

**The Story: “When Life Falls Apart”**  
**Sermon 2: Hard Truths in Hard Times / God Is Like Bacon**  
**January 11, 2015**

Good morning! Welcome back to The Story! We are taking most of a year to work our way through the greatest story ever. It’s the story of the Bible, in the words of the Bible, broken down into 31 chapters. We are about halfway done: chapter 15. Now the title of Chapter 15 in the book is, “God’s Messengers,” (it’s about the prophets in the Old Testament). But Randy and I thought of two other titles for this chapter. We could call it, “Hard Truths in Hard Times,” or we could call it, “God Is Like Bacon.” When we get done this morning you can choose which title fits best.

I suppose it is because there are so many frivolous lawsuits out there, but there are all these warning signs, and warning labels, and instructions on just about everything. And some of these warnings and instructions are amazingly stupid, I guess because so many people are amazingly stupid. Here are ten of my favorites.

- These are instructions on how to change a baby’s diaper. Now I don’t think anyone needs those instructions. I think with some trial and error they’d figure it out.
- Here are instructions that come with an iron. Down there in yellow: “Never iron clothes while they are being worn.” When I was teaching at the college there was a kid who tried. And he probably would have been okay, but he pressed the steam button.
- How about this one: “Touching wires causes instant death. \$200 fine.” I guess in case the instant death isn’t a good enough lesson.
- Here’s a danger sign: “Do not touch; not only will this kill you, it will hurt the whole time you’re dying.” Now that’s funny! It’s the second part that would keep most people from touching it.
- How about these instructions, for a thermometer: “Do not use orally, after using rectally!” At least until you wash it really, really good!
- How about this one: “Caution: this sign has extremely sharp edges! Do not touch the edges of this sign.” And then in really small print: “Also, the bridge is out.”
- Angela really likes this one: “No trespassing: violators will be shot; survivors will be shot again.” That works.
- This one is funny. It’s probably necessary in an elementary school. It says, “Don’t eat gum from urinal.”

- This one is on a pill bottle with medicine for a dog – remember, it’s medicine for a dog. It says, “May cause drowsiness; use care when operating a car or dangerous machinery.” It’s important your dog knows that!
- Last one: here are some instructions on how to use a hat. Now that’s just not right!

Now I’ve never heard anyone say, “Let’s kill all the stupid people.” But there are some who want to remove all these warning labels and just let the problem sort itself out... You see, sometimes warning are stupid, but sometimes warnings are necessary, and when people ignore them they get hurt. The Grand Canyon has walls that descend over a mile, 6000 feet deep. So they have warning signs for people to stay away from the edge. Apparently a couple years ago this girl wanted to get her picture taken next to one of the warning signs, out by the edge. So she walks out to the edge, next to the sign, the rocks give away, and she falls to her death. Some warnings we need to listen to.

Well, that’s kind of what the prophets of the Old Testament were all about. They were kind of like warning signs. They were there to speak hard truths in hard times. And if God’s people ignored their warnings, the consequences were awful. A couple weeks ago our team presented what we called an “Old Testament Rewind.” One of my favorite parts was when Melvin came out as one of the Old Testament prophets. He had a cop’s hat on, and dark sunglasses, and a safety vest, and this bullhorn. And he starts telling us, “Back away from the sin. There’s nothing to see here. Move away from the sin.” And that’s really what a prophet did: they were out there warning people to step away from the sin, and turn back to God, before someone gets hurt. Their words were often hard, but their purpose was grace. You see, God can see where we are headed, and when it is not good, he gives us these warning signs. And sometimes we ignore his warnings – I guess because sometimes we think we are smarter than God. That does happen when we ignore God’s warnings, doesn’t it? We think we are smarter than God? But the truth is, whenever we ignore God’s warnings, whenever we do something he tells us not to do, whenever we act like we know more than God, that’s really dumb.

Now last week we explored what happened after King Solomon died. If you’ll remember, Solomon was smart in some ways, but he overtaxed his

people, and he overworked his people, till they were ready to revolt. And worse than that in God's eyes, he permitted other gods to be worshiped in Israel. He permitted idolatry. Well, when Solomon dies, his son, Rehoboam, takes over. Not only does he allow the idolatry to continue, when the people ask him to ease up on taxes, and to ease up on their workload – he won't give, so there's a civil war, and from then on there is Israel in the north, and Judah in the south: two half nations that squabbled for 200 years.

