

- I. Advanced Organizer - Gonna start, by telling you an old story.
- A. **King Laius was the King of Thebes, married to Queen Jacosta.**
1. No luck conceiving a child.
 2. Visit Oracle at Delphi for help
 3. Oracle tells them the **child will kill his father and commit incest with his mother.** (slide 1)
 4. When baby is born, King Laius has his ankles bound and leaves him exposed to the elements to die.
 5. **A shepherd rescues the baby.** (slide 2) Brings him to another royal couple: **King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth.** (slide 3) They raise him as their own, and never tell him where he came from.
- B. The child becomes a young man.
1. One day, he's at a feast, and a random drunk guy yells out something strange. He says **Polybus and Merope aren't Oedipus' real parents.** Oedipus turns to them and they assure him they are. But Oedipus wonders what it's all about. He **decides to visit the Oracle at Delphi himself.** (slide 4)
 2. The Oracle doesn't answer his question, but she does make a prophecy. **Oedipus is doomed to kill his father and sleep with his mother.** That rightly horrifies him and so he decides not to go back to Corinth so it can't come true. He heads in a different direction, toward the kingdom of Thebes.
 3. Along the way, **Oedipus gets into a road rage incident with a group in a chariot.** (slide 5) A fight breaks out, Oedipus verses a group. (slide 6) The hero ends up **killing all but one and going on his way.**
- C. Near Thebes, he encounters a mythical creature, **the Sphinx.** (slide 7) The Sphinx is a monster with a riddle. The Sphinx poses the riddle, and when people answer it wrong, as they always do, she slays them.
1. Oedipus, however, is not your average passer-by. She slyly asks him the riddle: ""Which creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?"
 2. Oedipus thinks carefully and then he responds. "Man."
 3. Get it? It's because we humans crawl on all fours when we're babies, walk upright in our prime, and some walk with a cane when we're old.
 4. The Sphinx is so shocked and upset that she throws herself off a cliff and dies.
 5. When Oedipus makes it to Thebes he's the hero. He meets Creon, the brother of the widow Queen Jacosta, whose husband has been murdered. **Creon has been holding the post, with the promise that whoever got rid of the sphinx would be married to widow Queen Jacosta and made King of Thebes.**
- D. So **Oedipus marries the Queen and becomes King.** (slide 8)
1. Things go great. Until they don't.
 2. The couple has **4 kids.** They're happily married for many years.
 3. But then a **plague comes on Thebes.** People are dying left and right.
 4. Oedipus sends brother-in-law Creon to the Oracle for help. The Oracle says the **killer of Laius is living in Thebes.** To please the God Apollo, he must be expelled, and the plague will be lifted.
 5. **Oedipus promises to bring the killer to justice.** But he doesn't know where to look. He calls on a **wise seer, a blind man, named Tiresius.** (slide 9) The guy knows what's gong on, but doesn't want to tell the King. He recommends dropping the whole thing, but Oedipus can't leave it alone.
 6. Finally Tiresias says **Oedipus himself is the murderer they are looking for.** At first he thinks it's a trick. Maybe Creon is behind this.
 7. He goes to his wife for comfort. She says, "it couldn't have been you. My late husband was killed on the side of the road, in a place three roads meet." Oedipus has the uh-oh moment. "Hmmm...." he thinks. He calls for the **lone survivor of that fight on the road.**
 8. Just then a **messenger arrives with news.** His father, **Polybus has died.** "Phew, Oedipus thinks. Well, at least I didn't kill my Dad like the Oracle had said I would."

