

September 7-11, 2020 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #15

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

God's Covenant w/ Abram

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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 Reflection: (I didn't have time to write out reflections for the story of Abram & his covenant with God this week so here is a reflection on Jesus' words from John chapter 8) We are currently in a series looking at the 8 "I AM" statements of Jesus from the book of John. These statements are assertions about Who Jesus is and what that means for us. Last week we looked at the first of these statements from John chapter 6- I AM The Bread Of Life. Over the next two weeks we're going to be looking at His second I AM statement from John chapter 8- I AM The Light Of The World.

The book of John is unique among the 4 gospels- He repeats very little of what Matthew, Mark & Luke had already written. One of the things that is noticeably absent from the book of John is Jesus' parables. Jesus' parables are stories that all of His listeners could identify with that generally had twists that shocked them, confused them and made them do a lot of thinking about what they might mean. The Prodigal Son (a story about an insensitive younger brother, a holier-than-thou older brother and a big hearted father) pointed to a God that is different than they could ever have imagined. The Good Samaritan (a story about a man getting robbed and then being ignored/avoided by priests and temple workers but saved by the most unlikely of heroes- a hated Samaritan) made them think about who was their neighbor and more importantly were they being good neighbors? The parables made up a significant part of the other 3 gospels but John (seemingly) leaves the art of teaching by parable out of his gospel.

Or does he? I had never really noticed it before but when he was up here teaching on the book of John a couple years back Michael Card said that the entirety of John's gospel was a parable playing out before the readers very eyes. It was a cleverly disguised parable but there nonetheless. John finishes his book by giving his readers his purpose statement:

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. John 20:30-31 (NLT)

The point of the book that John wrote about Jesus' life was to bring the reader to faith. Not just a changed way of thinking but a changed way of living because of the new way of thinking. That's where John's story has been leading the reader since the first paragraphs of the book and John hints at this journey as he tells the story of the calling of Nathaniel- one of Jesus's apostles. After Jesus called Philip to follow Him, Phillip goes to find Nathaniel:

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth." "Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" "Come and see for yourself," Philip replied. John 1:45-46 (NLT)

Nathaniel is skeptical that anything good come ever come from Nazareth because it was the backwater, hick town of the northern part of Galilee. Every region has one. The place when its mentioned everyone rolls their eyes. That's where Jesus was from. Nathaniel doubts that the Messiah could possibly come from such a place and all Phillip says is, "come and see for yourself." And with those words Nathaniel's life was set on a trajectory that would change him forever and as you and I read those words we are invited to step into a story that John hopes and prays and believes will change the trajectory of our lives forever. As John guides us through the life of

Jesus he will leave out the traditional parables that are such a big part of the other three gospels but plunge us into the heart of the greatest parable that was ever acted out- the very life of Jesus. His I AM statements are just one way Jesus's life takes on the form of a parable. Over the next two weeks we'll look at how I AM The Light Of The World takes the form of a parable but for today maybe spend some time thinking about what it means that John sees Jesus' life as a parable that we are invited to step into the midst of so that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. Come and see for yourself.

Tuesday Reflection: When Jesus stands up in John chapter 8 and claims that He is the "Light Of The World", what does He mean? What would the people who heard Him that day have thought of immediately when He made this claim? We'll spend the next two weeks trying to get to the bottom of that question (really we'll only scratch the surface) but for this week we're going to focus in on 3 metaphors the Israelites would have had come flooding into their minds when they heard Jesus say this.

First off I think it's important to realize that when He says this He is essentially claiming to be God. We'll dive much more deeply into this concept next week but when he writes this account John makes sure we know three things- 1) what Jesus says. 2) where Jesus says it. 3) that this was something that would have gotten anyone else arrested for saying it:

*Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."
John 8:12 (NLT)*

Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come. John 8:20 (NLT)

As soon as Jesus makes this statement, "I am the light of the world", the Pharisees start arguing with Him. "You can't make these claims about yourself... these claims are not valid... who is your other witness to confirm these things?"