So in the north this guy named Jeroboam takes over as king – Rehoboam is king of Judah, in the south – he's dumb; and Jeroboam is king of Israel, in the north – he's dumber. You see, Jeroboam sets up two golden calves in the north where his people were supposed to worship. So now there is idolatry in the south under Rehoboam, and idolatry in the north under Jeroboam – they are dumb and dumber. And over the next few centuries of The Story, they go from Dumb and Dumber, to Dumberer, and Dumbererest. In Israel, dumbererest was a guy named Ahab. The Bible says, "Ahab son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twenty-two years. But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the Lord's sight, even more than any of the kings before him." (1 Kings 16.29-30) He was the worst of the worst.

Now part of the problem was his wife. (1 K 16.31 on screen) His wife was Jezebel. I don't mean she was "like a Jezebel," she was the original Jezebel. She was a princess of the Sidonians, and a passionate worshiper of Baal. Because of her, temples to Baal were built in Israel, and she brought in a lot of Baal priests, and along the way she murdered a bunch of God's prophets. She was kind of ISIS, way before there was an ISIS.

Well, it doesn't take long for God to say, "That's enough!" You see, usually when God sends a prophet with a message, it's not good news. Prophets didn't usually come telling people, "God says you're doing great! So from now on your rivers will flow with Coke Zero, and your trees will flower with Ding Dongs and Twinkies. No; usually prophets tell people to back away from the cliff, because they are about to fall, hard. So God sends a prophet named Elijah with this bullhorn: "Step away from the sin;

step away from this idolatry; step away from this Baal, because it's going to kill you, spiritually – the kind of dying that matters most.”

Here's what the prophet Elijah tells King Ahab, and his wife Jezebel. He says, “As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives -- the God I serve -- there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!” (1 Kings 17.1) “There's going to be a drought. No rain, not even dew on the grass when you wake up in the morning. Let's see how your Baal, your god, who you think controls the weather, can handle a beat down from the “in the beginning God.”

Now this showdown is one of the big ones of the Bible. You see, one of the biggest sins of the Old Testament, maybe the biggest, is idolatry. The first two of the ten commandments deal with idolatry: #1: “You must not have any other god but me”; #2: “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind.” (Exodus 20.3-4) There are more than 1000 verses in the Old Testament dealing with idolatry. In fact, it is one of only four commandments that has the death penalty attached for violators. This is serious stuff.

Now we tend to skip over verses on idolatry, because they just don't seem relevant to us. Most of us don't have any statues that we bow down to. But maybe this still bites. Kyle Idleman tells about a friend of his who returned from a mission trip in India. He was showing Kyle pictures of the houses he had visited. All the chairs would be carefully arranged around some golden image, some idol, that they would worship. Kyle said, “It seemed so primitive. It's hard to imagine people doing that sort of thing.” Then he says he walked into his own living room, and he noticed how all his chairs were carefully arranged around a fireplace, with a flat screen sitting on the mantle. And he began to wonder whether we really are so different.

I think we need to expand what we think idolatry is. What is most important to you? Where do you put your hope? What do you treat as equal to God, or even more important to you than God? Guys, we all battle some form of idolatry – every single one of us.

There was a Puritan preacher in the 1600s named David Clarkson, (no relation to Kelly, that I know of). Well he asks a series of questions to help

us discover any idols we might have. How would you answer these questions?