9. The survivor arrives. He **confirms that Oedipus is Laius' killer**. He also drops the bomb that **he is the shepherd who brought young Oedipus as an infant to a foreign land...**
 10. **Jacosta figures out what has happened**. She realizes Oedipus is the child she abandoned decades ago. **She hangs herself in despair**. (slide 10) When Oedipus discovers her, he understands too. He has indeed killed his Father, Laius, and married his mother Jacosta. He **grabs the pin off her broach, stabs his eyes out**, (slide 11) and is **expelled into the wilderness**, to wander with one of his daughters as a guide (slide 12). And the plague is lifted off of Thebes at last. **The end.**
- E. New Series on the work of Girard.
 - F. **"Why We Hurt One Another (And What Can Be Done About It)"**
 - G. **Anthropological look at violence** and it's role in human culture.
 - H. Girard was a literary scholar and anthropologist. Started as atheist. Came to faith because of what he saw in the Bible verses other Ancient mythologies.
 - I. Last week we talked about the foundational concept in Girard: **that human desire is imitative (mimetic)** (Point 1 slide), **and this can lead to violence**.
 - J. This week, we'll look at how this plays out more. Gonna start by walking you through Girard's theory of violence, which is derived by looking at stories like the Oedipus myth, and then we'll look at some places in the Bible where this seems to be revealed more openly, and even begins to be subverted.
- II. So for Girard, **the path of violence begins with what we talked about last week: mimetic desire that creates rivalry**. (Point 2 slide.) People vying for the same thing. Not everyone can have it. Rivalry and envy take root.
 - A. Eventually, in groups this becomes magnified and tension escalates.
 - B. **Group needs an outlet for it's violence**, otherwise it will just explode with everyone killing each other.
 - C. Instead, Girard noticed a pattern that seemed to be found in the founding myths of many ancient cultures as well as repeated again and again: that the **group identifies a single-victim to receive the collective violence of the group**. Girard called this the **"single-victim mechanism" or the "scapegoat mechanism"**. (Point 3 slide)
 - D. A single victim, or minority sub-group within the larger group is identified and becomes the target of the groups aggression.
 1. Usually singled out for something that makes the individual different, "other"
 2. **The group falsely accuses the victim of something that dehumanizes them**
 - a) people when they are scapegoated, **are often innocent of crimes they are accused of**
 - b) further, the accusation being made by the mob is **often true of the mob itself**
 - c) This can be done in all kinds of ways that we see around us. Identifying a racial or religious minority and labeling them as a group to be terrorists. Or rapists. Or criminals. Ignoring the clear evidence that yes, people from every group, particularly the majority commit acts of violence including acts of terrorism, mass shootings and so on, or rape, more so than the group we're targeting by far. But this group is unique enough that it's easier for us to let the accusation stick: they're the problem.
 3. This can take place in any kind of group:
 - a) **family systems: "black sheep"**
 - b) It can happen in schools, in companies, in community organizations. People are targeted for their race, or because they're differently abled.
 - c) church: **LGBTQ folks often bear that burden**. With them, allies and queer affirming pastors, theologians, churches, that's what we've seen just this year with phenomena like IV purge.
 - E. Scapegoat is subjected to violence - either driven out, expelled from community, or killed.
 1. **When that happens, group peace is restored**. Tension is momentarily eliminated. It has been fueled towards a common enemy and has united people that may have been divided otherwise.
 2. Often afterward, **the scapegoat is thought of more kindly**. In fact, in ancient cultures, the scapegoat was made a hero, or even a god. No one feels guilty because the **guilt has been dispersed amongst the group**.

