

February 8-12, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #36

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

RDNA- Enjoyment

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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:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

Always be joyful. 1 Thessalonians 5:16 (NLT)

Reflection: Like any good parent, God delights in the laughter of His children. He built us a habitat that includes sunsets and strawberries. He is the inventor of music and story. He gave us bodies that soak in experiences with all five senses. Enjoyment is part of God's plan for us. When we appreciate and savor the good things in our lives, God is pleased & honored. But for some reason, many of us leave the state of unabashed enthusiasm and enjoyment behind with our childhoods. We grow up and abandon our earlier agenda to search out adventure and fun. Enjoying life begins to seem trivial, not serious enough an occupation for creatures as intelligent as we are.

But C.S. Lewis wrote, "JOY IS THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF HEAVEN." In fact, someday we will outgrow all of our current troubles and sorrows and all that will remain is an eternity of joy. When we reach the height of spiritual maturity we will once again be filled with perpetual enjoyment.

When God rescued the Israelites out of Egypt and chose them as His people, He gave them laws and instructions to build their lives on. We never outgrow the need for structure and guidance. When I was a young man I thought that God's rules and traditions were there to keep me from having too much fun. The freedom to make life my kind of party was what I looked forward to when I got old enough to no longer have so much supervision.

And I'll admit, just like the prodigal son, I had a lot of fun for a little while. But it didn't take long till the choices I'd made to feel good resulted in exactly the opposite. I needed more and more just to get the experience that I craved. Until finally, the very things that represented fun and freedom, were the chains that kept me addicted and enslaved.

The irony is that partying was a big part of the instructions that God gave the Israelites. He wanted them to take a day off every week (He put that right up there in the 10 commandments). He established holidays and feast days (13 of them throughout the calendar year not including birthdays or anniversaries so the Israelites were always either gearing up for a party, celebrating a party or recovering from a party). He told them to remember and tell the stories of the good things that He had done for them. He told them to spend time celebrating, singing & having a good time with their families & communities.

Some people come to Riverside and wonder why we don't honor God by taking ourselves more seriously. The reason is that we believe that God finds joy in watching His children appreciate and enjoy life. That's what Jesus came to give us – generous life. We believe that it honors God when we set aside the impulse to look serious and important in our own eyes and instead adopt the posture and attitude of children (and we try to never forget that Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven is made up of people who are like children). We have chosen to offer the gift of celebration, making it a priority to enthusiastically embrace God's generosity to us by enjoying every minute of life... even the minutes were in "church".

Prayer: Father, forgive me for the times I choose something other than joy. Please show me how to strike the perfect balance in my life between joy & being realistic. I want to be more like Jesus. In His Name I pray, amen.

Tuesday: The Son of Man came eating and drinking and enjoying life. Matthew 11:18 (PhV)

Reflection: Sometimes people give us a hard time about how we do church, like were having too much fun. It can be a downer to be seen as frivolous or foolish to critics. But we take that risk partly because we see that in the Bible people said the same thing about Jesus. Like: Why aren't you fasting? Do you realize who you're hanging out with? Do you think this is all some kind of party? He wasn't called a friend of the rules or a friend of religion, He was called a friend of sinners. Ouch. That couldn't have been meant as a compliment (although Jesus took it as one)!

Jesus doesn't get defensive or apologize. He said, "The son of man came eating, drinking, and enjoying life." He compared His ministry to the party of a wedding feast. He told them that the arrival of the kingdom of God was something to be celebrated. (Matthew 9) Yes, Jesus took His ministry very seriously. He knew that God had given Him the task to transform people's hearts and lives. But He also had the wisdom to know that answers and lectures are rarely powerful or memorable.

The first sermon that Jesus preached in the synagogue, after the reading of Scripture, was conducted in the traditional manner. The response of the religious congregation was to try and kill Him. After that, Jesus aimed a lot of His teachings at individuals who sought Him out to ask Him questions. As His reputation spread from the miracles and healings He was performing, most of His preaching was to large crowds. He kept the people's attention for hours at a time by telling stories. They weren't intellectual speeches designed to inform- they were innovative views of God and His kingdom explained thru analogies about everyday things like farming or fishing. They could be understood by anyone, but the implications were profound. Jesus wasn't interested in looking smart- He wanted to change lives.

