

THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL FORECAST (Matthew 11:20-30)

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INTRODUCTION

Back some more years than I'd care to think about, I took drivers ed; the high school I attended offered it. At the very end of the class, just as most of us were getting in our behind-the-wheel time after getting our permits, we were all gathered in one of the lecture halls to watch a film. It was entitled, "Signal 30." It was police footage taken at scenes of fatal car crashes. Filmed by the Ohio State Highway Patrol, "Signal 30" was their code for a traffic accident involving fatalities. It was filmed in 1959, way before cars were built with a lot of safety in mind, and several years before seatbelts even became mandated equipment in new vehicles. It was, to be polite, a gruesome film - bodies, many of them still in the mangled cars they had been driving — horribly battered, broken and lifeless.

Now while the film had achieved almost legendary status in our high school — "Have you guys seen 'Signal 30' yet" was the common call-out from classmates who had already gotten their licenses — the film was unsparing in showing what police officers and first responders saw all too often. People who did not take driving and safety seriously paid an incredibly difficult and often permanent price. But the idea behind the film was simple: Your future decision-making every time you got behind the wheel should be profoundly influenced by the scenes shown in that movie.

Did it work? I'm not so sure. By the end of that first summer following graduation, I had lost 18 classmates — a few to other things but the majority to traffic accidents, a number of them while being under the influence. And the thoughts were always the same: How could they have made that poor a decision after seeing that movie and seeing what had happened to other people? Unfortunately, life very often does not provide do-overs. Those precious 18-year-old lives were lost, and they weren't coming back. And somewhere I wondered if those officers who were a part of that film were asking themselves, "What more do we need to show? What more do people need to see?"

Christ is taking a somewhat similar tone as He talks with the crowd gathered around Him following the display of power and grace He had provided to John's disciples. While He may be painting pictures of future judgment, He is painting those pictures with strokes of sadness, and even grief. He came into the world to be a Savior; He doesn't want to lose anybody. Yet He knows He will. That is the context for these next moments with the "Radical Rabbi." But first let's start this time **with a moment of prayer.**

TEXT AND ANALYSIS (Matthew 11:20-30)

We can't really appreciate today's message without being reminded of what we talked about last week. John the Baptist had sent a couple of his disciples to see Jesus. John, discouraged while being kept in prison, had just one question to ask: "Jesus, are you the one we've been expecting, the one our prophets said so much about, or should we be looking for somebody else?" But instead of attacking or challenging John's struggle with his faith, He simply showed John who He was by means of an incredible display of His miraculous power: healing the sick - the lepers - and restoring the broken bodies of all those around Him - the blind, the

lame and the deaf - plus raising the dead, plus preaching the news of the kingdom of heaven; in other words, to put it as simply and plainly as possible, Jesus showed them His glory.

Now of course, this wasn't the first time He had revealed Himself in such an incredibly powerful and visible way but, after John's disciples had left to report what they had seen, Jesus let His frustration at the sinful immovability of this people and their leadership come out - ***denouncing the towns in which most of His miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.*** [And then he said]: ***“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you”*** - ***Matthew 11:20-24.***

These must have been difficult words for the crowd that day to hear after what must have been the most awesome experience of their lives - watching all that Jesus did, right in plain sight. Wow; just think of the things they had had the privilege of witnessing: they had seen people completely blind receive sight (a miracle completely unique to Jesus, so something that had never been done before in their entire history), they had seen people completely lame walk, they had seen those suffering from the most feared disease of their time - leprosy - cleansed, they had seen people unable to detect the loudest noise they could imagine become able to hear the quietest sound in existence and, most astonishing of all, they had seen people brought all the way from the complete absence of life to living once again. Can you imagine what it must have been like to witness these things. Then, on top of all that, the “good news” of the kingdom of heaven had also been preached. Wow!

Yes, it had been an amazing day, and week, and month, and year - in fact all the time that Jesus had been gracing the planet had been amazing - just as the Scriptures had predicted:

- 1) ***[I]n the future He will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned - Isaiah 9:1-2 fulfilled by: Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali - Matthew 4:13.***
- 2) God declaring His presence with the nation of Israel: ***“[H]ave them make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them” - God speaking, Exodus 25:8*** had become before their eyes: ***The Word became flesh and made His dwelling (“pitched His tabernacle”) among us - John 1:14a.***

God had been promising, through His prophets and His own words, the arrival of somebody so special, so overwhelming that it would literally take their breath away. And now the fulfillment of all that promise - declaring amazing words while performing amazing works - was literally standing right in front of them. But it's in this moment that Jesus chooses to share His divinely-inspired frustration, that those words and works have seemed to make such little impact.

