

## THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL REPUTATION"

(Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12)

11.8.20

### INTRODUCTION

I know that we have been going through a difficult time in our nation but, probably no secret, it's not the first time. Just under 50 years ago, we were going through a very traumatic time in our history. Our president at the time was Richard Nixon; his vice-president was Spiro Agnew. However, in October 1973, Mr. Agnew had resigned from the vice-presidency, pleading "no contest" to a felony charge of tax evasion. Now, as that was going on, the Watergate scandal was starting to build up its own steam as revelations of further investigations became almost a daily staple of the news. But, in the meantime, President Nixon had to appoint a replacement for Agnew. He was encouraged to choose Gerald Ford, the Republican minority leader of the House of Representatives. Why? His reputation. Gerald Ford was liked. But even more important, Gerald Ford was trusted - on both sides of the aisle. President Nixon listened and nominated him. Ford's reputation was proven: The Senate approved him by a vote of 92-3; the House approved him 387-35. On December 6, 1973, he became the Vice President and, of course, following Nixon's resignation the following August, he became our 38<sup>th</sup> president. Reputation carried him far.

According to Merriam-Webster, reputation is defined as: "overall quality or character as seen or judged by people in general." Jesus was acquiring quite a reputation - one very much filtered by who you were talking to. To the Pharisees and their allies, His reputation reflected a man deserving to be gotten rid of. To many of the people, His reputation reflected a man deserving praise. We are going to be looking at some component parts of Christ's reputation today, and how that reputation should be ours as well. But first, **let's begin with a word of prayer.**

### TEXT/ANALYSIS

*[T]he Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus. Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place - Matthew 12:14-15a.*

When last we left Jesus, the "that place" to which Matthew is referring is the synagogue where He had just performed a wonderful miracle - healing a man's withered hand. A good thing, right? Not according to the religious leaders. Jesus in their view had committed two unforgivable sins: First, He had done healing on the Sabbath, which they equated as "work," and second, behind His casual flouting of Sabbath rules was His declaring God to be His Father - making Himself equal with God. All of these things had conspired to create such a hate for this Nazarene that, from this time on, the leadership was committed to a path whose success was only going to be measured by one outcome: the killing of Christ. Jesus of course was very aware of the murderous intentions that were beginning to take shape in their hearts and minds. So, as a result, both Matthew and Mark tell us that He left that area to return to the area around the Sea of Galilee.

Now, it's important to keep in mind that, while Christ never feared His enemies, He also knew that their developing plots and plans were not matching God's perfect timing for all the coming events surrounding His death. Several times in his gospel, the apostle John writes something similar to this: *[The religious leaders] tried to seize Jesus [while teaching in the Temple during*

*the Festival of Tabernacles], but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come - John 7:30.* Jesus was on nobody else's schedule except His Father's. His withdrawing was both a commitment to His Father's plans as well as the continuance of His ministry. And, as He said in John's gospel: *"No one takes [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father" - Jesus Christ, John 10:18.*

*Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed - Mark 3:7.*

Now Jesus was by no means alone. Mark tells us that His disciples were with Him and, in addition, a large crowd - at least initially from Galilee.

*[H]e healed all who were ill - Matthew 12:15b.*

What a great picture of love and grace is being displayed. And of course, Jesus knew the "backstory" on all these people. I would have loved to have seen his face as people responded to instantly being able to do something - whether it was to be able to see, hear, run around or whatever - that they had mere moment before only been able to dream about doing. But it's the attitude of Christ that shines the most here, underscored by Scriptures like these:

- 1) *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28.* Notice that there are no conditions on coming to Christ except one: being "weary and burdened." This moment in Galilee is what Matthew 11:28 looks like. Jesus received all who came to Him. As God, He knew the outcome of these brief encounters: who would through their healing surrender their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and those who simply rejoiced in that moment of physical healing and ignored the illness of their souls, and quickly forgetting He who brought the one and offered the other. Historically, all the people receiving these miracles remain anonymous; there were so many that both Matthew and Mark simply called them "a large crowd."
- 2) *Jesus ...was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd - Mark 6:34a.* The Greek word for "compassion" used here tells us that Jesus was literally "moved to His innards," meaning moved to the very depth of His being, by the circumstances of their lives - spiritual as well as physical. They were lost in so many ways and, as Jesus said following His encounter with the taxman Zacchaeus: *"[T]he Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" - Jesus Christ, Luke 19:10 (NKJV).* That's what was driving this amazing moment of healing being brought to all these people. Christ was lovingly, graciously and compassionately asserting Himself into their life experience.

