

## THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL SUBMISSION" (John 3:22-36)

7.12.20

### INTRODUCTION

I remember when our first daughter, Hayley, was born. We had done all the birth classes and all the shopping for necessities the best we could. Finally, the day came when Linda called me at work and basically said, "I think it's time." So, I get home and we get to the hospital and, later that evening, I was holding my first-born little girl. No words for that moment.

Then I remember bringing Linda and Hayley home from the hospital, and from all the care and attention that all those health pros at the hospital had provided. We walk into our house, we're standing in the entryway, and we find ourselves greeted by ...silence. All of a sudden, having the baby seemed the easy part. We both looked at each other. OK; we've had her - what do we do now? For just a second, it was overwhelming.

But then Hayley began crying - I guess she wanted to see the rest of the house or at least get a look at her new room or something - and we began settling into that "parent" routine. But I'll never forget that moment: "OK, she's born; now what do we do?"

In a sense, that's where we find ourselves in our look at the Radical Rabbi. Last week, we learned about the necessity of something that Jesus called being "born again." We learned about a second birth, a new birth - a spiritual birth - that was an absolute requirement for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

Now this week, we have the follow-up to new birth that basically asks the same question in a spiritual vein that Linda and I asked some 31 years ago: "OK, we've had the birth; now what do we do?" But first, let's get ready with a **moment of prayer**.

### TEXT AND ANALYSIS (John 3:22-36)

*After this, Jesus and His disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where He spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) - John 3:22-24.*

The "after this" to which John is referring is to Jesus' evening conversation with Nicodemus. Timeframe wise, we can probably assume that eight-day cycle of feasts in Jerusalem - Passover, Unleavened Bread and First fruits - are over, and Jesus has started a journey with the disciples that will eventually bring Him back to the area around the Sea of Galilee. His return to Galilee is where the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all begin recording His ministry. Now during this time, Jesus was overseeing baptism, likely meaning preaching and teaching but leaving the disciples to actually do the baptizing of those who responded to Jesus' words. John writes in the next chapter: *[I]n fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples - John 4:2*. At the same time, John the Baptist was continuing his ministry to the people - pointing to the coming Messiah and, in preparation for that coming, to be baptized for the repentance of sins. So, for a brief period of time, the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth actually overlapped.

*An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They (John's disciples) came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan - the one you testified about - look, He is baptizing, and everyone is going to Him" - John 3:25-26.*

John the Baptist had, like Jesus later on, ignored some traditional Jewish practices, such as ceremonial washing to maintain cleanliness in the eyes of God. The idea of outer physical cleanliness somehow translating to inner spiritual cleanliness in God's eyes was simply religion gone crazy in His point of view. In fact, John had gone after the Pharisees for suggesting that their lineage as God's chosen people somehow conveyed special status, reminding them: **"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" - John the Baptist, Matthew 3:8-9.** That whole "washing" argument had reminded John's disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, who similarly seemed to strive for something deeper on the part of His audiences than any mere outward displays of righteousness. And as they remembered John's first mention of Him, it also reminded them that it appeared that the crowds that had at one time been flocking to John were now flocking to Jesus instead. You can almost hear them asking, "Um, should we be concerned about that?"

*To this John replied, "A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of Him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for Him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" - John 3:27-30.*

John's answer is one of brilliance - genius and humility. You might even call it John's version of "prosperity gospel" - and it goes like this:

- 1) First, John pays homage to God's sovereignty, telling his disciples, "A person can only work with what God has given them." John is resting in God's sovereignty to define himself; he is not comparing himself to anybody else. In other words: "God rules. He made me to have a place in His plans. He is my master, so He can pretty much do with me what He wants."
- 2) Second, because of his complete resting in God's sovereignty, John is very comfortable reminding his disciples of what they themselves had heard him say to the committee of Jewish leadership who had come out to the wilderness to ask him, "Who are you?" John had reiterated his place in God's plan: "I am not the Messiah. I am His forerunner, His messenger, His 'voice crying in the wilderness.'"
- 3) Third, because he has embraced his place in God's plan, he is content; in fact, he is "full of joy" at his place as the "friend of the bridegroom." In other words, he is reminding his disciples: "Guys, I am not the main attraction. I was never going to be the main attraction. That is not who God planned me to be. It's just like being at a friend's wedding; we've all done that. We're excited for him, we're happy for him, but the occasion itself is all about him and his bride. Our joy is in being a part of His event. I am excited for Jesus of Nazareth in the same way. He is the main attraction - and

nothing makes me happier than that. My joy is in doing everything I can to support Him. And now that He's finally here, my joy is complete because my joy has always been about seeing Him arrive."

