

May 3-7, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #48

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

A Covenant Of Salt & Light

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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 ;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 Reflection: This week we're going to pick back up where we left Joseph last week- kind of. When we left Joseph last weekend we left a spoiled brat who had pushed his brothers (with his father's help) to the brink of wanting to kill their youngest brother. Through a series of fortunate events (Joseph would't have seen them that way at the time but they were indeed fortunate) Joseph found himself sold into slavery and on his way to Egypt rather than dead in a ditch (my sister Connie would always worry about her family and when they'd get home if they had been late at all she'd express how happy she was that they hadn't gotten in a terrible and accident and were laying dead-in-a-dich. I remember her husband Jeff would always ask why it always had to be dead-in-a-ditch? Why couldn't he be injured-slightly-in-a-ditch or stuck-in-a-ditch-but-doing-just-fine-thank-you-very-much but I'm REALLLY digressing so...):

When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Genesis 39:1 (NLT)

And here we find one of the first and clearest examples of God's covenant with Abraham being expressed beyond just Abraham's family/descendants. Do you remember the covenant God made with Abraham? It was never supposed to be ONLY about Abraham and his descendants:

I will bless you and... you will become a blessing to others... Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you. Genesis 12:2-3 (CEV)

God's plan was always going to be about blessing everybody on earth through Abraham and his descendants. It was never about the Jews being the only favored people or even God's favorites. The Jews were going to be the vehicle through which God blessed EVERYBODY. And however you view what Joseph is going through, Joseph is on his way to be a blessing to another nation- Egypt. If you know the rest of the story then you know that through another series of unfortunate events (or fortunate events depending on how you see this story) Joseph ends up in a place where he can prepare for a famine that only he sees coming and because of that not only is the family of Abraham saved but so is that entire region of the world.

That was one of the first outward expressions of God's covenant with Abraham. He had been blessing Abraham and his family this whole time (and sometime we should spend some time defining "blessing" because if you know the story of Abraham's family then you know blessings don't always feel like blessings to us) but now He's going to use one of Abraham's descendants to be a blessing to the whole world.

And one day God would send His own Son- a descendant of Abraham- to become the ultimate blessing to the whole world. But when Jesus came the Jews had seemed to forgotten their mandate. They believed God loved them and hated everyone else. They believed the Messiah would be only for them.

Boy were they wrong.

Thank God for that.

See you tomorrow.

Tuesday Reflection: So let's talk about salt for a few minutes today, shall we? I know- you don't really have any choice although I guess you could just skip on past or put this

reflection away but I'm going to talk about salt. One of Jesus' most famous sayings is about salt. We'll look at the actual scripture in a moment but why would Jesus use salt in one of His most famous sayings?

Because salt was valuable. And salt made a difference in people's lives. Some of the first widespread wars took place over salt access. The word "salary" comes from the Roman practice of paying their soldiers in salt. The word "salad" comes from the practice of Roman soldiers salting their leafy greens. Why? Why would they do that? Well it's more than just that it made them taste better- the main reason is because salt preserved things.

Leafy green veggies, meat- even human (and live stock) wounds. Rub a little salt on something and as long as it wasn't ice the salt made it last longer. In a world where rot and decay were one of the greatest enemies of human life that made salt incredibly valuable. And throughout the Old Testament God would clarify His covenant with the people of Israel in many different ways- one of them was by using salt to clarify these covenants:

It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord for both you and your offspring. Numbers 18:19 (NIV)

Don't you realize that the Lord, the God of Israel, made a lasting covenant (of salt) with David, giving him and his descendants the throne of Israel forever? 2 Chronicles 13:5 (NLT)

What's God saying? That through Israel God's covenant would bring healing and refreshment to a world that was rotting away. And one day the Rescuer (a descendant of Abraham's) would come to this world that was rotting to bring a preservative that would slow the decay that was/is rotting this world and everything in it. But He surprised the everyone in Israel because He made it obvious that He hadn't forgotten the original mandate of the covenant- to bless Abraham's descendants but also to bless every living human who would ever live through them.

