

#0239 – April 2, 2009

***inContext* Program Highlights**

[Lepine:] Over the past year we have heard ancient voices offering divinely inspired wisdom; Nehemiah demonstrating what leadership ought to look like; David with insight on the ministry of the coming Messiah; Jonah with the model of genuine repentance and the apostle John recounting his memories of the life of Christ.

This is *inContext* with Michael Easley, I'm Bob Lepine and Michael, today we are going to spend some time looking at many of the lessons learned from our year-long study of the Scriptures. Of course I think to myself, "The one who teaches always learns the most." As you've had the opportunity to dive into the Scriptures, really when you get up to preach we only get a percentage of what you've already learned in your message, don't we?

[Easley:] Yeah. Well, and that's just the privilege and the luxury of getting to study and prepare a message for a congregation, Bob. You know this as you preach in the local church you're affiliated with. There's just a reservoir of stuff you read and meditate over and see that in thirty-two to forty minutes if you're really fortunate.

[Lepine:] [Laughs]

[Easley:] You just can't spill out enough so hopefully, you know, that helps the communicator and it helps the congregation.

[Lepine:] I have to tell you, I'm a lousy editor because anything I come across that I look at and go, "Well that's interesting" I just want to tell -

[Easley:] Sure. Sure. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[Lepine:] - everybody all of the interesting things I've come up with and yet there's just not time to tell everything you've learned in the process, is there?

[Easley:] One of my good homiletician friends asked the question, "What are you trying to do to those people?" [Laughs]

[Lepine:] [Laughs]

[Easley:] You know, because what excites you and me *may* excite some but to back up and always ask the question, "What is God revealing about Himself in this passage?" and, "How do we respond as His servants?" I think those are the waterline questions for me.

What do we know about God from this passage? His character; His attributes; how He works. And how do we respond to what we learn about Him?

[Lepine:] Some pastors will take four weeks to unpack half of a verse. Other pastors will take one week and give you a three chapter synopsis.

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] You kind of go chunk by chunk as you teach. How did you decide that's the approach you wanted to follow?

[Easley:] I like the unit of thought concept, whether it's paragraph or narrative that's a fairly compact story. I think in the verbal, oral tradition of how stories were related, now the letters of course in the New Testament are read and they could reread them, but we have an oral tradition prior to that. Even Jesus' messages were told verbally.

So I think human nature is pretty much the same. I think our attention spans are somewhat limited. I think the captivation of the speaker; the interest, the rate, the pitch; all those things play into it. And there are far better people at this than me; I am very aware of that, but I like a unit of thought. What is this unit of thought? What is the big idea? Are there one or two main propositional truths here about God and then how do we respond?

Where I get lost in the weeds are the words because I love words. We all have our, you know, sort of bent, but that's where I settled years ago.

[Lepine:] There are themes that come out as you look at a particular passage from Scripture and when we were listening to your series on Nehemiah, one of the big themes that came out was the theme of leadership, looking at how Nehemiah led the efforts to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. We're going to hear just a portion of what you shared in that series about one of the lessons in leadership that you learned as you studied the life of Nehemiah.

[Easley:] If you read Nehemiah's prayers, do the study on your own. See if you can prove me wrong. When I read his prayers they ring of loneliness. Leaders deal with it. Presidents are lonely. Churchill was incredibly lonely. Commanding officers are lonely. Doctors are lonely. Principals are lonely. CEOs are lonely. People who run their own company are very lonely individuals. Coaches are incredibly lonely creatures. Police officers are incredibly lonely creatures. People in leadership, even pastors can be very lonely people.

You see it in lots of ways. They withdraw from people. They isolate themselves when they have time away from work. They have no interest in social events. Believe me, I understand this. You get to a point where it's all you do is spend all your time with people. I'm not saying crowds take care of loneliness. I'm saying close, intimate friendships carry us through life.

The good side of loneliness is that it forces you to trust Christ and deepen in your walk with Christ. But the danger of loneliness is, left in isolation; you will end-up in no good. Ask God for a friend who's closer than a brother and see if He'll give it to you.

And lastly, leadership is an enormous privilege. What a tragedy to lead a mediocre life. What a tragedy to live an unfulfilled life. What a tragedy to end-up, excuse me, like so many old people who are bitter, and resentful, and alone. You don't believe me? Go next door and talk to some of these people. You don't believe me? Go to Green Spring and talk to some of these people. Entropy is tough to beat, men and women. And, if God is moving you to be a leader, don't sit back.

Ralph Mattson wrote a book years ago called *Visions of Grandeur*, and with this I close;

“If we add up all the grand moments of our lives, most of us end with a very small pile of memories, but they are indeed golden. In contrast, a similar collection of all our mundane times yields a ponderous heap. It’s clear the bulk of our life’s efforts are consumed by routine tasks and ordinary business.”

