

October 12-16, 2020 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #20

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

What Do We REALLY Believe?

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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:

You have been saved by grace through believing. You did not save yourselves; it was a gift from God. It was not the result of your own efforts, so you cannot brag about it.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NCV)

Apostles Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell. The third day He arose again from the dead, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

Reflection: Have you ever thought about what you REALLY believe? Not just what you tell everyone else you believe. Not even what you tell yourself you believe... but what you REALLY believe? Am I confusing you? That's ok... it happens all the time. Think about it this way: There are two people. Both claim to "believe" in Jesus. They both claim to have the same faith. But one person you know is loving, forgiving, humble, kind, patient... they just exude Jesus' character in their lives and you love being around that person. Another person (who also claims to believe in Jesus) is angry, impatient, unforgiving, bitter, dishonest... and you don't really like spending time with that person. They both claim the same beliefs... the same faith... so here's the question:

Why are they so different?

There are lots of different answers to that question but one possible answer revolves around what these two people REALLY believe. What deep down in their hearts they truly think about Jesus, the world and how things work.

A little boy was riding home from church with his parents one day and he asked them a question:

Boy: The preacher today said that God lives inside of us. Dad: Yes son, that's true.

Boy: And the preacher also said God was bigger than we are. Mom: Yes... that's true too. Boy: (after a pause) ...so if God lives inside of us, and God is bigger than us... shouldn't he show through on the outside of us?

Great question, isn't it? We'll spend some time this week talking about why people with the same beliefs and faith can behave so differently, but for today spend some time talking to God about what you REALLY believe... about what's "showing through" (or not...) in your life. Then tomorrow we'll start talking about our convictions.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to what is "showing through" in my life. Show me what I REALLY believe and how that belief is dictating the way I live. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

Tuesday:

Look carefully for the child. When you find him, come tell me so I can worship him too.
Matthew 2:8 (NCV)

Reflection:

So yesterday we asked the question, what do I REALLY believe? That can be a sobering question if you really think about it. How can two people who claim the same faith be completely different? Like I said yesterday... there is more than one answer to that question. People's unique gifts, skills, abilities, strengths, weaknesses are one part of that answer. People's history and circumstances are another. But one part of that answer can be found in the concept of convictions. Over the next three days we'll look at 3 different kinds of convictions but today we'll start with public convictions.

Public convictions are convictions that we say we believe but we don't really believe them at all... we're just saying them to get something we want or stay out of trouble. In today's scripture reading you read about King Herod's public conviction when it came to the baby Jesus. He told the Wisemen that he wanted to worship the newborn king of the Jews just like the Wisemen did. But Herod's idea of "worship" was a little different than the Wisemen's (am I supposed to capitalize "wisemen"? I have no idea... or if I'm supposed to put an apostrophe at then of "wisemen" in that last sentence but I've never made a pretense (public conviction) of being a grammar all star so I hope it doesn't matter to you...).

Herod didn't want to worship the baby... he wanted to kill it. So why did he say he wanted to worship the baby? Because he knew the Wisemen would never come back and tell him where they found the baby if they knew his true intentions. He said something that he in no way believed. He lied.

That's a public conviction. It's something we say that we don't REALLY believe. And while it's true that some public convictions are a kindness (nodding your head when someone asks you if they think their outfit looks nice or if this salmon colored shirt makes me look strange or don't you like my new haircut?) it's also true that when it comes to following Jesus public convictions are the things that give faith a bad reputation.

It's quite interesting... I don't think you had that problem in early Christianity. There was no reason to claim faith in Jesus unless you REALLY had faith in Him. It wasn't popular. It wasn't a way to achieve power or influence. In fact, it was the opposite of those things. But over the centuries Christianity came to become not just accepted but the dominant religion in some parts of the world. That has led to public convictions becoming an incredibly damaging aspect of Christian public relations. The number one reason people cite when asked why they don't go to church is that the church is filled with hypocrites. One of the reasons they think that is because of people in the churches who have public convictions about Jesus. They say they believe but they only say it to get what they want.