That made Him pretty unpopular with most of the factions in Israel at the time. You basically had 4 main factions when Jesus comes upon the scene: the Romans, the Zealots, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Romans ruled to world. The zealots wanted to crush Rome so they could rule the world. The Pharisees wanted to withdraw from the world and the Sadducees wanted to merge with the world. But nobody was talking about blessing the world anymore. Nobody was talking about fulfilling the covenant of salt that God had made with His people.

Into this boiling cauldron of competing ideas Jesus came and one day He stood up to preach to a ragtag group of misfits and He wanted them to remember what God's plan has been all along (we call that sermon the Sermon On The Mount and it was the sermon that launched His ministry and signaled what His ministry would be all about). So He begins with the beatitudes- do you remember what the first word of the Sermon On The Mount was? Blessed. And then when He gets done telling them that they are invited to the blessed life He reminds them of what the blessed life is all about- being blessed to be a blessing. After He was finished with the beatitudes (which is the latin word for "blessed") He drops this little bombshell on this ragtag band of misfits that had gathered to hear this controversial and powerful Rabbi speak:

You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. Matthew 5:13 (NLT)

There were probably gasps. Us?!?! We're the salt of the earth? But how could that be? We're nothing. Everybody tells us we're nothing. But here was Jesus telling them that He would begin with this ragtag band of misfits with no power or money or influence and through them He would begin the ultimate expression of the covenant God made with Abraham so many thousands of years before.

So what does that mean for me and you? I believe most of what Jesus said to the people of Israel and His apostles He also meant for you and me. I think as He spoke He looked over the heads of whoever His first audience was across the miles and centuries so that He could look into your eyes (and mine too) and utter the same words He spoke to them.

So. You are the salt of the earth. Are you living like salt in this dying, rotting world? And if not, what would that even look like?

Wednesday Reflection: Yesterday we talked about salt. Today I want to talk about light. God not only described His covenant with Israel as a covenant of salt but also as a covenant of light:

I will watch over you, and I will appoint you to be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations. Isaiah 42:6 (CSB)

It is far too small a thing for you to be my servant to... bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth. Isaiah 49:6 (NIV)

Light is a little easier to understand than salt was for us modern folks. We have lots of ways of preserving things nowadays. Refrigeration, ziplock baggies and Tupperware containers as well as untold numbers of chemical preservatives and rot inhibitors. We don't think of salt as a preservative- we mainly think of it as a flavor enhancer (and there's probably a sermon in that analogy as well but we'll leave that for another time). Salt was had to unpack to understand- light not so much. All you have to do is be in a dark and unfamiliar place with no ability to flip on the lights to realize how important light is to us humans. We stumble in darkness without it. It's dangerous. We also know now that light is essential for human life on this earth. Even more important than salt.

Without the light of the sun our planet could never sustain us. Other than God (and maybe oxygen) it's the single most important factor in keeping us alive. They didn't necessarily know all of that 2,000 years ago but we do now. Remember that ragtag band of misfits Jesus was preaching to in the Sermon On The Mount? A group of nobodies. No power or money or influence. And yet Jesus told them they were to be among the first that would carry the "salt" of the gospel into the world. He didn't stop at salt though. Right after He told them that they were the salt of the earth He dropped this on them:

"You are the light of the world-like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

Not only were they to be a preservative to bring healing and preservation to a world decaying all around them- they would be the light that would illuminate the paths of a world stumbling

in darkness. Not bad for a group of people that had been told all their lives that they didn't matter. That they didn't have anything to contribute to the world. That God didn't care about them. Now they find out all of that was a lie. Right after He tells them that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world He says this to them- and this always confused me because I thought it was just a random saying that had nothing to do with the salt and light analogies:

Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. Matthew 5:17 (NLT)

So what is He saying? If we assume (I know- always a dangerous thing to do but I'm going to go ahead and do it here anyways) that this isn't just some random thought but rather has everything to do with what He just said about salt and light then suddenly this verse takes on a whole new meaning for me. He came to accomplish the purpose of the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. And what were the law of Moses and the writings of the prophets all about? The covenants of God. The covenant with Abraham where God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and then through those descendants to bless all the nations on earth with salt and light. And that His purposes would be accomplished through the least likely of people- the ragtag band of misfits that nobody would have given a snowball's chance in hell when it came to changing the world.