Don’t die that way. There are enough men and women in this room who if you truly respond to the call of God to be His disciple, to seek Him constantly, serve Him faithfully, and share Him boldly I believe He would use you for great things.

[Lepine:] Michael, do you think that the reason that a book like Nehemiah is in the Scriptures is to teach us how to be leaders?

[Easley:] Well, yes and no. I mean, there’s debate about this. I would line up on the side that there are certain applications you can make, watching the life of Nehemiah, his decision-making metric, the opposition he faced, so yes, I think there are. Is it a book about leadership? Ah, well, that’s not the only topic or the main idea. The rebuilding of the wall, it is to prepare Israel to worship YAHWEH in a temple complex at a future time but God used Nehemiah and he is a phenomenal leader.

[Lepine:] It is pretty clear that one of the reasons Psalm twenty-two is in the Bible is to paint a portrait of the one who would come as the Messiah and you highlighted that when we went through our series on the Psalms last summer. Psalm twenty-two is one of those Psalms you addressed and the Messianic implications of the Psalms were a big part of what we -

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] - heard you teach about in that series.

[Easley:] The Psalm is also seen prophetically written hundreds of years before Christ comes. Psalm 22:16:

They pierced my hands and my feet.

Now, for many years that’s been sort of the, you know, unarguable fact of the crucifixion. Now, the word probably means something more like tearing than necessarily piercing and that doesn’t unsettle our theology at all because Luke 24:39 takes on a far greater significance; because the fact that He is torn asunder in crucifixion whether it’s pierced or torn in His wrist, it doesn’t really matter, the fact that the psalmist was saying these words, that it’s used in Luke’s story to confirm Christ’s crucifixion corroborates the prophecy hundreds of years before and the experience of Jesus Christ. In fact, in a way, it’s an implicit proof of the resurrection.

This was said of the suffering servant. It happened to the suffering servant, and He’s resurrected and He proves Himself to Thomas; put here your finger, put here your hand, be not unbelieving but believing. Zachariah 12:10 is another one. It’s very hard to deal with if you don’t believe the story true. Psalm 22:18:

They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

All four Gospel writers saw that one as a one-to-one prophecy of Christ. Those Roman soldiers did not know what they were doing but they were fulfilling prophecy. And all these little indicators from this one Psalm are telling the New Testament Jew, "This is Messiah. This is the One who endured it."

Let's look at the collective animosity if we can call it that, the sort of harrowing spectacle in a snapshot. If you're trying to copy these down and can't they're all on the website. They're posted probably tomorrow morning when the PowerPoint goes up. It may already be there. He's poured out like water, His heart is like wax, and His tongue cleaves to his jaw.

Remember the Roman Soldier putting a sponge soaked in vinegar on His lips? They pierced His hands and feet, they looked, they stare, they despise Him, they sneer Him, His bones are out of joint, His strength is dried up. He's laid in the dust of death, His burial. They can count all His bones and they cast lots for His clothing, all in one little Psalm. The excruciation; the picture of the Christ.

You know, if you're an Old Testament person what in the world do you do with that? How do you exegete your way around that not applying to Jesus Christ? Psalm twenty-two started with a cry of dereliction and it ends of people who will be born that He has performed it, He has performed this. He has accomplished the salvation. And many draw the parallel when Jesus says, "It is finished," with the end of Psalm 22:31. He did it.

To me the most interesting feature of the Psalm is simply this; there's no confession of sin and there's no imprecation. If the Psalm was about David's sin and he was going through this excruciation because of some sin, then we would read a lot about him confessing his sin. The Psalm is vacant of confession of sin and the Psalm is vacant of any imprecation of, "God deal with the enemy." And, when Jesus dies on the cross he doesn't say, "God, deal with these who have rejected Your word. Deal with My own who didn't receive Me." You know, "Condemn them." He says, "Forgive them."

It's the only Psalm like it where there's no confession of sin and there's no imprecation on the part of those who have brought the excruciation on Him. Excruciation is a Latin word. It's combined its etymology through a couple of words. *Ex* meaning "crucify;" *crucia* meaning "cross" to crucify on a cross. That's what the word means. So when you hear someone say, "I'm in excruciating pain," they're saying, "I'm being crucified on a cross." The excruciation was only in Jesus Christ.

The difference between David is that he is praying for God to deliver him. Jesus Christ is delivered through death and He doesn't deliver Himself through His own death, He delivers you and me. His resurrection is based upon something entirely different. It's upon Him. David wants to be spared through death and Jesus Christ says, "I'm going to spare you through my death."

He suffered so we don't have to. He took it on so we don't have to. He bore your sin and mine so we don't have to bear them.

