... this is tough. Maybe one of the hardest parts of living in the new reality of Jesus' kingdom that we have to learn. But it is SO important.

Maybe right now you have no idea how you're going to let go. Ask God for help. You will be amazed at the miraculous way things change when you invite God into them.

Prayer: Father, I want to be able to pray, “forgive me my sins, **just as** I have forgiven those who sin against me.” but it’s not easy. I have no idea how I’m going to let go of my hurt. Please show me how and I will try to notice when I’m holding grudges and then try to let go. I can’t do it on my own... I need Your help. In Jesus’ Name, amen.

Wednesday:

*Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.
Matthew 5:25 (NLT)*

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Romans 12:18 (NLT)

Reflection: (I recycled this reflection from one I did a few months ago but I thought it fit in with this lesson as well...) I know that we’ve been talking about how to make peace with the people in our lives, but what about when we can’t really make peace? What about when the people in our lives don’t want to make peace or for some reason we can’t really approach the people that keep us from moving forward.

Sometimes approaching people might be dangerous. Sometimes it might make everything worse (not the kind of worse that’s a cop out for taking us off the hook from doing something uncomfortable but an actual case where going to someone would truly make things worse). And sometimes we don’t even have relationships with the people that are messing up our lives.

Once when I was a much younger man I was driving home from work at 2 AM (I was a pizza delivery driver for Domino’s pizza at the time). I ended up getting involved in a case of road rage (the other driver’s rage... not mine) and he pulled in front of me, got out of the car and as I rolled down my window to say I hand’t meant to pull in front of him he let out a roar (it was very reminiscent of the old Incredible Hulk roars that Lou Ferrigno is famous for) and ran up onto the hood of my car, jumped and landed with both feet on my windshield.

Whoa.

The windshield collapsed and he ended up on the roof of my car. I wasn’t thinking clearly but I knew I wanted him off my car so I put the car in reverse and backed up fast enough that I hoped he would come tumbling off the roof in a heap on the ground where he could sit and think about what he’d done.

I was disappointed when he came off the car like a gymnast and took a hulk like position waiting to see what I’d do. I didn’t want him to damage my car any more so I put the car back in first gear and revved the engine and lurched toward him... not to hit him but to demonstrate he wasn’t really in a great position at that moment to be threatening anyone.

A car drove by then and kind of broke the spell he was under and he ran and got in his car and took off. I got his license number and called the cops but to make a REALLY long story short, nothing ever happened to him.

Now I didn't have a relationship with this guy but he played a HUGE role in my life. I was constantly thinking of what I should have done differently. Eventually I tried to forgive him but just saying the words doesn't always make everything all peachy. Even when I started to get over the anger (and I don't know that you ever really get completely over it... My stomach is in knots right now just reliving what happened 18 years ago) if I ever brought it up people would invariably say to me, "this is what you should have done" or "let's go get even with that jerk".

I tell that story because for me that guy isn't someone I really need to go see to make things right, even if I could. But I do need to do my part to let go or forgive or else my anger is going to eat me up. It's going to control me and eventually it will impact my closest relationships. But what I've noticed is that as I learn to let go it still has an impact on my relationships... it's just that it's a positive impact instead of a negative one.

So how about you? Who/what do you need to let go of? Even if someone else doesn't want to let go, the Bible says our job isn't to make others let go... It's just to do all that we can to live at peace.

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Romans 12:18 (NLT)

Prayer: Father, today I want to choose to live at peace with the people in my life. Show me how to handle my anger in a productive way. Open my eyes to the people I need to make peace with. Make me a peacemaker. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. Matthew 5:38-42 (NLT)

Reflection: Sometimes you'll hear people refer to the concept of an eye for an eye as a brutal, violent law and they can't believe it came from the Bible. But it was actually a HUGE step forward for justice and law in the ancient world.

Imagine a world where there were no laws to govern human interactions, no police to enforce those laws and no courts to punish those who broke them. It was a lawless, brutal, unfair place to live where the strong took what they wanted and the weak were just out of luck. Imagine if you accidentally hit someone with a shovel and knocked out one of their teeth. What would the right reaction be? What would happen? Well, it would depend on the resources of the person you hit. If they were weaker than you, probably nothing would happen. But if they were stronger (or had a more powerful family) then you might be killed for knocking out a tooth.

Moses' law of a tooth for a tooth was a way of bringing proportional justice to the world so the weak wouldn't be taken advantage of. It was actually a big step forward from the brutality and injustice of the ancient world.

But human nature being what it is, it evolved into something else. By Jesus' day the idea was that if you hurt me, then I get to hurt you back. That's my right. Jesus looked around and basically said, "this isn't working... it was a big step forward but it's not bringing about the blessing and joy filled life that I want for you."

