

THE RADICAL RABBI: “RADICAL WORSHIP”

6.5.22

INTRODUCTION

Our radical rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, spent three years teaching his followers many things. But the outcome that he was looking for was not new or extended head knowledge; the Pharisees and other religious leaders had showed in abundance that simply having a lot of theological smarts was not the point of either the Scriptures or the Messiah. All the teachings of Jesus were meant to have an outcome that looked like something, blending into a lifestyle so transparently stamped with the likeness of God that, wherever the followers of his Son were in the world, the people encountering them would all come to the same conclusion as members of the Sanhedrin had observed during an interrogation they had conducted of two of the disciples, Peter and John. As they questioned these two, they took note that these men had been with Jesus — Acts 4:13b. Those leaders saw and heard something so peculiarly outstanding in both the lives of Peter and John that they could only come to one conclusion: Somebody had changed these uneducated, blue-collar guys into passionate and fearless men, now filled with a spirit of hope that could not be destroyed, joy that could not be dismissed, and courage that could not be intimidated. And they knew who that “Somebody” was.

Over the last two weeks, we have looked at two different yet fundamentally important aspects of the Christian life that had so grabbed Peter and John: (1) worshiping God by sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to him speak to us — in other words, making the word of God absolutely foundational in our lives, and (2) worshiping God by coming into his presence through prayer, making communing with God, talking with him about everything, equally absolutely foundational in our lives. But note the common word in both activities: worship — declaring by our response to God the worth of God in our lives. Put another way: Both of these activities reflect the exact same picture of coming into the presence of Almighty God Himself. Those two means of worship are key ingredients in the growing and maturing life in Christ. So as we begin, let’s start with the key ingredient of prayer.

THE “WHY” OF BIBLE STUDY AND PRAYER:

You know, in our day and age, we have lotteries going on all the time, with numbers for the winner or winners sometimes in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Well, today we’re going to look at a couple of treasure chests to which God has given us access — amazing chests filled with riches beyond compare. And the cool thing is, there is always more than enough for anybody who wants them. Come on down; these treasures are for anybody and everybody. And you can come again and again and again — there is no limit. In fact, truth be told, it’s Christ’s desire that you never stop.

These two treasure chests are “Bible study” and “prayer.” And before we go any farther, please understand that, when I talk about Bible study or prayer, I am not referring to those opportunities that we provide here in our church. I am talking about your own private, at-home opportunities.

OK; let’s start with the treasure chest that is Bible study. Now remember a couple weeks back when we featured a story about Jesus visiting the sisters Mary and Martha. Martha

flew into the kitchen and got busy trying to prepare a meal for her honored guest. Mary, on the other hand, spent her time sitting at the feet of Jesus, just listening to his teaching. When Martha figured out where her sister was and what she was doing — instead of helping her — she was really ticked off. But Jesus responded to her by saying: “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed — or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” — Luke 10:41-42. Wow — Mary had chosen a treasure that was not only hers in that moment but would remain hers throughout eternity.

So what are some of the treasures awaiting us when we dive into God’s word? Well, how about these samples:

- 1) Direction (Psalm 119:105). “Your word lets me see where I’m going!”
- 2) Answers for life:
 - a) Anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7).
 - b) Meeting my needs (Philippians 4:19).
 - c) Overcoming fear (II Timothy 1:7).
 - d) Overcoming guilt (I John 1:9).
 - e) Loneliness (Matthew 28:20; Psalm 23:4). Some 22% of millennials say they don’t have any friends. Some 25% of millennials — that’s one out of four — say they don’t even have any acquaintances. Brad Delp was the lead singer for the 1970s rock group Boston. He had worldwide fame, with fans all over the globe. He succumbed to suicide. The note he left behind said in part, “I am such a lonely soul.”
 - f) Need to be loved (Jeremiah 31:3)
 - g) Fear of rejection (Matthew 11:29; “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine” — God speaking, Isaiah 43:1b.
 - h) Purpose: 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) Strengthened faith (Romans 10:17).
- 4) Resistance to temptation (Psalm 119:11).
- 5) Godly wisdom: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work — Paul, II Timothy 3:16-17.
- 6) Spiritual victory: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God — Paul, Ephesians 6:17b.
- 7) Encouragement: Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart — Jeremiah 15:16a (NASB1995).
- 8) Nobody understands: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet he did not sin — Hebrews 4:15.
- 9) Nobody on my side: [Jesus] is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them — Hebrews 7:25.
- 10) Our only standard: Jesus (John 13:15).
- 11) Forgiveness:

