

March 4-8, 2024 Edition

Following The Year_(s) Of[^] Jesus Part II4

Jesus Feeds The 5,000

-or-

Have You Heard The Tragedy Of King Herod The Fool?

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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:

As soon as Jesus heard the (bad) news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them. Matthew 14:13-14 (NLT)

Reflection: Have you ever heard the one about the Rabbi and 15,000 people who were with Him and were REALLY hungry? That's what this week's focus is. But before we begin talking about the actual story let's take a look at that day in the life of Jesus. Max Lucado calls it the second worst day of Jesus' life (can you guess the worst day? Maybe the crucifixion, huh?). Why was it so bad? First Jesus gets the news that John the baptist, His cousin, had been killed. And if that weren't enough Jesus is informed that Herod, the guy who killed John the baptist is now watching Him closely. Jesus is now on a watch list that nobody wants to be on.

So Jesus takes His closest friends and tries to get away from the crowds. They get in a boat and head off across the lake to be alone for a bit. A time for Jesus to grieve, to recharge, to recover. But the crowd has a different idea in mind. They still want something from Jesus. So they look at the boat's trajectory and run around the lake so that when Jesus gets to the other side... it's like a remake of "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?" (although this was about 2,000 years before that particular TV show had been made so does that make this a prequel?).

Jesus is trying to get away to rest and instead He arrives to a crowd of people who all want a piece of Him with their hands out and their mouths open. Max Lucado calls it the piranha hour (most of you moms know what I'm talking about, right?). So what does Jesus do? He's grieving, He's nervous about Herod, He's trying to get away and being thwarted by people who don't care about anything but their own needs/wants/desires. What would you do (yeah, me too... aren't you glad Jesus isn't like us?). So what does Jesus do?

Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

And because of that selflessness Jesus eventually would perform the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (well... 5,000 men... that's how they counted back then. I guess they didn't count children or women because to them children and women didn't count? It wasn't a good time to be a child or woman but more on that another day). Did you know that this miracle is the only miracle other than the resurrection that is recorded in all four gospels? And if Jesus wasn't willing to let God interrupt His plans it would never have happened.

So what about Jesus' "me" time? He got it... eventually. After this day He would go off by Himself and get the rest He was looking for earlier. This isn't a story about how people don't need rest. It's a story about allowing my plans to be interrupted by God. So how

about it? Does God have permission to interrupt your day to change the world, even if you're having a tough day? Turns out, God cares about the piranhas.

Prayer: Father, feel free to interrupt me today if you need me. I will learn to design my life in such a way that I have the space and energy to be interrupted even on my toughest days knowing I can live with being in over my head for a season and can recharge after Your interruption is done. Teach me to know what a season is, and how to NOT design my life in such a way that I never get the chance to recharge. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Tuesday:

Creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. Romans 8:21 (NLT)

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done. John 14:12 (NLT)

Reflection: Ok... so Jesus fed 5,000 men (probably more like 15,000 total when you count in women and children) with 2 sardines and 5 biscuits. So what is this story really about? What is the point of Jesus' miracles? When I was growing up we were taught TONS of Bible trivia. One of the things I was taught was the definition of a miracle. A miracle was a sign... a sign that pointed to the authority of the one performing the miracle. It was the temporary suspension of the natural order.

That's what I was taught. I don't buy that anymore. Oh, I agree with the sign part of it... the miracle was not the point of what God was doing in and through a person... the miracle only pointed to something else greater (in this case that something was a someONE named Jesus). But what I take issue with now is the idea that a miracle was the suspension of the natural order of things. Do you want to know what I think now? I hope so cause I'm about to tell you ;o)

Now I think a miracle is actually the opposite of the suspension of the natural order. I think now that a miracle is the reinstatement of the natural order. In other words, with the miracles Jesus keeps saying, "you want to know what reality is supposed to look like? Look back at the garden of Eden. The way things are now is not the way things are supposed to be. They are a perversion, a mutation of the way God intended things to be. God never intended for the natural order of things to include starving children with bloated bellies that look full but are in reality completely empty. He never intended for the natural order of things to include pain, disease, oppression, prejudice, isolation or heart ache. The miracles are Jesus showing us that He's come to make things right. The miracles are a snapshot of what's coming.

They are also invitations to us to join Jesus in His assault against the things that have perverted the natural order of things. In other words, if we are going to follow Jesus then we will join Him in His assault on hunger, sickness, death, oppression, injustice, prejudice, isolation and pain. We can't all attack every enemy with our limited lives... but all of us can find one or two areas that affect those we care about and join Him in the all out assault against that enemy. Maybe your passion will be fighting hunger, or injustice, or homelessness, or prejudice, or disease. You can't fix everything that's wrong with this

world but if you follow Jesus you will join Him in fighting against one or two of the injustices that have infected this world.

So what do you say? What injustice is there out in the world that you want to give a swift kick to? Not alone. You don't have to do this alone. In fact, you can't. But with Jesus by your side there is no telling what kind of difference you can make. I'll leave you with the words of Steven Curtis Chapman from the song, Coming Attractions:

A day is coming when all will be fed.

