

10/29/15
Week 44: Fall Mission Feeding
Jefferson Bethke

Betty: Welcome to *LIFE Today*! Thank you so much for joining us. I'm Betty and this is James.

James: And I just love the way you welcome people. And I love that beautiful smile! We told you she missed a little bit because she had eye surgery. Can you see?

Betty: I can see these lights are really bright in here.

James: So you got rid of the cataracts and you got better lenses. How do I look?

Betty: Boy!

[Laughter]

James: Man, I was just really hoping that you'd just fall in love with me.

Betty: You look good, honey!

James: Thank you, darling! Excuse us while we slip out.

[Laughter]

We got one of my favorite people, Jefferson Bethke. Now you probably saw him on the YouTube video that hit about six million in just a few days, and then 29 million. And it was "I love Jesus but I hate religion" or "Hate religion/love Jesus." Either way it fits, it's what he was talking about. It really just got everybody's attention.

Then he wrote a best-selling book. And now he's got another one that's destined to be a bestseller; it's just out. It's called, *It's Not What You Think*. Listen to the subheading: Why Christianity is about so much more than going to heaven when you die. You have no idea how much I pray you come to understand that.

Would you welcome Jefferson Bethke back to *LIFE Today*?

Jefferson, good to see you, buddy!

Jefferson: Good to be back!

James: I believe the last time you were here, because you've become so well-known, that you were in love and you were about to get married. But you did get married and now a year or so later you've got an addition; right? Tell us about it.

Jefferson: Yes, I got married about a month after the last time I saw you. Then we, within about 10 months, which we were doing the classic, people asking us, "When are you going to have kids?"

We would say, "Three to five years -- three to five years." Ten months in, we're pregnant. Whoops! Yeah, she is about 15 months now, Kinsley Joy Bethke. She is beautiful. I'm kind of biased but if you go and look at my Instagram, she is pretty cute.

Betty: She is. I saw her.

James: I'm so happy for you. I really like the whole title. I think you have a remarkable gift; but why Christianity is about so much more than going to heaven. I'm going to tell you as a preacher that has been around a long time. Maybe people say, "You're on the back -- you're going out. You're in your 70s, you ain't got long. You've already lived your three score and ten years. Boy, you're on borrowed time."

[Laughter]

Here's the deal. I think that life is about so much more than going to heaven. I know I'm going to heaven; I've believed it forever. But I just believe there is a whole lot of heaven that should be in us, and you talk about the kingdom of God being a reality. I've looked at these chapter titles, I love it! So what do you want us to hear?

Jefferson: Well, I think specifically with the subtitle, one of the huge heartbeats of the book is me really studying the context Jesus was in, in the first century. Really Jewish world viewed him as a Jewish rabbi; right? What that entailed and one of the biggest things is when you said "heaven," that word *heaven* to a first century Jew, they didn't think of a place with babies and wings and diapers with harps in the sky. They didn't think that. To them they just thought like God's dimension or another way to put it is God's control room. There was not a distance, it was

just a different dimension to earth. Kind of like a husband and a wife; and God in the beginning God created heaven and earth, kind of like a compliment of each other.

So heaven is this control room of God and the narrative of scripture becomes this thing where God, because of the brokenness of sin that ripped that marriage apart of heaven and earth, is trying to put it back together. He's trying to put his dimension and our dimension back together; which makes sense when you start reading Jesus.

The first thing that Matthew says that Jesus says in Matthew four is "Repent the kingdom of heaven is near." He doesn't say -- like if it was like an American gospel, it would be, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is really, really far away. Raise your hand. You go there when you die." That sounds opposite -- that sounds opposite to me. So I think when you read --

James: It sounds about as dull as people make it look.

Jefferson: Precisely. Like that's why when people say... like when they describe that picture of heaven with the babies and wings, I'm like, "I don't want to go there."

[Laughter]

I'd probably see that and run.

James: I don't want to sit up there playing a harp all day.

Jefferson: But to me, it becomes really exciting when you really realize that this life, every moment that I have, that I'm breathing, whether it is in my marriage, as a father, how I deal with finances, anything of that regard, my whole life is all about how do I bring heaven down here to earth? How do I make what is true of heaven, kind of God's dimension where he's fully reigning and ruling, and how do I make that true over my own life? Which then again fits into Jesus' prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

So I think a lot of times we have this idea that it's all about getting out of this place; like let's just get in the heaven spaceship and leave? And this place is going to burn one day. When really, the narrative of scripture isn't a narrative of restoration and reconciliation it's about actually putting it back together.