The Pharisees knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. How do I know that? Well, first of all, why else does John point out that "he was not arrested" if this wasn't against the Pharisees rules? But there's also the prayer that was prayed at this particular feast by the priests. We'll dive into this festival (the festival of tabernacles or booths) next week but suffice it to say every year the priests would pray, "O Lord of the universe, thou commandest us to light lamps to thee, yet thou art The Light of The World."

The religious leaders of first century Israel regularly referred to God as the Light-Of-The-World. Jesus knew exactly what He was saying and everyone listening to Him knew exactly what He was claiming. I wonder if it's possible that Jesus stood up and said this immediately after the priest prayed his prayer referring to God as the Light-Of-The-World? I don't know but I think that would have been awesome.

How confusing must it have been to follow Jesus through all of this and try to piece together exactly what He was getting at? Last spring in our midweek Bible study we went through the last few chapters of the book of John where Jesus is trying to explain the relationship between Himself (God the Son), His Father and the Spirit. What we noticed was that over and over Jesus

would claim that He and the Father were one in the same and then He'd make some statement that seemed to suggest He and the Father were somehow separate from one another. He'd make statements that He and Spirit were one in the same and then He'd say something like, "if I don't go the Spirit won't come..." I used to think that Jesus didn't really need us to fully understand the relationship of the Trinity but the more I study it the more I think that it's more likely that Jesus knows we can't understand the relationship of Trinity. It's beyond our capacity.

So what do we do with all that then? Trust. Trust that Jesus understands that relationship and so we don't have to. Just know that He is the Light Of The World and because of that we have some benefits that everyone listening that day would have seen immediately. We'll talk about 3 of those benefits this week but for today maybe spend some time in childlike wonder of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit and how the 3 somehow operate and relate to us independently and at the same time in concert.

Wednesday Reflection: Jesus said the He is the light of the world. What does that mean for us? What did the people listening to Him think of when He said this? Well one thing I think we can be pretty certain the people understood is that light is the ultimate source of life. Without light, life will cease to exist. We think that the sun is the light source that sustains our planet and keeps us alive and it's true. We live in an ideal spot when it comes to our solar system. Scientists call it the Goldilocks zone. Any closer to the sun and our planet would be too hot to sustain life as we know it. Any further away and our planet would be too cold to sustain life as we know it. But it just so happens that the distance of the earth from the sun is "just right". Scientists will tell you that without the sun we would cease to exist.

But did you know that in the Kingdom of Heaven there will be no sun? Crazy, huh? How will that work out? Well, John tells us:

I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there.
Revelation 21:22-25 (NLT)

As it turns out, the sun only sustains us because the Son has declared that it be so. You see this throughout the scriptures but maybe most clearly in the Old Testament:

Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
Deuteronomy 8:3 (NLT)

What is Moses saying here (and if this verse sounds familiar it's probably because Jesus quoted it to the devil when He was being tempted right after His baptism)? Well, he's saying that food only nourishes us because God has declared that it be so. Air only sustains us because God commands it to sustain us. And the sun only sustains us because God commands it to. When Jesus claims to be the Light Of The World He is making a bold statement- He's saying, I'm the ultimate source of LIFE. Without Him everything would cease to exist- poof! Gone. In the very beginning of the Bible we read this:

Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person. Genesis 2:7 (NLT)

We only have life because God shared His breath with us. And from the moment that He breathed life into Adam He has been the One that sustains us:

The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. Hebrews 1:3 (NLT)

Jesus- The Light Of The World- sustains everything by the mighty power of His command. Because of that the sun gives us the warmth and energy that we need to survive. Because of that food nourishes us and air keeps us breathing. This is Who Jesus is and everyone who heard His claim to be The Light Of The World would have known what He was claiming for Himself. Crazy right? That's exactly what the religious leaders thought. In fact they said so later on in John chapter 8- the accused Him of being possessed by a demon which was their go-to definition of insanity.