At Riverside, we sometimes function like the "gateway drug" of churches. (Obviously religion isn't a drug – but I do have some experience about how people get sucked in to life altering habits.) We aren't always the first choice of the church connoisseur but we're pretty approachable for the first time "user." Sometimes, after people mature in their tastes, they find themselves interested in a more traditional & organized church. And we're okay with that. We want everyone to find themselves in the best place to do what God is asking them to do next with their lives. But the things people pick up around here (often not realizing that they're learning much at all) tend stay with them. One man (who was not really a fan of the video clips but came to Riverside with his wife who needed something more accessible than traditional church) moved on to a more structured congregation when his life shifted and they had different needs. But I ran into him a few years later and he told me that he finds it almost impossible to pick out a movie at blockbuster without being reminded of some Biblical principle.

Not everyone needs to be entertained to learn. But we've discovered that it's often those who most desperately need the life changing principles of Jesus' kingdom that are the most appreciative of the humor and common language that we use at Riverside. Some of you don't need "a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down" when it comes to Jesus' teachings. So if you're one of those who want to roll your eyes when a silly video clip comes on rather than being glued to the "short-attention-span-theatre" of modern entertainment,

we want to say THANK YOU FOR YOUR PATIENCE! It's the times when you are most skeptical of the clip showing up front that I can count on grabbing the attention of the teens from the Hiland road program (and one thing that gets new kids to come to church on Sundays from Hiland is when they hear that Pastor Ed played a clip from Southpark or Ace Ventura or Saturday Night Live in church). And a few minutes of practicing your patience so those less familiar with God can laugh (and hopefully lower their guard a little) is an admirable sacrifice.

Prayer: Father, I read in the Bible that you came eating and drinking and enjoying life. Teach me how to enjoy my life in such a way that people will be drawn to You because of my life. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday: All the people had been crying as they listened to the words of the Teachings. Nehemiah said, "Go and celebrate with a feast... and share gifts... with people who have nothing. This is a sacred day... Don't be sad, because the joy of the LORD will make you strong." Nehemiah 8:10 (NCV)

Reflection: It's the times when we've messed up that we may need humor and enjoyment the most. The Bible tells us that the joy of the Lord makes us strong.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the wall around the city, he began by having God's law read aloud. He wanted to make sure that the people were ready on the inside before putting all that effort into fixing things on the outside. But when the reading was over, the people only felt defeated and discouraged. They realized how far they had strayed from what God had designed them for. All they could see was their failures.

But Nehemiah told the people not to despair. He wanted them to be ready for change, not to focus themselves on grieving over how far they'd fallen short. He told them to cheer up and look forward to the big things that God was getting ready to do rather than lament their own limitations and failings. It's times like these when the willingness to hope is an act of courage & faith. No matter how bad things get, there is always some small thing we can notice to remind ourselves that God still loves us. It's like that song says, "though the sorrows may last for the night, His joy comes in the morning."

God is not intimidated by any of our emotions. Sometimes it is appropriate to cry and grieve. Sometimes we will feel anger or fear or discouragement. But the willingness to be on the look out for the next generous thing that God is preparing can give us the courage & strength to get through the tough times. Jesus told His followers in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble, but be brave, for I have defeated the world." God wants us to be on the lookout for things to enjoy and be grateful for even when the blessings seem few and far between. Because sorrow is no match for joy as long as it's joy you've chosen to focus your life on.

Prayer: Father, teach me how joy can make me strong. Show me how to live a life where I focus on what's good rather than on where I've gone wrong. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday: You'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to

praise, not things to curse... Do that, and God, who makes everything work together, will work you into his most excellent harmonies. Philippians 4:8-9 (MES)

Reflection: Sour and sullen Christians make the good news of God's kingdom look more like bad news. It's unfortunate when we let our lives become so busy and demanding and harried that we have no more encouragement to offer than those who don't know God. We simply can't have everything and be everything and do everything. Trying to have it all just leaves us exhausted and insatiable and insane.

God wants us to focus on what's most important, on what makes life worth living. The things that bring satisfaction and contentment aren't marketed and advertised. When we focus on getting more and more, we can forget how to enjoy what we already have.