So, when Jesus says “Woe” to the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida, it is simultaneously a cry of judgment and an exclamation of sorrow. When He calls out Capernaum, it is simultaneously an umpire’s decision and a father’s grief. And the cry? “What else do I have to do? What else do you have to see? If these miracles I’ve done here had taken place in Tyre and Sidon (two Gentile cities), you’d have seen a people in sackcloth and up to their eyeballs in ashes, so deep would have been their profound grief at their sins. And put these miracles in even such a place as the legendary wickedness of Sodom (which God had destroyed due to their unrelenting, unrepentant sins), and even that town would have still been here today.”

And then Christ turns from words of punishment to words of praise: ***“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what You were pleased to do” - Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:25-26.***

Now Jesus is not necessarily talking children in the chronological or physical sense, but He is addressing His Father’s revealing Himself to all who are little kids in their hearts, in terms of their humility and the awareness of their own helplessness and then, from those twin understandings, to see their need for being taught the truths of the Kingdom. That was the great downfall of the religious leaders of the time. In their hearts they were confident that they knew it all regarding the things of God. The problems with that? Well first, they didn’t know it all and, second, when you think you do know it all, there is very little incentive to listen to anybody else. Those humble of heart, those who see themselves as little kids in God’s eyes, realize their need for God’s teachings, and therefore are eager to learn all they can of Him. It reminds us of Paul’s words to the church in Corinth: ***“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” - Paul, I Corinthians 1:27.*** So why did He do that? Two reasons - that we would understand:

- 1) Our salvation is totally and completely all about God and because of God; as Paul said later to the Corinthians: ***It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus - Paul, I Corinthians 1:30a*** and therefore to remind us, as God did Himself through the prophet Jeremiah: ***“Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord” - God speaking, Jeremiah 9:23-24a.***
- 2) Our salvation allows the reason we were created to be fulfilled: ***“Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made . . . the people I formed for Myself that they may proclaim My praise” - God speaking, Isaiah 43:6b-7, 21.***

And all these things reflect God’s sovereignty, His complete and perfect rule over everyone and everything: ***“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” - God speaking, Isaiah 46:10.***

And then Christ goes on: ***“All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to***

whom the Son chooses to reveal Him” - Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:27. A couple of things we see in this verse:

- 1) Jesus is the singular “Immanuel” (“God with us”) revelation of God to the world, and
- 2) As Jesus Himself would later say: **“No one comes to the Father except through Me” - Jesus Christ, John 14:6b.** Jesus is and will remain the only path to the life found in God.

And then Jesus concludes with a wonderful invitation, found in three simple commands, that cuts to the heart of His entire gospel message: **“Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” - Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28-30.** So, let’s look at those three commands:

- 1) “Come to me” - The Greek tells us that this command also contains the understanding of “follow.” Relationship with God through Jesus Christ does not start with doing (because there is absolutely nothing we can do for our salvation) but rather with a yielding surrender that empowers us to both come to the Father through Jesus the Son and then to follow the Son to live a life pleasing to the Father. This will allow us to know true “rest,” wherein our lives will in fact experience being refreshed in the life of Christ. This is the peace with God to which Paul referred in his letter to the church in Rome: **Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ - Paul, Romans 5:1.**
- 2) “Take my yoke upon you” - This is where the true joy of the life of Christ is found, in obeying His call to take up His yoke. Why? Because in taking up the yoke of Christ, we are being coupled alongside Christ. He empowers us; He enables us. What could be better than that? This contrasts sharply with the terms of life that the religious leaders were presenting. They were telling the people to “do” the law - all the Mosaic stipulations - but provided no aid, no relief to those burdens while leaving them quite alone to carry this overwhelming religious load. And the yoke that Christ commands us to take? An easy one, according to Jesus. But the word in the Greek suggests that “easy” means “well-fitting”; in other words, Christ in His amazing love places us in a yoke that is tailor-made, custom fit, just for us - perfectly for us. That’s what Paul had in mind when he said: **For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do - Paul, Ephesians 2:10.**
- 3) “Learn from me” - While the first two commands come out of a surrender to Christ, learning suggests the long-term process of relationship. As we learn more about our Savior, we find more peace in the Savior. This provides the peace of God to which Isaiah, some seven centuries before this moment, referred: **You will keep Him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you - Isaiah 26:3a (NKJV).**

APPLICATION

Now these are some great words from Christ, but they do present a bit of a problem: I’m already saved, I’m already a Christian, so what do these words of Jesus have to do with me? Well, we know for starters that we’re supposed to follow Christ’s example that, as He said to His disciples: **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” - Jesus**

Christ, John 13:15. OK; fine, but here He was referencing the miracles He had just displayed before all the people in the crowd that day. So, what miracles can we point anybody to? Do miracles still even happen?