And yet that's exactly what they did- they changed the world. They were salt and light. Who would've ever guessed it? Not them. And not anyone else (other than Jesus).

So how about you? Did you know that YOU are the salt of the earth? Did you know that YOU are the light of the world?

At least you're supposed to be.

You could be.

What would that even look like? Something to ponder today.

Thursday Reflection: So we've learned this week that God's plan was to rain salt and light down into the lives of the descendants of Abraham and then through them to distribute salt and light to the people of this world- people struggling with the rot and decay of this world and stumbling around in darkness. So what does that have to do with me and you (I'm assuming most of us are not direct descendants of Abraham)? Well if you're a follower of Jesus it has a lot to do with you and me:

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus... And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you. Galatians 3:26-29 (NLT)

If you are a follower of Jesus then you are a spiritual descendant of Abraham and a recipient of God's promise to Abraham. What was that promise? Salt and light. Blessed to be a blessing. God wants to bless you but not only so that you'll live a blessed life. He also expect you and me to then take those blessings and be a blessing to all the people of this earth. Seems like a mighty tall order, doesn't it? How do I do that? Well, it'll look different in every follower of Jesus' life. But all of us who follow Him are called to become distributors of salt and light:

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

The Great Commission (which is what professional Christians call that verse we just read) used to freak me out. I thought it meant that every single good Christian (with the emphasis on "good") had to become a missionary (with the emphasis on "had to") and if you didn't you were disobeying a direct command of Jesus. Really the last one He gave before leaving earth. "But I don't want to be a missionary," I would moan. And it made me feel horribly guilty that I wasn't.

It doesn't anymore. I realize now that while every single one of those original apostles did go out and become missionaries to the far flung reaches of the world that not every single Christian did. Really most Christians stayed right where they were and became missionaries to the people all around them. Some became preachers but most were tradesmen, teachers, craftsman, housewives- you name it. Whatever they were when they became Christians most of them continued on with that profession and not much changed about the geography of their lives.

But they were salt and light to a dying world stumbling in darkness. I learned years ago that if we were to translate Jesus' words from the Great Commission it would more accurately read "as you are going through this world..." rather than "go into all the world..." That changes things quite a bit for me. Basically Jesus is saying that once you become a follower of His then you start dispensing salt and light wherever you go- whether that's to the other side of the world (which some of His followers will be called to do) or the other side of town or even the other side of your home. You can be a missionary of salt and light in your community, neighborhood and family. And while you may not think that's as impressive as what Mother Teresa did think about this- Mother Teresa could never have been salt and light to your family the way you can be. God wants you to start where you are. Don't neglect the simple little things you can do for your husband or wife or kids or parents or siblings or neighbors or co-workers because they are NOT little things. They are actually the big stuff that changes the world every bit as much as the missionary who goes to the other side of the world.

So do something life-giving for someone close to you today. Something maybe that anybody could do but nobody else will do that you can do and watch as the salt and light of Jesus changes their world as it changes yours. But don't forget- the result isn't in your control- that belongs to Jesus. All we can do is dispense the salt and light- how that impacts the people we are dispensing it to is between them and Jesus (and that puts them in REALLY good hands).

Friday Reflection: So whether it's been mentioned and whether you have thought about it or not this whole week's set of reflections has been about evangelism. Now evangelism is like a 4 letter word for many Christians who grew up in evangelistic churches like I did. I was given the impression (whether my church intended to give me this impression or not this is the impression I ended up with) that if I didn't attempt to "evangelize" or "save" every person I came into contact with then if they ended up in hell that was partially on me (in fact it was probably mostly my fault). We were taught evangelistic methods and how to spark up a conversation with a complete stranger on the bus and through a series of masterful questions to lead them to the question of their salvation.

I was terrible at it. And that bothered me. A lot. I figured I was failing Jesus. Not only did I never once lead-a-lost-soul-to-Christ with this method of evangelism but I seemed to make things worse rather than better when I tried. Eventually I got so tired of the guilt and pressure I just stopped trying at all. I moved the guilt and shame to a leaky compartment of my brain that only bothered me from time to time rather than the 24/7 it had bothered me when I was trying and failing.

