

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL PERSPECTIVE"

(John 1:29, 3:30)

7.19.20

INTRODUCTION

This September my wife Linda and I will celebrate 39 years of marriage. Over all those years, I think there is only one issue over which she has seriously contemplated leaving me. It's not what you'd normally think: marital unfaithfulness, drinking, gambling, golf widow - nothing like that. But it is the one ongoing behavior of mine that absolutely drives her nuts.

I love reruns. Now while that may sound harmless enough, I'm not just talking about watching a show a second or even a third time. I'm talking about watching a particular scene in a particular show or movie - over and over and over again. She'll come walking through the living room and she'll see me watching some part of a show or movie on TV. The next time she walks through the living room, she may see me watching that same scene. Sometimes she might sit down next to me and ask why I'm watching that scene again, and again, and again. Most of those times she just gets up and leaves sorry she ever stopped to ask. But then, two days later, she'll see that same scene again. The next week, that same scene - to the point that she is ready to scream, not to mention hiring somebody to throw the TV - and me - as far away as possible.

So, what's going on? No, I'm not deliberately trying to drive her nuts - that's just one of the perks. But as a creative person, somebody who's written plays and stories, I love the creative process, so I enjoy watching how a scene was put together, and I mean everything about it - the pacing, the lines, the facial expressions, the set, how dialogue was spoken, what dialogue was chosen - everything. For me, it's like going to school. No matter how much I watch a show or a scene, I always can find something that I didn't notice before, or some new way that a moment in a scene hit me. And, as long as I continue to find new stuff, I'll keep watching - over and over and over again. I never know when I may want to use that scene as a template for creating a scene in one of my stories or plays, or maybe use it as an illustration in a message, or whatever.

I'll do the same thing with books or, especially, with magazine articles. There is one article about a 19th century American painter that I must have read 50 times if I've read it once. The way it's written, how it impacts me - whatever it is, it draws me back into that narrative over and over and over again.

Now Linda is not wired that way. So, for her, it's just her weird, spooky husband being weird and spooky. And it's been that way for 39 years. Ain't love grand!

So why am I talking about that stuff? Because we're sort of going to be doing a bit of a rerun today. After last week's message, a conversation I was blessed to be a part of let me see that maybe God was directing me to do a bit of a rerun. And let's face it: So many parts of Scripture are literally never-ending gold mines, always with something more to be found and valued. And God let me see through that conversation that it was probably important to return to some of last weeks' Scriptures to "rerun" some of the treasures that

we found - as well as find some new gems. So, with that in mind, let's begin with a **word of prayer**.

TEXTS AND ANALYSIS (John 1:29, 34; 3:30)

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!... I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One. . . . He must become greater; I must become less" - John the Baptist, John 1:29b, 34; 3:30.

Now, for all the impressive things that John the Baptist accomplished in his life - in fact, so much so that Jesus Himself said of him ***"Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist"*** - ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:11a*** - one of the greatest but often overlooked thing he did is this: He was the first to verbally declare precisely and unapologetically just who this Nazarene was and, as a result, if that was true, then who he, John, had to become in response. This is an amazing "triple feature," these three amazing statements, so let's look at them one by one, getting a bit into the Greek to help us break them down to see exactly what he is telling us:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" - John the Baptist, John 1:29b.

The first thing John does is focus everybody's attention on Jesus - "Look!" He then identifies Him - but not as Jesus or as a Nazarene or Galilean or anything else. He identifies Him as the "Lamb of God," which would have had an incredible resonance for all the Jews in the audience. "Lamb of God" alludes way back to God's initial instructions to Moses to relay to the Israelites regarding what would become known as "Passover," and specifically to these words: ***"Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household"*** - ***God speaking, Exodus 12:3***. John is declaring Jesus is the "lamb" that God is selecting for all families, for all households.

Then John tells us what this "Lamb of God" is going to be doing. But the Greek clarifies Jesus' role as the "lamb" by telling us that Jesus is "the One," using the definite article to specify that Jesus, and no other, is this "Lamb of God." This puts the Baptist's statement in that family of "one-and-only" verses concerning the uniqueness of Jesus and the absolute necessity of claiming His "one-of-a-kind" sacrifice:

- 1. "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" - Jesus Christ, John 3:3.***
- 2. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"-Jesus Christ, John 14:6.***
- 3. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" -Peter, Acts 4:12.***
- 4. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people - Paul, I Timothy 2:5-6a***
- 5. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son - I John 5:11b.***

In other words, at the end of the day, God is declaring very clearly through His word: "Don't even bother trying to find another way because there is no other way. You want to come to me; you want to know me? It's through My Son - period, end of story. Do you

really believe I would send my beloved Son to die for you unless there was no other way for you? Think about it."