Well, actually, yes they do. We are currently sitting in a worship center absolutely chuck full of miracles. It's us, folks — we're a bunch of living, breathing, walking, talking miracles of God that can be shown to the world.

Skeptical? Well stay with me for a minute and I'll explain it. You see, a lot of times we limit our idea of miracles to the incredible events found in the Bible, such as those amazing moments that Jesus provided for us last week. And yeah, those were incredible. But not all the miracles God does are those "broad-brush" types like what Christ did. Remember that our Heavenly Father is a God who is into the details. As Christ Himself told us: "***Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered***" - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:29-30***. Now that's some detail! So, if we use that as a basis to define a miracle as "anything that is totally, solely, only a work of God that cannot be explained in any other way," then the idea of what makes a miracle can pick up quite a bit.

So what miracles am I talking about? I mention in your study guide that, as believers, we are all party to two (2) miracles, and we find them in the two (2) testimonies that make up our lives:

- 1) The first miracle to which we can testify is our "new birth" in Christ. If new births that we witness as human beings are miracles — our kids and grandkids — how can our spiritual new births not also be seen as even more miraculous? To think that a life as much a dumpster fire as mine was can be seen by God Himself as now being without sin, that could totally, solely, only be a work of God — based on the grace in His heart and in the work of His Son on the cross. To think that I could go from a "dead in my sins" existence to ***all things have become new - Paul, II Corinthians 5:17b***, that is totally, solely, only a work of God. To think that I could go from a sin-contaminated life to ***the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses [me] from all sin - I John 1:7b (NKJV)*** is totally, solely, only a work of God.
- 2) The second miracle to which we can testify is the Holy Spirit's remaking us into the image of God through Christ; as Paul wrote: ***You [have been] taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness - Paul, Ephesians 4:22-24***. In fact, according to Paul, that is what is happening to our lives in every moment after the "new birth", and I love reading the joy in his words, that he is ***confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 1:6 NIV***. So, if that's true, that we are in fact an ongoing work of Christ through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, then this second miracle requires some questions to be considered:
 - a) How are you different from when you came to Christ? How are you more different, more in the image of Jesus, than you have ever been before? How have your priorities in life been changed?

- b) Where have you seen God working in your life? What have you seen Him providing for you that could totally, solely, only be His working out His continuing sanctification in your life?
- c) Where have you seen God at work in the world around you (i.e., church, your family, your workplace, your neighborhood)?

Now one way to collect all this: Get a journal and start writing down every miracle you have the privilege to see. God is always at work, so there should always be something to see — whether it's found in your devotions, an answer to prayer, a change in attitudes, whatever. As soon as you can, write that miracle down. That becomes the basis for sharing God in terms of His “todayness” - His relevance and His being active in our world. And I promise you: If you ask God to teach you how to look for Him, you'll find Him; you'll see Him at work.

And, as a way to get started, maybe just start looking for one miracle in the week so, for the week beginning March 21, 2021, what is something you saw or had happen that could totally, solely, only be God at work? Whatever that is, write it down. Then, when you have opportunity to share the gospel with somebody, you will be able to add these real-world moments that can tell that person that God is alive and active and present in this world, and not just in 2,000-year-old “stories.” And folks? That's what we're here for - that we were created for God's glory, and that all our words and works would bring God praise and glory from our witness of Him to all those around us. And we will confirm the wonders of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ***“You show that you are a letter from Christ, . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts - Paul, II Corinthians 3:3.***

CONCLUSION

Remember that demon-possessed man that Jesus healed in Luke 8? Following his healing, he wanted to come along with Jesus. But Christ said no, and He sent him on his way with these words: ***“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So [that's what the man did; he] went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him - Luke 8:39.*** This is exactly what David found himself so excited about: ***I proclaim Your saving acts in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips, Lord, as You know. I do not hide Your righteousness in my heart; I speak of Your faithfulness and Your saving help. I do not conceal Your love and Your faithfulness from the great assembly — David, Psalm 40:9-10.***

And you know what's really cool? While we're doing all of this, we are immortal. Not one of us will ever die a moment too soon. God will maintain our life on this planet as long as He has ministry for us to do. Only when we're done doing His work will He take us home. Until then, we will be immortal - we will never die!

God desires us as individuals and as a church to not only learn Him and reflect Him but present Him to the world around us. A great avenue for doing that is to simply be a reporter of how God is present-tense working in your life, in the life of our church, and throughout the world. Remember the words of the psalmist (and I love how “The Message” paraphrases it): ***Keep your eyes open for GOD, watch for His works; be alert for signs of His presence — Psalm 105:4 (MSG).*** Let's pray!