- Question 1: What are you most disappointed with right now? Your career? Your financial status? Your sex life? Your family? Your marriage? If it really has you down, if it is hanging over you a lot, it's may be an idol for you. Whatever you're most disappointed with probably points to what you are putting your hope in, instead of God. And when it's not working well, it is apparent that God is not enough, for you.
- Question 2: What do you sacrifice your time and money for? That's really how to discover who or what your god really is. Maybe it's a person, or a home, or how your body looks, or what entertains you. The Bible says, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is too." Where do you spend your money, and your time? You'll probably find your idol.
- Question 3: What do you worry about? What scares you? Is there some person, or some thing, that if you it, life would be terrible? That can show you who or what you worship.
- Question 4: Where do you go when you get hurt? This is a big one: Where do you go when life is really hard? To the refrigerator – for "comfort food"? To a bottle, or a pill? When you fight with your wife, do you retreat to a porn site? Maybe your day has been extra hard, do you flee to the TV, flipping through the channels, numbing your brain so you don't have to think about things? Where do you go for comfort?
- Question 5: What makes you mad? What makes you angry? What if Mississippi holds on and upsets Kentucky. Would that ruin your week? I'm serious! Maybe someone disrespects you and you can't let it go; because you have made being respected by people your idol. What makes you mad that you can't let go?
- Question 6: What brings you the most joy? Now understand, God wants us to experience joy. In fact he gives us these amazing gifts so we can taste that joy. But sometimes the gifts he gives us become more important to us than the giver of those gifts. Sometimes we allow the gifts to replace the giver.
- Last question; question 7: Whose applause do you long for? Whose approval do you want most? A boss? A spouse? A parent? A friend? Whose opinion do you value the most? Because sometimes

there are opinions we value more than God's. And that will point to some idol in your life.

Now here's the deal, guys: the reason God hates idols is that don't satisfy; they can't satisfy. It's not that God has low self-esteem. It's that he loves you, and he knows that anything you put in his place cannot satisfy. The only one who can satisfy you is God. God is not jealous of his rivals because of how it affects him; he is concerned because of how they affect you. You were made with a God shaped hole in your heart, and nothing else can fill it. Everything else is a cheap substitute. Everything else is ... turkey bacon.

Now, how many of you guys like bacon, real bacon? I love bacon; it's one of God's greatest gifts to man. I love the smell of it cooking, I love the sound of it cooking, I love the taste of it cooked. I even have this bacon scented candle. Maybe you have noticed the fragrant aroma. Did you know that you can get bacon flavored baby formula, and bacon flavored coke, and bacon mints, and gummy bacon. One of my regrets is that I missed the bacon sundae they were selling at Burger King for a while. Now I've got to tell you, bacon is causing a crisis in my home. There are some odors that are really getting to Julie right now, and the smell of bacon is one of them. And so I am facing this moral dilemma: Julie, or bacon. I'll let you know when I make my choice. By the way, we thought of offering bacon to anyone who came forward this morning, but that would be going way too far.

Here's the deal, guys: God is like bacon – real bacon. Can I get an Amen to that? He's like real bacon; not turkey bacon, not some cheap substitute. They don't make turkey bacon scented candles. Any of you guys smell this? It's nice! You see, we have all these cheap substitutes for God. We settle for all these cheap substitutes for God. We try to find our security, or our hope, or our identity, or our deepest pleasure is these cheap substitutes. And they won't satisfy! They can't! Whenever we put anything else in God's place we end up thinking, "Is this all there is? There's got to be more than this? Life's got to mean more than this." Because we have settled for something other than God to satisfy us, to live for – some cheap substitute, like turkey bacon.

So God goes to this prophet named Elijah, and he sends Elijah to deliver a warning sign to King Ahab. He says, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives -- the God I serve -- there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!" (1 Kings 17.1) Now what makes this extra cocky is that Ahab and Jezebel thought Baal controlled the weather. He was the weather god. And what God says is this: "If you want to worship Baal, I'm going to take the rain away from you ... and your rain god. I'm going to hold back the rain so you will understand who the real God is."

Well this drought goes on for 3 years. And at the end of year 3 the prophet Elijah goes back to King Ahab and kind of sets up a cage match between his "in the beginning God" and Ahab's Baal. Elijah says, "Summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel." It will be 850 to 1. Then it says, "Elijah stood in front of (all the people who were gathered) them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent."

Now that's weird: "the people were completely silent." But do you know why they were silent? Because they wanted it both ways. If they had wanted the "in the beginning God," they'd have said, "We choose God." If they had wanted turkey bacon, they'd have said, "We choose Baal." They said nothing because they want both. We do the same thing. We don't really want to push God off his throne, we just want to let some other person or some other thing share the throne with him. We don't want God to go away, we just want him to scoot over. We want God and -- something else -- side by side. But God won't share. Because nothing else will satisfy. Anything else will pull us down; not lift us up. So he wants us to choose.