Next, while John declares Jesus as the one who "takes away the sin of the world," the Greek tells us that John is telling us that, even in that moment, Jesus is already "taking away," literally carrying away our sin. The Greek word for "sin is HAMARTIA [ham-ar-tee^-ah] - literally, "missing the mark" like an archer missing the bullseye - only in this case the mark being God's standard for holiness, which according to Paul is His very glory: *[All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God - Paul, Romans 3:23.* And, as Peter tells us: *He (Jesus) was chosen ("selected" by God) before the creation of the world - I Peter 1:20a.* So, in a sense, Jesus has been taking away the sin of the world since He was chosen by God to become His "Lamb." And, with every passing moment, Jesus was coming closer to the actual act that would make His taking away sin a done deal. In the meantime, Jesus' life on earth would be preparing everybody for what that sacrifice would mean.

And Jesus' life, death and ultimate resurrection would be offering a forgiveness and restoration from sin in two ways: first, offering forgiveness for our specific acts of sin and, second, offering by means of the Holy Spirit entering a believer's life a remedy for the very condition of sin itself by driving the process of transforming believers more and more each day into the image of Christ. And, as John makes very clear, it was not simply Israel's sins, or Jewish sins, but the sins and the condition of sin of all people everywhere - no limits.

"I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One" - John the Baptist, John 1:34.

This is a great example of a testimony, of giving witness to what we ourselves have experienced. By saying, "I have seen," John is declaring that he is giving factual testimony of a state of being of which he is certain - basically, "I know what I've seen." By amplifying that statement by adding, "I [have] testified," John is letting us know that this is not hearsay, not something that somebody passed down to him. He has seen it for himself.

And then he concludes by declaring that this one whom he has seen and understood for himself is not only the Messiah, the Christ (the Hebrew and Greek terms for "Anointed One") but, most specifically, the Son of God. In other words, John is not simply reflecting on somebody's role, but just as awesome just who it is who has been chosen to fill that role - the Son of God Himself. That certainly ties into John 3 where we see these words: ***For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life - John 3:16.*** God's Word has a wonderful capacity for commenting and explaining itself. These verses present us with an incredible picture not only of God's love in making the plan of salvation, but then in the overwhelming gift of choosing His "one and only" Son to actually be the one to make that salvation plan happen. Wow!

"He must become greater; I must become less" - John the Baptist, John 3:30. And now some "rerun" on a verse we looked at last week. When we considered these words, we talked about how this was essentially what the life of Christ should look like - that we become more and more like Him - and the person we were before Jesus came into our

lives should be ever more fading away, so that Christ is all that is showing. We talked about Paul writing to churches in Corinth, Galatia and Philippi teaching them about what happens upon our surrender to God through Jesus Christ; he wrote about our being transformed into the Lord's image, being "clothed" with Christ, and the lifelong working of the Holy Spirit in our lives to complete us in Christ.

And if you remember, we closed our service with the thought that, as Jesus increases in our lives while we decrease, some words of David from Psalm 34 would have a growing meaning and understanding in our lives; quoting from the English Standard Version translation, those words were: *My soul makes its boast in the Lord - David, Psalm 34:2a (ESV)*. But as much as those words impacted me, that same verse, told through the paraphrase of *The Message*, provided even greater clarity, and in fact hit me even harder: *I live and breathe God - David, Psalm 34:2a (MSG)*.

Wow! Isn't that an amazing way of sharing the same idea? "I live and breathe God." That is very much in tune with what Christ said in how completely we are to love the Lord - literally, with everything we have: "all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, all my strength" - literally adding up to: "I live and breathe God!"

APPLICATION

So today, we're going to get a bit more practical with these verses and ideas, meaning that we are going to look at some real-world applications of what it can mean to have Jesus increase while we decrease.

One way to do that is to evaluate what we would consider our resources, the gifts that God has given us. David gave us some great words in expressing thanks to God, while at the same time reminding his nation (and us) who is the ruler over everything; he said: *"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise Your glorious name" - David, I Chronicles 29:11-13*. So, let's look at some of the "everything" that has so graciously come down to us from God:

- 1) Life. The most basic, most important gift is our simple existence. But the Bible teaches loud and clear that our lives are a gift from God, that we are here because he created us here:
 - a) *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. ... Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being - Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7.* Notice the activity of God: He decided, He created, He formed, He breathed.

