

Aug. 31- Sept. 4, 2020 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #14

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

The Full Armor Of God Part Deux

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August 29/30, 2020



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 ;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 Reflection: The next piece of armor is our faith which Paul compares to a soldier's shield. To me faith is all about my commitment level:

In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.
Ephesians 6:16 (NLT)

Growing up I thought faith was all about certainty. That if I had any doubt, any uncertainty then God was going to cast me out into the darkness until I could somehow manufacture enough certainty to appease Him. But as I read through the Bible I started to notice that Jesus was willing to work with uncertain people as long as they were willing to commit to Him in spite of their doubts and confusion. You see it in Peter's response to Jesus in John chapter 6 when Jesus makes some absolutely crazy sounding statements (at the time they seemed nuts even though in retrospect they make a lot of sense now) about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Most of the people who had been following Jesus at that point had walked away. Jesus turns to Peter and asks if he's leaving too? Peter's response isn't a statement of certainty:

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.
John 6:68 (NLT)

Peter doesn't say, "they might not understand but we do, Lord. We get You! We speak Your unspoken language, fluently!" No. Peter basically says, "I don't get it either, Lord... but where else is there to go?" Not a ringing endorsement. But Jesus doesn't cast Peter out for that lack of certainty. He shrugs His shoulders and basically says, "ok... let's go then..." and the story of Jesus' work in the lives of the apostles continues. I don't know about you but I'm glad that story is in the Bible. Otherwise I'd feel pretty lonely. I'd think that I didn't have much faith if I thought that faith was nothing more than certainty. But in the Bible the word "faith" functions more like a verb. It's an action word. In fact, it could probably be better translated as "commitment". Faith isn't the absence of doubt- it's about the commitment and willingness to move forward with Jesus even when we don't understand. You find it throughout the Bible. Faith is more than simply ascribing to a set of ideas- it's letting our ideas about Who God Is and how He wants to relate to us and how He wants us to relate to each other and the creation change who we are and how we live. If I do that then my faith acts as a shield. The enemy can attack but nothing stops me from advancing or holding my ground. It's interesting that Paul says the arrows of the devil are "flaming" arrows. What's up with that?

The Roman army often had to fight enemies that shot flaming arrows at them. If they used wooden shields then the arrows would stick in the shield which was good because you don't want flaming arrows bouncing off a shield and catching anything else on fire that they might land on. But it was also bad because your shield would catch on fire itself. If your shield was made of metal it couldn't catch fire but the arrows bounced off and could injure your fellow soldiers. So the Romans made their shields of three pieces of wood that they glued together with thick pieces of leather in between each sheet of wood and then covering the entire shield. Then when opposing armies would launch flaming arrows at them they would soak the shields in water so that the arrows would stick to the shield but would immediately be extinguished.

That's what Paul is saying your commitment/faith will do for you. The enemy may launch flaming arrows at you but your commitment/faith will catch those arrows and immediately douse them. It's not about 100% certainty- it's about the commitment to move forward or stand

your ground even when you don't understand. Even when you are confused or frustrated. It's about not-retreating. Not surrendering even when things look bleak. To the extent that you and I can maintain that level of commitment/faith- to that extent you and I will have a shield that will keep the arrows and attacks of the devil from even reaching our body armor. Our commitment/faith is the primary means of protection. The more you practice it the more you'll see God's faithfulness and the easier it will be next time to move forward even if you are uncertain or confused or frustrated. So pick up your shield.

Tuesday Reflection: The next piece of armor is the helmet of salvation which to me is all about remembering my Savior.

Put on salvation as your helmet. Ephesians 6:17 (NLT)

I don't think we need to spend a lot of time talking about what the helmet is for. The most vulnerable and probably the most important part of a soldier's body is his/her head. Knock a soldier hard enough in the noggin and they lose their ability to fight effectively. And if the devil can get you to doubt your salvation (which is indirectly the same thing as doubting your Savior) then he effectively wipes out your ability to resist his schemes because your doubt will repel you from God. The whole point of putting on the armor is so we can draw close to God. Doubt your salvation and you will move farther away.

