

BIG QUESTION UNDER INVESTIGATION

We're in... Unit 7: The Law-Giving God

Unit 7 Big Question and Answer and Song:

"What Are God's Laws Like?

God's Laws Are Perfect!" *PFI ESV Songs 7, Tracks 3,4*

Unit 7 Bible Verse and Song: Psalm 19:7,9,11, ESV

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; (sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned;) in keeping them there is great reward."

PFI ESV Songs 7, Tracks 5,6

BIBLE TRUTH

We're learning... Bible Truth 2:

God Created Us Perfect Law-Keepers, But We Are All Lawbreakers

God created Adam and Eve without sin. They kept God's laws perfectly. They loved Him as they should; and, they loved each other as they should. They pleased God with their "works." That is, they pleased God with how they lived because they loved Him perfectly in their hearts, and they obeyed Him and His good laws perfectly in their lives.

But when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, their hearts and lives became sinful. No longer could they please God with their works, because no longer could they live perfectly. They were spoiled with sin.

Sin didn't stop there. It spread down to all of Adam and Eve's children, too. It even spreads down to us, too. Yes, just like Adam and Eve, we have sinful hearts. We break God's good laws with our thoughts, words, and actions.

God is good and He hates sin. God would not be good if He did not hate it. But, oh, how terrible is God fair punishment for breaking His laws! It is death: separation from Him and His good ways forever! This is what we all deserve.

Yet, God is so merciful to sinners like us! He sent His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect live here on earth and offer it up as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all who would ever turn from their sins and trust in Him as their Savior. Because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life with God!

BIBLE VERSE

How do I know this is true? The Bible tells me so!

Bible Truth 2 Bible Verse: Psalm 14:2-3

The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.

CASE STORY

Luke 18:35-19:11

Our story is: The Case of the Tiny Terror.

As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. Who was the Tiny Terror? Who was he a terror to? Why?
2. Why could he not be in fellowship with God or God's people? How did this change?

This story takes place in New Testament times, while Jesus lived on earth.

In Israel, there was a city many nicknamed "Little Paradise." All year round this city enjoyed warm weather, even when the rest of Israel had snow. Springs watered the land, so that no one was ever thirsty and so crops could grow year round. There were beautiful rose gardens throughout the city, especially in the Royal Gardens of Archaelus, son of Herod the Great, who ruled that part of Israel from his splendid palace there.

But perhaps best of all was the air of Little Paradise. It was filled with the sweet smell of balsam leaves that drifted along the breeze from the large balsam plantations planted there. There were few places in the world where balsam could grow; and no where was it as fine as here at "Little Paradise." Merchants from Egypt to Arabia came to buy balsam here. Many fought and died to win Little Paradise and its balsam trees. They wanted to grow rich from selling the perfume and the healing medicine made from its leaves and sap.

At the time of our story, Little Paradise had fallen under the control of the Romans. There still were plenty of Jews who lived and worked there, but a part of just about everything that was made, bought or sold in Little Paradise went to the Romans in the form of a tax. With all those merchants coming in and out of Little Paradise to buy that priceless balsam perfume and medicine, there was a whole lot of tax money to be collected. Little Paradise was one of three richest tax collection stations in all of Israel.

Tax collecting was hard, thankless work that the Romans would rather not do. The Jews hated the tax collectors for taking their hard earned money and giving it to the Romans. They spit on them. The Jewish elders even allowed the people to break one of the Ten Commandments and lie to the tax collectors about how much they bought and sold! The Romans wanted to get tax money without having the hassles of collecting it, so they got Jews to collect it

for them. "We'll make a deal with you," the Romans would say, "You collect all our tax money and whatever extra you can squeeze out is yours. We don't care what you do to the people to get the money or how much extra you collect for yourself," they said. "Just get the job done. Soon you will be very rich. Doesn't that sound good!?" they said. Most Jews refused, but a few who found all that money irresistible. One such man was a man named Mr. Pure-Righteous--as his parents called him.

If Mr. Pure-Righteous' parents had known what their son would grow up to be, I'm sure they would have never given him such a name. Really, it's not a good name for any person, for all people though created by God to be law-keepers, have all rebelled against God and have become lawbreakers. No one is Pure-Righteous by keeping God's laws.

But as it turned out, this name was to be a particularly bad choice for this child, for he grew up to be one of the greediest, wicked men in all of Little Paradise. A far better name would have been Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous --and so we shall call him--for this man did not just grow up to be a tax collector. He grew up to be an architelones: a chief tax collector! Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous headed up tax collection for Little Paradise as well as for goods passing through that whole part of Israel. As boss of the other tax-collectors, he encouraged them to get all the money they could from people, then he took a big, fat amount for himself before handing the rest over to the Romans.

Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous became very rich from all he had stolen in the name of tax-collecting--and also, very hated. The other Jews spit on him. He wasn't allowed in the synagogue or the Temple to worship. No decent person would allow him to step foot in their house or even eat or talk with him. His wickedness made him "unclean," as they called it—not fit for fellowship with God or with God's people. When he made contact with them or their homes, they became "unclean", too. Only tax collectors and other outcasts would have anything to do with him.

What a terrible life! God created us to be law keepers who know and love Him and each other. Life as a lawbreaker would never bring happiness, as Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous was finding out. Only life lived with God, according to His good ways can. But what could be done now? Surely there was no hope for Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous....or was there?

On one warm, spring afternoon some exciting news spread through the streets of Little Paradise faster than balsam scent in the breeze. "He's coming! He's coming! The Rabbi Jesus is coming!" people exclaimed. "He and his disciples are with a crowd from Galilee headed to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. He's just healed the blind man who begs on the road outside of town! Now they're headed this way!" they said.

This was big news indeed! Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous was just as excited as everyone else...and perhaps more so. Even he had heard about this rabbi who spoke powerfully and did amazing miracles. But perhaps there was something else besides curiosity going on inside of Mr. Unpure- Unrighteous when he heard Jesus was coming. Perhaps there was a glimmer of hope in his heart. Other Jewish teachers would have nothing to do with lawbreakers like himself, but this Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners...He forgave sins. He had even made Levi, the tax collector of Capernaum, one of His twelve closest disciples!

People often left their work and lined the streets to cheer the Jews on their way to Passover. An even larger crowd that usual gathered now just to see Jesus. Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous wanted to see Him, too; but he was too short to see over the crowd and too hated to be helped.

The crowd praised God as Jesus, followed by His disciples, other Jews, and the healed blind man entered Little Paradise. But poor, tiny, Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous could see nothing! Suddenly an idea came to him. Running on down the street ahead of the crowd, Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous climbed up a mulberry-fig tree as Jesus was about to pass that way.

The tree was perfect. He, Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous could hide in the leaves from the eyes of Jesus—and everyone else, yet, he could see Jesus perfectly. After all, he knew he was unpure and unrighteous. He was a lawbreaker; and Jesus was a great rabbi. What would Jesus say to him, if He knew what all the people in Little Paradise knew?

But Jesus DID know what they knew and even more! He was the Son of God. He knew everything there was to know. Matter of fact, Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous was one of the very reasons Jesus had come to Little Paradise. Jesus had come to save lawbreakers who trusted in Him as their Savior, forgiving their sins and making them Pure and Righteous in God's eyes, with His own Pure Righteousness.

God had planned that today would be the day of salvation for this poor lawbreaker of a man.

Jesus came to mulberry-fig tree, called Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous by name, then said the most incredible thing: "Hurry and come down from the tree, for I must stay at your house today."

"Jesus knows my name without me even telling Him! He wants to stay with me! He wants fellowship with me! A man so unpure and so unrighteous! Perhaps there is hope for a lawbreaker like me, after all." Joyfully, he climbed down the tree and led Jesus and His disciples to his home.

Mr Unpure and Unrighteous rejoiced, but others grumbled. "Jesus has gone to be the guest of a sinner! He should have stayed at the priest's house, not at the unclean house of a wicked man!" they said.

But Jesus knew they were wrong. It wasn't just Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous who was a lawbreaker and sinner; they all were! He had come to save all who would turn away from their sins and trust in Him as his Savior. Even a man like Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous could be made Pure-Righteous before God by Jesus' Pure Righteousness.

That night Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous shared with Jesus and His disciples his fine food and luxurious home, but surely it was Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous who received the greatest gift that night. Imagine how hope must have grown in his heart when he met Levi, the tax collector from Capernaum who had turned from his wicked ways and become one of Jesus' closest friends! Imagine how wonderful it must have been when Jesus offered him—Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous—forgiveness of sins and salvation through faith in Himself, the Messiah, the Pure-Righteous Son of God!

That very day, Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous turned from his sins and believed in Jesus with joy. His sins were forgiven. At last he lived up to the name his parents had given him. Through Jesus, he was truly Mr. Pure-Righteous now!

The first thing Mr. Pure-Righteous wanted to do was to change the way he treated the people of Little Paradise. He stood up in front of Jesus and the people and said, "Lord, half of everything I have I give to the poor. And to anyone I have wronged, I will give them back four times what I wrongly took from them."

The people were amazed. "Give away half of all he has to the poor! The teachers of the law say don't give away more than one-fifth of what you have. Give back four times

what he took! That's what thieves were supposed to do! Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous really is a changed man!"

This time Jesus agreed with the people of Little Paradise. Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous was a changed man. Just like his great-great-great-grandfather Abraham who believed in the LORD and was counted Pure-Righteous for his faith in Him, now Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous had become Mr. Pure-Righteous through his faith in Jesus. "Today, salvation has come to this house, since this man also a son of Abraham," Jesus told them, "for the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Our Bible Truth is: God Created Us as Perfect Lawkeepers, but We Are All Lawbreakers

Our Bible Verse is: Psalm 14:2-3

"The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one."