And this all happened modeled on His image, His likeness. Notice the activity of man: Nothing.

- b) We are created with an obligation to the Creator, which is why the psalmist famously wrote: ***Know that the Lord is God. It is He who made us [and not we ourselves – NKJV], and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture - Psalm 100:3.*** Again, notice God's activity in our existence: He made us, He owns us. Man's activity: Nothing.
 - c) When Moses was trying to talk his way out of being God's choice to lead Israel out of Egypt, God's response as Moses listed all his shortcomings was this: ***The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" - God, speaking to Moses at the burning bush, Exodus 4:11.*** Who gives, who makes? God, and God alone. Man's contribution: Nothing.
 - d) ***[Y]ou, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand - Isaiah 64:8.*** Note the side-by-side comparison of participation: We are simply the material to be molded, but God is the artist, the one doing the molding, the one creating with a designed outcome in His mind. And that translates into one of the great common denominators of everybody who has ever lived: We are all creations of God - His design, His artistry, His outcome. And every "work" of this Artist comes out precisely as He wants.
 - e) ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" - God speaking, Jeremiah 1:5a.*** Every time I read these words, I am stunned by what they tell me - that long before my feet ever hit the ground, God knew me. He knew the plans He had for me, He knew the ministries He desired for me, and He created me with those outcomes in mind. But He also knew me - personally, intimately. It is such a picture of passionate caring and a precise fitting into His plans. There is a love and affection there that takes my breath away. And we can all say the same thing: "God made me like no one else, to be like no one else. He made me exactly, perfectly, the way He wanted me to be."
- 2) Time. Perhaps one of the most overlooked gifts of all. God has given us lifespan, time to learn him, experience life, and put those two together in a way that increases Jesus and brings glory to God. So, what does the Bible say about time?
- a) ***[A]ll the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be - David, Psalm 139:16b.*** My lifespan is a result of God's plans for me. Since He owns all things, He owns my time as well; he owns every second. So, if it truly belongs to Him, what am I doing with it to increase Jesus?
 - b) ***Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom - Moses, Psalm 90:12.*** Because I recognize that my time on earth is a gift from God, my love for God should challenge me to see my "days" as a resource given me by my Master in which to invest for Him.
 - c) ***My times are in Your hands - David, Psalm 31:15a.*** Because God has created my lifespan, He truly is in charge of every moment. Therefore, how I spend my

time is a reflection of my relationship with Him.

- d) ***"As long as it is day, we must do the works of Him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work" - Jesus Christ, John 9:4.*** These words of Christ reveal the dual nature of time that all Christians need to be aware of: (1) the limits of their own time on earth, and (2) the limits that God puts on the work of the church prior to His initiating the time clock of His own "end times." Both impact Christians and should both be huge motivators to pursue increasing Jesus in the world in which we live and with the opportunities that God grants us.
- 3) Wealth - the material resources which God graciously gives us to maintain home, family and His other opportunities:
 - a) ***"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth" - Moses, Deuteronomy 8:17-18.***
 - b) ***"Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. ...Everything comes from you, and we have...only what comes from Your hand"-David, I Chronicles 29:12, 14h.***
 - c) ***"[A]part from Me you can do nothing" - Jesus Christ, John 15:5b.*** It is an incredibly stark reminder of just how much we can plan and do and accomplish without God. Literally in the Greek, "Without Me you cannot do a thing at all."

So, what are we looking at; I mean, what does God want us to know? Simply this: that God Almighty has designed, created and established our lives - our very existence, the length of that existence, and the talents and abilities we have been graced with to make use of during that existence - that every one of our lives would be lived one way: ***I live and breathe God - David, Psalm 34:2a (MSG).***

But what does that mean? What does that look like? What does Christianity look like? I've been wrestling with that over the past several days as I have been praying to God and listening for His voice, His direction. And I think that He has led me to an answer, and it goes like this.

In the epistle of James, we read the foundation for this view of practical theology: ***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says - James 1:22.*** What's the deception? That simply hearing the word and being around the word is enough. It's not! We often spend so much time focused on sermons and studies and learning everything we can about everything we hear that we forget that the Bible is not an academic exercise strictly for the mind. The Bible is an instruction book that is designed to show us how to live in a way that is pleasing to that God who has designed us and created us and established us for His purposes. In other words, the Bible is designed quite literally to be "fleshed out."