While Revelation 21, the end of the book says that heaven is going to come down to earth like a bride adorned for her husband. I think that's a bigger vision; it makes me more excited that my life actually matters. Because if it is about that escapist vision, then who cares what I do here, let's just go there. But when it really matters, I think that's when it makes it really exciting.

Betty: When we realize that God has a wonderful journey planned for us, it is not hang in there until it is time to go to heaven.

Jefferson: Exactly! I think again, Revelation 21:22, it seems like real and dense and it is a city. Everything is vibrant. I would like to believe a city entails that there's food and art and music and all these different things, and that's a place I really want to go to.

James: You've got a second chapter here that says: The temple is not what you think. What is it? You say he's not pitching a tent in the back yard.

Jefferson: Yeah, yeah! It's one of those famous Christmas verses, John 1:14, where it says: The word became flesh and dwelt among us. That word *dwelt* in Greek literally means "tabernacle." So you can basically say, "The word became flesh and tabernacled or templed among us."

Again, that's the story of scripture; is not about a building but actually about that being a shadow. So when we see the temple in the Old Testament that's kind of God preparing us for the true temple, which is Jesus, and then we become recipients of that by the power of the spirit; meaning like it's living, it's breathing.

And the cool part about that is when you read that John one verse like the Old Testament temple, it is a temple, it doesn't move. But Jesus becomes that new temple and he has legs. So now this temple is on the offensive, this place where heaven and earth is crashing together, this place of God's dwelling place in space is now going out and kind of infecting the earth with his presence and beauty and joy; and that's, again, what we're called to do as disciples.

James: If we get it the way you're trying to help us get it, think the way he wants us to think, I feel like it is critically important that everyone understand everyone here in the studio, hundreds of you, and everybody watching all over the world, that we have been left here by divine assignment for a divine purpose. If he has left us here not to discuss the times or the seasons, which have been set in his power -- and don't start asking anyone, "Is this the time you're going to set it up the way we think it is going to be and the way everybody thought?"

He says, "Don't even get caught up in all of that. It's fine for you to study it, it's fine for you to wonder about the future, fine for you to see the things that I've said." But he said, "What I want you to be is a witness at home in Jerusalem, then in the surrounding communities, and then to the ends of the earth."

So I feel like I'm here on a divine assignment, a divine mission to be a witness for Christ. Is that what you feel like people need to hear? And do you feel like people in churches who are supposed to be the church, the body of Christ are failing to realize that they are here right now for divine purpose?

Jefferson: Yeah. I think that's... we're created to be image bearers and I almost take a whole chapter in there, I think chapter five or six to talk about that; where we were given a job from the very beginning -- and the way I've heard it that I really like to think about it is kind of like a 45 degree angled mirror, like humans are that. And what that means is like if you were a 45 degree mirror then when God is kind of shining down on you, which is natural that light would then go out when it is at a 45 degree angle; then the same thing going back.

So that's our job as image bearers is to reflect the divine beauty and grace and presence into the world as a witness, as a disciple, and then reverse, then take the earth, take all the raw materials out there, make something beautiful out of it as a creative being that we can do and then bounce that back up to God in worship. So it's kind of this two-way street of that mirror. I think that's really interesting way and really beautiful way to think about being a witness.

So then ask yourself, how and where in my life do I need to do that? Where in my life am I not doing that? And how can I get better at that every day?

James: Do you think that actually showing an interest in people when you are around them, letting them know you notice and you care, and that if there is any need that you would be willing to help take that to God or help deal with it? Do you think that's an important part of the process of being a witness for Christ, have that light?

Jefferson: I think that's the main process. Jesus does a little play on words in the gospels where he says, "The greatest commandment" -- so singular -- "is love God and love neighbor" which is two commandments. So is Jesus like a "C" student or what's going on there?

[Laughter]

But I think what he's saying there specifically is it is one commandment because you can't have one without the other. Like you can't love God without loving neighbor, and by loving neighbor you're actually loving God. That's really convicting, first of all, because I think a lot of us, especially medieval times since, are very much private spiritual, meaning like my walk with God is about me and the prayer closet, me and my quiet time, me doing this. Which yes, that is an aspect, but actually how you treat other people is one of the biggest aspects, which is why Jesus said, "What you do to them, you do to me." I don't think we take that as seriously as we really could.