Then one day as a 21 year old who had recently gotten extremely serious about my faith people started coming to me to ask me about what was different in my life. People started coming to church with me not because I guilted them into it but because they were genuinely curious about what was going on. Three of my friends started following Jesus and got baptized to demonstrate their faith. It was amazing.

What had changed? My evangelistic method.

And I didn't even realize it. I didn't know I had stumbled upon one of the most effective forms of evangelism there is. Since then I've heard it referred to as Emmaus Road evangelism or Lighthouse evangelism. It's the simplest and in my book, most effective form of evangelism there is for most of us. Don't get me wrong- the methods taught in churches work really well for some people- mainly people with the spiritual gift of evangelism. You know who these people are if you have spent much time around churches. They sneeze and someone gets saved. They are routinely evangelizing strangers everywhere they go. It's glorious for the Kingdom of God and for them. The problem is when churches want to teach the rest of us how to evangelize effectively they always bring in someone with the gift of evangelism who tries to teach us how to sneeze properly so's as to bring people more effectively to Christ (I may be expressing myself a bit sarcastically there but it's not far off from the truth).

I would leave those meetings and try sneezing at strangers and they completely rejected my advances (it would be even worse these days with Covid and all that going around ;o) It left me feeling like there was something wrong with me (not that there isn't something wrong with me but it's not that copying someone else's evangelistic methods didn't work for me).

So what do the rest of us that don't have the spiritual gift of evangelism do? Does that mean we don't have a responsibility to "evangelize" the lost? To spread the salt and light of Jesus to others in this world that need it so desperately? Nope. Still important. Most of us will just do it a different way.

So let's talk about lighthouse evangelism. Yesterday we read the Great Commission of Jesus to His apostles just before His ascension to His throne in Heaven:

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NLT)

Luke records more of what Jesus said to His apostles and disciples in the book of Acts:

You will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NLT)

We are to be “witnesses”. And what do witnesses do? If you’ve watched much Law & Order then you know- witnesses answer questions. That’s all they do. That’s all they’re allowed to do. If they start to do more than answer a question they will get shut down quickly by one of the lawyers who are asking the questions. The witness only tells what he/she knows or saw. They aren’t the judge. They are not the jury. They are not the prosecuting or defense attorney. They are answerers of questions.

So are we. It’s not my job to get someone to ask- it’s my job to live a life that stimulates others to ask us what we know or have experienced. Jesus called it illuminating and seasoning:

You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the light of the world-like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:14-16 (NLT)

In other words, we are to live our lives in such a way that the salt and light that Jesus is pouring into our own lives will cause us to shine in such a way that it stimulates questions from other people. What’s different about you? Why do you do the things you do? What’s wrong with you (ok that one may be just a question I get but it’s still a question)? And when we get asked that ‘s when we are asked to be ready to answer:

Always be ready to answer everyone who asks you to explain about the hope you have, but answer in a gentle way and with respect. 1 Peter 3:15 (NCV)

Live your life and then be ready when the questions start coming. You don’t have to be a theological expert to answer these questions because the questions will be about what Jesus has done in your life. Sure, people may ask other questions that you don’t have the answers to and I became obsessed with trying to at least grapple with those questions so that I would have a better understanding of them and so that I could maybe in some small way help others grapple with those same questions but our only real requirement is to be able to answer about the hope we have found and nobody is a better expert on what Jesus has done in your life than you are.

I can remember thinking, “heck, I can do that...”

It changed my life and I’d like to think that in my own small way it has changed other people’s lives as well but the outcome of my answering of questions and what that does in another person’s life isn’t my responsibility- it’s Jesus’. So now I just try and live my life in a way that shows I’m “learning to be the light” (one of my favorite songs and one I’ve tried to pattern my life after- look it up and give it a listen. It’s by a group called NewWorldSon). I’m not “THE LIGHT” but I’m learning to be-the-light.

How about you? I’ll leave you with this today and together we’ll try to change the world for Jesus just by living lives that express the salt and light He’s been pouring into us:

Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night. Philippians 2:14-15 (MES)