Put another way, there are two (2) huge facts that tell us that, yes, Christianity is all about the believing and the learning, but it is also all about the doing, and those facts are these:

- 1) If Christianity was only about simply saving us, then Jesus could have gone directly

from heaven to the cross. Salvation is accomplished - no muss, no fuss. No need to be born in a stable, no need to grow up in a broken world. Just bleed, die, rise - and it's complete!

- 2) If Christianity was only about coming to faith in Christ by claiming His blood on the cross to wash away our sins and that was the end of it, the moment we surrendered to God through His Son, we would be gone without a trace to take our place in heaven.

But instead, what do we find? We find that Jesus lived for 33 years among us, including three (3) in active ministry, teaching His followers what a life pleasing to God, a life reflecting citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, actually physically, mentally, emotionally and physically looked like. We find epistles from Paul and Peter, among others, continuing to teach us what the life needs to look like to truly reflect Christ. All of that is unnecessary if, the moment we're saved, we're gone. Obviously, we're not!

CONCLUSION

Which leaves us with some serious things to consider as we live the life we claim to believe. For instance:

- 1) ***[I]f anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! - Paul, II Corinthians 5:17.*** OK, the basic question: How is my life new in Christ? How is my life different - how I act, how I think, how I respond - from before I surrendered to Christ?
- 2) ***I have been crucified with Christ, and nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me. And the life I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me - Paul, Galatians 2:20.*** To be "crucified with Christ" means that all my old ways were nailed with Christ on the cross, that His victory also conquers me. Has that happened? Are my old ways "dead?" Or have they hung on like an old habit that I am more comfortable with showing?
- 3) ***"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another"- Jesus Christ, John 13:34. We know the words, but what does it mean? What does loving one another like Jesus loved us look like?***
- 4) ***Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you - Paul, Ephesians 4:32.*** How has God forgiven us? Is that our model for forgiving others?
- 5) My shirt: ***[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - Paul, Galatians 5:22-23a.*** Do I see that fruit, that evidence of the Holy Spirit, in my life? How do I show patience or kindness or gentleness or self-control that I never could have done before I surrendered to Christ?
- 6) ***For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline - Paul, II Timothy 1:7.*** How much have we explored what that means? How often have these words empowered us to do something we saw as "hard" or "awkward" simply because we knew that Jesus commanded it? How often have we embraced our helplessness, of absolutely clinging to Christ in each and every

situation of our lives because we were excited to see Christ's strength perfected in our weakness (II Corinthians 12:9), realizing that, when we were weak-embracing our helplessness - then we were truly, victoriously strong?

- 7) ***To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth." When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly - I Peter 2:21-23 (quoting Isaiah 53:9).*** Jesus is our example; He said that Himself in John 13 as well as Peter telling us that in these words. But what does that look like? How do we respond when somebody insults us? How do we deal with somebody who makes us suffer? How do we deal with somebody who's not easy to like, not easy to get along with? How does Jesus' example translate to us?

Now this is not about guilt. This is about the words of Scripture coming alive in our lives. This is about our lives being so transparently different than how the world operates that people simply need to know why that is.

So, regarding our lives, how are we living them in regards to those three (3) resources we mentioned before? What are we doing with the gift of life that God has given us and living that life for Him? What are we doing with the limited amount of time we've been granted? And what are we doing with the wealth of resources we have been given by God?

If we see people in political terms or cultural terms more than we see people in terms of being saved or lost in eternity, we're missing the point. If we spend more time on social media than we do in Bible study and prayer, we're missing the point. If we see any part of a day or week as "my time," we're missing the point. If we are more concerned with income growth than kingdom growth or church growth, we're missing the point. If we follow the stock market more closely than Scripture, we're missing the point. And my dear ones, if we think our lives are simply to know the Bible or know some verses or come to church or be a good person and maybe volunteer for a church job, and then try to otherwise fit God and His Son into our lives the best we can, we are missing the point.

Another way to say all this: If somebody were to describe Jesus Christ by how they have seen Him in any of our lives, what would that portrait look like? Would the Jesus they describe from our lives match up with the Jesus of Scripture?

Folks, that's the gig - not just quoting Christ but reflecting Christ, so nobody can tell where our lives stop, and Christ's life begins. So where are we at? If we want to be a church that makes a difference, it starts by living life in such a way that people see the "Jesus difference" in us - and by seeing it absolutely have got to have that for themselves. Let's pray!