

THE RADICAL RABBI: "POINTING TO RADICAL"

(John 1:35-51)

6.14.20

INTRODUCTION

I remember that, when I was a little kid, I would hear grownups from time to time tell me or some other kid, "It's not polite to point." Well, in our following the ministry of the "radical rabbi," today we're going to be looking at some Bible characters who did all kinds of pointing that was absolutely polite, and the very best thing to do - all based on who it was they were pointing at.

Now while we are taking this look at Jesus, whom we have called the "Radical Rabbi" for the purposes of this series, it is going to be my intent to try to follow an estimated timeline of the ministry life of Christ. But what we talked about last week as we began this series can be the overall arch of Christ's ministry - the coming kingdom of heaven and all that that means. That is going to be the focus of everything that Jesus says and does over His next three years. And because the "coming kingdom" plays out as the theme behind all His preaching and teaching and healing, we stepped out of the timeline to present that theme.

But today we're going to go back to the beginning. So, as we do that, let us begin with **a moment of prayer.**

As we get started here, we need a little bit of context. In the rear-view mirror, so to speak, are the two major events that prepared Jesus for ministry:

The first was His baptism. John the Baptist, the prophesied forerunner of the coming Messiah, was the one who received Him in the Jordan River and carefully immersed Him in the waters. Now, an obvious question would be, why would Jesus see a need of being baptized? He had no sin to confess or from which to repent. True, but the answer seems to be that, as a participant in baptism, Jesus was also underscoring and endorsing the message that John had been presenting to the nation - a very specific message highlighting a very specific issue: the need for individuals to seek repentance before God for their lifestyles of sin (repentance meaning a change of direction, a literal "U-turn"). That "setting the stage" for Christ's ministry was huge; it literally did "prepare the way" for the message that Jesus would soon be spreading. And just as important was the fact that Jesus undergoing a sinner's baptism identified Him with sinners - an idea that would ultimately keep Him nailed to the cross as a sacrifice in the place of sinners.

And then, as Jesus came up out of the water, an amazing act of God the Father's affirmation for His "beloved Son" Jesus (and also, it seems, for John) to witness; the first three gospels all relate this moment. Now, Mark and Luke relate it as a personal moment between Father and Son; just listen to the personal pronouns: ***"You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased"*** - ***God speaking, Mark 1:11b; Luke 3:22b.*** In Matthew's account, it is more of a presentation; in other words, God knows His Son; now He wants the world to know His Son as He does: ***"This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased"*** - ***God speaking, Matthew 3:17b.*** And by anointing Him with the Holy Spirit, God is signaling that, ministry-wise for Jesus, game on - it's time.

And while God's affirmation was certainly for His Son, it also served to fortify John's testimony of Jesus as well, as He shared this experience so that everybody would know specifically who He was talking about (and you can almost see Him pointing out Jesus to those around Him): ***"This is the One I meant when I said, 'A Man who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me'*** (a reference that he had come to know that Jesus was Himself God: "He was before me"). ***"I myself did not know***

Him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that He might be revealed to Israel" - John the Baptist, John 1:30-31. In other words, this moment of baptism was also going to be a means of introducing God's Messiah to the world. Then John concludes his testimony with these words of witness: ***"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.*** In other words, John is declaring in no uncertain terms, "Hey, everybody; this guy, this guy right here, He's God's "anointed one"; He's the Messiah; He's the Christ, He's God's promised deliverer come to life, and now come to us!"

And one more thing we are given to notice: While the experience of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon an individual in the OT was for a moment of very specific work by God through an individual, with Jesus the Holy Spirit will be dwelling with Him, remaining with Him, for every moment of His ministry of working the Father's will in the world - affirming in its own way how distinct Jesus and His ministry would be.