Now, here's how the cage match went down. (1 Kings 18.25 on screen) Elijah says, "Since there are so many of you, you go first. Pick a bull, sacrifice it, put it on the altar, but don't set it on fire. You guys call on your turkey bacon Baal to light the fire for you. Ask your god to light it up. (1 Kings 18.26 on screen) So Baal's dudes start dancing, and they start praying, and they start begging ... nothing. (1 Kings 18.27) So Elijah starts trash talking. "You're going to have to get louder -- maybe Baal is

daydreaming! Maybe he's asleep and you have to wake him up. Maybe he's in the bathroom; maybe he's constipated and he just can't come out now." Elijah has the spiritual gift of sarcasm. (1 Kings 18.28 on screen) It says these Baal priests went on for hours, getting louder and louder. They were even cutting themselves until they bled, because that's how they worshiped their turkey bacon Baal.

Now that seems weird to us, doesn't it? Cutting yourself for your god? Hoping that will be enough; hoping that will satisfy? But we kind of do it too. We bleed for our gods. Some of you have almost bled out for the god of alcohol, or drugs. You have sacrificed nearly everything in your worship of that god. Some of you have sacrificed your intimacy, and your marriage, for the god of sexual pleasure. You have bled for that god. Some of us have bled for the god of cable TV, or Facebook, or the internet. You have sacrificed your relationship with your husband, or your wife, or your kids so you could spend time with your god. We all do it: we bleed for our gods.

(1 Kings 18.29 on screen) Well they go on with their antics all day long. No reply; no response. So now it's Elijah's turn. And he prepares his altar, and he sacrifices his bull. And just to make it interesting, he has them drench the whole thing with water. Remember: there's been a drought for 3 years. This is pretty in your face, wasting all this water to make a point. This is God tying his hands behind his back before he dazzles them. And then Elijah just prays. He doesn't dance, he doesn't shout, he doesn't beg, he doesn't cut himself. He says, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command." Listen, this isn't Elijah testing God; this is Elijah following God's instructions. This is God making a point. Elijah says, "O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself." (1 Kings 18.36-37) "Don't do it for me; do it for your glory; do it so your people will wake up and come back."

And "Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the

Lord is God!" (1 Kings 18.38-39) No kidding! Because The Story is all about remembering that there is a God, and he deserves first place in everything, and our life won't make sense until we give him the glory he deserves. You see, idolatry is not offensive to God because he has a fragile ego; it hurts God because he loves us. Whenever we put any thing or any person in his place – we will not experience the life God meant us to live. Whenever we settle for less, we get hurt, and people around us get hurt.

Do you know what happens next? They kill all these prophets of Baal. Sounds hard, but it was necessary. Sometimes a cancer has to be cut out if there is any hope in saving a life. In fact ... it's quite possible that something needs to be cut out of your life, right now. Who or what is pulling you away from God, right now? Is there someone, or something that has caused you to ask God to scoot over for? God won't tolerate that. Not because he is threatened, but because he knows that no substitute will satisfy, and inevitably it will pull you down. Listen guys, God isn't mad at you because you have chosen poorly; it's that he loves you so much, and wants the very best for you.

This is so tough. This is about balancing truth and grace. There are those who love the truth, but they are not very loving. And there are those who are very loving, but they won't speak the truth. Guys, it's not loving to speak any less than God's truth. We want Capital City to be a place of 100% grace, and 100% truth – God's truth. We want this to be a place where you can experience grace, where that grace will blow your mind. But in order to experience that grace, we have to accept God's truth. Without truth, there is no real grace. We have to acknowledge our idols, we have to throw down our idols, before we can experience the incredible grace of the "in the beginning God."

The truth is, God loves you no matter where you've been, what you've done, even if you have been gorging yourself on turkey bacon. But it's time for you to taste the real thing. We'll be down front after this service is over if you want to talk about making things right with God.

One more thing, before I close. At the end of the story we studied this morning – God sent rain. After three years of drought, it rained, and the people worshiped the real God, the "in the beginning God." You see, God

doesn't give us warnings to put us down, he gives us these warning so that we will push away whatever is pushing him away in our life. Because he wants the very best for you. Forever.