

**"THE RADICAL RABBI -  
AN INTRODUCTION: SOMEBODY BIGGER"**

**(Genesis 3:15)**

5.31.20

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we are starting a brand-new series by taking on an up close, personal and intense look at Jesus of Nazareth. What does the Bible say about Him? Why was He here? What did He do?

No other person in the history of the planet has had a larger influence than has Jesus of Nazareth. Religions have come into existence because of Him. Books continue to be written about Him. Songs continue to give praise to His name.

Yet, oddly enough, only four books in a small 66-volume library we call the Bible even come close to telling us everything there is to know about Him - and one of those authors concluded his account by saying this: ***Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written - John 21:25.*** But even with that, the impact of His life upon the world continues to be felt.

For those of us who call ourselves "Christians," based not on our religious affiliation but rather on our faith, Jesus of Nazareth is the foundation. It is His sacrificial death at the hands of the Roman Empire that we claim changed our lives. His reported resurrection empowers the belief that this was, in fact, not a man but a God-man-God in human form. That same resurrection simultaneously gives all Christians promise of what we have to look forward to following our own lives. And, in the meantime, His ongoing Holy Spirit in the lives we are living now allows us to continue to be molded by Him to become more like Him.

From a beginning "supporting cast" of 12 guys, mostly fisherman, all but one from the same region in northern Palestine, within three centuries the arguably greatest empire the world has ever known was turned from hostility to Christianity to embracing it. From there it has become the largest religion in the world.

Unfortunately, over the course of time, what Christianity promotes and what Jesus intended have often not been the same thing. And in these trying and challenging times, it is more important than ever that, when we claim the mantle of "Christian," we reflect the truth of what that means because we actually understand what that means.

Over the course of this series, we will be looking at the things Jesus taught, the sermons He preached, and the healings He presented - from when He walked out of the wilderness following the temptations from Satan to literally the moment before He rode into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. We will be making sure to include His miracles because, as He Himself once said, if people didn't believe the words He spoke (His teachings and sermons), then they should start any consideration of Him by believing the works He did (the miracles) because the same power and authority was found in both. And that guy - a man both of

amazing words and equally amazing works - is the guy we're going to study.

We're going to do everything we can to get as close to Him as possible. His ongoing Holy Spirit will be our guide as we take what I hope will be an exciting, challenging and life-changing experience.

And frankly, the timing has maybe never been better than it is right now - not just because of the ongoing battles we are seeing with COVID-19, a deeply struggling economy and, of course, over the last several days, the ugly faces of hate and injustice - but because of other battles that humanity has been struggling against since virtually the beginning of time. Substance abuse is at an all-time high, as is suicide, those two things in particular telling us that people are increasingly desperate to find something, anything, that can soothe their inner souls. Jesus proclaimed to all that would listen: "Come to Me. No matter who you are, no matter your past or your present, absolutely no matter your circumstances, **'Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest'** - **Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:28.**" That's a profound invitation for somebody to make. The question results: What can coming to Jesus do? What did He say it would do? The world needs to hear the answer to that question; the world needs to hear about Jesus of Nazareth.

So that's what we are going to do. We're going to take our time because such a person is more than worthy of all our time and attention. But the goal is that, by the end of this series, all of us will have a clearer view of who Jesus of Nazareth is, and what our lives can become because of Him.

## **TEXT**

So, we are calling this series about Jesus of Nazareth the "Radical Rabbi." Now, while a rabbi was simply a religious teacher in ancient Israel, some of them attracting students who would themselves someday be a rabbi, we need to look at the word "radical" to get a fuller picture of the kind of person we are going to be presenting.

So, what does it mean to be "radical?" The dictionary defines "radical" in the sense in which we're using it as: "Relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something." Basically, it means that how something was once viewed and practiced has been changed - in a revolutionary, profoundly different way. The change to something new is like nothing that has ever been experienced, or maybe even thought of, before.

Now Jesus was Somebody who was a long, long time in coming; in fact, the apostle Peter tells us just how far; he wrote: ***He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake - I Peter 1:20.*** But His arrival, in the fullness of God's timing, was first promised in the wake of the greatest tragedy the world has ever known.

To recap: God had created a world that perfectly met His standards; as Moses reported it: ***God saw all that He had made, and it was very good - Genesis 1:31a.*** And the culmination of His creation had been His fashioning of the very first people to inhabit this

beautiful world: Adam and Eve.

They were provided with everything they would need to keep them happy. But one terrible day, an enemy of God's was able to convince them that what God said He had provided them was not enough - and His commands were not really all that serious. They should have more - specifically, the fruit found on a tree called *the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* - **Genesis 2:9b**. Convinced by what this "serpent" was telling them, they went ahead and ate some fruit from the forbidden tree - and everything for the rest of world history changed in that flash of a moment. As the apostle Paul would write thousands of years later: *[S]in entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned* - **Paul, Romans 5:12**.

So, God gathered all the parties together. And, before He spoke to the woman, and then to the man, to explain the consequences of their choice, He spoke to the serpent and explained the consequences for him, concluding by telling him: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel"* - **God speaking, Genesis 3:15**.

