

May 24-28, 2021 Edition

The "BIG Story" Of The Bible #51

Finding Jesus In The Old Testament

Pentecost: The Church Begins

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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 move into a new phase of the Great Rescue- the day the church began. But before we dive into what a "church" is and what the day of Pentecost means for us (especially within the context of the story of the Bible) I want to reset a little bit to remember what brought us to this point.

It all started with Adam & Eve's belief that they knew better than God what would fulfill them and make them happy. They believed the lie that the serpent told them- the doubted God's love, care and plan for them. So they ate the forbidden fruit and sin entered the world for the first time. Shame, regret and guilt. Fear, anxiety and worry. But sin didn't just short circuit our relationship with Heaven- it also short circuited our relationship with each other, our relationship with ourselves (mental illness and self destructive behaviors) and our relationship with God's Creation. Suddenly sin had brought pain, death, sickness, accidents and animal attacks not to mention natural disasters. Adam & Eve had broken the world and everything in it. So God comes down and makes the first prophecy in the entire Bible:

I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel. Genesis 3:15 (NLT)

Basically God pronounces judgment upon the serpent and grace upon Adam & Eve. And from that moment until the moment Jesus would crush the head of Satan it's as though a cross-shaped-shadow appeared on the horizon and everything marches towards that one moment in time. It's really what the entire story of the Old Testament is about.

So now let's skip a bit to Moses. The people of Israel are enslaved in Egypt and God chooses Moses to lead them out of captivity. It's the Passover that really ensures their release. On the night of the first Passover God tells the people to sacrifice a lamb and paint the blood from that lamb on the doorposts of their homes to ensure that they are protected from death itself. God tells the people to get ready to move because this will be the last straw for Pharaoh and he will beg them to leave after this. And God is right (shocking, right? How often do we have to see that over and over before we start to recognize that BEFORE we get ourselves into situations we can't get out of?). The people of Israel leave Egypt and after a few hair raising adventures they find themselves at the base of Mt. Sinai exactly 50 days after Passover where they enter into a covenant with God to become His treasured possession of all the people on earth, His holy nation, His kingdom of priests. The 10 Commandments were the stipulations of that covenant:

Now 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." And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has commanded." Exodus 19:6-8 (NLT)

And the people of Israel became the people of God. But we watched as they failed over and over again to live up to the stipulations of the covenant. God warned them over and over but they just wouldn't listen. He sent prophets to tell them what would happen if they didn't turn back to Him and also to tell them about a shadowy, mysterious figure that would save them. This figure would be part conquering King and part sacrificial Servant. The King would trample His enemies under His feet. The Servant's sacrifice would bring about the healing of the nations. The people longed for this figure to arrive- especially after Israel is conquered by Assyria, then Babylon, then

Persia, then Greece and finally by Rome. When would God send this Messiah Who would rescue the people of God?

When the Rescuer finally comes nobody recognizes Him. How could this be the Rescuer? He isn't doing any of the stuff we imagined the Rescuer would do! But Jesus did miracles that just made people all the more confused. He turned water to wine, healed the sick, made the blind see and even raised the dead. He taught them about God in ways nobody had ever imagined God before. And He treated people like they really mattered- even (and maybe especially) people who had been told repeatedly that they didn't matter.

Eventually Jesus was sacrificed (on Passover). It turned out that His sacrifice brought redemption, freedom and rescue for the people of God (from every nation on the planet as it turned out- not just the Jews). And when He burst out of that tomb 3 days later Jesus showed us exactly how the Rescuer's sacrifice would bring about the healing of the nations and how simultaneously His sacrifice would trample His enemies under his feet (not human enemies but the consequences of sin on this world and its people & the old serpent from Genesis chapter 3). He was the conquering King, the Lion of Judah and the suffering, sacrificial Servant. But now He is forevermore the King of Kings and Lord Of Lords. Jesus is the Great Rescuer promised from Genesis 3:15.

And for forty days Jesus spent time with His followers until it was time for Him to ascend to His throne. He told His friends to wait in Jerusalem and so 10 days later there were 120 of them gathered in an upper room (probably the same upper room where they had celebrated the last supper. Probably the same upper room where they had huddled in fear while they waited out the three days that Jesus was in the tomb. That means that on the day of Pentecost (a celebration of the anniversary of the covenant God entered into with Israel 50 days after they left Egypt) God did something BIG again. Wonder what it means for you and me? That's what we'll try to get to the bottom of this week. But for today maybe spend some time thinking about why God might enjoy doing things in the New Testament by following the same patterns that He followed in the Old Testament (Jesus- the Lamb of God sacrificing Himself on the Passover among other things)?

