

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 3:

God Gave Us His Laws To Convict Us Of Sin, That We Might Be Saved

God made each of us with a heart that tells us what is right and wrong. When we hear God's laws, we know that they are right. When we disobey God's laws, we know that we are doing wrong. We know we are not the perfect law-keepers God created us to be and calls us to be.

God's laws remind us that we deserve God's punishment for our sins, but that's not all God has planned for His laws to do. He has also planned for His laws to show us our sin, that we would turn away from our sins and be saved.

God loves to save sinners! Jesus promised that whoever comes to Him, repenting of their sins and trusting in Him as their Savior, He will never turn away. No matter how bad of a lawbreaker they have been, He will forgive their sins and save them. He will forgive us all of our sins, if we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior.

BIBLE VERSE

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

Bible Truth 3 Bible Verse: Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

CASE STORY

Matthew 3,4,5,14; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 3,2

Our story is: The Case of the Convicting Convict. As you listen to the story, see if you can figure out:

1. A convict is someone who has been arrested and put in jail. Who was the convict? Why was he in jail?
2. Who did he hope to convict of his sins that he might repent? Did this person repent?

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

Away from village and city. Away from family, friends and their everyday lives, people were going. Out into the hot, dry wilderness of Judea. Why? To listen to the words of a wild-looking man named John, living out there near the Jordan River. John looked like Prophet Elijah, with his long, uncut hair and his camel-hair sackcloth clothes. He sounded like Prophet Elijah, too, as he gave his urgent message: "Repent for the kingdom of God is near!"

The people listened and wondered: "Could the Messiah be coming at last? Was John the 'voice crying in the wilderness' to prepare the way for the LORD, the Messiah?" Many believed he was. So crowds of people from Judea, Jordan and Jerusalem journeyed out into the wilderness to see and to listen.

But John's message wasn't a message of see and listen. It was a message of change. People needed to repent—to turn away in their hearts from their love of sin, and to turn away in their lives from the sinful ways they lived. This is what John was urging all to do.

But who **would** repent and believe? Many people did. They confessed their sins and were baptized by John there in the Jordan River. Their baptism was a sign of their repentance and their looking forward in faith to the forgiveness of sins God would give through the coming Messiah. Even people known as especially bad sinners came to be baptized, too. People like the Jewish tax collectors who had taken too much money from people. People like the Jewish soldiers who did cruel things to help the tax collectors come, too. They all repented, believed and were baptized.

But the Pharisees and Sadducees—the Jewish religious leaders—were a different matter. They refused to repent and believe: "Why should we, of all people, repent? We fast twice a week; we keep all of God's laws and even all the little rules that the Jewish teachers have made up. We

make our sacrifices; we give a tenth of everything we have—even our spices. We are ready for the Messiah already,” they thought. “Besides, God will save all the Jews, just because they are the sons and daughters of Abraham. Only really sinful people, like those tax collectors and soldiers, need to repent. Not us!” they said. “John is wrong. He certainly is NOT the prophet preparing the way for the Messiah!” they insisted.

But John knew the truth. All people are sinners who need God’s forgiveness. It didn’t matter who you were. How sad it was that the Pharisees and Sadducees believed if all Israel repented for a day, then Messiah would come. Yet they were the ones unwilling to repent themselves!

“You think you are right with God already, but your lives don’t show it,” John said to them. “No one is saved just because they come from Abraham’s family. I baptize people with water for repentance, to prepare them for the Messiah. After me He will come. He is more powerful than I—whose sandals I’m not even fit to carry! And He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will bring eternal life to those who repent and believe, but God’s judgment on those who will not. This will be what happens to you, if you don’t repent of your sins,” John warned then. Offended and furious, the Pharisees and Sadducees went to report what John was saying to the other leaders.

Then one day, John announced the Messiah had come! “Here He is, Jesus, the one God will use to take away the sins of the world!” Now there was more reason to get rid of John. Who was he to announce Jesus as the Messiah! They would must do something now!

