

## GOD'S LOVE IS FOR EVERYONE

*Genesis 12:1–3; Matthew 15:21-28; Ephesians 2:11–22*

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Last Sunday we met Josh,<sup>1</sup> a 1<sup>st</sup> century street preacher and political activist with a degree in Social & Political Thought.<sup>2</sup> We touched base with him in the morning as he got up, had breakfast, and left for the day with his friends. We re-joined him in the afternoon, catching up with him when he engaged in a conversation with Jim, a questioning and searching money manager. Today we get to spend some time with Josh again, this time, on a different day, in the evening as he is trying to fall asleep.

Josh tossed and turned in his bed, unable to fall asleep. The woolen blanket seemed more scratchy than usual, the mattress more lumpy. No matter where he lay on the bed or how he turned—one side and then the other, on his stomach and then on his back—he could not fall asleep. Finally he admitted to himself that it wasn't the bed nor the blanket. The reason he could not sleep was the stuff turning and churning in his head. He could not stop thinking about what had happened earlier that day, the conversation with a strange woman.

Josh realized that until he sorted that out in his head, he would not fall asleep. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and slipped his feet into his sandals. Throwing a blanket over his shoulders and grabbing a jug of wine from the cupboard, he headed out the door and into the back yard. Josh stoked the still glowing coals in the cooking fire and added a couple of pieces of wood. The branches caught quickly and he had a small but comfortable fire. He took a swallow or two of the wine and sat down on the ground, his back against a rock, and stared into the flames. He had to figure out what had happened today and what it meant. It had the possibility of turning his whole life's mission and sense of calling from God on its head. He determined to sit here and think and pray till he had this stuff sorted out. Throwing another

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<sup>1</sup> The English name "Jesus" comes through the Latin from the Greek *Yaesous*. *Yaesous* comes from the Hebrew *Yeshua* or *Yehosua*. This is our English "Joshua." So for the purposes of this story the man we know as Jesus is called Josh.

<sup>2</sup> In a sermon entitled "Enough." A copy is available as per footnote #1 above.

branch on the fire and taking another drink of the wine, Josh pushed the ‘rewind button’ in his mind and went back to the scene and experience shortly after lunch.

Josh and his group of special friends had left the Galilee and headed north into Phoenicia to get away from the crowds and spend some time to themselves. Given Josh’s reputation by now, his days were hectic and often filled with tension because the religious leaders really seemed, every day and wherever he went, out to trip him up and to get him. He was always on edge. So, some time away to relax and to spend it in more casual conversation with his friends seemed “just what the doctor ordered.” Walking along leisurely, sometimes in serious conversation, sometimes joking and even poking fun at each other—put 12 or so young men together and add a half dozen or more women to the group and you are bound to have some good times—walking along, they came close to one of the villages. A woman from the village came out and started shouting at the group. At first they just ignored her. As she came closer, they noticed she was yelling at Josh in particular, and it was getting more and more annoying. They had come here for some peace and quiet and not to deal with people again, and especially not with the non-Jews that lived in the area. After all, God had called them, and particularly Josh, to deliver God’s message of hope and healing to the Jews and more specifically to the Jews who were often outcasts and suffering in poverty, shame, and loneliness. This woman, a descendant of the people who had been nothing but trouble for Josh’s ancestors, often massacring whole villages, and therefore an enemy—there were still bitter feelings toward the Canaanites—this enemy woman was now expecting help. She was not part of the “house of Israel” and came nowhere near to having the right faith. She was an idol worshipper and who knew what still went on in their temples. Why should they care for her and her daughter and help her daughter get well? God neither loved Canaanites and other Gentiles nor meant them to experience healing. Heck, as the Jews often said, they were dogs, fit only to fuel the fires of hell. And yet, even then, something had been niggling at the back of Josh’s mind that he couldn’t quite push away, that kept insisting on attention though he wasn’t sure what it was.