Tuesday Reflection: So today we are continuing with the story of the Bible and we now enter a brand new phase of that story- Jesus has gone and ascended to His throne in Heaven but now Jesus returns... sort of. Remember what He told His followers about why He had to leave:

Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:4-5 (NLT)

And today we look at that day when the Spirit of God entered the world to stay. To remain within each one of us. In the Old Testament we saw the Spirit of God at work from time to time but it was always a one off event. The Spirit would descend and empower an individual or the nation of Israel as a whole to do something super-human but when the act was over the Spirit returned to Heaven. On the day of Pentecost the Spirit descends to stay.

Now I don't know about you but the word, "Pentecost" always confused me. I grew up hearing it over and over again but had no idea what it meant. Pentecost was a festival the Jews celebrated

every year just like they did the Passover and several others. Pentecost literally means, "fiftieth" and was a celebration of the day that Israel gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai (on the 50th day after their salvation from slavery in Egypt) and entered into a covenant with God to become His treasured possession, His holy nation, His kingdom of priests. The giving of the 10 commandments (which were the stipulations of the covenant; i.e. IF you do this THEN I will do that) was also celebrated. As it turns out Jews from all over the world flooded into Jerusalem to celebrate this special day every year.

On this year there is a lot of upheaval. Everyone knows about Jesus- the most famous Rabbi Israel had ever seen. They know how people were calling Him the messiah and how He had been crucified by the Roman government at the request of the Jewish religious leaders. They also knew that something had happened three days after He had been buried. That the tomb was empty and that while the religious leaders claimed that Jesus' disciples had robbed the tomb of Jesus' dead body, the disciples claimed Jesus was in fact alive and had appeared to them. Rumors were flying. Nobody knew what to think. Everybody was on edge.

And then something happened.

The Spirit of God descended on the 50th day after Jesus had been killed- the day of the Passover. There was a sound like a rushing wind and it filled the place the disciples were gathered (120 of them in all) and something that looked like "tongues of fire" rested upon all of the believers. They all started speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to do. It raised such a hubbub that people who were in town to celebrate the festival of Pentecost rushed over and gathered around the disciples what at this point were declaring the wonders of God in a language that everybody (Luke mentions 16 different languages represented in the group listening to what must have been a very strange conversation) could understand.

What exactly was going on? We don't know for sure. Some people think each disciple was speaking a different language so no matter what language a visiting Jew happened to speak they could understand it in their native language. I prefer to think of it like what happens at the United Nations (sort of...). Have you ever watched as someone gives a speech at the UN and people from around the world are listening to a translation of that speech through head phones while the speech is going on? I think it was sort of like that except they didn't need headphones (good thing since that technology wouldn't be invented for about 1900 years or so). The Holy Spirit was working a miracle so that when Peter preached the very first sermon in the very first church service ever conducted (an impromptu church service but a church service nonetheless) everybody could understand even though it was only Peter speaking.

And do you know what happened? The Bible tells us 3,000 men believed Peter and were immediately baptized into this brand new thing the Bible calls the "church". But that's only men... they didn't count women. Scholars believe if you add in women and children the number baptized that day was probably at least triple the 3,000 and probably was more than that. On the first day of the "First Church of Jerusalem" (I made that name up... it's not in the Bible but I kind of like it) the number of followers of Jesus went from 120 to somewhere around 10,000 people.

WOW. That's rapid growth, huh? If things were tense and volatile before the day of Pentecost and Peter's sermon imagine how tense and volatile they were afterwards. If you've been with us

throughout this lesson series looking at the story of the Bible maybe you remember how I kept talking about how even as God was working in individuals lives and in the life of the nation of Israel He was sort of building a fire the way someone who's camping might do. Making sure that when the match was put to the kindling and logs everything would be prepared so that the fire would ignite the fuel and start burning easily because of the work that had been put in before.

What we are going to see in the book of Acts is how the day of Pentecost is sort of like God putting a spark into that kindling and what it looked like as the fire took hold and spread uncontrollably throughout the entire world. But for this week we will be trying to answer a question about Pentecost that the people who were there asked themselves:

Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Acts 2:12 (NIV)

In coming weeks we will look at exactly what a "church" is and what the church is supposed to do and what it's supposed to look like but for this week we will instead try to answer the question, "what does Pentecost mean?"

Wednesday Reflection: So I guess the first thing I'd say about what Pentecost means (other than literally translating it as "fiftieth" which is what it "means" in the Greek language) is that the power to change us and to change the world comes from outside of us. It's pretty much something God has been harping on ever since, well, the beginning of the entire story of the Bible and that recurring theme continues here:

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. Acts 2:1-3 (NLT)

This power didn't originate from within them- it came from Jesus. It was the power He told them would come only if He left this earth physically and ascended to His Throne in Heaven:

And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven. Luke 24:49 (NLT)

I could keep going all day long. When Adam & Eve blew it in the garden of Eden God didn't come down and tell them it would be ok because they had everything they needed to save themselves already within them. Nope- He told them that He would fix it. That He would pay the price attached to that check they wrote that they could never afford to pay on their own. And as the story of the Great Rescue unfolded we just saw this theme played out again and again. Abraham learned this lesson. Isaac learned it. Jacob learned it. Joseph learned it. Moses learned it. Joshua learned it pretty much by watching how Moses learned the hard way but learn it he did. And finally we watched as the nation of Israel learned this lesson. The power to save doesn't come from within us- it comes only from God.