And, of course, the second major event was Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. This seems to have been a necessary, even mandatory, test for Christ to pass; Matthew, Mark and Luke all testify that it was the Spirit that led Jesus out into the Judean wilderness to go one-on-one with the devil. Jesus passed this test not as God, who cannot sin, but as a man, genuinely tempted but fighting those temptations through what Paul would decades later call ***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God - Paul, Ephesians 6:17b.*** To every temptation that Satan tried - tempting Jesus to use His power for Himself, tempting Jesus to challenge and test God, and a final tempting of Jesus to worship Satan instead of God - Jesus responded not with divine miraculous power but with the power God has given to everybody to claim, attacking each temptation with the power and authority of God's word. Satan left Him, defeated. And Jesus came out of the wilderness, refreshed, tested and victorious - and ready to begin the three-year ministry to which He had been entrusted. And now we're going to watch as some people begin to explore this new kingdom - as well as the guy who passionately wants to tell them all about it.

TEXT AND ANALYSIS (John 1:35-51)

The next day John (the Baptist) was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus - John 1:35-37.

OK, before anything else, let's check out a map to see where all the events we're going to be talking about today actually took place. John was baptizing just north of the Dead Sea in the province of Perea. After His baptism, we are told that the Spirit led Jesus west from there, crossing the Jordan to head into the wilderness, returning Him to Judea. Following His victory over Satan, He returned to the spot where John was still ministering - and from where John signaled to two of his disciples to follow.

And to set this up even better: This is occurring the day after John the Baptist had declared upon seeing Jesus (which was following His baptism and upon His return from His 40+ days in the wilderness): ***"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" - John the Baptist, John 1:29b.*** In one statement John captures both the person and the purpose of Jesus.

So now it's the day after that. And John is there with a couple of the disciples he has picked up along the way of his ministry. We know that one of the disciples was Andrew, and there is quite a bit of consensus that the second disciple, unnamed in the text, is actually the apostle John - the author of the gospel.

Anyway, when the Baptist sees Jesus again, he describes Him in the same way - the "Lamb of God." But beyond mere pronouncement, his words are also an encouragement for John's disciples to see Jesus as

John himself does - meaning also that it is time for them to leave John, as his ministry to them is over, because the One for whom John has been preparing everybody is now here. John is pointing them to Jesus. From here on out, it's Jesus they must follow. It's the progression that the Baptist saw very clearly; as he was later to say (and I love the KJV translation): **"He must increase, but I must decrease" - John the Baptist, John 3:30 (KJV).**

That showed an incredible humility on John's part. Remember what the Bible tells us about John's ministry: **People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan - Matthew 3:5.** He had become a famous guy. He even had disciples, which was a measure of a rabbi's status and prestige at that time, sort of like a celebrity's entourage is a similar measure today. But the Bible tells us that his "decreasing" had been a part of his message from the beginning; as he had told priests and Levites sent out to him to learn about his ministry, he was merely a "preview"; it was the One coming after him who would be the "main event" - somebody, John told them, **"the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" - John the Baptist, John 1:27b.** Now that was a duty considered so demeaning that even Jewish slaves wouldn't be asked to do it, yet John when comparing himself to the One who was coming did not even see himself measuring up to that status. And now John is showing his understanding of his place in encouraging his disciples to leave him, pointing them to Somebody not him. There is Someone far greater and more worthy for them to pursue.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are You staying?" "Come," He replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where He was staying, and they spent that day with Him. It was about four in the afternoon - John 1:38-39.

It's such a simple word - "come" - and yet it implies invitation, and fellowship, and relationship. Jesus is inviting them to experience Him, not simply to walk in the same direction as He is. It's a profound invitation - as important today as it was then.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus - John 1:40-42a.

Now Andrew gets the distinction of being the first person in recorded history to privately witness about Jesus. And the person he chooses to give this initial witness to is his brother Simon. Note the process that Andrew uses as he begins to point his brother to Jesus:

- 1) First, he goes to his brother and shares his testimony, his experience, of who he believes this new rabbi to actually be.
- 2) He brings him to Jesus, that Simon could have his own experience of seeing and hearing what Jesus was all about.

Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter) - John 1:42b.

