

August 24-28, 2020 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #13

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

The Full Armor Of God

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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 ;D) 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:

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. James 4:7-8 (NLT)

Reflection: This week we will be focusing in on one part of the book of James where James says to resist the devil and watch him flee from you as you draw near to God. This verse was HUGE for me in my earliest years as a follower of Jesus. As I tried my best to recover my life from the places my best choices had taken me.

I'll never forget the first time I read James 4:7-8. I was struggling to live the life I believed God was asking me to live. I know there are a lot of people in our culture who don't believe in a devil or in the forces of darkness but just try to make a positive change in your life and watch as the opposition aligns against you. I was trying to quit doing a bunch of stuff that was really and truly very bad for me. I was trying to start doing a bunch of stuff that I couldn't see how it was so important that I start doing it. I just knew that the Bible said to cultivate these things in my life so I was going to do my best to cultivate them. But it was far from easy. I felt the opposition to this new life every direction I turned. I didn't know how long I'd be able to keep up this new life. I was getting very nervous.

Then I read James 4:7:

Resist the devil and will flee from you.

I tried my best to resist the devil but I wasn't sure what that was supposed to look like. Was I supposed to enter into one on one combat with this spiritual force of darkness that was a roaring lion according to the apostle Peter? I wasn't sure what I had that would give me the advantage against this dangerous adversary. Then I read the very next verse and everything changed for me:

*Resist the devil and will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
James 4:7-8 (NLT)*

It's not enough to just resist the devil. On our own we will never prevail. But God doesn't ask you to go one on one against the devil. He asks you to draw near to Him and He promises to stick with you. It's like a bully at school that won't come near you while you're standing by a teacher. It's not because you're suddenly more powerful and could take that bully down but because of who you're standing by. It's like one of my favorite jokes from my childhood. I told it to anyone who'd listen and I thought it was hysterically funny... although I can't guarantee you will.

There was a Roman legion marching through Israel and an Israelite soldier popped his head up over a hill and started mocking the Roman army, "na na na na boo boo, I'm better than you, you... go and stick your heads in doo doo (I'm starting to remember why it was my favorite joke ;o) Anyways... the centurion had 5 of his men run over the hill to kill

that lone Israelite. The five soldiers run up the hill and disappear on the other side where there are sounds of battle that last about 10 seconds. A few seconds later that same Israelite sticks his head up over the hill and mocks the Romans again- "is that all you've got?!?!? Come on, surely you can do better than that!" The Centurion sends 15 of his men over the hill with the same result. About 10 seconds of battle sounds and then silence followed by the Israelite popping his head up and mocking the Romans again. The Centurion sends 25 men, then 50, then 150... every time there would be sounds of battle and then the Israelite would pop up again looking as fresh as a daisy. Finally when all the men had been sent over the hill and the Israelite still wasn't killed the Centurion decided that the old saying was true- if you want something done right you have to do it yourself. As the Centurion was making his way up the hill one of his soldiers crawled back over the hill and said, "don't do it sir... it's a trap... there's ... 2 of them!"

Even today as I type that joke I smile. How about you? Is that your new favorite joke? Probably not. But I'll tell you what should be one of your favorite things- when it comes to spiritual warfare you are never alone. At least you don't have to be. If you resist the devil by drawing near to God then there are always 2 of you (or would it be 4 of you if you include the Holy Spirit and Jesus?). You never have to face the battle alone. In fact... you better never face the battle alone because if you do I will make a bold prediction- you will lose.

Tuesday:

A final word: 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. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.
Ephesians 6:10-13 (NLT)

Reflection: James tells us to "resist the devil" but how do we do that? I mean, sure, he tells us to "draw near to God" but how do we do that? Well, James has been explaining that for almost an entire four chapters by the time he says these words. In a nutshell James tells us to work on our character to become like Jesus. To become people of integrity (becoming people of honor), mercy (becoming a blessing to the people God entrusts into our lives) and justice (not only refusing to take advantage of people with less power than we have but speaking up for the weak when they are being taken advantage of by someone else).