Is it any wonder that the church is at odds with our modern culture? Turn on your TV on any afternoon and start flipping through the channels. You will find talk show hosts on tons of stations who will all tell you the same thing- you have the power within you. How many times have you heard somebody say that you can do whatever you set your mind to do? No you can't. I'm not trying to be negative but just because you decide you'd like to fly doesn't mean you have

the power within you to fly. You can probably summon the strength required to buy a ticket on Alaska Airlines and fly that way but you're never going to jump off of a tall building and fly without a hang glider or a parachute no matter how much positivity you have inside of you and you release into the universe.

But even followers of Jesus have fallen for this dangerous lie. Have you ever heard anyone quote Philippians 4:13. In most modern translations it's rendered as "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength". I have heard so many people claim this promise over something that they really wanted. I had a teenaged boy once tell me that it didn't matter if another girl in the youth group was WAY out of his league and didn't have romantic feelings for him- he knew he could do all things through Christ. I can remember thinking, "better not tell your crush that because she might decide to oppose you which might cause a rift in the universe if she applies Philippians 4:13 to not being your girlfriend." I didn't say that to him but you get my drift I hope. Philippians 4:13 is not a blank check that you can fill in with whatever crazy stuff you find yourself wanting. It's a promise that no matter what you are going through Jesus will get you through it. That's why I love the way the Living Bible translates this verse:

I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power. Philippians 4:13 (TLB)

If God wants me to fly then I guess at that point I'll be able to fly but unless and until He makes that known to me I think I'll keep my two feet on the ground unless I'm dreaming. The power to save comes from outside of us and that's the first thing Pentecost teaches us. The disciples didn't have everything they needed to change themselves and take on the world inside of them- they needed God's Spirit to do that. And on the day of Pentecost that's what they received. And do you know what happened?

They were changed and they changed the world.

Thursday Reflection: Another thing we learn from Pentecost is the absolute equality of the human race. No one culture is considered to be the Christian culture (although there have been a few cultures over the centuries that thought God was might impressed with them and maybe every other Christian/church should pattern themselves after them). Look at what happens at Pentecost:

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" Acts 2:5-7 (NLT)

Luke records 16 different languages and cultures represented at the Temple on the day of Pentecost. Some of them were Jews by birth who lived in other parts of the world and some of them were Jewish converts- God fearing gentiles- who were interested in learning about the God of Israel. And when Peter gets up to preach the very first gospel sermon ever preached what do we find?

Well it's kind of confusing. Peter preaches in one language and the people there all hear him in their own language. They all understand him no matter what language they speak. So what

language is Peter speaking? Is it Hebrew? Aramaic? Greek? We don't know for sure but we know this- no one language and no one culture can claim to be the "original" language of Christianity. The very first sermon it seems was preached in every language on the face of the planet (I may be exaggerating here a bit but you get my drift) at once. It seems to me that maybe God was doing something absolutely beyond our capacity to understand by having Peter preach that first sermon in a miraculous language that even Peter didn't know but could understand. Does that make sense? I know, my brain is spinning too.

No matter what language Peter was speaking we know this- the rest of the New Testament is God teaching everyone that we had better not dare to feel superior to anyone else over language or culture. It's not an easy lesson for the Jewish Christians (which was everybody at this point in time) to learn but it's a lesson God was dedicated to teaching them. Eventually a guy named Paul would come along and he'd see the vision more clearly than anyone else at that time. Once when writing to a little church he had planted in Galatia he wrote this:

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (NLT)

What was God up to? He was reversing all of the consequences of sin and pointing things back towards the way things were in the beginning. Before the idea of inequality existed. It's a lesson we have to continually remind ourselves of because our cultures try so desperately to compete for top spot in the world. How about you? Who do you think you're better than?

Friday Reflection: One more thing Pentecost teaches us is that now God's got a better go between than before Pentecost. What does that mean? Let's go back to what Pentecost was a celebration of in the Jewish faith. It marked the day that God came down to Mt. Sinai and entered into a covenant with Israel. It was the day that Israel entered into what the New Testament calls the "Old Covenant".