3. The other reason guilt is not felt is because there is a **total denial that scapegoating has taken place**. The denial comes through the dehumanization of the victim, the silencing of their voice and narrative through active silencing of their voice or delegitimization. The way the story is told amongst the group **affirms that the violence is just; that it was necessary**. Even deserved.
 - a) The myth of Oedipus, Girard would say, is one of the earliest examples of this mechanism at play. **Oedipus is seen as guilty, and expulsion from the community of Thebes is the appropriate response**. He did it: he killed his father, he slept with his mother. He must be punished and his punishment heals the community from the plague they're under.
 - b) **But was this justice?** Did Oedipus knowingly commit any crime? **Or did he spend much of his life trying to run from the curse of a prophecy that was spoken before his birth?** I'm not saying the guy was blameless (killing someone by the side of the road is not cool) but he certainly was not trying to commit patricide or bed his mom. Quite the opposite.
 - c) **What about the fact that Oedipus was cast out as a baby**, his ankles bound and left on the mountainside to die, just as a preventative measure? He experienced expulsion before he could even walk. Was that just? Yet these angels never made it into the Greek and Roman myths.
 4. And this is where the **Hebrew Bible begins to show something different**. We're going to look at two passages today that are important and relevant as they reveal this single-victim mechanism for what it is, and in so doing, begin to undermine it.
- III. The first, and the one which we'll spend the most time on, comes to us from the end of Genesis. It's another story: the **Joseph story**. Remember how the story starts.
- A. 3 Now Israel (aka Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons because he was a son born to him late in life, and he made a special tunic for him. 4 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated Joseph and were not able to speak to him kindly.**
1. So already we can see the mimetic rivalry at work, right? And it continues from there. Joseph begins to have dreams and announces them to his brothers. Dreams about them bowing down to him some day. Now Joseph hasn't done anything wrong other than be probably a little too braggy in front of his brothers. He has not hurt them in any way. He's innocent of any wrongdoing, but the brothers are feeling envy because of the favor he seems to have received from his Father in these dreams.
 2. So next the brothers are off grazing their flocks away from home, and Jacob sends Joseph to go follow after them and report back. Here's what happens next:
- B. 18 Now Joseph's brothers saw him from a distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 19 They said to one another, "Here comes this master of dreams! 20 Come now, let's kill him, throw him into one of the cisterns, and then say that a wild animal ate him. Then we'll see how his dreams turn out!"**
- 21 When Reuben heard this, he rescued Joseph from their hands, saying, "Let's not take his life!" 22 Reuben continued, "Don't shed blood! Throw him into this cistern that is here in the wilderness, but don't lay a hand on him." (Reuben said this so he could rescue Joseph from them and take him back to his father.)**
- 23 When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of his tunic, the special tunic that he wore. 24 Then they took him and threw him into the cistern. (Now the cistern was empty; there was no water in it.)**
- 25 When they sat down to eat their food, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying spices, balm, and myrrh down to Egypt. 26 Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is there if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? 27 Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites, but let's not lay a hand on him, for after all, he is our brother, our own flesh." His brothers agreed. 28 So when the Midianite merchants passed by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty**

pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites then took Joseph to Egypt.

1. **So the brothers cast out Joseph. They channel their envy and let it unite them in violence.** But even within that process there's some resistance. At first they just want to kill him. Reuben is a check on them to not be too hasty. Then when his back is turned, the other brothers do the next best thing, expel him. Send him off to slavery in Egypt, never to be seen again, or so they think.
2. **Girard sees a lot of parallels between Oedipus and Joseph.** Oedipus is rejected by his family of origin. They almost kill him. Instead, he ends up sent off to a foreign land.
3. In the same way, Joseph is expelled by his family and sent to a foreign land. And interestingly, the parallels continue.

a) Once in Egypt, Joseph works in the home of Potiphar. He becomes trusted by his master because of his competency, and given privilege, promoted to be the personal assistant of Potiphar, almost like an adopted son. And Joseph's presence brings prosperity and blessing to Potiphar's household. As it says in Genesis 39:6, "***So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph's care; he gave no thought to anything except the food he ate.***"

b) Then things take a turn. Reading on:

(1) Now Joseph was well built and good-looking. 7 Soon after these things, his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Have sex with me." 8 But he refused, saying to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not give any thought to his household with me here, and everything that he owns he has put into my care. 9 There is no one greater in this household than I am. He has withheld nothing from me except you because you are his wife. So how could I do such a great evil and sin against God?" 10 Even though she continued to speak to Joseph day after day, he did not respond to her invitation to have sex with her.