James: John emphasized highly that if you say you love him but you don't love your brother, you're a liar, you're walking in darkness, you don't know the truth. This is so sad the way people don't like each other.

I find many people that I think may not know what would be helpful if they knew it, I even think I know many people who profess to be Christians who are simply wrong. But I have a God-given love for all of them. That's why I talk to people who are outside my Baptist circle or my particular Gateway Church circle. I want everyone to know Christ. I want to treat people that I believe are wrong or incorrect or imperfect or they're misguided or just totally deceived, I want to reach out to them the same way I would want someone to reach out to me if I were misguided or deceived or defeated. I think this is exactly what Jesus does, and I think the church must do that.

I feel like I hear you saying that continually. You actually told us in that first YouTube little piece that you did, you're still doing a lot of these YouTube clips. Is there a particular vehicle they go to if they want to see some of these word messages that you're putting out? They're a visual in words; where would they find it?

Jefferson: They can go to YouTube and then just search my name. My actual user name is Bball 1989, which I'm not too proud of but I chose it when A.O.L. Instant Messenger was a thing, like ten years ago.

[Laughter]

And you cannot change it. But you can find me either way.

James: You have a chapter in here where you talk about brokenness -- that brokenness is not what you think. I believe God uses broken vessels, I have a broken heart. Betty and I have had things happen; we lost a daughter, that's brokenness. But you're talking about brokenness; what do you want us to hear? I think you want us to see something maybe from a different perspective or with a better understanding. What are you saying?

Jefferson: That chapter was an interesting one to write because I think for me it was one of the hardest because it is always hard to write about that from your own perspective.

And then two, what's been cool about it, is that I've already heard from a few people who have been able to read early copies that that's the one that's resonated the most and that kind of fits in with the point that I try to make in that chapter. I use the analogy of like, a lot of times I grew up thinking that brokenness was me showing weakness or failure or maybe I wasn't doing it

right or maybe like something was wrong with me or I didn't understand the scriptures -- just something was wrong. When in reality I think brokenness, two things can happen but you have a real good opportunity to show Jesus in that moment in a way that you couldn't before, in the analogy I use in chapter eight of the book is scars versus wounds.

So I talk about everyone, and I think this is even more true with my generation with social media and online and all that stuff, that we're so wounded, we have an immense amount of wounds. The thing that's true about wounds is like if you have one physically and you touch it, you cringe, it hurts. If someone else tries to touch it you kind of pull back, you don't let them see it. You cover it up. You're never honest, whatever it is.

I think a lot of us we have a lot of those places where we don't let anyone touch, we don't let anyone near. If anyone does, we cringe, we pull back, we kind of remove from relationship if they get close to that part of our hearts. It's usually the darkest things that have happened to us or that we've done to other people.

But what I talk about though is a lot of times we need to realize that Jesus takes those wounds and makes them scars. When a wound has been healed it becomes a scar. The interesting thing about scars is they're way different. What I mean by that is you're not afraid to talk about them; like you don't tell people your wounds because they hurt and they're fresh.

But a scar doesn't hurt anymore; if someone touches a scar I don't cringe. In fact, it tells a story. Like I have a little tiny scar on my upper lip you might be able to see. When I was one year old I thought it was a good idea for me to eat the dog's food. He didn't think that was a good idea; didn't end well.

So I have a seven-inch scar on my shoulder from when I played baseball in high school. Dove weird and just my shoulder blew up so I got two titanium plates and screws in there. But yeah, scars tell a story.

So the whole point that I talk about in chapter eight is might you -- it takes some soul digging and a lot of people don't like to do it but if you really want joy, you really want peace, you really want that fullness that you're looking for, it happens by taking off the mask, being vulnerable, uncovering the bandage and taking it to the healer, which is actually a title of God in the scriptures.

And then -- it is exactly what you were talking about a few minutes ago with witnessing -- then instead of hiding those parts about you, you then actually kind of roll your sleeves up and say, "Look what Jesus did." You tell your story. I think that's a real interesting way to think about it that we have to get to and ask ourselves what parts that people get close to hurt and might we

actually bring those to the feet of Jesus? Let him heal them in the same way that his scars came about, which is through the death and the resurrection, kind of Romans 6, baptism, of letting it die, bringing new life out of it. And when that happens, and you can be honest, and not worry about pain anymore and just say, "Look what Jesus did."