God came down and laid out the provisions of the covenant (it wasn't referred to as the "Old Covenant" at that point because... well I imagine you know why). If Israel would follow the stipulations of the covenant than Yahweh would be their God and they would be His treasured possession, His holy nation, His kingdom of priests. Then God starts laying out the stipulations of the covenant (we call them the 10 Commandments now but God called them the 10 realities or fundamentals of life). You might be familiar with some of the commandments- no other gods but Yahweh; don't worship other gods; rest on the sabbath day; don't lie; don't chew; don't go with girls that do...(ok I made a couple of those up but you can go back and read it for yourself to see what the 10 commandments were).

But God hadn't gotten very far through the stipulations of the covenant before Israel as a nation begged Him to stop talking directly to them. They begged God to let Moses be the go-between. And God allowed it. It wasn't ideal but if that's all the slave-minded Israelites could handle at this point then He would accommodate them:

Moses continued, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, 'Don't let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.' "Then the Lord

said to me, 'What they have said is right. I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (NLT)

So God spoke directly to Moses and then Moses would tell the Israelites what God said. Moses was the go-between. And the day of Pentecost is when the Israelites celebrated that day. Now here we are on the day of Pentecost- 50 days after Jesus died to bring salvation, redemption and freedom not just to the Jewish people but to all mankind and what happens?

God comes down. Again. It's like dejavu all over again but there are some differences just like there are some similarities. At Sinai God comes down to a mountain to meet His people. At Jerusalem God comes down to a mountain to meet His people. At Sinai God enters into a covenant with His people. At Jerusalem God enters into a covenant with His people that was confirmed in Jesus' own blood. At Sinai the covenant begins between Israel and God. At Jerusalem the new covenant begins between God and all mankind. At Sinai God descends upon the mountain in the form of fire. At Jerusalem God descends upon His people in the form of fire (and here we start to see some differences). At Sinai the people witnessing God descending are terrified and beg Him to stop. At Jerusalem the people are filled with wonder and want to hear more and start asking questions.

Let's stop there for a minute. Why are the people in Jerusalem not terrified? Because of the go-between. Moses was a pretty good go-between but even Moses couldn't hold a candle to Jesus. Jesus comes to this world not just to save us but also to bring God near to us. Because of Jesus God is no longer the terrifying entity that is beyond understanding and can never be approached. In fact, because of Jesus there are things that before would have been fatal to humanity that now are part and parcel of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

In the Old Testament whenever the glory of God showed up it was unapproachable. God warned the Israelites not to get too close or they would die. Now the very same glory of God in the very same form of fire alights upon every single believer and dwells within them.

ARE YOU NOT BLOWN AWAY BY THAT?!?!? What's the difference?

Jesus.

In Jesus God has begun reversing the damage done when Adam & Eve brought sin into the world. Before sin there was no distinction between heaven and earth, spiritual and physical. God walked with Adam & Eve and talked to them face to face before sin entered the world. Sin. Ruined. Everything.

And not just between us and God. It ruined everything between people too. Why? Because that's what arrogance and pride do- it ruins our relationships. In fact if we want to truly understand Pentecost we need to go back further than just the book of Exodus and the covenant Israel entered into with God 50 days after the original Passover when the blood of a lamb brought about Israel as a nation's redemption, salvation and freedom. We need to go back to Genesis chapter 11 and a very strange story about people deciding that they would build a tower so that they could ascend to God (not something humanly possible or Jesus would never have had to die).

Because of their arrogance and pride they started a building project. And though it is a very strange story and there is a ton of misunderstanding surrounding it I think it's pretty safe to say that ultimately it was a picture of what sin did to the world- it separated us. At the start of the story there is only one language on all of earth. But because of their arrogance the judgment of God falls upon them and suddenly nobody can understand each other anymore and the project falls apart.

That is why the city was called Babel, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.
Genesis 11:9 (NLT)

Why does God do that? Lots of reasons and we don't have a ton of time to go into them right now but let's just leave it with recognizing that after Eden the world is unravelling and this is just another consequence of sin in this world- humans are separated from one another.

Ok... now let's go back to the day of Pentecost. There are people from all over the world who all speak different languages and yet suddenly they can all understand one another. I don't know about you but that blows my mind. Because of the work of Jesus and now His church the effects of sin upon this world are being reversed. What was lost is now found. What was split apart is being reconciled. It's obviously an ongoing process but that's ultimately where all of this headed and we in His church have been given the job of uniting the people of this world under one banner- Jesus. The Great Rescuer. The ultimate go-between.

So how are we doing? I know, not as well as we'd like probably. But this much I know. When the people of God do what the church is supposed to do more and more people are reconciled to each other and more and more people are reconciled to God:

And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.
Acts 2:47 (NLT)

And because of that you and I are here now- added to His church. With nobody between you and God Himself but the new and better go-between- Jesus Himself. So what's your next move?