- 4) And to sum up, one of the greatest verses ever declaring his understanding of who Jesus is, and therefore who he is - literally the key to John's prosperity: ***He must become greater; I must become less***" - ***John the Baptist, John 3:30***. A number of translations show this verse like this: ***"He must increase, but I must decrease."*** Note the "have-to-ness" of this situation: He must increase; I must decrease. John is declaring in no uncertain terms that his role must now be diminishing. His was the role of the herald, announcing that the King was on His way, that the King would be passing this way shortly. Well, now the King is here; He has come. John understands, accepts and even embraces the fact that his role is now ended. He now will find his role, and therefore his joy, in the arrival of the King he proclaimed. Long live the King!

***The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them - John 3:31-36.***

The distinction is now made: Jesus must increase because He comes from above - from heaven. John the Baptist, for all his faithfulness in fulfilling his role, was still no more than one who "belongs to the earth." While John was a forerunner sharing a message he had been given from above, Jesus was greater because He had come from above, and therefore was able to bear witness to what He had actually seen and heard, what He had actually witnessed. God's word is always truth, but whoever accepts it is affirming that God is true by responding to His truth with the surrender of their lives to His truth - much the same idea as the apostle John would write in his first letter (a verse we touched on last week): ***Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about His Son - I John 5:10.***

Jesus is then further identified as being "above all" - in other words, worthy of all praise, honor, glory and surrender - due to the following attributes:

- 1) Being sent directly by God,
- 2) Being given God's Spirit "without limit," and
- 3) Having "everything" lovingly placed "in his hands" by His Father.

As a result, because of all those things, placing one's belief in that Son of God will result in eternal life - eternity in the presence of God and His Son - but rejecting who Jesus is will result in facing God's wrath. Why? Because rejecting the grace of having Christ's redeeming, substitutionary death for all their sins denies everything that God has said His Son's death accomplished, rendering Christ's life meaningless, His blood meaningless, His suffering

meaningless, His separation from God meaningless - as if it never even happened - leaving a sinner facing the wrath of God alone, both because of his sins remaining eternally with him, and also because the sinner has totally and willfully treated His Son's amazing sacrifice with an unforgivable contempt.

## APPLICATION

Our main focus this morning really has to be about that idea of "He must increase, but we must decrease." Why? Because increasing Jesus is everything - for the growth of the individual and for the impact of the body of believers in the place where God has planted us.

The New Testament is full of examples of the fundamental importance of this desire in our lives:

- 1) When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church telling them: *[W]e all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit - Paul, II Corinthians 3:18*, the transformation he is talking about is the change brought about in our lives by increasing Jesus.
- 2) When Paul wrote to the Galatian church telling them: *[A]ll of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ - Paul, Galatians 3:27*, he was declaring that a life clothed with Christ, with our testimony of Jesus being revealed in our words, actions and attitudes, has essentially become our life's uniform - identifying us with the "team" for which we live.
- 3) When Paul wrote to the Philippians that he was *being 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*, the "good work" to which he was referring was the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of each believer to increase Jesus.

This now becomes the incredibly critical question as we move forward into our lives with Christ once we have had the experience of being born again: How are my thoughts, my words, my actions, my attitudes, increasing Jesus? How are all the different areas of my life increasing Jesus? We often talk about being a "healthy" church. That's the question that is the fundamental starting point for that conversation: Is Jesus increasing here? Are we known simply by the attributes of our friendliness, our welcome, our music, our building? Or are we known because, every time somebody walks in here, they are made more and more aware that Jesus is the biggest, most obviously growing feature of this church because Jesus is increasing here.

Why is that so important? Several reasons:

- 1) First and most important, increasing Jesus is important because it is how we say "I love you" to God and His Son and reveal the depth of our surrender to Christ for all He surrendered for us:
  - a) *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart (emotionally) and with all your soul (spiritually) and with all your mind (mentally) and with all your strength (physically)" - Jesus Christ, Mark 12:30 (quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*. Love the

Lord with ALL!