But after His death, burial and resurrection Jesus' followers remembered His claims and made sure that those who came after them would never forget. Most of the earliest church's hymns (several of which are recorded for us in the New Testament) repeat these claims over and over. I'll leave you with one of those hymns from the book of Colossians:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything... Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Colossians 1:15-17 (NLT)

He holds it all together. He made it. He sustains it. He is The Light Of The World and one thing that means is that He Himself is the ultimate source of life in the universe.

Thursday Reflection: Another thing that Jesus was getting at when He claimed to be The Light Of The World was that He is the ultimate source of reality. Why would those two concepts be linked? Because light shows us the reality of what is all around us whereas darkness hides reality. When a child has a nightmare and is sure there are monsters all around them what does a parent do? They flip on the lights to show the kid there's nothing there to be afraid of. We turn on the lights because the lights illuminate the room and show us the reality of what's really there. I sometimes have what people have told me are night terrors. I'll wake up and be absolutely convinced there's something terrifying in the room. One recurring theme is a crazy ninja type person with what I can only describe as a shotgun bow & arrow aimed at me. I don't know why I think he's waiting for me to wake up and move before turning me into a pincushion- it's not rational but it sure seems real to me when I wake up in this state.

When I was young these night terrors paralyzed me. I'd lay in bed for what seemed like hours terrified to move. I don't get them nearly as much as I used to be but it still happens from time to time. Now when I wake up absolutely convinced that the shotgun-bow&arrow-ninja is back to take me out I am able to tell myself that there's nothing there but I still have to get up and turn on the lights so I can convince the little Eddie still within me that it's just my robe.

Light illuminates reality. It shows us what's true and what's not. It's always been that way. When the Israelites left Egypt and gathered around Mt. Sinai God entered into a covenant with them:

If you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation. Exodus 19:3-6 (NLT)

What is the covenant they were to keep? We call it the Ten Commandments. That's what we call it but it's not what the Israelites called it and it's not what God called it. The word we translate into English as "commandments" literally means "word". God called these the Ten Words (not in the sense that there were only a total of ten words in the covenant but that there were 10 messages or statements. Scholars say that the best way to understand this in our language would be to call these the Ten Realities or Ten Fundamentals. This covenant that God gave to Israel is really nothing more and nothing less than the fundamentals of what it means to live in community with God, others and ourselves. We often think of the Ten Commandments (yes I used the phrase because it's what all of us think of them as) as some impossible standard that could never be lived up to when in reality it's the absolute baseline of what it means to be a human. It's not some bar set so high we could never get over it- in fact to get under this bar one must slither. Think about it- Worship only God. Don't make false idols. Don't kill each other. Don't steal from each other. Don't lie about each other. Don't sleep with another's spouse.

These are ultimate reality and even though most of us have broken them a time or two and might have even excused ourselves for doing so, if someone does one of these to us it destroys community and relationship. When Jesus claims to be The Light Of The World He's claiming that His Light will expose the true reality of things and we'll either embrace that or hide from it. As strange a concept as it may be to us the writers of the Bible considered God's law to be something that kept them from stumbling rather than the thing that caused them to fall:

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path. Psalm 119:105 (TLB)

God's Sunrise will break in upon us, shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace. Luke 1:78-79 (NLT)

I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments. Psalm 119:45 (NLT)

I've told you probably dozens of times before in these reflections that when I was young I never would have put the words "commands" and "freedom" in the same sentence but I would now. I always thought the commands of God were a sort of prison and that it was the people ignoring those commands who were truly free. But eventually Jesus' Light showed me the reality of what was truly going on in this world. I started seeing the traps and pitfalls all around me and realized God's word/law/commands/way were truly a light for my path to keep me on the road of freedom. Jesus- The Light Of The World- is the ultimate source of reality. I pray I never forget it:

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32 (NLT)

Maybe today spend some time thinking about times in your life where you became painfully aware that God's way would have kept you free if you had only listened and then maybe take a

close look at your life today and ask yourself if there's any part of God's plan that you're still ignoring?