Josh’s friends finally spoke up. “Come on Josh, send this woman away already! She’s not one of us.”

“I know,” Josh replied. “My mission, and you guys know this, is to the Jews, the house of Israel. There is more than enough work for me there.” It was weird, as Josh thought back on it. It had almost been as if he had been trying to convince himself and yet, why would he have to? His God-given mission was clear—hope and love and healing to God’s people, the Jews.

Josh walked up to the woman. “Look, lady. Enough already,” he said, looking straight at her. “You know the rules. You don’t take the children’s food and give it to the dogs.” Though she didn’t show it on her face, the woman grimaced inwardly. She knew the Jews thought of her and her people as dogs, called them that even to their faces. She had heard it often enough. She had hoped, from the stories she had heard, that this Josh guy might be different. “I guess not.” But she was not going to give up. She was desperate for her daughter. Without this man’s help, she would die, sooner rather than later.

So, she had a comeback for Josh. “Yeah, I know. But you also know when kids eat they often drop scraps and crumbs on the floor and the dogs eat that stuff. I’m just asking for a few crumbs, a couple of leftover scraps.” At first Josh was struck speechless by her audacity. Then the shock at her audacity turned to admiration. There was faith here, much to his surprise. A refusal to give up. A mother’s love for her daughter like God’s love for God’s people. Where else could that come from but from God? A realization that God was at work here forced its way to the very front of Josh’s brain. An insistence that God loved her and her daughter enough to heal the little girl. Josh could not turn his back on her. And so he said: “Go home lady. Your daughter will greet you at the door. Totally healed. I admire your faith.” Had he really said that last part, suggesting this heathen had faith, faith completely separate from God’s temple, God’s Torah, God’s practices, God’s Chosen people? He had, before he had been able to stop himself. His friends had stood around, open-mouthed, unable to believe what they were hearing.

Josh had been very quiet the rest of the afternoon and his friends had somehow realized that they best leave him alone. They even put their own joking and laughing aside, instinctively knowing this was not the time.

Now, here, outside, beside the fire with the glorious canopy of stars overhead, Josh replayed the scene in his mind, again and again. Each time as he went through it—what he had thought, what he had said, what she had said, what he had done—that “thing” that had been niggling at the back of his mind moved a little closer to the centre, came into a little clearer focus, and then he pushed it away. It could not be! It went against everything he had been taught in synagogue school and everything he had believed about his mission.

As he sat there, he thought he heard something, music as if wafted on the breeze. He cocked his head and listened.

*(Play music)*

Given the timeless nature of music, a song from the future was being played and sung in his backyard.

*God's love is for everybody  
Everyone around the world  
You and me and all God's children  
From across the street to around the world.  
From across the street to around the world.<sup>3</sup>*

Once more that which had been on the outside edge of his horizon came towards the centre of his thinking and now there was not stopping it. With the words of the song ringing in his ears, it burst into the very centre of his thinking like a huge flash of light, like a star from above landing in the yard in front of him, like God throwing that star right at him as if to say: “Come on, Josh, don’t you get it?! How dense are you?!” And then Josh knew. A brand new, earth-shaking, world-view shattering revelation. God’s love was not meant just for the people God had chosen 2000 years ago. God’s blessing was not intended simply for Abraham and his descendants to be followed by a narrower restriction to the descendants of Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, later called Israel. God’s love was meant for everyone. “Everyone one around the world. You and me and all God’s children, from across the street to around the world. From across the street to around the world.” This was the greatest news ever, the most profound insight anyone had ever

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan Moyer Suderman, “God’s Love is for Everyone” from the collection with the same title. Available on YouTube. Also available from Bryan at [SmallTall Ministries | engaging all ages in the scriptural story of God's love.](#)

received. As the song continue in his ears and on the breeze danced around the fire and sang with it. “God’s love is for everyone.”<sup>4</sup>

*(I suggest you go to Spotify and listen to the song. The artist is Bryan Moyer Suderman. The song’s title is “God’s Love is for Everyone.”)*

God did not intend there to be any barriers between people and religions. God did not prefer one group of people or one religion over another one. Healing and hope were meant for everyone. Starting tomorrow, he was going to re-jig his entire mission. It was time that all people knew they were loved by God, that all people knew they were part of God’s family, that there were many ways to experience God. Healing and hope, love and peace were to be seen, admired, nurtured and grown wherever they were found and however they were expressed.