Tomorrow we'll talk about a second kind of conviction that is closely tied with this one. Not everyone who's a hypocrite has only public convictions. But for today spend some time talking to God and thinking about the concept of public convictions. Are they always bad? Are they ever good?

Prayer: Father, help me to understand what public convictions are. Open my eyes to any public convictions (lies) in my own life that are destroying my credibility... and Yours. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Wednesday:

Peter said, "Everyone else may stumble in their faith, but I will not... I will never say that I don't know you! I will even die with you!" Mark 14:29-31 (NCV)

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Matthew 26:40-41 (NIV)

Reflection:

The second kind of conviction that we're going to talk about this week are called private convictions. There are things that want to truly believe. We may even truly believe that we believe them but when push comes to shove we demonstrate that we don't REALLY believe them. Not REALLY.

Let me give you an example. At the Last Supper Jesus told His disciples that by the end of the night all of them would cut and run. Peter speaks up and says that he would never do that. He would rather die than desert Jesus. If you've read "the rest of the story" then you know Peter was wrong. Turns out cutting and running was exactly what he did. Not only that... he also denied Jesus three times.

His conviction that he would never leave Jesus was in the end, not true. I think he really thought it was true. I know he really wanted it to be true. But it wasn't true. When the heat got turned up Peter's convictions melted.

How about you (I've been wrestling with this one all week and misery loves company so now I'll share a little of that misery with you ;o)... do you have any memories where you said something was true, you even believed it was true but when the heat got turned up your conviction melted? Yeah... me too. It sucks, doesn't it? Peter felt horrible when he saw how weak he really was. If you read the story of what happens after the resurrection you'll find a very different Peter. A quiet, reflective, shamed Peter who doesn't say a word until Jesus speaks directly to him. The great news is that when Jesus does speak to Peter he restores Peter and let's Peter know that private convictions melting in the heat of the moment is not the end of the story. I know He'd say the same thing to you.

Private convictions (things you truly believed about yourself/God/life but had a setback when things got tough) are not nearly as bad for the cause of Jesus as public convictions (lies that you never really believed... you just said them to get something you wanted). Nobody (especially Jesus) really expects you to be perfect... and if they do then stop worrying about them. But the question is... are you progressing? Are you moving forward? Are you growing and becoming more like Jesus? That's the goal and that's all Jesus expects from you. Tomorrow we'll talk about what that would look like but for today spend some time thinking about your particular areas of weakness when it comes to your convictions. Where are you most liable to stumble when the heat is focused on what you claim to believe?

Prayer: Father, help me to make decisions today that will make me more like Jesus rather than less like Jesus. Help me to make my private convictions stronger. In Jesus' Name, amen.

Thursday:

I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway... I love God's law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Romans 7:18-24 (NLT)

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:25 (NLT)

Reflection: Today we're going to talk about core convictions. Core convictions are the things we believe so deeply that they impact everything we do without us even having to think about them. For me one of my most basic core convictions revolves around the concept of gravity. I believe in the concept of gravity. I'm totally committed to this concept in my life. I don't have to think hard and long about whether to jump off a tall building or from a cliff. It's not something that have to work at... it just part of my mental map.

How about you? What things are so deeply ingrained into your belief system that you don't have to give them a second thought. That you display complete congruence between what you say you believe and what you do?

For Jesus... ALL of His convictions were core convictions. He stayed away from sin like I stayed away from the edge of the Empire State Building when I was on the 108th floor even though there was a fence that would (supposedly) keep you from falling 108 floors to my death. But when it comes to sin... I wish my core conviction or my mental map was as strong.

These days we talk a lot in church about "saving" faith. We seem to have this idea that if we can just get someone to stand up or raise their hand during a prayer or come forward while we sing that they have been "saved". And while I don't think there's anything wrong with that way of doing church I just don't see that kind of concept in the Bible. With the disciples this is the way their convictions were changed: First they had faith in the faith of Jesus. They saw this complete congruence between what He said and what He believed and what He did. They were impressed. They wanted to follow someone like that so they did. But the core conviction of Jesus didn't translate to the disciples the moment they decided to follow Jesus. As they followed Him I think their public convictions changed to private convictions. They weren't just parroting what they thought Jesus wanted to hear. They were actually trying to make those convictions their own. But it took time. Lots of it. And it wasn't until after His death and resurrection that they trusted Him with their eternities. At first it was just about living life the way He lived life.