Friday Reflection: One last metaphor this week for what Jesus was getting at when He said, "I AM The Light Of The World"- that He is the ultimate source of joy. This one may seem like more of a stretch than saying that because of the Light Jesus shines into our lives that He is the ultimate source of life and reality so let's spend a minute thinking about this. In John chapter 15 He said:

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!
John 15:11 (NLT)

He says He is going to fill us with His joy. Not just any joy but "my joy" is what He promises. He promises that because of that our joy will overflow. How does Him being light make that a reality? As Alaskans we know better than most what happens when the amount of light available to us dwindles. In fact, scientists have a name for it- seasonal affect disorder. I think I can rather confidently say that a lack of light in our lives makes us "SAD". It robs us of our joy. So how do we combat this disorder? Through light therapy. We buy boxes that we stare into and if we're lucky we get out of town during the darkest part of the winter to get some much needed sun. I think it's pretty obvious that a lack of light brings a kind of depression and light is the only thing that can combat it. Light brings us joy.

I think the same can be said for the Light Of The World. A lack of His Light will bring us down and the only thing that can combat it is Light therapy. In the Old Testament God gave Himself all kinds of names that described Who He is and what He can accomplish in our lives. El Shaddai mean God Almighty. Yahweh Yireh means The Lord Will Provide. Yaweh Nissi means The Lord Will Defend. Here is another one of the names of God from the Old Testament:

I will go to God - the Source of all my joy. Psalm 3:4 (NLT)

Literally the Hebrew of that verse says, I will go to El Simchathgali which roughly translates as the God of Exceeding Joy. The Light Of The World is the ultimate and only source of true joy in the universe. If we want true joy- not just an emotion that can and will eventually pass- then we have to go to Him. And His Light will bring joy. Our God is a God of joy. Jesus said this about Himself when He got in trouble with the Pharisees for hanging too much fun:

The Son of Man came eating and drinking and enjoying life. Matthew 11:8 (PhV)

Did you know that verse was in the Bible? Ok... if you've been coming to Riverside for long you probably do but I for one NEVER heard that verse growing up. I remember the first time I read that and I thought, "that's awesome... I want to be like Jesus even more now!" If you're not enjoying life you're missing out on what makes life sweet. I know there are seasons of our lives where joy is tougher to feel but that's exactly when we need to pursue it all the more. We need our Light therapy. We need to continue to go to the God of Exceeding Joy and live our lives according to His reality. One thing I notice over and over is that when I'm living according to His reality as illuminated in the life of Jesus I will eventually see His plan and His hand at work in my life and as I see that it fills me with an inexpressible joy I can't explain.

But that means that often joy isn't a feeling but a choice. I have learned that there are lots of days when I have to choose joy. On those days I recite this verse to myself over and over:

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24 (NLT)

This is the day. This one. Right now. This is the only day you and I are promised. None of us knows what tomorrow holds. So if you and I are going to pursue joy then it's going to have to be today. Today with all its ups and downs and highs and lows and challenges and obstacles. Don't let today pass you by without choosing joy. What will that look like? I don't know. You'll have to think about that. What can you do today to pursue joy. What can you do today to bring more joy into the world. One thing I've noticed is that in this upside down, topsy turvy world that we live in I often can only find joy by doing my best to bring joy to someone else. I don't get it- I've just noticed it's true.

So do something today, in fact do something right now to bring more joy into the world. Listen to music. Watch a comedy. Talk to someone you love talking to. Eat a really good meal. All joy ultimately comes from the Light Jesus came into this world to bring us so don't be afraid to be like Him- eat, drink and enjoy life.