There won't be a single hungry mouth begging for bread.

A day is coming when every disease will be swept away.

As mercy floods through every street.

A day is coming... but until that day comes...

Let Your kingdom come in me. Let Your will be done in me.

Here on earth as it is and as it will be in Heaven.

Show Your glory to the world. Tell Your story to the world.

Let my life be a preview of coming attractions.

Steven Curtis Chapman~ Coming Attractions

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the injustice You want me to join You in fighting against. Give me the passion and show me the way to make a difference. Let my life be a preview of coming attractions. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people.

Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted.

John 6:11 (NLT)

Reflection: Another thing this story tells me is that Jesus is powerful. You may be thinking, duh! That's pretty obvious- and you're right. But where does that power come from? If you're not careful you'll get caught up in the idea that somehow our words are where the power is. That by learning the right incantations (Christians wouldn't like that word but that's the definition of stringing the right words together in the right sequence to manipulate a spiritual power into doing what a person wants home to do) we will unlock the power of God to flow into our lives in the way we think it should. But don't get caught up in that. Jesus taught against it... and the longest public prayer you will see Jesus giving (the Lord's prayer which is now a public prayer but I don't think that was Jesus' intent when He gave it to us) was 20 seconds long. And whenever He ate the Bible says simply that He would take the food and "give thanks". Jesus' prayers were VERY simple.

So how did we ever get to the place where public prayers are often so long the congregation has a tough time staying awake? I worked at a church once where

when certain guys got up to pray you could hear the teens setting the stopwatch feature on their watches to see how long this prayer would last and would it break the all time record (the record was 17 minutes and 24 seconds when I was there... not sure if anyone's broken that record since I left, sorry ;o)

Now don't get me wrong... if you like long prayers and going to churches where the prayers take more time than the sermon then God bless you. But I do think we need to be careful. Why? Because for people who can't make a prayer last that long, who can't string together the right cliches and phrases in such a way that they impress the rest of the congregation, for those people prayer becomes an obstacle. They decide that the power must come from knowing the right combinations of words instead of the power coming from the One we are praying to.

Jesus' power came from His connection to His Father. Any power we find in prayer is going to come from our connection with Him. God hopes you will approach Him the way a child would approach a father that they love and respect and trust. And when we do that... we have the ability to become pathways of God's power. Conduits between Heaven and earth where God's power flows as we attempt to battle the enemies of hunger, disease and other injustices with Him. So let's approach our Father together and ask for His help right now.

Prayer: Father, sometimes I don't know what to pray for. I want to learn to trust you, show me the way. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

But Jesus said, "You feed them." "With what?" they asked. "We'd have to work for months to earn enough money to buy food for all these people!"
Mark 6:37 (NLT)

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?" John 6:8-9 (NLT)

Reflection: Can you imagine the look on Philip's face when Jesus told him to feed the people? But Lord, there's 5,000 of them (not including women and children)... how am I going to feed them?" What was Jesus doing? Was He messing with them? Maybe a little bit. But mostly He was teaching them (and anyone else who will learn) a lesson in changing the world. A lesson in battling the enemies of oppression, injustice, prejudice, isolation, hunger, disease, etc. So what is that lesson?

"You can't do it alone and just because what you have doesn't seem like much if you give it to Me I'll show you what can be done with very little."

Andrew finds a little boy who has 2 sardines and 5 biscuits. The miracle doesn't occur because of the faith of the little boy or even the faith of Andrew. In fact, Andrew has very little faith, he even says, "not sure what You can do with this little bit, Lord?" (Ok... I'm paraphrasing a little but that's what he says, go back and read it again ;o) So if the miracle doesn't happen because of the faith of the people coming to Jesus then why does it happen. One word:

Sacrifice.

Notice, nothing happens until the little boy does something with his meager lunch. He gives it to Jesus. Verse 11 is the scariest part of this story to me:

Then Jesus **took** the loaves. John 6:11 (NLT)

Suddenly that little boy... you remember him right? The only one who thought to bring a lunch? The only one who didn't have to worry about going hungry? That little boy suddenly didn't have a lunch anymore. He had given it to Jesus. But once the little boy does that what happens? This is really cool. Once the little boy gives up his meager lunch he ends up getting much more than he would have if he kept his meager little lunch. In a strange twist of physics this little boy ends up eating much more of the lunch that he brought than had actually existed before he gave it to Jesus.

Have you ever wondered why more of God's power wasn't flowing through your life? I know I have. And while it's not universally true that any time you feel a lack of power it's because there's something you're holding back from God, it's always a pretty good place to look first. Why? Because God can't multiply what you haven't given to Him. Why not? Because that would be altering free choice. In other words, in order for God to really change what you have, you have to give it to Him and let Him take it first.