Paul told the Philippians, "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." (Philippians 4:8 NLT) He isn't saying that everything is good. There's a lot of misery in the world. But we can't help anyone when we let ourselves become completely discouraged and depleted. Laughter and comfort and simple pleasures are food for the soul. Yes, we want to be sensitive to people's suffering. Just as it's appropriate to mourn our own losses and disappointments, but I believe it is a mistake to give the bad news more air time than the good news. God wants us to be voices of hope in this dark world.

When we focus on the things that can and are going right we feel encouraged. And encouragement is something this world desperately needs. So many are sick and hurting around us. We have our own problems and setbacks. But if we, who believe that Jesus has triumphed over death itself, can't find something positive to say, who can?

I love the movie "Patch Adams." Robin Williams plays a medical student who emphasizes the role of laughter and encouragement in helping his patients. I'm not saying that we all need to be walking around in hospitals with big floppy shoes and clown noses (though the image does make me smile). I'm not saying that a joke will cure terminal cancer. What I'm saying is that when the prognosis is bad there is still value in a good laugh. Joy will take the power out of our problems... the power that they have to define us. The power that they have to dominate our lives. The power that they have to determine our future by determining how we feel right now. God doesn't just give us permission to seek out joy. He wants us to cultivate the kind of joy that spills over into other people's lives, making their burdens (and ours as well) easier to bear.

Prayer: Father, today I want to focus on what's good. Remind me when I start to wander off in the direction of what's bad in this world. Turn my eyes back towards the joy that can be found by focusing on the admirable. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday: Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Psalm 100:1 (ESV)

Reflection: "In every job that must be done there is an element of fun." Who said that? Mary Poppins!

Usually I stick to quoting Jesus (or the Bible) but today I felt like Mary had something we needed to hear. Lets face it, life has a lot of chores. We can take ourselves too seriously, but it

rarely makes the work load easier. Fun, on the other hand, can even make the work day seem shorter.

My favorite commandment may be the one found in Psalm 100 that says, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord." Personally I find it energizing to find humor in my daily grind. This world is full of irony and absurdity even among the dark and tragic things that can happen. Sometimes the best response is just to laugh. I like listening to happy music. I like to sing way too loud when I'm driving around in my car. Not everyone appreciates my joyful noises (in fact, my wife finds my cheerfulness downright offensive when she's feeling tired). But I like to think that God finds my merriment amusing- I know I do.

Next week we're going to talk about progress – how to focus on those baby steps that can add up to a more powerful life. Part of what fuels progress is not beating ourselves up for our mistakes and imperfections. Our society is so impressed with success and image and competence. But God loves us for who we are. He isn't waiting for us to become more impressive... He already loves you as much as He can possibly love you. He couldn't love you any more than He does right now... with all your imperfections and flaws and frailty. Yes, God loves you just the way you are... He just loves you too much to let you stay that way. And so He calls us forward as a parent calls their child to get back up and try again when teaching their child to walk. You would never tell a child moving from crawling to toddling to give up if he or she fell the first time he tried walking. You'd tell them to get up and try again. God does the same thing.

Sometimes we forget to look at ourselves with God's eyes of grace. We have expectations for ourselves and long lists of things we feel we just have to accomplish. At the end of the day we can discourage ourselves by focusing too much on what we didn't get done. We can exhaust ourselves trying so hard to measure up to our own standards.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus has already done the hard work of defeating sin and death. We aren't asked to redeem or restore ourselves. The only thing that is required is that we have faith that Jesus is able to make us acceptable as God's children. We don't need to earn salvation. We just need to receive it. What Jesus did is enough. It makes us enough in God's eyes. It affords us the ability to take a deep breath and even to make a joyful noise.

Sure, there's still work to be done. There's still progress to be made. But it isn't about gritting our teeth and fixing ourselves. God simply wants us to cooperate with what Jesus is already in the process of doing in our hearts and lives. And knowing that Jesus has our future in the bag can relieve the pressure of always having to do or be enough in our own eyes.

Prayer: Father, I want to learn to be able to appreciate the beauty and joy all around me. Show me how Your Son was able to do it even with all the heartache and drama that He seemed to attract. In Jesus' Name, amen.