- a) Our reality: [A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God — Paul, Romans 3:23. That means church people, too, including members of our own church family.
- b) God’s response: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you — Paul, Ephesians 4:32.
- c) Limits on forgiveness: NONE!!! Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” — Matthew 18:21-22 (NASB1995). In other words, forgiveness is not a moment; it’s a way of life — and I certainly hope it is; I personally need God to be forgiving me all day, every day. What if God put limits on how often he forgave us?
- d) The testing side of forgiveness: If we truly believe that God is sovereign overall, that his eye is truly even on the smallest sparrow, that he knows the numbers of hairs on our head and the number of days in our lives, then we need to understand trials and testings for what they are: an opportunity gifted to us by God himself for our growth, for our benefit. They are an opportunity to gain maturity in Christ — and a moment brought to us by a perfectly loving God who only desires the best for us.

It’s like this: Somebody genuinely sins against us; for example, they verbally take us out to the woodshed and “beat” us within an inch of our lives. Or maybe somebody is talking about us behind our backs — you know, that gossip thing. Hurt and pain? Absolutely! Frustration? Tell me something I don’t know. And you want more pain? Have the sinner, the person who went after us like this, be a member of our own church family here. Ouch even more!

But here’s the deal: While what that person did is absolutely sin (and there is no argument about that), for everybody else who may be affected, it is a test. How are we going to react? Are we going to pray for that person? Are we going to pray that we would reflect the words of Jesus: “A new command I give you: Love one another. [How do we do that; what does that look like? Answer:] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [So what does that do? Answer:] By this everyone will know that you are my disciples [they will see that you have been with Jesus], if you love one another” — Jesus Christ, John 13:34-35.

So are we going to pray for wisdom that we have the right response? Are we going to pray that our actions and responses will glorify God? Are we going to pray to praise God and bow to his sovereign right to test us, and praise him for having such a love for us that he wants us to grow more and more into the image of his Son? Do we recognize that that is the greatest compliment of love a Christian can receive, that the God who loved us so much he sacrificed his own Son on our behalf would test us because he only wants the best for us?

Sound crazy? That’s what the disciples did: The Sanhedrin arrested them for teaching in the name of Jesus and had them flogged. Their response? The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name — Acts 5:41. That’s what Paul

and Silas did — singing hymns in prison while being held in stocks in prison following their being flogged (Acts 16). That’s what James told us we can know: Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything — James 1:2-4. Does God’s testing drive us to our knees in praise and worship for such a love as his?

And notice something about all these pieces of treasure — not to mention ones that we didn’t even mention. They are not bits of fantasy, but rather real-world treasures for real-world issues. God has given us his word as a treasure to enrich us while we travel in this world.

Wow — and just when you thought what could be better than this treasure chest, there’s another one right next to it, equally open for us to experience and enjoy. So what are some of the treasures found in this next chest called “Prayer?”

- 1) Prayer brings us closer to God, deepening our relationship with him, meaning that we become closer to his priorities, his way of doing things. David knew that, writing: The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth — David, Psalm 145:18. That’s why the author of Hebrews was so emphatic when he wrote: Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need — Hebrews 4:16 (NKJV).
- 2) Prayer focuses us on God’s priorities: Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things — Paul, Colossians 3:1-2.
- 3) Prayer discredits anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7).
- 4) Prayer inspires hope: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit — Paul, Romans 15:13.
- 5) Prayer brings God’s answers: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” — God speaking, Jeremiah 33:3 (NKJV).
- 6) What if I’m not sure what to pray: In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans — Paul, Romans 8:26.

Wow — pretty great treasure chests, don’t you think?

APPLICATION

So why this particular message? One memory from my first church: After a Sunday message, he came up to me after the service and said how much he appreciated my messages. But then he said how glad he was to hear them because that was the only time in the week he opened his Bible — and he was one of my elders.