But you better realize first that He doesn't always give back what you give in the form you give it to Him. Some preachers will tell you if you give God a ten dollar bill then He'll give you back one hundred. And while God does promise that you can't outgive Him, He never promises that what you get back will be in kind. In other words, just because you give money doesn't mean that the blessing that comes back will always be money. Just because you give the blessing of your time or energy doesn't mean that the blessing coming back will always be in the form of time or energy.

Basically this deal that God make with us is, give me everything. All of yourself. I will take it (that's the terrifying part) and give you back what is truly going to be good for you. But you have to trust me. I know better than you do what will make you happy. But until you give me everything... I can't do a thing with what you're holding on to with a death grip.

So I guess the question for today is, what am I holding back?

Prayer: Father, I want to give you all of myself. To give you everything I have. I don't know what that will look like and it scares me. But the best I know how I give you everything. Show me what I'm holding back. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday Reflection: Have you ever wondered what Jesus meant when He said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done.
John 14:12 (NLT)

Huh? How is that possible? Didn't He feed 15,000 people with just a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread? Didn't He walk on water? Didn't He calm hurricanes with just a command? Didn't He heal the sick and cast out demons? Didn't He defeat death and the grave with nothing more than an ugly stick (the cross) and His own power? How is it then that I will do the same works He did? What does He expect me to do? I can't do any of those things.

Well, from what I can gather when the Bible invites us to become like Jesus it's not primarily His power that it's talking about. I heard a preacher once say, "the 'omnis' are off the table." What he was saying was that God isn't inviting us to be omnipresent (everywhere at once) or omniscient (all knowing) or omnipotent (all powerful). He's not looking for anyone that can move mountains or part seas or defeat evil- He will take care of all of that. What He's looking for is people who are willing to develop and cultivate His character into their lives:

Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times-speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly-and so become more and more in every way like Christ. Ephesians 4:15 (TLB)

When we do that it makes it possible for His power to flow through our lives. That's when we become "channels" of His power. It's still His power- but we've opened our lives up to making it possible for His power to flow into and out of us. And what is it that makes that possible? Speaking like Jesus spoke. Dealing with others the way Jesus dealt with others. Living the way He lived. We talk about this a lot at Riverside- that God only shares His power, knowledge, wisdom and presence with those who are actively developing the character of His Son in their lives. We might think that's not fair but just think about how dangerous the power of God in the hands of someone who had no interest in developing His character would be. And He's not looking for perfection- He's looking for commitment. When I committed myself to becoming more like Jesus (and I love that the scripture we read above said we will become "more and more" like Jesus. This is a process and not so much a destination) I started seeing His power flowing into my life in ways I never dreamed were possible. I was still FAR from perfect at it (I still am for that matter even if I like to think I'm closer to His image in my life than I was 32 years ago when I first made this commitment) and yet seeing His strength being unleashed in my life was more addictive than any substance I'd ever been ignorant enough to expose myself to.

I guess what I'm getting at is this- before we can become channels of His power we HAVE to commit ourselves to becoming channels of His compassion. He spends 3 1/2 years with

His disciples teaching them how to live like He did. They would eventually perform some of the same miracles He did but their access to His power came only after they chose to put on His character. After He had fed 15,000 people with a couple of sardines and a few loaves of bread Jesus was asked a very interesting question:

"Well, what do we do then to get in on God's works?" Jesus said, "Throw your lot in with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God's works." John 6:28-29 (MES)

His response is fascinating. Basically He says, "join Me on My mission to love the unloveable, forgive the unforgivable and accept the unacceptable. Committing yourself to My 'way' of living will open your life up to the power of God." The problem then was that very few wanted to adopt Jesus' way- they just wanted His power. I wonder how true that still is today? I know for much of my life I have been guilty of that. And when Jesus started explaining to these people who desperately wanted His power what it would look like to become channels of that power most of them didn't like what they heard and they left Him and went home. Only a few stuck around to continue their education in "Jesus University":

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. John 6:66-68 (NLT)

Not exactly a ringing endorsement, huh? Peter is confused by Jesus' invitation just like the people who left- but he stuck out his commitment and look how that worked out. We don't always understand why Jesus asks us to do what He asks us to do but when we live up to our commitment it changes us and that changes the world. Sidewalk Prophets have a song called, "Live Like That" that has become a prayer for my life every day (if it's not on your phone so that you can listen to it when life gets tough then you need to download it NOW in my humble opinion). It reminds me that sometimes (and often much more than sometimes) living like Jesus lived isn't easy. Sometimes (and often much more than sometimes) loving the people that nobody else will show up for- the "least of us" as Jesus called them- means ignoring what we think is "right" and treating them the way Jesus would if He were here in our place. And guess what? When we do that, He is (here in our place I mean)! When we love the way He would then people will see Jesus when they see us.

So how about it? Do you want His power flowing into your life to give you the ability to make changes you never dreamed you could make? Then you've got to "live like that." You've got to commit to developing the character of Jesus. You've got to become a channel of His love and compassion before you can become a channel of His power.