And Josh knew the first thing he would do, or at least do as soon as possible. Once they got back to Galilee he and his friends would go to the other side of the lake, the side where there were no Jews, only heathen non-Jews, and just like he had fed the 5000 to show the Jews God was alive and at work among them, caring for them and feeding them, he would feed thousands to show the heathens that God was alive and at work among them, caring for them and feeding them. Blessing them. As he rolled that phrase around in his mind—blessing them—he suddenly stopped. Why had he not seen this sooner? Why had the rabbis never talked about this in synagogue worship and synagogue school? God had told Abraham that God would bless him. They, as Abraham’s descendants, had always banked on that. Now, as Josh repeated that story in his mind, he noticed something that the rabbis had never talked about. There was a phrase there that was absolutely crucial to this entire story: “I will bless you,” said God to Abraham, **“so that you may be a blessing to others.”**<sup>5</sup> God’s intention: to bless all people, not just some. And God had specifically told Abraham God had not picked him for who he was or what he believed. God simply picked Abraham and now Josh realized God had picked all people. They were all God’s people, all part of God’s family, all walking hand in hand in

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<sup>4</sup> From Bryan’s first CD: <http://www.smalltallministries.com/music/recordings/gods-love-is-for-everybody/>. If you go to <http://www.smalltallministries.com/about/> you will notice it is the song that set his own career in song writing, singing and teaching into motion.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 12:1-3. Emphasis mine.

God's presence. The only ones not part of that circle were those who judged others and what they believed and tried to shut others out of the circle, suggesting they were not welcomed by God, not wanted by God, unless they became the same.<sup>6</sup>

Josh realized a new age had truly dawned, an age like no other. All people together working on God's dream. Expressed in different ways in different cultures but all on the same side. Wow! This was truly going to be great!

Josh, whom we know better as Jesus, caught the vision. And he did go feed the Gentile heathen just like he had fed the Jews. In Matthew's telling of the stories, all the symbols in the feeding of the 5000 are Jewish, all the symbols in the feeding of the 4000 are Roman and Greek. And both feedings, given the language they use of "Took, Blessed, Broke, and Gave" are communion table stories. Jesus shared communion with everyone indicating everyone was in, everyone was welcome, everyone was part of God's family, **not** after they had done certain things or believed certain things but now, who they were and as they were.

This idea was tough for the early Christians to grasp, despite all Jesus did and taught. Then Peter had his vision and Cornelius got the Holy Spirit. Still it was tough. Paul did catch the vision and when he came to Athens, he was eager to speak to the philosophers and debate with them. In that context he took one of their altars, the one to an unknown God and plugged in the message of the God revealed in Jesus. Partnering did not mean ignoring Jesus but it meant bringing that which is unique in Jesus to the larger table where all people might gather.

That is our mission today. There is that which is unique in Jesus which can add to that which is present in the teachings of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, First Nation folk, and others. There is much they can learn from Jesus. There is much we can learn from them. At the foundation they are all about God's love and peace, God's healing and hope touching the lives of everyone. It is as we hold hands together with the others that that dream of God can become a reality. The realization that "God's love is for everyone" and the willingness to partner with any and all who would partner with us to bring God's peace and love to the world,

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this topic—those excluded by God—ask for my sermon, "SC Courthouse or UG Coffeehouse," by emailing [jumpintothestory@sasktel.net](mailto:jumpintothestory@sasktel.net).

will help create the kind of world God first created in Genesis and re-created in the resurrection of Jesus.