Paul says the same thing but he frames it differently. He starts out telling us we are in a battle with the forces of darkness and then he says almost exactly the same thing James says- "resist the enemy". And then Paul goes into the armor we need to put on to overcome in this battle we are in. And this armor is sort of like a makeover program you

might order from a late night infomercial. I mean... you've seen those, right? Sometimes it's weight loss. Sometimes it's some crazy kind of 90 day fitness boot camp that will turn you into Arnold Schwarzenegger. Sometimes it's a workout for your mind or your career or your children. But do you know what happens when we see those infomercials and get excited and order the program? Well, eventually the program comes, right? And when it arrives do you suddenly have all the benefits that the infomercial promised? Nope... you have to open it up first. Then you have to read or watch or listen to the directions. And then comes the part that's tough to follow through on- we have to actually put what we got in the package into practice. That's where the power is in these programs, right? Actually doing what we're told to do to implement and unlock the benefits.

Same thing is true with the armor. When you choose to follow Jesus it's like you get this package of stuff that you have access to. But you have to put it on. You have to practice using it. If you don't you'll never get to enjoy the benefits of the armor. But the problem for me was that even once I started trying to use it I felt like I was just going to mess it up. Like I didn't know what I was doing. It was overwhelming for me. I felt like I had no idea what I was doing (and it was actually a pretty accurate assessment of the situation). I might have given up if I had any other place to go. And even though I didn't have any other ideas of what could save my life other than Jesus, I still might have given up if I hadn't started to notice God's power being unleashed into my life. I learned a very important lesson very early on in my new found role as a follower of Jesus- life with Him is not about how far you have progressed in comparison with other followers of Jesus. It's not that kind of race. It is a race but our only competition is ourselves. God knows each of us better than we know ourselves. He knows the unique challenges and experiences in each of our lives. He knows what each one of us is capable of and what is going to be extremely challenging. And He rewards people not based on how far we've gotten but he judges us based on what He knows we're capable of at this point in our lives.

I started to see miracles in my life. I started to see His power unleashed in my life not because I was so stinking good at following His Son but because I refused to let my own shortcomings and misunderstandings stop me. I wanted nothing more than to become who He created me to become. I learned that God really does look at our hearts and as long as my desire was to become like His Son then God would unleash His power into my life to help me along- even when I was having a tough time understanding what He was asking me to do. I saw the stuff about putting on the full armor of God but I had no idea what it was or how to put it on. What is the belt of truth? What is the body armor of righteousness? What are the shoes of the gospel? How about the shield of faith? The helmet of salvation? The sword of the Spirit? And what's the deal with prayer? How do I pray? How long should I pray? How often should I pray? What should I say when I pray? It was baffling to me.

But the awesome thing is, God is a God Who works with amateurs. And thank goodness because even those of us who have been doing this for a while aren't anywhere close to having it all figured out. So what I'm going to do is share with you in the coming days is

the way I look at the Full Armor Of God. This isn't the only way to look at this passage of scripture but it's the way that makes the most sense to me right now. So if you're curious about this armor and what it will do for you then we'll continue figuring that out together tomorrow.

Wednesday Reflection: When it comes to putting on the full armor of God it begins with putting on the belt of truth. We talked about this last week almost exclusively- David's concept of God and how that concept shaped how David lived his life. This is the foundation of every other piece of armor that Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter 6:

Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth. Ephesians 6:14 (NLT)

The belt was the part of a soldier's armor that determined how effective every other piece of protective equipment and weaponry would be. The soldiers wore long robes that were less than ideal for fighting. It was impossible to be nimble and fast wearing a long robe. So when the time came for battle a soldier would reach down and pull the bottom of his robe up from between his legs and tuck it into his belt. Now he was wearing a weird kind of pair of pants and now he could move. Now all the rest of the armor became that much more effective. Now he was ready for battle.