Who are you most like? The people of Little Paradise? Do you look at certain other people and think of them as lawbreakers and sinners, but not see that you, too, are a lawbreaker and sinner? The Bible tells us that not one of us is a perfect law keeper as God created us to be. We all deserve God's eternal punishment for our sins. Confess your sins and turn in faith to Jesus as your Savior!

Or perhaps you are more like Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous. You are afraid you are too sinful to be forgiven by God? Confess your sins and trust in Jesus as your Savior, too. He promised that whoever comes to Him, He will never, ever drive away. He can save you, too, no matter what you have done. Let's praise God for sending His Son to seek and save sinful people like you and me. Let's ask God to give us soft hearts that see our own sin and turn and trust Him as our own Savior.

Close in prayer.

NOTE on story: This is the story of Zacchaeus the tax collector from Jericho. In an effort to help the children notice new things about this very familiar story, I opted to use "Little Paradise" as a nickname for how the Jews thought of Jericho; and Mr. Pure-Righteous for Zacchaeus, the meaning of his Hebrew name. Feel free to use the real names instead of these nicknames, if it will better suit your children.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False:
 God sent His Son, Jesus, to live a perfect live here on earth and offer it up as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all who would ever turn from their sins and trust in Him as their Savior. Because of Jesus, our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life with God!
 Answer: True.

2. Crack the Case Questions

a. Who was the Tiny Terror? Who was he a terror to? Why?
 Answer: Mr. Unpure-Unrighteous (Zachaeus). He was a terror to the people of Jericho because of the way he collected tax money from them--too much and with cruel methods.

b. Why could he not be in fellowship with God or God's people? How did this change?
 Answer: Because of how he chose to live a life of sin and would not turn away from it (repent). Through Jesus, he learned how his sins could be forgiven. At last, he turned away from them and trusted in Jesus as his Savior. He was restored in fellowship with God and His people.

3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse:
Psalm 14:2-3
 The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is ____, one who seeks God. All have ____ ____; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even ____.
 Answers: wise; turned aside; one.

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN

At the Cross
PFI ESV Songs 7, Tracks 11,12

Verse 2
 Was it for crimes that I had done
 He groaned upon the tree?
 Amazing pity, grace unknown,
 And love beyond degree!

Refrain
 At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
 And the burden of my heart rolled away,
 It was there by faith I received my sight,
 And now I am happy all the day.

Verse 3
 Well might the sun in darkness hide,
 And shut his glories in,
 When Christ the mighty Maker died
 For man, the creature's sin. *Refrain*

Words: Isaac Watts Music: Ralph E. Hudson

Because we are all lawbreakers, we deserve God's eternal punishment. There will never be anything we can do to earn back eternal life with God. But at the cross where Jesus, the perfect law keeper gave up His life as the payment for all who would ever turn from their sins and trust in Him, that we can find forgiveness and eternal life. By His perfect sacrifice, all of "crimes" and "burdens" can be "rolled away" forever. What amazing love! What grace--what kindness that we never deserved! That Jesus, the very Son of God, through whom all things were made, would choose to come suffer and die on the cross to save sinful creatures like you and me. All who have Jesus as their Savior do have reason to be happy all the day, every day! There's is eternal life with God!

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY

A=Adoration, C=Confession, T=Thanksgiving, S=Supplication

A God, we praise You or being our Savior! You are so merciful to sinful people.

C God, we confess that many times, we are like Zacchaeus. We want to have good things and are willing to harm others to get them. We need a Savior, just like Zacchaeus.

T God, thank You for promising to send a Savior to save all those who turn from their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior, no matter how sinful they have been.

S God, work in our hearts! Help us to turn away from our sins and trust Jesus as our own Savior. Change our lives so that we don't just say we believe in Jesus, but we show it in how we turn away from our old ways of sinning, just like Zacchaeus did.

BIBLE VERSE SONG

The LORD Looks Down
PFI ESV Songs 7, Track 13

The LORD looks down from heaven,
 On the human race,
 To see if there is one who's wise,
 One who seeks God
 But all have turned away;
 All alike have become corrupt.
 There is no one who does good,
 No, not even one.
 Psalm Fourteen, two and three.

Words adapted from Psalm 14:2-3, HCSB Constance Dever © 2011

Adam and Eve were created with hearts that sought after God. They were perfect law keepers who were not corrupt and did not turn aside from God. But after they rebelled, they and all their children after them turned aside. Yes, the LORD sees everything and knows everything. He knows what is in each of our hearts. We all have sinful hearts and do sinful things. We have all become corrupt with sin. None of us seek after God on our own. But praise God for sending Jesus to be the Savior of sinners like us! Praise God for sending His Holy Spirit to work in our hearts! God gives us hope! He can do in us what we could never do for ourselves!