- b) *[W]hatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him....Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord...since you know that [i]t is the Lord Christ you are serving - Paul, Colossians 3:17, 23-24.* Serve the Lord with ALL! And that's not just Sunday morning stuff, or something that we keep confined to just one little compartment of our lives. Jesus calls us to love the Lord with all and serve the Lord with all because He desires to be the master of all in all our lives. He's not looking for a partnership agreement; He's looking for unconditional surrender. So, what He's looking to be doing is always increasing in our lives - every day, not just Sundays or other "special times." He wants His entire life to be our entire life.
- 2) Increasing Jesus is important because it is the basis for the judgment of Christians upon coming into heaven:
- a) *[W]e will all stand before God's judgment seat. ... [E]ach of us will give an account of ourselves to God - Paul, Romans 14:10b, 12.*
- b) *[N]o one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even though only as one escaping through the flames - Paul, I Corinthians 3:11-15.* My entire life will be gathered into a pile before being set aflame by the perfect standard of God's holiness. What will burn? What will remain?
- c) This judgment will be based upon and conducted by the One who knows all and sees all; therefore, He will examine all. As God said through the prophet Jeremiah in the OT: *"I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve" - God speaking, Jeremiah 17:10.* And as Paul underscored in the NT: *[The Lord] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart - Paul, I Corinthians 4:5b.* And very clearly God wants us to understand that it is the totality of our thoughts, our deeds, and our words that will come under His perfect scrutiny; as Jesus Himself told some Pharisees arguing with Him: *"I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:36-37.*
- 3) Increasing Jesus is important because it is how the world sees what born-again people look like - as people living a life based not on themselves but rather on a new Master who sits on the throne of their lives. We are the picture of what the "new birth" looks like. We are the example of what the "new birth" can mean for somebody's life because Jesus Christ has become our new identity:
- a) *"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" - Jesus Christ, John 13:15.*

b) *[I]f anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here - Paul, II Corinthians 5:17.*

## CONCLUSION

If you'll take a look at the "study guide" for today's message, you'll see the following question: *Do you sense the need for a restart, a new beginning, to "increase" Jesus in your life?* This isn't being asked from a sense of judgment; you answer to God, not to me. But it is asked from the standpoint of necessity. For us to be used by God in the place where He has placed us, we have to be no-holds-barred, no doubt, no hesitation sold out to Jesus Christ. If there is anything in your life that you place ahead of Christ, if there is ever a time when you are challenged by God to do something and find some major wrestling match has broken out inside, in your heart, that is saying, "I ain't gonna do that; I don't care who you are or what you say," that is a scream-and-a-half that Jesus is not the King. And if He's not the King, then who is? If He's not the undisputed King of this body of believers, then who is?

*My soul makes its boast in the Lord - David, Psalm 34:2a (ESV).* Is the Lord our greatest boast? Is our passionate love for the Lord the basis for our joy, our worship, our messages, our ministries? Is Jesus Christ what defines this place?

The other day we talked about this in our elder meeting, so this may be a bit more of a "guy" thing than a "girl" thing. But when I met the woman who would become my wife, when we all met that one who would become our spouse, we didn't just sit on a street corner and wait for them to show up and flirt, or show up and pop the question or throw a ring on the finger, or show some kind of interest or whatever. We pursued them; we intentionally pursued them. Nothing else mattered. We had them in our "heart sights" and there was no way we were going to let them go. And we didn't just want them for "date nights" or for just some occasions but not others. We wanted them to be in every part of our lives - and we weren't going to be satisfied unless and until that happened. And if that person was truly a passion, we have continued pursuing them to this very day.

The same thing is true for any other thing in our lives that we would consider a "passion." When our kids were born, we didn't just hold them in that moment, look at them, give them a gentle hug, and then say, "OK; I'm good." No way! We pursued loving them to this very day. The same thing with careers or hobbies or friends or whatever. When it's passion, we pursue; we intentionally pursue.

Is Jesus Christ our passion? Do we pursue him with unquenchable passion? He must increase; all else must decrease. Once "new birth" has happened, that's the drill. It's all about Jesus - and there's nothing casual about that. It's passionate - and it's intentional. Ladies and gentlemen, what is your intention? When it comes to Jesus Christ, what is your intention? What do you see your life pursuing ahead of all else? That's our question today. So, what's our answer? Let's pray!