[Lepine:] David is obviously one of the guys in the Old Testament who got it. You know you read Psalm fifty-one where he says:

“Lord You don’t require sacrifices or else I would give them. The sacrifice You require is in a broken and a contrite spirit.”

I remember reading that and going,

“No David. God does require sacrifices of you.”

But David goes, “Yeah, but I see what it’s all about.”

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] “I understand what God’s pointing to.”

He didn’t understand everything about the coming Messiah, but he understood enough through divine revelation and through maybe his own study of the Scriptures -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - and the typology that is seen through the Old Testament. He had a pretty good picture of what God was going to do.

[Easley:] Again, I think we often sell the prophets of old short. I think they had a better Christology than most Christians today -

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] - and certainly some of the things he penned again, in my sanctified imagination, I see him wheeling back and reading and singing those and going, “Wow! I hadn’t seen even what he penned because of the inspiration of God’s Spirit.”

[Lepine:] When we got to our study of the Gospel of John, which was a long study we did hear on *inContext*, -

[Easley:] You have to preach something. [Laughing] You may as well, you know?

[Lepine:] [Laughing] I remember when we got to John chapter nine you said this is one of my favorite portions -

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] - of all of Scripture. It’s the story of the recovery of sight to the man who was born blind and of course the account is a remarkable account, but what it teaches us about our own spiritual blindness is really at the heart of what Jesus was demonstrating when He healed that man.

[Easley:] That’s the progression of unbelief; of disbelief. As we start out going, “Oh, I don’t know. I don’t believe Him. This can’t be true.” And when you start that way, you remain in your blindness.

On the other side, we have the progression of faith. The man who's blind in verse eleven, all he knows is the guy's name is Jesus. That's all he knows. He hasn't seen Him yet. He's the one they call Jesus. In verse seventeen he says, "He's a prophet."

In verse twenty-eight the Pharisees say of the blind man, "You're one of His followers; you're a disciple of His."

And in verse thirty-three he says, "I don't know where He's from, but if He wasn't from God, He couldn't do this."

And then verse thirty-eight, he believes. One is a progression of faith and one is a progression of disbelief; of no faith.

In very recent days I have worked with people in both places and it's been remarkable. One person, for years I have tried to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with this person. For years. And we have made gains and losses over the years. And most recently I made a little overture. It was not bold or brash or rude or confrontational. It was a little overture just to open the spiritual discussion again and they slammed the door so loud it's still ringing in my ears.

They have started from a posture of, "Michael, that's your life; that's your crutch. I don't need that stuff." Just like the Pharisees. Confident; they know it all; they're arrogant; they don't need it. That's okay. That's where he is right now.

The other man I met just several weeks back and his wife came to Christ about six weeks ago and this man is laid out with a very strange disease that paralyzes your body and goes out the other way, hopefully. And I went to see him in the hospital. We spent a couple hours in the book of Job and we talked about illness and why these things happen. I just asked him, "Why do you think this has happened?"

And his answers were priceless. "Maybe I'm going to fast. Maybe," in so many words "maybe I've become materialistic. Maybe -"

I said, "Would you say that God's getting your attention?"

He said, "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah."

And we went through the Gospel of Christ and I don't arm wrestle people to believe or not believe in Jesus. I even used that expression, I said, "I'm not going to arm wrestle you over this, but you need to come to the place in your life where you trust Christ. Would you be ready to do that now?"

He goes, "Yes, I would. I need to do this."

So right then and there we walked through the Gospel. Jesus loved him. He died for him; paid for his sins and if he believes in Jesus, he'll have eternal life. And we prayed together, he and his wife and I, and I wish I had a hidden video camera of his wife's face and his face as we left that meeting. He moved from the camp of death into the camp of life, believing.

And Jesus Christ poses the same question to every one of us. Do you believe that He is the Son of Man? Have you believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man? I find that marvelous that a physician can diagnose, prescribe and we swallow. That to me is a remarkable equation, and yet when the Spiritual Physician diagnoses, "It's sin" and prescribes, "I have to die for you."

He swallows, we get everything and people will resist. Isn't that remarkable? Because it is the Spirit of God who moves in men and women's hearts to call them to Himself. If you're here today, and my greatest fear about Immanuel, I've said it before, is that you sit in this church for years, nodding politely, trying to stay awake some of the time, mildly entertained, but you've never trusted Jesus Christ.

Can you answer the question today in the affirmative, "I believe in the Son of Man. I believe in Him."

And if you cannot, then today could be the first day for you to embrace the truth of trusting Christ to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. He took it. He paid for it. He took the pill. He died in our place.