*When they heard about all He was doing, many people came to Him - Mark 3:8a.*

Long before we ever experienced the power of electronic social media, people already knew the social media power of "word of mouth" - and we certainly see it here. Matthew was doubtless witnessing Christ's healing "all who were ill" in the large crowd following Him from Galilee. And, based upon hearing about all that Jesus was doing, Mark tells us that Christ was quickly being accompanied by a regional, multinational crowd from all over the place: *Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea (the Greek name for the nation of Edom, south of Judea, south and west of the Dead Sea), and the regions across the Jordan (would have included Perea (north and east of the Dead Sea) as well as the area ruled by Philip, another of Herod*

***the Great's sons and the brother of Herod Antipas) and around Tyre and Sidon (in the province of Phoenicia, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea northwest of Galilee).***

This geography of ancient lands tells us that, among other things, people were willing to walk a whole long way - many, many miles to get close to Jesus (i.e., Idumea was south of Beersheba, the southernmost point in Israel which was roughly 146 miles south from Capernaum while Sidon is roughly 50 miles northwest from Capernaum) and, despite the demonstrated opposition of their religious leaders, people were determined to see Jesus. And why not? He was doing things that their religious leaders could never have even imagined.

***Because of the crowd He told His disciples to have a small boat ready for Him, to keep the people from crowding Him. For He had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch Him - Mark 3:9-10.***

But a couple of interesting things are happening, seemingly at the same time. On the one hand, the press of the crowd to be healed meant putting the disciples on alert to have a boat ready, just in case the press of the people began to push Jesus right into the lake. But still the people kept coming in the hopes of being healed, and Jesus continued to bring them healing where none had been before.

***He warned them not to tell others about Him - Matthew 12:16.***

But at the same time, when you think it would be the obvious thing to let people know what was going on, Jesus instead was doing just the opposite - telling the people He was healing not to tell others about Him. While any good PR firm would probably be tearing their hair out, Christ's reasoning was obvious: While the works were important in validating who He was, it wasn't the healing of the body that was His primary goal - not by a long shot. It was the healing of human souls that had brought Christ to earth in the first place. Have people's view of Him confined to merely His healing would miss the point of His presence. It was their spiritual healing that was the greater need. And people simply coming to Him for physical healing without understanding His greater message would conceivably make all the healing a hindrance to His ministry, not a help.

***Whenever the impure spirits saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But He gave them strict orders not to tell others about Him - Mark 3:11-12.***

As if Jesus wasn't showing enough of His amazing power in the healing of physical issues, He also showed complete, total power regarding spiritual illness - the possession of people's lives by "impure" spirits. These demonic trespassers were completely undone when in the presence of Jesus, as evidenced of their blindingly quick surrender to Him, in recognition of both who they were and who He was. But of all the IDs that Jesus wanted, theirs was not one of them. He wanted no association with Satan in any way. He simply ordered them to go away - quickly and quietly - and they went. They recognized that this was the same divine Being that had spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ***"I am God, and there is no other. By Myself I have sworn, My mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before Me every knee will bow; by Me every tongue will swear. They will say of Me, 'In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.' All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame"*** - ***God speaking, Isaiah 45:22a-24.*** They undeniably saw Jesus for who He absolutely truly was: the Son of God.

***This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is My servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him, and He will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out, till He has brought justice through to victory. In His name the nations will put their hope" - Matthew 12:17-21 (quoting God speaking, Isaiah 42:1-4).***

It almost might seem that Matthew is jamming something into the narrative that is completely out of context. What does a section of Isaiah's writings have to do with this moment? As it turns out - everything! We've been seeing what Jesus is doing; now Matthew tells us with the prophetic insight of Isaiah who Jesus truly is. It really is a wonderful thing Matthew does here - pulling back from this wonderful scene right in front of us to communicate something even more wonderful, proclaimed some 700 years before this moment. Remember that Matthew was writing his gospel to an audience of Jews, which is why, more than any other writer of the gospels, he reinforces the message of his gospel with the prophetic writings that came before him that point to the same Savior as the one he is portraying with his words and his memories as a disciple - guided by the Holy Spirit.

So, what is it that Isaiah is wanting his audience - and Matthew's - to know about this Messiah?

- 1) First: His identity. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Scriptures had forecast regarding the Messiah. Those words of love and affection from the Father - ***the one I love, in whom I delight*** - take us back to that moment immediately following Christ's baptism when He received His Father's blessed affirmation: ***"This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"***- ***God speaking, Matthew 3:17***, in concert with the words that John the Baptist shared regarding Jesus: ***"I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him. And I myself did not know Him, but the One who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The Man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the One who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One"*** - ***John the Baptist, John 1:32b-34***. And, as a result of Christ's pleasing His Father, He would have His Father's own Spirit upon Him, validating His love and support for His Son in all He did. And lest it appears that the Son is somehow being diminished by being labeled a "servant," besides the common meanings for the word "servant," it can also mean a "trusted royal envoy." Certainly Christ would have been all of that.
- 2) Second: His message. Jesus would "proclaim justice [KJV: "show judgment"] to the nations," and will do so by means of the Holy Spirit enabling His human nature to do all required of it. The message is that Christ would be bringing His Father's justice to the world. The foundation of that justice? God Himself; as the psalmist said: ***Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you - Psalm 89:14***. And the beauty of that justice? It is totally fair and totally equitable to everybody. However, with the advent of sin in the world, the bringer of such justice would have to be somebody not already corrupted with the influences of sin. Certainly, Christ would have been all that.
- 3) Third: His behavior - even in the righteousness of His cause:

- a) He will not quarrel - He would not seek useless confrontation.
- b) He will not cry out - He would not draw attention to Himself. He would not shout down His opponents, nor would He become known as some sort of street-wise, unrelenting agitator. His chief weapon would be meekness.
- c) He will not break a reed. One use of reeds was to make a small musical instrument. However, if it was in the slightest way broken - cracked or bent - it could not be used and would be thrown away.
- d) He will not snuff out a smoldering (or smoking) wick. That and the reed had such little value to begin with that discarding them wouldn't upset anybody. But that's not how Christ's value system works. Christ's redemptive love goes out to everybody; in these cases, the broken reed will be made whole again, and the smoking wick just about extinguished will once again burn brightly.

So, despite the righteousness His life and message brought to the world, Jesus functioned within these behaviors. And the upshot of all this? As Greek scholar Robert Guidry has observed: "*The persecuted Jesus does not seek justice by taking His cause to the public. Neither should His persecuted disciples. Like Him, they are to proclaim justice, not seek it*" (R.H Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution*, page 230). What all these people saw in the flesh right in front of their eyes is the promised Messiah of Isaiah's vision. And what a great vision it is!

#### APPLICATION

The lessons we can take from this moment in Christ's ministry are simple yet profound - and they all make up what came to be a "radical reputation":

**First - radical grace:** Just the amazingly beautiful grace by which Christ reached out to all the suffering around Him. In fact, that's what the apostle John makes clear in the beginning of his gospel: *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth - John 1:14.* His wondrous compassion, His tender affection toward all of those around Him is humbling. He simply gave His best to all who came His way, and in doing so reflected one basic truth: How we treat other people comes from a foundation of how we view them. Is that our model of how to treat all those around us - fair treatment for everybody? Whose view of people do you hold to - your own or your heavenly Father's? No testing standards, no meeting "my" standards, just fair treatment for everybody, even our best for everybody? That's what Jesus did.

**Second - radical behavior:** Keep in mind that Jesus is totally and completely God - as Paul reminded his readers in his letter to the Colossian church: *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him - Paul, Colossians 1:15-17, 19.* All the might and all the power that created the universe, sustains that universe and continues to power that universe is completely in Him. At the first hint of resistance or opposition, He could have shown His enemies in a nanosecond completely who He was. But that would have blown up God's plan of salvation so, because of that outcome, He absolutely

wouldn't do it. And He even had backup: If heavenly intervention had been desired or needed, He could have called down legions of angels to defend Him. Again, He's saved but our salvation is torched. So instead, He pursued the path that Peter described: ***When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly – I Peter 2:23.*** As a result, He conducted Himself with a behavior that He Himself described like this: ***"I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:29b.*** Is that how we function with the people around us - turning the other cheek, showing the world gentleness and humility? That's what Jesus did.

**And third - radical manhood:** We live in an age of incredible animosity, with no give or take. To admit a mistake is weakness; to ask forgiveness is somehow unforgiveable. As a result (and not surprisingly), we tend to be drawn to the biggest, the strongest, the loudest, the proudest. That must make it the best, right? In fact, might makes right. That must make it the way to be. Especially for us guys, being a man is most often portrayed in our culture as being tough as nails, being "macho," real men don't cry, don't talk about feelings, all that stuff – in fact, one of the greatest compliments we can receive is to be considered "a man's man." Is that the deal? Is that a target worth aiming for?

In a word - No! And not to exclude anybody, but this is a "shout-out" especially to all you dads out there: If your son (or grandson) ever comes up to you and asks, "What does it mean to be a real man?" start that conversation by having him read Isaiah 42:2-3. If any of you guys ever wonder if our contemporary notions of "manliness" are the correct ones, start that evaluation by reading Isaiah 42:2-3. And for anybody here this morning who thinks the only way to get ahead in this world is by force and power, and by drawing attention to yourself, start the rebuttal process by reading Isaiah 42:2-3. For all the power that was available to Jesus, He went through this world reflecting these words from some 2,700 years ago: ***He will not shout or cry out or raise His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out - Isaiah 42:2-3a.*** And let's not forget something else: Physically, Jesus (and all His disciples) were studs - all of them guys who spent a huge chunk of their lives doing incredibly physical labor. But Christ realized - and showed - that the greatest strength a person could convey is the gentle meekness that was at the center of Isaiah's vision because that was the greatest pleasure of His Father. It begs the question: Whose pleasure do you live for - yours or your heavenly Father's? Whose power do you desire above all - yours or your heavenly Father's? Jesus knew that He was not here for Himself but for His Father. Therefore, seeking to please His Father - that's what Jesus did, to the exclusion of all else.

## CONCLUSION

What a completely radical reputation, and what an amazing picture this moment from Christ's ministry gives us - of both power and gentleness, of both strength and service - the whole time striving for nothing less than being a reflection of His Father, for the furthering of His plans and for His honor and glory. Is that what we live for? Is that all that matters to us? Let'spray!