#### ANALYSIS

Now don't miss the significance of what God was saying. He was saying that, despite the history-making damage that had been done, God was going to be sending Somebody who was going to be bigger than **all** of that - bigger than the entrance of sin into the world (including the effects of that sin on literally everything that existed), bigger than the loss of paradise, bigger than all the pain and anguish that was about to begin for the whole human race. Somebody was coming who was even bigger than the architect of this horrific moment. And even all of Satan's attempts to stop this Somebody would fail. Ultimately, Satan would be defeated by this coming Somebody.

Wow! That's quite an expectation. Now think about it: Sin had changed everything, literally everything, as in there wasn't anything that hadn't been changed by sin, starting with man's relationship with God. And yet, Somebody was coming who would be bigger than all that - which also meant that, if this Somebody was bigger than sin, then maybe, just maybe, He was big enough to undo what sin had done.

And, over the years, as one prophet after another began filling in the sketch of who this Somebody was going to be, the picture became clearer that this Somebody was going to be bigger than **everything** that Satan had tried to do. Man, that certainly sounds like a hero, maybe even a superhero, to me.

But yet, when Jesus of Nazareth, the One who was that Somebody, actually arrived and began to do His Father's work, it seemed that He was defying all the expectations that had grown up over the centuries about this "messiah" that God was going to send to His people.

First of all, you would think that a superhero would look the part. Not this superhero; there was nothing magnetic about His looks, nothing that said this guy was somebody special. In fact, the prophet Isaiah had forecast just the opposite: *He had no beauty or*

*majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him - Isaiah 53:2b.* According to Isaiah, He was going to be just an average-looking Joe. OK; so that's maybe a little bit radical.

Second, you would think that such a dynamic leader would come from an equally dynamic place that reflected such expectations - the power and glory of Rome, the intellect of Athens or Alexandria, even the ecclesiastical heritage and tradition of a place like Jerusalem. But no; this guy hailed from northern Palestine, from a dusty little village of about 400-500 people called Nazareth. This was such a nowhere place that ancient Jewish literature doesn't even mention Nazareth until sometime in the third century AD. Even one of Christ's own followers, before he got to know Him better, said upon hearing where Jesus was from: *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"-Nathanael, John 1:46a.*

Third, you would think that the leader of a dynamic, revolutionary new movement would choose the best and brightest to help get His message out there to the world. Wrong again. Instead of that, Jesus of Nazareth surrounded Himself with 12 guys who all had in common the very distinct pleasure of being very indistinct - which was a very "God thing" to do; as the apostle Paul would point out just a few decades later: *God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him - Paul, I Corinthians 1:27-29.* The disciples were nothing special; in fact, a case could be made that, simply by virtue of the fact that they had mostly gone into their fathers' businesses, they were failures in the eyes of those who taught in the synagogue schools and had seen absolutely nothing remarkable to recommend any of them for further studies. They were relatively uneducated blue-collar guys, some of whom it's likely could not have even written their own names. Even the members of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling counsel, *realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men - Acts 4:13b.* So how in the world could Jesus expect anything useful out of these guys? OK; so now that's getting a bit more radical.

Fourth, you would think that an important person would want to be found in only the best places - eating the best food, hobnobbing with the elites of their time. Certainly we live in a world that showcases celebrities who travel to the best places, frequent the hottest of the "hot spots," and do everything they can to remain in the public eye. OK, so then you have Jesus of Nazareth; who did He hang around with? Folks, it wasn't pretty. He hung out with the "bottom of the barrel" types - especially when He was grilled by the religious leaders: *"Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" - Luke 5:30b,* noting much to their disgust that Jesus even *"welcomes sinners and eats with them" - Luke 15:2b.* Yes; He hung out with prostitutes; He hung out with tax collectors. Those two groups alone were about as low as you could get. And He seemed to hang out with people that the religious establishment thought the least-deserving of His attention, not the most - people they dismissively referred to as "sinners." And yet not only was Jesus seen in their company, but He actually seemed to welcome their company. Now

we're beginning to go a little deeper into that "radical" place. How in the world can you expect to impact the world when nobody in their right mind would want to hang out with the people you hang out with? And the radical thing was, it didn't seem to bother Him - not in the least. It was thought that hanging out with dirty, disgusting people somehow stained you with that dirt and disgust. Jesus of Nazareth never even blinked when they came anywhere near Him. Even when it was lepers - the scariest people of all because of the disease they carried around with them - not so much as one step backwards. What in the world is wrong with this guy, anyway?

Fifth, as the radical hits just keep on coming: Jesus of Nazareth walked around in a place that was physically occupied by the greatest empire the world had ever known. They basically could take what they wanted, they could arrest who they wanted, they seemed to even be able to kill who they wanted, especially if it sent a message of warning to anybody who thought rebellion might be a cool idea. Then Jesus of Nazareth shows up. And even if He did seem to have a way with the turn of a phrase, what really got people's attention was the miracles - those moments where He seemed to have power beyond imagination.