So He invites us into a whole new way of doing things. He invites us to refuse to fuel hate. But He is not creating a new class of victims either. His solutions of turning the other cheek and going the extra mile were not new legal codes where we have to let people punch us or take advantage of us until we can't go on (I actually dealt with these cultural concepts that everyone listening to Jesus would have understood immediately but that we don't really recognize living 2000 years later). It was actually a new and courageous way of dealing with conflict and difficult people that would change the world. Don't think it can really change the world? Tomorrow we'll look at that... for today let's think about how we handle injustice in our own world- injustice where we are taken advantage of and the kind of injustice where we take advantage of others.

Prayer:

Father, forgive me for the times I've taken advantage of others. Forgive me for the times I've held grudges because of how someone else has taken advantage of me. Today I choose to learn from You how to relate to the people in my life. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

"You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. Matthew 5:38-42 (NLT)

Reflection:

Sometimes people will not understand Jesus' teaching, they think it's got doormat language, and they'll describe it by saying stuff like "When you become a Christian, you have to let people take advantage of you." But we don't like that. We want to be able to retaliate. What goes way down deep in me, "If you hurt me, at least I have the right to hurt you back. If you hurt me, at least I have the right to not love you." See, that is what goes way down deep. "I want to have the right to not love you." And Jesus says, "No. That right you have to die to. If you want to follow me, that right you have to die to." You see, to pray the Lord's Prayer is to pray "Your kingdom come. Your will be done." And the kingdom of God is the kingdom of love because God is love. In the kingdom of God, nobody ever has the right to not love because it is just the reign of love.

Anybody ever do that? Anybody ever even really seriously try? There was one; never thought about this until this week. I just want to say, there has never been anybody like Jesus. There is no hope; I don't know of any hope outside of this man who said these remarkable things, and then lived this life and then died this death that changed the world.

The last week of His life, this one who had taught such wonderful things found out how much His enemies hated Him. He said one day "If somebody slaps you, turn the other cheek." And then the final day of His life, we are told that His enemies surrounded Him and they blindfolded Him and they spit in His face and they struck Him with their fists. And others slapped Him and said "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you? Prophecy to us!" They hated Him so. And he could have called 10,000 angels. He could have run away. But He just stood there; turned the other cheek.

He said if somebody takes you to court, takes the shirt off your back, tell him, "Here's my coat." One day His enemies took Him to court, put Him through the mockery of a trial, condemned Him to death. And then as an ultimate expression of humiliation, because to be robbed of clothing, to be naked was such an expression of humiliation, they took His clothes. When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took His clothes, divided them into four shares with the undergarment remaining. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." And they gambled for the last of His clothes. They take His shirt. They take Him to court. They take His shirt. Jesus says, "Here, take my coat as well if that'll help you."

He said, "If Roman soldiers come someday and they make you go with them a mile, then at the end of that mile you say, Can I go with you another one?" One day the soldiers came for Him. They forced Him to carry a cross until He couldn't carry it anymore. And then we're told in Matthew 27, after they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene named Simon. And they forced Him to carry the cross. It's the same word. It's exactly the same law. One day the soldiers came for Jesus, and he went a mile with them. But at the end of the mile, he said, "I'll go another. I'll go another mile. If that's what it takes, I'll go another mile."

Jesus said, "If somebody asks you, don't just turn away." He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating drops like blood. He said to His Father, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup be taken from me. Don't make me drink it." The Father asked for more... not because the Father wanted more but because we needed everything that Jesus had to give... do you know what He said? He said, "All right, not my will, yours be done." and He went to the cross.

That's the one we follow. That's the only hope for this sorrow-twisted world. Ultimately, this world will not be redeemed by a different economic system or a different political arrangement, although those questions are real, real, real important. Ultimately, you think about gangs and violence and wars and ethnic cleansing, broken homes, hearts shattered. What's ever going to heal that? Not politics. Not economics.

It's the way of the cross. It's the way that says, the evil, see, the hurt, the cycle of hostility. . . it stops in me. . . with the Father's help now. At the cross it will all get turned around. And now it comes down to you and me in our lives. And how I react in my daily interactions will change the world for better or worse.

You probably won't get slapped by somebody this week. Probably nobody will take you to court and sue you for your coat. Probably no soldier will force you to go a mile. But you'll have all kinds of opportunity and I will, too.

And just to make sure that we're thinking this way, I'd like to give us a phrase that we're all going to take with us into the week. And the phrase is "Here's my chance."

Here's my chance. And the idea is that each moment when there's something difficult--relational problems, somebody's hurt me, somebody comes to my mind; then I remember this is an opportunity to be with Jesus, to live in the reality of the Kingdom, to be a Kingdom agent, to actually manifest redemption, to be strong and powerful and creative in the service of the good.

Here's my chance to be with Jesus, to learn from Jesus how to live like Jesus. And to make sure you all take that with you, we're all going to say it together out loud. Here we go. HERE'S MY CHANCE!

Prayer: Father, thank You for the way You changed the world. Thank You for the way You changed my life. Today I want to look for opportunities to make a difference in this world by how I react. Here's my chance! In Jesus' Name, amen.