11 One day he went into the house to do his work when none of the household servants were there in the house. 12 She grabbed him by his outer garment, saying, "Have sex with me!" But he left his outer garment in her hand and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his outer garment in her hand and had run outside, 14 she called for her household servants and said to them, "See, my husband brought in a Hebrew man to us to humiliate us. He tried to have sex with me, but I screamed loudly. 15 When he heard me raise my voice and scream, he left his outer garment beside me and ran outside."

16 So she laid his outer garment beside her until his master came home. 17 This is what she said to him: "That Hebrew slave you brought to us tried to humiliate me, 18 but when I raised my voice and screamed, he left his outer garment and ran outside."

19 When his master heard his wife say, "This is the way your slave treated me," he became furious. 20 Joseph's master took him and threw him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined. So he was there in the prison.

- (2) So Joseph is **falsely accused of a crime similar to Oedipus: seducing his mistress's wife, a mother-figure to him.** But the story makes transparently clear that **this is another false accusation.**
- (3) Like Oedipus solving the sphinx and saving the people, **Joseph also has riddle-saving capacity.** He is able to interpret dreams, and this skill, discovered by his fellow inmates in prison, earns him an audience with the Pharaoh himself, who also has a dream to be interpreted. Joseph solves the riddle, interprets the dream, and is put in charge of the rationing project that will save Egypt and beyond.
- (4) **So both Oedipus and Joseph come as foreigners to new homelands and after they solve riddles, they're promoted to positions of power and glory.**

- (5) So ***is this the same story?*** Does hearing it in the Hebrew Bible simply mean that it is the Jewish version of Oedipus Rex? Girard would say it's actually the opposite. He puts it this way:

(a) ***"Locating the common data allows us to take note of an irreducible difference, an impassable gulf between the biblical story and the myth."***

The myth and the biblical story are in basic opposition over the decisive question that collective violence poses: Is it warranted? Is it legitimate? In the myth the expulsions of the hero are justified each time. In the biblical account they never are. Collective violence is unjustifiable....

Oedipus is responsible for the plague and can do nothing to heal it short of his own expulsion. But Joseph is not responsible for the famine. Moreover, he manages the crisis so ably that he protects Egypt from the disaster that could have occurred....

The same question underlies both narratives: does the hero de-serve to be expelled? The myth answers at every point "yes," and the Bible answers no, no, and no. The career of Oedipus ends in an expulsion whose finality confirms his guilt. Joseph's career ends in a triumph whose finality confirms his innocence."

- (b) **Girard sees the Biblical account as a story that undoes the power of myth.** Now this is meaningful because the stories were more powerful than entertainment. **Ancient cultures used myths to justify their violence. These myths lay behind ritualized practices of sacrifice.** Nearly all primitive cultures practiced human sacrifice, often the sacrifice of children. Most of Israel's neighbors, the worshippers of Baal, engaged in worship practices that required them to kill their children on behalf of the divine.
- (c) **But the Hebrew Bible tells a different story.** It says the stories that lie behind these heinous practices of killing the innocent to appease the gods, **these stories do not reflect the Divine heart. God is the one who upholds the innocent who has assumed the violence and rage of the community. God sees his or her innocence. And God preserves and even causes the one who has been cast out to be leader of all.**
- (d) **In the end, Joseph does see his brothers kneel before him.** His dream comes true. They come to Egypt to receive food in the famine, and then they get there, it is their brother they kneel before, begging for mercy, and they find restoration of relationship, forgiveness, and unity instead of the division of exclusion.

4. So the **Joseph story is an undoing of the kind of narrative that lies behind ritualized violence.** That's what we see from our first passage.