It began to cross some people's minds: If this guy can make these kinds of illness things go away, and even things like blindness - there was even talk that He had brought a few dead people back to life, unbelievable as that sounded - could that power maybe be turned on our enemies: you know, get the Romans kicked out of here, get our country back, and maybe even get back to the power and glory of King David's Israel? Oh man, would that be cool.

After all, a number of people thought, isn't that the whole idea behind the world "messiah?" Isn't reestablishing a great Jewish kingdom what that's all about? Hadn't the prophet Isaiah talked about the Messiah some 700 years ago with the words we heard earlier: ***For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*** [And this was the best part:] ***Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this - Isaiah 9:6-7.***

Just one problem: Jesus, with all the acclaim He seemed to be getting, the only power and glory He was interested in was the power and glory of His Father. He said He was here on His Father's agenda, not His own, and certainly no national agendas that might come to mind. He certainly was interested in building a kingdom, but it wasn't any kind of earthly kingdom, but a completely spiritual, heavenly one.

And people calling Him "Messiah" and the One who comes "in the name of the Lord?" People even willing to try and make Him king by force? Most people would kill to be "forced" to be a king. But not Him. His only goal was His Father's kingdom - and the last thing that would ever be was anything like an earthly kingdom. He had specifically said so, right at the very onset of His ministry when He came out of sometime in the Judean wilderness; as Matthew reported: ***From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for***

*the kingdom of heaven has come near" - Matthew 4:17.* And He held onto that thought, right through to His moments with the Roman governor Pilate three years later: *"My kingdom is not of this world" - Jesus Christ, John 18:36a.* And a couple of decades later, the apostle Paul would clarify what the kingdom of heaven meant: *For the kingdom of God is ... a matter ... of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit- Paul, Romans 14:17.* And while people would be trying to wrap their heads around what that meant, a couple of things seemed really obvious: the Romans weren't going away, and neither were their tax collectors. To turn down all those who would have jumped on the bandwagon of His leading them in glorious fight against the Romans, with all the power He had, now that was radical.

But then He never said anything that you would think somebody would have to say to "energize His base," as we say today. Instead of hating the religious establishment, instead of hating the Romans and their soldiers and their leaders and their tax collectors and rallying His supporters with His incredible gifts of oratory, He loved them. In fact, He preached love - to everybody. He would talk to anybody, meet with anybody, even do for anybody. He had even done some miraculous-type stuff for the Romans. How can we build up hate when this guy keeps talking up love? Love – to everybody? That's incredibly radical!

Then, after all those things - and you'd think that would be enough - it's the things He was saying. Man, talk about radical! He was saying that a guy's actions weren't the full measure of right or wrong, but even what He was thinking. So, all of a sudden, anger's equated with murder, and lusting after some good-looking woman you weren't married to was on a par with committing adultery against the woman you were married to. Thoughts carrying the same weight as actions? You've got to be kidding me.

And it wasn't just His words, but the fact that He seemed to be putting His words on a par with God's words. Wow! Now that's absolutely radical. And that wasn't just rumor; thousands of people had heard Him say those things, where He would quote one of the Scriptures with the phrase, "You have heard that it was said," and then whatever that was, and then say, "But I say to you," like He was God Himself talking to people, telling them how to live. It doesn't get much more radical than that.

And He wasn't shy about that either; He'd said it Himself: *"The words I have spoken to you - they are full of the Spirit and life" - Jesus Christ, John 6:63b.* And in case His audience wasn't sure what He was saying, He made it even more clear, telling His disciples: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"- Jesus Christ, Matthew 24:35.* That's some serious "equating my words with God's word" stuff. And He also spoke of what His word could do for somebody who followed it as if it was God's word: *"If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" - Jesus Christ, John 8:31b-32.* And He concluded His great Sermon on the Mount with an illustration that truly spoke to how He viewed the things He would be preaching and teaching over the next three years: *"[E]veryone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise*

*man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 7:24-27 - making people mindful of Scriptures they had heard in their synagogues, that God offered through the psalmist that His word was like a lamp for my feet, a light on my path"- Psalm 119:105.*

How could He do that? How could He keep on saying those things and doing those things and hanging out with the ragged fringes of society, and it seemed nobody could stop Him? Oh, it wasn't like people wouldn't have loved to. The religious establishment for one hated His guts. But whenever they tried to trap Him with a tricky question, even if they'd put all kinds of thought into it, He would tum it around on them. He'd look like a genius, and they'd look like idiots - every time. Pretty soon they began looking at something a lot more sinister than simply tying His tongue - like taking His life. When you think about it, for religious leaders to plot to murder somebody, that's kind of radical too.

But that's who Jesus of Nazareth was - a radical rabbi, like nobody had ever met or seen or experienced before. And the fact is, the world has never been the same since He showed up. And guess what? It was never meant to be.

## **CONCLUSION**

So that's who we're going to be studying for this next little while - Jesus of Nazareth, the radical rabbi. And folks, this is the kind of study that the church is built for, that we open our doors for. Invite people to come. Pray for God to put somebody on your heart that you could contact and bring on in here. As crazy as this world has been, and is, and probably will be, Jesus has never been more necessary. He's also never been more available. Let's let His radical kingdom mission be ours - for His Father's honor and glory. Let's pray!