So what is salvation? Well, it's what your Savior does for you. And according to the Bible Jesus came to save us from our past, our future and our present. First of all, Jesus saves us from our past. He forgives our sins. He removes us from our sins as far as the east is from the west (and I'm not mathematician or engineer but I'm guessing that's a REALLY long way). He takes our sins and puts them in a bag with a brick in it and drops it in the deepest ocean and then He puts up a sign: No Fishing! He doesn't go fishing in there and he doesn't want us fishing in there either. The devil has no problem fishing in those deep waters of forgiveness. He will continually remind you of all the rotten, crummy, dirty things you've ever done. But when you hear a voice whispering in your ear reminding you off the stuff in your past and encouraging you to wallow in guilt, shame and regret remember this- that's not the voice of God. That's the voice of the devil. If you allow him to make you doubt your Savior he will severely diminished your ability to fight in this spiritual battle we are engaged in. Regret, guilt and shame require an enormous outpouring of energy. You will never be effective until you trust your Savior and the salvation He brought to you.

The same goes for your future. The devil will attempt to make you worry about the future. He will fill you with anxiety and fear and cause you to doubt your Savior's ability to give you the strength you need to handle whatever may be in the future. Jesus never claims you won't have tough times in the future. He just promises you won't have to go through them alone. And He promises that whatever happens on this earth- nothing that truly matters will be lost eternally. We may lose things here on this earth (health, relationships, money, status, etc...) but they are not forever lost if you are wearing the helmet of salvation. Can you imagine the confidence remembering that will give you? Can you imagine the fear whenever you forget it?

But by remembering that my past is forgiven and my future is secure it frees up so much energy to live today at my absolute best. And believe me... there are people in this world who are

counting on you to be able to live at your absolute best. So put that helmet of salvation on and move into the future with the confidence that can give you.

Wednesday Reflection: The next piece of armor is the only weapon we are given in this battle. Paul compares it to a sword and I guess I'd say this part of resisting the devil is all about sharpening and honing our weapon and learning how to use it.

And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:17 (NLT)

The word of God which is the only weapon you are issued. But what is the word of God? John calls Jesus The Word of God. The Bible is called the word of God. So which one is Paul talking about here? My guess is Paul is focusing on the Bible but either way- this is one powerful weapon.

So we need to learn how to use it. This weapon is so powerful that when we truly unlock its potential it's like splitting the atom. I know it can be intimidating- it's often confusing and sometimes scary and then it will be frustrating. But don't let that stop you. If you find something you don't understand when you're reading just make a note of it and keep going. To make sure there are fewer times you have to stop and write down what you don't understand DO NOT BEGIN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT!!

Was that clear enough? Start with the gospel of John and the book of James. You'll still find things you don't understand but you will find even more that you can understand and apply to your life. The whole point of the Bible is to introduce you to Jesus and show you how much He loves you. Your mission (should you choose to accept it) is to become like Him. To learn how to plug into the power of Heaven. To learn how to let that power change your life. To learn how to treat people the way Jesus treated them. And in so doing you will unleash the power of God into your life and into the world around you.

And it all begins with reading the Bible and then doing what you read. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in Matthew chapter four He responded to every single temptation by quoting scripture. And every time He quoted a scripture the devil flinched and the temptation was over. So let me ask you a question: if Jesus responded to spiritual attacks (temptations) with scripture how much more do we need to learn the scriptures and use them when we are attacked? We will finish up tomorrow talking about a component in our battle with the forces of darkness that most people don't include in a discussion of the full armor of God but without it all the armor in the world won't amount to much.

Thursday Reflection: The next piece of armor really isn't a piece of armor but it is essential to your success in battle and it all comes down to prayer. When it comes to this battle aid I'd say it all comes down to communications.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers. Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Most descriptions of the full armor of God don't include this component but there's no substitute. A soldier is so much more effective when he/she is in communication with their commander. In the ancient world they used things like flags, trumpet blasts and drums to communicate with soldiers in the field. Paul says we need to stay connected to our Commander

through prayer. I know that prayer can be intimidating. What do I say? How do I say it? Should I sit or stand or kneel or lay down on my face? How often should I pray? How long should my prayers last? It can be exhausting. The Bible isn't specific about time frame or number of times a day you should pray. I remember seeing scriptures like the one we just read that say things like "pray with stopping" and being mystified. How can I never stop praying? I have to eat don't I? What about sleep?