[Lepine:] You know the unbelief that is represented by this man's blindness also shows up in our unbelief about our own spiritual condition. As we were going through the study of the life of Jonah, you get to chapter two and Jonah has to own up to his sin and Michael, you made the point in that study that rather than trying to owning up to that sin, we try to find ways in our own life to excuse our sin.

[Easley:] Again, one of the challenges culturally, we've become a people of victimhood. We are all entitlement oriented. We all want to blame somebody else. I get so tired of watching this stuff in the news. Why can't people just say,

"Yeah, I killed my wife."

Why do they go through lying and lying and lying and we worship the law and we worship all these things. Everyone says, "Everyone knows this person is guilty."

Cindy and I watch the news and go, "How many guys are going to kill their wives this year?"

This is insane and some of these men will get away with it because we've got a culture that has celebrated the right of the victim and that everybody's end is entitled. I love those freedoms and liberties but theologically if people would own their sin it would be a different world.

I remember when President Richard Nixon lied about Watergate. I remember after it all came to light, it was pretty hard to argue with tapes in those days. Today we could probably figure a way to do it, but in those days it was pretty much a smoking gun for Richard Nixon's presidency. I often thought that if Richard Nixon would have said, "I did authorize the wiretap. I shouldn't have done it."

You know what would've happened? Congress would have slapped him on the wrist and they would have built his library. But instead he fought them and we see it with a lot of

leaders today. They simply can't say, "It was a weak moment. I made a poor choice. It was my fault."

Cindy and I know a person on the Hill who was caught doing something. It wasn't an egregious sin. It wasn't an immoral sense of an affair or a sexual sin. He was stealing some other people's writing and when he was caught he admitted it. He said, "I am guilty."

I honor him for at least admitting it. It will be very different if he owns his sin than if he denies and tries to get around it. Prayer is an acknowledgment that I am a sinful person and I said all the time and I need God's forgiveness and help.

Thirdly, Jonah deserved death not deliverance. YAHWEH was gracious to Jonah to spare his life. YAHWEH was gracious to the sailors on the boat to spare their lives and God is gracious to you and me. We do not deserve salvation men and women. I don't care what church you grew up in, what denomination you were bread and buttered in, I don't care if your parents were founding elders and pastors and whatever they were, we do not deserve salvation. We deserve death. We deserve separation. Jonah is an illustration. Not the Ninevites. Not the Phoenician sailors. Least of which Jonah deserved to be saved.

This is a story tucked away in the Old Testament; the God of justice of the Old Testament. We might say He's bending over backwards and getting His feet wet trying to illustrate that we don't deserve it but it is a miracle of God and of YAHWEH that He saves.

Fourth, YAHWEH does not punish indiscriminately. I talked about this at the beginning. God doesn't punish enemy nations and sinful people and stubborn prophets at a whim. God is incredibly patient.

Last, then we will conclude, is that I want you to notice this kind, sovereign YAHWEH. Again the fish says "yes" to God. Everything we're going to see in the book says "yes" to God except the stubborn prophet. I wish chapter two verses nine and ten was the end of the book. I wish it would stop right there.

*"But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.
That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the LORD."
Then the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.*

The end. I would love it if it ended there but it doesn't, does it? It gets worse. But, it is a great provocative reminder of the grace and the patience of this kind Sovereign that He would invoke us and invoke the Jew in the context and use Jonah, this reluctant, stubborn, disobedient prophet to show the world, He is a kind Sovereign. It's one thing to be Sovereign but it's a very different thing to be a kind Sovereign.

[Lepine:] You know Michael, listening back to these excerpts from your messages, it's just a great reminder that no matter which page of Scripture you land on, on any given day, there's treasure there, isn't there?

[Easley:] My hope is that every time a person is exposed to it, they close the Book saying, "What do I need to do as a result of what I've read?"

[Lepine:] Well, and we also hope that folks will stay in touch with us through our website, incontextradio.org. In the days ahead Michael, that's the best way to keep up with what's happening through the ministry, right?

[Easley:] Right. We'll be diverting. All the new broadcasts will be going to the website and to some other stations in the near future. We'll also have everything accessible there for free. If people want to download or listen online, they'll be able to do that at their leisure. So we again give just a tremendous "Thank You" to Moody Radio for their kindness in continuing the program through the end of the month and their graciousness to continue using some of their resources as we move more to the internet and to some new stations.

[Lepine:] Well, and I know how much you love great preaching and beginning Monday on many of these stations this time slot's going to be filled with a program called *Today in the Word* that's going to feature some of the best messages that have been preached at Moody Bible Conferences over the last four decades.

I hope our listeners will continue to tune in to hear great preaching just as they've done over the last year with *inContext* as Moody debuts *Today in the Word* on Monday with many of these stations and I hope they'll join us back tomorrow for our final program of *inContext* with Michael Easley.