James: I think if we could really get honest, I think most people are looking for someone that will admit the truth about their own battles and so forth. And know that we can find someone who won't bury us in the muck or even bury us in the pit we dug with our own mistakes. But don't turn your face down; turn your face up to the one who is on the edge of the pit you may have dug looking down wanting to lift you up out of it. We really have to realize, that's where he is. He is inclining his ear.

He says he lifts us up out of a horrible pit and put our feet on a solid foundation. So it doesn't matter where we've been, how we failed, he will heal the scars, we can become stronger and more radiant. Jefferson, God has given you a tremendous amount of wisdom.

You know from the time I've met you I've liked you. I've always been your bud. I mean I've always been pulling for you. You've never wondered about that; did you?

Jefferson: No.

James: Felt like you had a fan and a friend in me. Well, let me tell you, you are exceptional -- you are brilliant! And you are very articulate, you have incredible gifts. I marvel at what God's put in you. I just pray you'll continue to be a real faithful witness. I pray people will visit your web site. I hope you'll go to the bookstores or go online and get the book.

As a matter of fact, if you don't mind, I will give it to our viewers as a gift, which means we have to pay for it.

Jefferson: My wife would be stoked!

James: I will tell you and I'm saying to you, I believe what this young man has to share is of great value. Would you agree that this guy's a gift and would you agree to join me and Betty and pray for him that God will use him?

We say thank you, Jefferson! Thank you for giving the Lord your life and receiving the gifts that he's given you and really using them for his glory.

I want you to know the book is in the bookstores. You can get it online. It might be a wonderful thing for you to give to a young person you know that is seeking or growing. When you look

around your church and you see young people, why don't you ask, "God, can I get that for somebody at the church? One of the young people?" How about just for you? Or how about you read it and pass it on?

Betty, I want to show our viewers really what I believe will capture their heart like our hearts have been captured.

I want you to just kind of move into the setting and not only be there in the individual who represents what we do so well but I want you to be there looking through the eyes of Jesus, knowing this -- and this is not an exaggeration at all -- you can be the answer to the challenge and you can actually be the very hands of Jesus and you can effectively express the love of God. Watch this and see if you don't want to do that. It's exciting.

On the mission field

Chris: Been here in Angola for about the last week. This is my first time overseas. This is my first time leaving the country. To say there's been some eye-opening experiences and some levels and degrees of shock would be an understatement. The malnutrition clinics, those have been, by far, some of the toughest things I've seen.

The first day in the clinic I held a kid that Mr. Peter said might have less than a 10% chance of living. And looking at the mother of the child and just knowing what it feels like to be in that position of helplessness is the hardest part because from personal experience I know what it feels like in those situations. I don't have kids but I've sat there in my own life experience as I sat next to my mother when she was going through chemo and I've been in those hospitals and I know what it is like to sit in that situation and you feel helpless, you feel like you can't do anything. There's nothing that you can do right then and there, and you want to fix it.

So to be able to see the productive feedings that L.O.I. has helped provide to these villages so we keep them out of the clinics is good to see. And just because you're not here handing a bowl to a kid doesn't mean that you're not actually feeding them because these kids can't survive without you. We can't be here without you to help them. When you see the kids smile when they get food and you see them happy and you see them so grateful, they're grateful for you.

End of clip

In the studio

James: There's no way to explain the joy that is flowing in our hearts right now as we see the children with their lives saved because the love of God through people like you.

But also, that is our grandson that graduated from Baylor just a few weeks before he went there to the mission field in Angola, Africa. That is the first son of our daughter that went to be with Jesus just over two years ago, that's Robin's son. The little kid that used to greet us when we would go up to see Robin and her husband and our three grandchildren, her children; they would meet us with a sack full of money running out to the car saying, "We've been saving all the money we could to help the kids over in Africa!" There he is.

And he's such a beautiful picture of the love of God. And when he says he understands suffering as he looked at the mothers and the children, he certainly does; and watching him hold that baby.

I just talked to him about two days ago for quite awhile and he said, "Papaw, I never will be the same. My whole life has really been changed."