When it comes to the spiritual counterpart of a soldier's belt Paul says that's the "truth". Now it may be more than this but it's certainly not less than this- the "truth" is our understanding of Who God is. It will influence every other aspect of our spiritual armor. If we see God as nothing more than Creator, King and Judge then we will be terrified by Him. We will think of Him as a rule keeper. As Someone Who wants nothing more than to catch us messing up so He can thump us. But as we saw last week- the Bible paints a more holistic view of God. He is not only Creator, King & Judge- He's also Shepherd, Father & Friend. We still have to be careful not to forget that God is Creator, King & Judge or we'll see God as nothing more than a celestial Santa Who only wants us to have what we want and God is much more than that. The "truth" is, God is very complex and until we start to see Him for Who He truly is our faith will be impacted.

If you're anything like me, your concept of God will be ever evolving. Your understanding and grasp of each of the roles He plays in our lives will continue to grow as you understand more and more about the other elements of the full armor of God. But this is the foundation. This is where it will all begin for you. So maybe it's a good time to ask the question: what is your concept of God? Who is He to you? How do you think He feels about you? Want to know how to change your view of God? Get to know Jesus. The Old Testament is great and right now we're going through a series looking at the BIG story of the Bible but (and as friend of mine likes to say this is REALLY BIG but ;o) we are constantly looking for and finding Jesus in the pages and stories of the Old Testament. Without a full understanding of Jesus the Old Testament will never make sense and will often make God seem mean and nasty.

So get to know Jesus. Read the gospels. Then read them again. Listen to the gospels. Download a Bible app that will read the Bible to you and listen to the words of Jesus while you drive or putter around the house. You will start to know Jesus in ways you never would have dreamed. You'll start to see how He saw His Father, how He treated people, how He sees us, how He wants us to see other people and how that will change how we treat others. That's the only way you're going to get a clear view of Who God Is.

Once you have the belt of truth fastened around your waist it's time to pick up the next piece of armor which we'll talk about tomorrow but for today spend some time thinking about what it might take to see God for Who He really is.

Thursday Reflection: Which leads to our next piece of armor that Paul talks about- the body armor. This piece of armor is all about relationships.

Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. Ephesians 6:14 (NLT)

The body armor of a follower of Jesus is all about righteousness. We had to talk about what part the belt played in a soldier's uniform to understand the last point. I don't think we need to spend a huge amount of time talking about the role body armor plays in the life of a soldier. It's sort of secondary protection from the attacks of the enemy (we'll talk about shield soon). However, in order to understand how spiritual body armor works we need to understand the concept of righteousness. Righteousness is a big word that means nothing more than to be in a "right" relationship with someone. If I owe you money that I can't pay back then we stand in a state of "unrighteousness". As soon as I make good on my debt I then can stand before you, righteous. When the Bible talks about righteousness it can mean several different things- my standing before God; my standing before other people in my life; my standing before the created universe and my standing before (or would it be within?) myself.

Usually the context that the word "righteousness" is used in determine which relationship is being referred to. Here there is no such context. Some translations of the Bible add "God's" to this verse right before the word "righteousness" because they assume (I'm assuming this is why they do it... no we've both "assumed" and I don't know if you've heard this or not but it's generally not a good policy to "assume" ;o) that it's our standing before God that offers us the kind of spiritual protection that body armor provides to a soldier. But I think it's more than that (not that the translators of the Bible are sitting up into the wee hours of the morning worried because Pastor Ed disagrees with how they translated Ephesians 6:14). I think our standing before other people is a HUGE part of our spiritual protection. I mean, if I have unresolved conflict with my wife then there is going to be a big gap in my spiritual armor. A gap that the enemy can exploit. Why else would the apostle Paul say in Ephesians chapter 4:

And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)

Believe what you want about the body armor of righteousness- if your relationships with other people are strained you are vulnerable. On the other hand, if you are in a place where all is right with the world- right with God, right with other people, right with yourself (being true to your own values and ethics) and right with reality (do you fight with reality or live within the truth that the Bible explains about this broken world we live in that is filled with not only sin but the consequences of sin that impact not just our spiritual lives but also the physical world bringing pain, suffering, sickness, accidents and natural disasters that cause untold frustration and confusion to the lives of God's people- especially when we think our own lives should somehow be immune to the impact of living in a broken and sin-infected world) then you are in a place where the devil is going to have a tough time finding a place to attack you. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that every attack that He makes to set up what the Bible calls "strongholds" in your mind revolve around your relationship to God, others, yourself or reality itself (and sometimes a combination of them). Live in a state of harmony- to the extent that that's possible in anyone's life this side of Heaven- and the devil has lost his ability to attack you with any efficiency at all.