But the Pharisees and Sadducees didn’t have to. King Herod, sitting in his luxurious palace, not far to the east of the Jordan River. Would take care of John instead. His spies reported to him about John: “You should see the crowds of people coming to hear him and be baptized!,” his spies told him. “The Pharisees and Sadducees hate John, but the common people, tax collectors and soldiers are repenting and being baptized. They love him,” they told Herod.

“You better watch John,” the spies warned. “He may become a powerful enemy. He says the Messiah is coming. He talks against you. He says your marriage to Herodias, your brother’s wife, is wrong. The people are listening. Be careful or he will turn them against you.”

Queen Herodias was furious when she heard this! It was

true. She had left her husband to be wife to the powerful King Herod. And as a daughter of the High Priest, Herodias knew God’s laws and that she had broken them. But she would not repent. She wanted John dead. “Silence that man!” she ordered.

Herod agreed, but he had to be careful. The people loved John. He must silence John without killing him to keep them happy. Herod posted guards and waited until John crossed the Jordan River into his territory. When he did, they seized him and put him in Herod’s dungeon there at Machaerus.

Even with John out of the way, Herod couldn’t stop thinking about him. “What is John like? I have to see him and hear him, myself,” Herod thought. So John be brought before him and Herod allowed him to speak: “I am the voice crying out in the wilderness,” John told him. “Prepare yourselves for the way of the LORD. The Kingdom of God is near. The Messiah is coming. Repent! You must not have Herodias, your brother’s wife!”

Herod was fascinated by John, but his words disturbed him. Him, repent?! He was half-Jew. He knew God’s laws and how he had broken them. Now God was graciously using John to offer Herod salvation.

Would Herod repent and believe in the coming Messiah? No, he would not! Herodias certainly wouldn’t either! She looked for a chance get rid of John for good.

At last it came. Herod threw a big party to celebrate the day he was crowned tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. High officials, military commanders and other important men came. As they climbed the steep cliff and entered the castle grounds, his guests could not help but be impressed with Machaerus. It looked out onto the rugged Judean wilderness and the lovely hills of Hebron from its 3800-foot perch above the Dead Sea. Herod had huge storehouses for grain and food; cisterns full of gallons of water; and an arsenal filled with every weapon imaginable. It was all so amazing!

In the banquet hall, dinner went on for hours as dish after dish of fine food was served. Then came the entertainment. Salome, Herodias’ daughter, pleased them with her splendid dancing. Round and round, faster and faster, she leapt and twirled to the beat of the music, delighting everyone with her beauty and grace.

No one was more pleased with Salome’s dancing than Herod, himself. In front of all his guests he stood up and

said to her: "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you., up to half my kingdom," he promised.

"What shall I ask for?" Salome asked her mother.

At last the moment Herodias had waited for: "Ask for the head of John the Baptist," she coldly answered.

Salome went to the king and said: "Give me the head of John the Baptist...on a platter."

The king was so upset. What was he to do? He had made a promise to her before these important men! To refuse her might cause these men to distrust him. Herod wanted them to know he was a man of his promises. Oh, how Herodias had trapped her husband! Would he have John put to death, and anger the people who loved John? Or, would he save John's life and lose the respect of these men? And what about himself? Would Herod really add killing John to the long list of wicked things he had done already? Or, would he at last repent and prepare his heart for the Messiah whom John said was coming?

Herod gave into the pressure, brushing aside any stirring in his heart he answered, "You heard the girl. Send the executioner to the dungeon. Bring her John's head." The executioner did as he was told. John's head was brought in and given to Salome...then she gave it to her mother.

John the Baptist died that night in Machaerus, but that did not stop the plans of God. All that John had promised came true. The Messiah, Jesus, had come and He was bringing the Kingdom of God. Reports began to stream in to Herod from all over Galilee about Jesus. What amazing things he said and did! The the people who had repented of their sins and by faith prepared their hearts for salvation through Jesus, joyfully received Jesus and were saved.