IV. But the Hebrew Bible goes further than undoing the myth that lies behind ritualized violence. **It also challenges the sacrificial ritual itself.** We see this when the Hebrew people receive the Law from Moses, after they've been delivered from slavery in Egypt. We find it as **God is giving them their own rituals, rituals that set them apart from their neighbors.** Look at the procedures for observing the Day of Atonement, the day when the Hebrew people will confess and name their sin to God. This in Leviticus 16:

a) ***"When [the priest] has finished purifying the holy place, the Meeting Tent, and the altar, he is to present the live goat. 21 Aaron is to lay his two hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins, and thus he is to put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man standing ready. 22 The goat is to bear on itself all their iniquities into an inaccessible land, so he is to send the goat away in the wilderness."***

b) **This is where the term "scapegoat" comes from.** The story is that the Hebrew people receive this tradition from God. It's like He's saying to the people, *"I know you feel like you need*

to do this. If that's how it's gotta be, let me tell you how it's gonna go. It's gonna be a goat; not one of your poor, not a foreigner, not one of your kids. It'll be a goat."

- c) The very fact that the priest lays his hands on the goat and pronounces the sins of the people communicates the usually projection that happens in the scapegoating mechanism. It's usually hidden, but here it's made explicit. ***This animal is innocent.*** It's my sin for which it's being offered. It's my envy, my rivalry, my violence that this animal is absorbing.
- B. **So what does all this exploration from Oedipus to Joseph, to Leviticus show us?** It communicates that the Hebrew Bible continues to reveal and make clear what so many cultures have not wanted to confess: that **mimetic rivalry triggers violence in us, and we tend to project our anger and violence at the vulnerable.**
- C. Next week we're going to look at how this **Jesus** makes this scapegoating mechanism most clear, and also gives the power to undo it.
- D. But for now, I want to leave us with a **couple of summary points to consider this week**; points that I think might be particularly resonant given the current cultural climate we find ourselves in.
- V. Point One: **Anxiety, fear, anger, and hatred are contagious, and can be quickly magnified in group contexts.**
 - A. ***Where do you see this at play in your life?*** In media consumption? In social media behavior? In gatherings with friends? At protests?
- VI. Point Two: **When we project our negative feelings onto a person or group of people, we often end up making false accusations, and ultimately creating unsafety in our social system.**
 - A. **Once the scapegoat mechanism has been employed, the group is no longer safe.** The peace only lasts momentarily. Soon another scapegoat will be needed.
 - B. **The name of the Enemy the Bible employs, often translated "Satan" literally meant in Hebrew, "the Accuser".** Rene Girard doesn't believe that Satan is necessarily a person, but it's helpful for us to **personify this very real spirit at play** which he would say is completely diabolical. For Girard Satan is this **spirit of accusation**; he is mimetic rivalry that turns to violence. And if we find ourselves participating in the demonization of another human being, however deserved we think it is, we are more likely listening to the Accuser, rather than the one the Bible Calls the Advocate, often translated the Holy Spirit.
 - C. I've been studying the work of **Dr. King in regards to nonviolent resistance.** This is something he deeply believed in and embodied, particularly after visiting India and studying the methodology of Gandhi. One of King's core beliefs about nonviolent resistance was particularly relevant to us here. As King said it, **nonviolence is directed "against forces of evil rather than against persons who happen to be doing the evil."** In fact, King believed that the person doing the evil ***was themselves a victim of evil***, just as much as the person to whom evil is being done. Isn't that powerful? So King would tell his followers, ***"It is evil that the nonviolent resister seeks to defeat, not the persons victimized by evil."***
 - D. **There are many of us who feel like we are looking evil in the face right now.** But if we allow the Accuser to tempt us into scapegoating, we are only continuing the cycle of violence, a cycle which can never bring true freedom for the community. **The only answer is to avert our eyes from the person and focus on the evil itself: focus on the injustice, on the inequity, on the work of the accuser to scapegoat. But we cannot turn and scapegoat the scapegoater. For when we do, we fall into the same trap.**
 - E. As we end: **consider what the evil is you may be confronting today.** What does it mean to stand against the evil and not the "victim of evil"? How might the Advocate be empowering you to confront the accuser and break the power of evil in the world around you? Through prayer? Through dialogue? Through civic participation? Through non-violent action?
- VII. Close in Prayer