Unfortunately none of us can live in complete harmony in all of those areas at all times which is when we are open to attack. The key is to realize how the devil works and recognize his attacks for what they are and remember the truth of Who God is and who I am and how God sees the people in my life and let that soften the blow. So the armor begins with the belt of truth- seeing God for Who He Is. Then I am to put on the body armor of righteousness- living as best as I can in a state of right relationship to God, others, myself and reality. Tomorrow we'll talk about the shoes and the shield.

Friday Reflection: The next piece of armor Paul talks about is the shoes of the gospel. This part of the armor is all about me being able to create a life that is not easily knocked off balance or off track:

For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News (gospel) so that you will be fully prepared. Ephesians 6:15 (NLT)

Alexander the Great changed warfare forever. He won many of his battles due to the quickness of his army. His soldiers were able to move faster and surer than his enemies and as it turned out that gave him a huge advantage. So after Alexander armies were always trying to create the perfect foot wear. It had to be light so they could move quickly but it also had to be tough because opposing armies would often litter the battlefield with sharp, dangerous objects (those of you who have ever stepped on a lego in the middle of the night have some small concept of what I'm talking about ;o). The shoes or boots of a soldier also had to have good traction so when they needed to dig in and stand their ground they would not easily be pushed off their foundation.

Paul says this is what the peace that comes from the gospel does for a follower of Jesus. But why would the gospel give us the kind of mobility, stability and quickness/nimbleness that a soldier's footwear was required to give? Well, the gospel is something Paul talked

about a lot. Normally he can't just mention the gospel (which literally just means "good news") without going into a philosophical, poetic discourse on just how amazing this good news is for us. The gospel was basically what Jesus has done for us. It is the story of His willingness to leave the majesty and comfort of Heaven to come to this earth, be born as a helpless baby to peasant parents, grow up and live a perfect life and then submit Himself to the horrors and humiliations of the cross and die a criminal's death, be buried in a borrowed tomb (do you know why He was buried in a borrowed tomb? He only needed it for three days so why buy something you're not going to use? ;o) and then three days later to be resurrected and after 40 days with His followers to ascend back to Heaven. That's the gospel. But why would the gospel give us the stability, mobility and quickness that a soldier's boots gave them?

Because if we understand just how far Jesus was willing to come for us it will help us better understand God. Can you imagine a Father that would allow His Son to go through all of that just so you and I could have hope? What kind of God would do that?!?!? Well, a God Who loves me/you more than I or you could ever understand. What does that understanding do for your belt of truth? It makes that belt much more substantial, doesn't it? And that then give me/you confidence to stand before the attacks of the devil. It teaches me not to believe for a second the lies that I'm told over and over again by the devil that God doesn't care. That I'm unacceptable to God. That I could never be "good enough" for Him. It reminds me that my standing before Him is in a "right" place not because of what I've done (other than accepting the gift He offers) but because of what Jesus did for me. The gospel tells me that no matter what else I may know, God cares about me deeply. And as Paul said so famously in another of his letters (this one to the Romans):

If God is for me, who can be against me? Romans 8:31 (NLT)

To the extent that I can live within that reality- to that extent I will not be moved by any attack. The shoes of the gospel will keep me on my feet, ready to move and never knocked down. Unfortunately nobody can live in that place 100% of the time. But it is something to aim at. Something to constantly remind myself of. One of my favorite things about listening to Christian music is how often I'm reminded of this theme in the songs I listen to. It helps to remind me when I start to forget.

I'll leave you with this verse to reflect on for the rest of the day- let it give you a stability unlike any you've ever known- even when (and I would probably say especially when) the devil throws down the his lies (spikes on the spiritual battlefield) saying God doesn't care about you or you've gone too far for Jesus to save you:

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. Romans 3:21 (NLT)