A quietly amazing moment: Jesus immediately recognizes who this is that Andrew is bringing to meet him - though they have never met before. And then Jesus renames him; Simon becomes "Cephas" in the Aramaic, and "Peter" in the Greek. Both words mean the same thing: "rock." Now by no stretch of the imagination is Simon any kind of rock for ministry at this point in his life; in fact, there is nothing solid about his character at all. But Christ's renaming him is a profound foretelling to both what Simon is going to be called to be and, more important, what Jesus will make him to be. This transformation, symbolized by a simple name change, makes a thunderous declaration of exactly who is to be the only power in a person's life that can make them pleasing to God and useful for ministry in His kingdom.

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, "Follow me" - John

1:43.

Up until this time, Jesus had been in the province of Perea, in an area just north of where the Jordan River empties into the Dead Sea. So, at this point, He decides to travel north to His home province of Galilee. As He arrives there, He finds a man named Philip and tells him, "Follow me," literally pointing Philip to Himself. This was a cultural twist; in that time, students most often chose the rabbi that they were going to follow but, in this case, this rabbi is doing something radical by choosing the student who will follow Him. And by telling Philip to "follow," Jesus is essentially telling him to accompany Him, to follow along in the same way. But even more than that, Jesus is telling Philip to unite with Him, to literally come into a union of direction. That will make their rabbi/disciple relationship a far more deeply held connection.

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" - John 1:44-45.

Philip, Andrew and Peter were from the town of Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee - about six miles east of the village of Capernaum. It is very possible that Philip knew Nathanael from their common lives as fishermen; the first century Jewish historian Josephus reported that there would be as many as 330 boats fishing the waters of the Sea of Galilee at one time, so that common vocation likely created its own community of relationships. But, however they knew each other, Philip came upon Nathanael (who was originally from the village of Cana, a village less than four miles north of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth) and did the same thing that Andrew had done with his brother Peter: He began pointing Nathanael to Jesus by sharing his personal experience and impression of Jesus of Nazareth, including who he felt Jesus actually was.

"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip - John 1:46.

Nathanael's initial response to Philip's announcement quietly adds another layer to the humble circumstances with which Jesus knowingly placed Himself on earth. While Judeans generally looked down on Galileans, viewing them as poor, largely uneducated country bumpkins, Galileans themselves viewed Nazarenes as the absolute bottom of the barrel. How could anything as magnificent as the mighty prophet that Moses foretold ever come from a dump like Nazareth? But notice the other thing that Philip does. When Nathanael initially objects to what Philip has told him, Philip doesn't try to persuade him from any kind of personal argument. Instead, he just challenges him to come to where Jesus is, see and listen to Him for himself, and form his own conclusion.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, He said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." "How do You know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi ("teacher"), You are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel" - John 1:47-49.

Nathanael seemed aware that he had a reputation from those who knew him of honesty and integrity; here was a man who had no ulterior motives for what he did. He wasn't a schemer of any kind, but rather what some today would call a "straight shooter." When Jesus greeted him with this knowledge of Nathanael seemingly already in place, Nathanael was stunned; he knew he had never met this Nazarene before. So, Jesus basically told him in reply, "Before Philip called you, before I even met you, I saw you." The Greek tells us that the "seeing" to which Jesus is referring is far more than mere sight; it is also perception. In other words, Jesus not only saw his person, but discerned his character - his strengths, his weaknesses, everything about him. And Nathanael understood in a moment who that kind of knowledge meant that this Jesus of Nazareth was, and he declared it immediately: ***"You are the Son of God; You are the king of Israel" - Nathanael, John 1:49b.***

Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that." He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man" -John 1:50-51.

This is an amazing statement of promise and expectation; essentially Jesus is telling Nathanael, "You think My seeing you under that fig tree was a big deal? You ain't seen nothing yet." And then Jesus adds an allusion to the story of Jacob's dream, when he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven, and angels moving up and down on. After Jacob had awakened from that dream, he set up a monument to commemorate the event, and he named the place "Bethel," which means "house of God." What is Jesus telling Nathanael and, by extension, us?

While Jacob saw a ladder in a dream as a connection between God and man, Jesus is declaring that He Himself is now going to be that connection between God and man. Jesus is going to be the new "Bethel," the new house of God revealed in living, human form.