It became clear to me that, for many Christians, they have let church activities — morning worship and Bible studies — become their sole visit to the treasure chests. Wow — talk about a self-inflicted injury. There are 168 hours in the week. For all that Christ offers to mean and provide for us, we’re going to be content with a one-hour visit? Are we really

going to allow ourselves only one meal for the entire week? We're not just going to be hungry. We're going to be starving!

So what do we do with all of this? Well, it goes back to something we have voiced many times over these last years: Our declared faith in Jesus Christ has to be more than declared; it has to look like something. Jesus himself said as much to his disciples, once very pointedly asking them: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" — Jesus Christ, Luke 6:46. And within the context of living lives that display the priority of spending time at the feet of Jesus and that also display the priority of spending time in prayer to Jesus, most of what our lives should look like is worship.

It's like this: We live in this broken, corrupted world 24/7. Shouldn't our worship also be 24/7? Radical? Maybe. Necessary? Absolutely. So everybody, how are you doing? How is your time in Bible study? Is it happening? Are you learning, growing? Is it making you want more? And prayer — how much time are you spending talking with God, and listening to God as well? Prayer is a conversation between two, not just one listening to the other's talk. So how much treasure are you covering yourselves with from each chest? There's no bottom to the chest. The only limits are the ones we put in place.

And how are those treasures impacting your lives? How are your lives different than they were, say, a year ago? Are you finding yourself becoming more in the image of Christ, or less? These may be awkward or difficult questions to consider, but they are essential as we look to the future.

CONCLUSION

Now, as we close, one problem in the world — of the "several" problems in the world — is people outside of Christianity criticizing or mocking its people or its beliefs. The truth is, unless somebody has experienced meeting Jesus Christ for who he truly is, they don't know anything about Christianity. Oh, they may have some understanding of the religion, but they don't have a clue about the relationship. As Paul said so well: The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit — Paul, I Corinthians 2:14.

Exactly how foolish may Christianity look? One of my favorite guys, A.W. Tozer, wrote this: A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest and happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible and knows that which passes knowledge.

So why is Christianity real for us instead of foolishness? We know the greatest reality of all — God. We worship in his word; we worship in prayer — all this because we carry the Holy Spirit, a direct deposit of Christ himself, in all our lives. Worshiping God through Jesus Christ is how all of who and how God is is revealed to us. It's how he leads us, guides us, reminds us, and talks to us.

And why is this so important? Well, look around at the world. How's that working out for everybody? And yet this is the time and place to which God has placed us. And as we look at the world, we need to be aware of one overriding reality, and I'm reminded of it by this memory: I remember, particularly during the Apollo lunar missions, watching the countdowns before those massive rockets fired and the spacecraft left the launch pad on its way to the moon. Well, there are three countdowns going on right now — countdowns to which we will never know their end is near until their end happens. And what are those countdowns?

- 1) The end of my days. OK; I don't really care about that because, by the grace and mercy of Almighty God, I have a post office box waiting for me in heaven — along with an eternity in the presence of Jesus himself. So whatever my days (Psalm 139:16), I can hit "zero" anytime.
- 2) The end of days of those around me. OK; some of those are, like me, written in the book of life and beyond ready for heaven. But there are also many around me not saved. Their days may be close to concluding; have I connected them with the gospel? Christ died for them, too.
- 3) The end of days for the church. This comes from our End Times Bible study group (starting up again in September) but the Rapture, an event in real time where God will pull his church (all believers in Jesus Christ worldwide) off-planet and into heaven can also happen at any time.

All of those "clocks" are in countdown mode, meaning they are all heading for "zero." Are we making use of all the time and opportunities we have?

But another question comes to mind. For those of us who are Christians, what are your priorities? Are you looking forward to heaven? Do you have an eagerness for Christ's return that you have for absolutely nothing else?

Think about it like this: Imagine a person that you admire more than anybody in the world. And that person lets you know that they are coming to your house. You are invited to tell anyone and everyone about this amazing moment that is promised to you. Only problem: You've been told everything about this coming except when it is going to happen. How would that impact how you prepared, how you lived your life?

Well, Jesus is coming, for sure, in real time, to bring all his children home. What are you doing to be ready? What are you doing to help get other people ready? The clocks are ticking; the countdown is underway.

How are you doing? Are you continuing your trips to the treasure chests of Bible study and prayer? Are you growing, maturing, falling in love with your Savior? Let's pray!