What I've learned is that there are all kinds of way to stay connected to God. I love a song that Keith Green sings that's called, "I'll Make My Life A Prayer To You". What would that look like? To make my life a prayer? Basically God just wants to hear from you. If you're happy- tell Him about it and thank Him. If you're sad- tell Him how you're feeling. Are you scared- talk to Him about that. Are you confused- tell Him and ask Him for guidance and wisdom. The Christian rock band, Petra, has a song on their "This Means War" album called, "Get On Your Knees & Fight Like A Man!" I know... sort of sexist, right? Give them a break- it was written almost 30 years ago. Anyways... the song is about the place of prayer in spiritual warfare. In the chorus they sing: "Get on your knees and fight like a man. You'll pull down strongholds if you just believe you can!"

Prayer is powerful but without the rest of the armor it won't be. As you increase the lines of communication between Heaven and earth it will impact every other piece of armor. And as you practice using the other pieces of armor your prayer life will become even more powerful. It's like the opposite of a vicious cycle. What would that be? A glorious cycle? Sounds good to me... let's go with that.

This is the full armor of God. This is how you resist the devil- not by fighting him with your own power and on his terms but by drawing near to God. How do I draw near to God? This is one way to look at it. Put on the full armor of God. In so doing you will be drawn into the very presence of the Creator of everything. You have a power available to you that you can't possibly imagine. It takes practice to learn to use it. Start today. Let's start right now by maintaining our line of communication with God... talk to God right now. Tell Him what's on your mind. Don't worry if you're not doing it right. Imagine a dad listening to his son or daughter take about what's important to them. The way we say what we say isn't nearly as important as being honest and sincere. So speak to God.

Friday Reflection: Have you ever noticed that there are LOTS of other people out there putting on the full armor of God and so many of them do it differently than you or I might? What gives? How could reasonable, logical, sincere and devoted followers of Jesus read the same text and come to such different conclusions about what they read? I don't have all the answers to that question but I've stopped worrying about it. It used to REALLY bother me because I figured that Bible interpretations were like the Highlander- there can only be one!

But I have since calmed down. People have been coming to different conclusions about the same directions by God since the very beginning and God doesn't seem to get too worked up about it so why should I? Why should you? The answer is, we shouldn't. In the book of Romans the apostle Paul addresses a difference of opinion amongst the Christians who made up the church in Rome. What was the issue? Meat-sacrificed-to-idols. What the heck is meat-sacrificed-to-idols, you ask? Well, it was steaks that yesterday were attached to a bull that was sacrificed to

pagan gods in the temples of Rome (Jupiter, Apollo, Minerva, etc.). But today those steaks have been butchered and brought to the city's marketplace to be sold to the citizens of the city (it was one way the priests of the pagan temples supported their "ministries").

So what's the problem? There were those among the Christians of the church in Rome who believed that to eat meat-sacrificed-to-idols would be an affront to Jesus. After all (they reasoned), a massive amount of the Old Testament is a polemic against idolatry. One fifth of the 10 Commandments warn God's people about staying away from false gods/idols. Wouldn't it follow that Jesus would want us to stay away from meat-sacrificed-to-idols?

The other side of this disagreement were Christians who weren't bothered by a steak's provenance. Who cares where this steak was yesterday? It's just a piece of meat now and I am not worshipping an idol by eating this porterhouse. Besides- Paul said those false gods weren't really anything anyways so what's the big deal?