To me that's the most powerful way to change your core convictions. Do what Jesus did. You'll find out He can be trusted with your day to day life and as that happens more and more you'll be able to trust Him with your eternity. This does not mean that we are saved by

the things we do. Please don't misunderstand me. But Biblical belief is not just changing your intellectual ideas about reality (deciding that you do think that Jesus is God's Son and that He died for your sins and can save you if you let Him). It's about believing all of that and then letting that belief change who you are every day.

I do believe that following Jesus can change your convictions. That over time your private convictions (the things you want to believe... think you believe... but when it comes down to it you do something else) can become core convictions... part of your mental map that you just do because it's part of who you are. After all... the same disciples that ran when Jesus was arrested and killed because they were afraid of what the government would do to them are the same ones who went willingly to their deaths because they had learned that Jesus could be trusted with their day to day lives and over time that led them to trust Him with their eternities.

How do we change our core convictions? We'll look at that tomorrow. For today spend some time thinking about your core convictions. What do you believe so wholeheartedly that you don't have to think about it... what you say you believe, think and do are in complete harmony?

Prayer: Father, I want to have core convictions like Jesus had. Open my eyes to where what I say and what I do are not in harmony. In Jesus Name, amen.

Friday:

Happy are those who don't listen to the wicked, who don't go where sinners go, who don't do what evil people do. They love the LORD'S teachings, and they think about those teachings day and night. They are strong, like a tree planted by a river. The tree produces fruit in season, and its leaves don't die. Everything they do will succeed.
Psalm 1:1-3 (NLT)

Obey all the laws Moses gave you. Do not turn away from them, and you will be successful in everything you do. Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed. Joshua 1:7-8 (NLT)

Reflection: How do I develop the core convictions of Jesus? I think the answer lies in the evolution of the faith of very first followers of Jesus. At first they had faith in Jesus' faith. Sort of like guilt by association... this was faith by association. Gradually they started trying the stuff Jesus told them to do... the stuff He was actually doing. They were FAR from perfect at it at first. But over time their convictions were changed. And that changed the world.

Over and over the Bible tells us what the secret to success is. Did you see it in the scriptures for today? Two things. Meditating or thinking about God's words and then putting those words into practice. That is the only way you will ever learn that Jesus can REALLY be trusted. And as you learn that your convictions will start to change. My hope/dream is that one day my core convictions about sin and Jesus' say of living are as congruent with my behavior as my conviction about how gravity will hurt you if you get too close to the edge of a

cliff. I'm not there yet... I'm a long way off (farther than I'd like to admit and that's as much confession as you're going to get out of me in this venue ;o) but I hope and believe I'm getting closer rather than farther away from that reality.

How about you? Do you spend time learning about what Jesus wants from you? Then do you think about that throughout your day? Devos like this one (or any other devotional that you find online or in the bookstore) are great ways to start your day. Then you can set the alarm on your watch or phone to go off every hour or every three hours or six hours or whatever to remind you think about what you read that morning.

But there's one final step to success. You read it in God's words to Joshua.

Be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed.

Doing what you know. There's no substitute. You can learn everything Jesus ever said but it won't make you more like Him until you start putting into practice what you already know. So start with one thing this week that you have been holding back on. Turn it over to Jesus. Start trying to live like you believe what He said about that particular habit or emotion or behavior or thought process. And you know what I know you'll find. Jesus can be trusted with your every day life. You'll learn (as those first disciples did) that being generous really does lead to a better life than keeping on death grip on what you've got, that forgiving, as hard as it is, is far superior to holding onto bitterness and anger, that patience really is a virtue. So give it a shot and watch as your core convictions start to change.

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to the areas in my life where I haven't be living by what I say I believe. Today I hand those over to You and ask for strength and courage and I try to live the way You have taught me to live. In Jesus' Name, amen.