

June 14-18, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #54

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Beyond Anger Management

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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:

"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're going to look at the first of the "teaching" segments of Jesus' Sermon On The Mount- and He starts with anger (makes you a little mad, doesn't it? ;o). But before we get there let's reset what we've learned about the most famous speech ever delivered in the history of the human race. First and foremost 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 (and if you're not there yet that's ok because Jesus is going to show us how to become salt & light). 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:

"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:

Yes... I know I used that verse in yesterday's devo. But I didn't really talk about it. Does it seem like an impossible dream that you could never be angry with someone?

Growing up I never saw my mom & dad fight. I thought that meant that if you were a good husband you didn't get angry with your wife.

Then I met Judy.

What a failure I was! That woman knew how to punch my buttons. I thought I was an utter failure as a husband because I was angry A LOT. I thought I was in serious trouble because Jesus said if I'm angry with someone (like my wife) I was subject to judgment. But the word for angry that Jesus uses isn't talking about the momentary emotion you might get when someone throws away your favorite robe that had a huge hood that when you put it up it made you feel like Obiwan Kenobi- even if it was old and tattered and falling apart... But I digress.

That word for anger is the carefully tended fire of hate and resentment that we can build in our hearts. The kind of anger that drives our life. The kind of anger that will destroy our life is we're not careful. In the Star Wars movies do you remember what the emperor and Darth Vader would say to Luke? Release your anger, embrace your hate, it will make you strong.

And do you remember what Yoda and Obiwan would say to Luke? Let go of your anger, find peace, embrace the light. Whatever you think about Star Wars episodes 1, 2 & 3 they are a brilliant treatment of what happens to a human life when one embraces anger and makes it the center of their lives. We're going to spend this week looking at anger but for today let's lighten the mood a little with the top 10 signs you might be a redneck Jedi:

You Might be a Redneck Jedi If....

10. You ever heard the phrase, "May the force be with ya'll."
9. Your Jedi robe is camouflage.
8. You have ever used your light saber to open a bottle of Bud Light.
7. You can easily describe the taste of an Ewok.
6. You have ever had a land-speeder up on blocks in your yard.

5. The worst part of spending time on Dagobah is the dadgum skeeters.
4. Wookies are offended by your B.O.
3. Although you had to kill him, you kinda thought that Jabba the Hutt had a pretty good handle on how to treat his women.
2. Your business cards read "Billy Bob, Jedi Master".
1. If you have ever heard ... "Billy Bob, I am your father ... AND your cousin!"

Ultimately what God wants from you is for you to not let anything (any emotion) be your master. To choose what to focus on and how to treat others... in the physical world but also in your mind. There are an awful lot of us who have let people who hurt us take up space in our minds and we are offering them free rent. Stop it. Learn from Jesus how to let it go (I know... some of you just had a "Frozen" moment...).

Prayer: Father, I don't want anger to rule my life. Show me where I've given in to anger in my life and show me how to choose Your way instead so that I might become a person of salt & light instead of a person of darkness and bitterness. In Jesus name, amen.

Wednesday:

So when you offer your gift to God at the altar, and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there at the altar. Go and make peace with that person, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23 (NCV)

Reflection: The Bible is a fascinating book. It is so plain and simple that anyone can sit down and start reading it and even if they don't understand everything they read if they keep going they will find more than enough that they do understand to transform their lives (if they put into practice what they read). But it's also a very complex book filled with subtle and mysterious concepts that take a little more education and digging to understand.

For instance, what's the deal with Jesus saying that when I'm bringing my gift to the altar I should wait until I've cleared things up with my brother or sister who has something against me? I don't bring gifts to the altar... What is an altar anyways?

The altar was at the Temple and Jews who didn't live in Jerusalem would wait their whole lives sometimes to make a trip to Jerusalem and offer a gift at the altar in God's holy Temple. It was the most important thing a Jew would ever do, spiritually speaking.

So I think what Jesus is saying to us is that whatever is the most important thing to us spiritually speaking, if we're doing it and then realize that someone has something against us (in other words if we've wronged them) we need to stop whatever we're doing and figure out a way (if there is one) to make things right.

What is the most important thing to you spiritually speaking? Praying? Reading your Bible? Serving others? Giving to others? Whatever the most important thing if your spiritual life is, it just became the second most important if you have anyone in your life that you've wronged. Jesus says you need to put all your energy into bringing peace back into that relationship.