APPLICATION

What we see in this initial connecting of our "Radical Rabbi" with followers is that to be a disciple involves two very basic but fundamental activities:

- 1) To be a disciple means to follow, literally to be going in the same way, in a union that suggests a remaking of the student's life into that of the teacher.
 - a) This is what the apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote to the church in Ephesus: ***You were 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.***
 - b) This is what the disciple John had in mind when he wrote (and I like the CSB translation): ***This is how we know we are in Him: The one who says he remains in Him should walk just as He walked - I John 2:5b-6 (CSB).***
 - c) And certainly, this is what Jesus Himself had in mind when He spoke to His disciples after washing their feet in the Upper Room: ***"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" - Jesus Christ, John 13:15.*** This wasn't just about doing things like Jesus did; this was about something far deeper, as Paul wrote: ***Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 2:5 (KJV).***
 - d) In many ways, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is fleshing out what John the Baptist said as his ministry came to end; pointing to the "Radical Rabbi" from Nazareth, he said: ***"He must increase, but I must decrease" - John the Baptist, John 3:30 (KJV).***
 - e) The end result? All who have been ***clothed with Christ - Paul, Galatians 3:27b (CSB)*** will become more and more ***hidden with Christ - Paul, Colossians 3:3b.***
- 2) To be a disciple means to go, to reach out, with the message of Jesus Christ that came to us. We move from receiving the word to spreading the word.
 - a) It's what Christ meant when He said: ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" - Jesus Christ, Mark 16:15.*** Simple translation: Go to ALL, preach to EVERY!
 - b) Notice the pattern those first disciples established: They first brought news of the Messiah to those closest to them; they reached out to people they knew (and that knew them): John the Baptist to two of his disciples (Andrew and probably John), Andrew to his brother Simon, Philip to his friend Nathanael. This reflected Jesus' closing words to His disciples just prior to His ascension: ***"[Y]ou will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" - Jesus Christ, Acts 1:8b.*** They started nearby and gradually made

their circles of witness wider.

- c) Notice also how they shared their news - not argumentatively, but simply being a witness, reporting what they had personally experienced. And then they brought that person to Jesus because they trusted that, once meeting Jesus, they would come to understand what all the excitement was all about once they began experiencing Him themselves. It's always about the experience of meeting Jesus. He will obviously use our words, but it is Jesus who is the one who saves the soul and makes all things new.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately it is an OT verse that paints a wonderful picture of what was happening to these guys after they met Jesus: ***"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws"*** - God speaking, Ezekiel 36:25-27.

Folks, what was happening to these guys wasn't committing to a new religion. It was becoming a new person - from the inside - by committing to a Radical Rabbi. However, they lived before - how they reacted, how they responded, how they thought, what they did - all those things started becoming new because they started becoming new.

Some critical questions that we, as individuals, and as a church, need to ask ourselves:

- 1) How has the coming of Jesus Christ made us new? Maybe better said, how has the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives made our character new - the real "us" that shows up when no one is looking? How has our character changed - from last week, from last month, from last year? What evidence is there that we have indeed been born again into someone completely new?
- 2) How has the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives made the people around us new? Do the people around us notice a difference from who we were before?
- 3) Are the people around us more aware of heaven and hell, and the coming appointment with God that everybody who has ever lived will have? What are we doing to make them aware of that date, and how to be ready for it?

A church I pastored some 10-15 years ago developed a slogan that we featured on a sign that was visible as people entered the worship center. It stated our purpose - both as a church and as individuals, and it went something like this:

We are here:

To come to know Christ,
To grow in Christ,
To show off Christ, and
To go out for Christ.

That's really it; regardless of what we do for a living, God has made us and placed us for those purposes: That we would come to know Jesus Christ, that we would grow in that relationship, that our lives would reflect that relationship, and that we would go everywhere we could to declare the need for that relationship. Those purposes are the only ones that matter, because those purposes are the only ones that have eternal consequences. What did you think we were here for? Let's pray!