I said, "I know Chris, ours was too when we saw very legitimate needs that could be met so beautifully and effectively with love." Well, Chris is there and those malnutrition clinics are miracles of love. It's just like now we need eight more ten ton trucks to keep delivering food. A lot of them have worn out and we've bought scores of them over the years -- you have -- but we need eight. That's very expensive -- over \$300,000.

We need a tremendous number of the little bowls that we give to the children so they don't have to bring the tin cans or the plastic bags. You're the ones that thought up the bowls. You saw Chris feeding there these bowls that you put the food in and we really need to replace a tremendous number of them and get the trucks.

When we hear our grandson and we know that journey that brought him to that place where he could speak with such brokenness and sincerity, I can't help but believe there's not a person watching, Betty that wouldn't say, "I want to help get those trucks. I want to help feed ten children or five or three." What's going on in your heart when you watch?

Betty: Well, first of all, with great joy I watch our grandson. I'm not a bit surprised to see him over there because, like James said, since he was very small he has been drawn to the children that needed food, that needed help, and he wanted to help -- as all our grandchildren do. They love to give to others that are in need.

I look at that and I think there is an opportunity for us to help these precious little ones. And it takes some of the things that don't seem so -- that we can't be necessarily drawn to so much but it's so important, and that's the transportation. We have to have the transportation to get the food to them so that you can see the smiles on their faces when they get that nourishment in their bodies.

So I hope you will join us. Please be a part of getting the transportation so that we can continue to save the lives of these children.

James: Thank you, Betty! I really believe Betty expressed the heart of the Lord, and so did Chris -- and I think you want to. I want you to be mindful that for \$30, \$50 or \$100 we can feed three, five, or ten children for months. You're the only ones that provide that. I find myself in my heart longing that if you could possibly help us care for ten you will so they don't end up where those children were, basically, maybe the last days or hours if they don't have a miracle. But let's get them before they get there.

We've got 400,000 of them we've located. We need the food and you're the only ones that can provide it. Would you right now go to LifeToday.org? Would you get up and move to make that mobile device or whatever you can get to go online? Or you can dial the phone number and just take your bankcard and use it like a check. Please do that. How often do you use it for something that really is not that necessary? -- But this is life-giving. Would you make that gift now?

Father, I pray everyone who can will; in Jesus' name.

We have some beautiful gifts to send you just to say thank you for helping us care for those children and giving them life and to provide the miracle of those trucks and the thousands of bowls that we need to replace.

Please go, LifeToday.org or dial that number.

Begin video clip

Announcer: Disease, malnutrition, starvation -- all terrible human atrocities being faced every day by people living in remote and impoverished areas of Africa -- and those at greatest risk are the children.

Life's mission feeding program is there able to feed and care for over 400,000 children in crisis areas of Angola, Mozambique, and Sudan. With previous food reserves gone and malnutrition levels in Angola rising due to increased food scarcity, we desperately need to replenish our supplies for our feeding programs immediately. Your life-saving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 will help feed and care for three, five, or ten children for the next three months.

Also, please consider an additional gift toward our \$316,000 goal to provide eight all-wheel drive trucks and 76,000 new bowls for the children.

As our thank you we'll send you this soft-covered journal Bible featuring the gospels, Psalms, and Proverbs for your devotional time in the word. With your gift of \$100 or more to help feed ten children please request the complete Holy Bible Journal edition perfect for keeping notes and insights as you read and study.

And finally, with your gift of \$1,000 or more to help feed 100 children, you may request this beautifully framed canvas print of "The Forest Chapel" by Thomas Kinkade.

Please call, write, or make your gift online today!

End of clip

In the studio

James: Well, you can see the beautiful gifts that we want to send to just express our love for you. And Betty and I say thank you so much.

By the way, thanks for praying for our daughter's children and our daughter when she was in her battle. I think you can see in Chris your prayers are answered because of the love of Jesus. And you pray for Jefferson.

I think a lot of you have since you met him on YouTube and met him here. His book is wonderful. You help us help those kids, and you say, "Hey, would you mind sending me Jefferson's book?" -- We'll sure send it to you. We'll be glad to so just ask for it. But it is online and you can get it in the bookstores. Jefferson is our friend and he's going to always be in our prayers.

Would you like to say thanks to Jefferson?

You know we're always going to be a team.

Jefferson: Thank you so much.

James: Thank you! Thank you so much for your help. By the way, visit the stream -- stream.org. Get enlightened and get educated.