Now I think we need to stop here and make one thing clear. This is not a new legal code Jesus is handing down. Sometimes making peace with people that we've wronged could be dangerous or counterproductive. In those cases I think we need to figure out a way to heal those wounds in a way that is safe and productive. What will that look like? I don't know. But Jesus does. So maybe your next step in managing anger (both yours and the anger others have towards you) is just to spend some time talking it over with Jesus. Talk to someone whose wisdom you trust and get as much advice as you can. It's not always an easy answer and Jesus wasn't about easy answers. He was about people becoming salt & light. And that only happens when we use our God given creativity and discernment to figure out how to live the lives we've been called to live.

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I've brought anger and resentment to the lives of others because of my actions. Show me how to do what Jesus is asking me to do... show me how to make peace with the people in my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday

When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly.
Matthew 5:25 (NLT)

Reflection: Not a lot of deep insights today... there are a lot of things Jesus says that are confusing and hard to understand. This isn't one of them.

Don't put off til tomorrow what you can (and should) do today. Why? Because when you do you waste opportunities for the transformation of your heart to take place... and dragging your feet retards the transformation of your heart.

Joe Beam (one of my favorite preachers) asked a group of people one time, "what is the number one most used word in prayers?" What do you think it is? Amen would seem like a good guess. Maybe give-me? Turns out it's the word, "help". Have you ever noticed how often you'll say, "help me... (fill in the blank)?" Joe suggested we turn the words, "help me" into the words, "make me". What might happen if I asked Jesus to make me create peace with the people in my life instead of asking for His help.

Joe said a few weeks after he made that case in one church he was back in that same church and a woman told him she tried this in her own life. It turns out she had been having an affair and hadn't been able to break it off. She had been praying that God would "help her" stop the affair and nothing was happening. So she prayed that God would "make her" stop the affair. She prayed that prayer in church the night Joe was challenging people to change the way they prayed. She said by the time she got home her husband had found out about the affair.

Not what she had in mind at all.

But she said, it did stop the affair and she told Joe that she and her husband were working things out and the future looked brighter than it ever had. So how about you? Are you brave enough to pray that God "make you" create peace in your life (or that God make you do whatever it is that you've had no progress on even though you've been praying for His help)?

Is it scary? You betcha. But maybe scary is just what you need to start making real progress in your life. Do it now... don't wait.

Prayer: Father, today I pray that You will make me make progress in my life. Today I give You permission to do whatever You have to do to move me forward. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

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 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 hadn'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)

And one last thought for the week. Do you struggle with anger? Does it make you feel weak and powerless and leave you wondering if you're even ok with God? Then you need to go listen to Mercy Me's latest song, "Flawless". Pay particular attention to the part where they sing, "no matter what they say or what you think you are the day you called His Name He made you flawless." Let me introduce you to amazing grace!

Jesus takes weak, angry people and turns them into miraculous transformed individuals every day.

A fisherman named Simon who was an impetuous hothead becomes Peter and helps change the world forever. A man named John who along with his brother James was nicknamed the Sons of Thunder, a man who asked Jesus if he should pray to God to send down fire on an entire town and destroy it just because they didn't accept Jesus' message became the Apostle of Love. A man named Saul who became famous for killing Christians met Jesus and became the Apostle Paul... a man who would become famous for teaching brothers and sisters how to live lives of love, acceptance and forgiveness. A man who almost singlehandedly spread the Christian faith into the Roman empire. And a young man named Ed who thought his life was over and saw no hope became for a meaningful future had his life turned around and went from being a petty, envious little punk to... well maybe I'm a bad example.

I have seen Jesus work miracles in my own life and in many of your lives just by following Him. Believing that He knows what He's talking about and trying your best to do what He says... even when we fail over and over, as long as we get back up and try again Jesus' power and blessings flow into our lives and give us the ability to become someone we never dreamed we could. Never forget that the day you called His Name He made you flawless.

What will He do in your life? I don't know exactly... but I know it'll be amazing. Will you believe that Jesus knows what He's talking about? Will you do what He asks, even if it's one of the hardest things you've ever had to do? Will you say, "I'm sorry" to the people you've hurt? As far as Jesus is concerned... this is job 1 to living life in the Kingdom.

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.