What was the result? The anti-meat-eaters shook their fingers and tsk tsk tsked the pro-meat-eaters. The pro-meat-eaters shook their heads and ridiculed the anti-meat-eaters. It was fracturing the church at Rome. So Paul weighs in on the matter. You'd think there would be a "right" and a "wrong" answer to this question, wouldn't you? I mean, the fact that a large part of the Old Testament and 1/5 of the 10 Commandments were warning the Israelites about idolatry seems pretty persuasive to me. So what was Paul's solution? This:

Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. Romans 15:7 (NLT)

Paul's directions were for both parties to do what they believed in their heart was right but to stop letting the matter separate them. Radical acceptance wins out over who is more "correct" (and it's pretty obvious from Paul's other writings who he sides with when it comes to who's "correct" but that's a story for another time) in Paul's book (which the book of Romans is, literally). He says that if your conscience convicts you over the eating of meat-sacrificed-to-idols then for goodness sake, don't eat it because violating your conscience is never a good idea. To the pro-meat-eaters he says don't ridicule and look down on your anti-meat-eater brothers and sisters in Christ. Accept one another because that will lead to God being glorified.

Hmmmm. I wonder if there are any corresponding issues in the modern church where followers of Jesus disagree as to what the right way to proceed with some issues might be? Seems like there must be something if only I could put my finger on it/them. I'll leave you with this to ponder and chew on this weekend:

The following is from Max Lucado's book, *In The Grip Of Grace*. I figured since we've been talking about accepting others and not judging this would be a great way to think about it in terms of other churches out there that we may have a problem with ;o). Enjoy!

Life About The Fellow-Ship

God has enlisted us in his navy and placed us on his ship. The boat has one purpose—to carry us safely to the other shore.

This is no cruise ship; it's a battleship. We aren't called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons

of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties of the seaport and invited us to follow him. Our faith was born at the sight of his fondness, and so we went.

We each followed him across the gangplank of his grace onto the same boat. There is one captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew. When we first boarded we assumed the crew was made up of others like us. But as we've wandered these decks, we've encountered curious converts with curious appearances. Some wear uniforms we've never seen, sporting styles we've never witnessed. "Why do you look the way you do?" we ask them. "Funny," they reply. "We were about to ask the same of you."

The variety of dress is not nearly as disturbing as the plethora of opinions. There is a group, for example, who clusters every morning for serious study. They promote rigid discipline and somber expressions. "Serving the captain is serious business," they explain. It's no coincidence that they tend to congregate around the stern.

There is another regiment deeply devoted to prayer. Not only do they believe in prayer, they believe in prayer by kneeling. For that reason you always know where to locate them; they are at the bow of the ship.

And then there are a few who staunchly believe real wine should be used in the Lord's Supper. You'll find them on the port side.

Still another group has positioned themselves near the engine. They spend hours examining the nuts and bolts of the boat. They've been known to go below deck and not come up for days. They are occasionally criticized by those who linger on the top deck, feeling the wind in their hair and the sun on their face. "It's not what you learn," those topside argue. "It's what you feel that matters."

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

Some think once you're on the boat, you can't get off. Others say you'd be foolish to go overboard, but the choice is yours.

Some believe you volunteer for service; others believe you were destined for the service before the ship was even built.

Some predict a storm of great tribulation will strike before we dock; others say it won't hit until we are safely ashore.

There are those who speak to the captain in a personal language. There are those who think such languages are extinct.

There are those who think the officers should wear robes, there are those who think there should be no officers at all, and there are those who think we are all officers and should all wear robes.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

And then there is the issue of the weekly meeting at which the captain is thanked and his words are read. All agree on its importance, but few agree on its nature. Some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want to celebrate so they can meditate; others meditate so they can celebrate. Some want a meeting for those who've gone overboard.

Others want to reach those overboard but without going overboard and neglecting those on board.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

The consequence is a rocky boat. There is trouble on deck. Fights have broken out. Sailors have refused to speak to each other. There have even been times when one group refused to acknowledge the presence of others on the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

"What do we do?" we'd like to ask the captain. "How can there be harmony on the ship?" We don't have to go far to find the answer.

On the last night of his life Jesus prayed a prayer that stands as a citadel for all Christians:

I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. (John 17:20)

How precious are these words? Jesus, knowing the end is near, prays one final time for his followers. Striking, isn't it, that he prayed not for their success, their safety, or their happiness.

He prayed for their unity. He prayed that they would love each other.

As he prayed for them, he also prayed for "those who will believe because of their teaching." That means us! In his last prayer Jesus prayed that you and I be one.

So now, go forth and be one (whatever that means).