But the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and Herod who had rejected John, rejected Jesus, too. The Pharisees and Sadducees had Jesus' arrested. Then on the very morning of Jesus' death, they had Him brought before Herod for questioning. Herod had been as curious about Jesus as he had been about John. Here was the Messiah standing right before him, would he seek the salvation John had promised Jesus would bring? No, he would not. He would not be convicted of his sins or repent of them. He would not believe in Jesus. He and his soldiers dressed Jesus in a purple robe and mocked Him; then sent Him back to be condemned to die. Once more God had shown Herod mercy, but once more he chose to keep his wicked ways with his wicked wife. What a sad end for King Herod!

Our Bible Truth is: God Gave Us His Laws to Convict Us of Sin That We Might Be Saved

Our Bible Verse is: Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will freely pardon."

How merciful God had been to Herod! How many times He urged Herod to repent and prepare his heart for the salvation that was to come through the Messiah. Yet every single time, Herod refused to repent. To the day he died--as far as we know--Herod never repented of his sins and believed in Jesus.

What about you and me? Are we shocked that Herod never repented of his sins? We shouldn't be. All of us, like Herod are lawbreakers with rebellious hearts. Too many times, we would rather keep our sinful, selfish ways rather than be convicted of our sins and turn to God. Let's praise God for His mercy shown to all of us, sinners. Let's praise Him for using His laws to convict us of our sins. Let's ask Him to send the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and the hearts of others that we all might repent, believe in Jesus, and be saved.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. A Question about the Bible Truth, True or False:

No matter how bad of a lawbreaker they have been, He will forgive their sins and save them. He will forgive us all of our sins, if we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior.

Answer: True. How merciful is the LORD!

2. Crack the Case Questions

a. A convict is someone who has been arrested and put in jail. Who was the convict? Why was he in jail?

Answer: John (the Baptist). Herod and his wife didn't like that he said that they were sinners for getting married. (She had been Herod's brother's wife first.)

2. Who did he hope to convict of his sins that he might repent? Did this person repent?

Answer Herod. No, he did not.

3. Fill in the missing words from the Bible Verse:

Isaiah 55:6-7

"Seek the LORD while he may be ___; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked ___ his way, and the unrighteous man his ___; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly ___."

Answers: Found; forsake; thoughts; pardon.

BIBLE TRUTH HYMN

Breathe on Me, Breath of God

PFI ESV Songs 7, Track 15

Verse 1

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Words: Edwin Hatch; Music: Robert Jackson

We are all sinners. We were made to love and obey God, but we have all turned away from that most wonderful of lives. Only God can change us and He can, by His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is nicknamed the "Breath of God." Our breath fills our body with the air that it needs to live. The Holy Spirit fills God's people with Himself so that they can know and love God and have His eternal life. God will send His Holy Spirit to work this way in us when we turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior. This song is a prayer asking Him to do this.

AN ACTS PRAYER FROM OUR STORY

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

A God, we praise You for being holy and yet so merciful! You call us all to repent of our sins that we might be saved through Jesus!

C God, we confess that we are sinners, like the people who heard John the Baptist's message. We also need to turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus as our Savior.

T God, we thank You for not leaving sinful people like us in our sins, but providing a way of salvation as Your free gift through Jesus.

S God, work in our hearts! Help us to turn away from our sins and trust in Jesus as our own Savior. Help us to live faithful lives, like John the Baptist--faithful to You, all the way to the day we die!

BIBLE VERSE SONG

Seek the LORD

PFI ESV Songs 7, Track 16

Seek the LORD while He may be found,
Call on Him while He is near,
Seek the LORD while He may be found,
Call on Him while He is near,
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts,
Let him return to the LORD,
That he may have compassion on him,
That he may have compassion on him,
Isaiah Fifty-five, six and seven.

Words: Isaiah 55:6-7, ESV Music: Constance Dever ©2011

What is wickedness and unrighteousness? It is disobeying God and His good laws. That means we all are wicked; we all are unrighteous. That means we all deserve God's just punishment for our sins. But God is so merciful! He uses His laws to show us our wickedness and unrighteousness that we might forsake (turn away from) our sin and turn to Him for forgiveness through Jesus and be saved. God will forgive our sins when we do this! Every single one!