

Outrageous!

Countercultural Request

May 3, 2015

PRELUDE – We Are

Drama – “Going Public”

Feature – “Best Day of My Life”

Good morning everyone!

I will never forget the day that I went public. I can still remember what it was like as I stood there, waiting with great expectation and anticipation. I’m not sure I would call it “the best day of my life” but it was certainly among the top ten.

I was 15 years old and it was quite a surprise to the people who knew me that I would take such a step – although I do think my parents probably suspected that it would eventually come out. Even though

they had not been overly encouraging along the way, they knew that I had some – how shall I put it – “tendencies” in that direction and so, when the time came, they did not stand in my way. In fact, not too long after I went public, they and my two sisters made the same decision I did and they all went public as well.

A Quick Review

I’ll come back to that in just a bit but, first, as Shannon said, today we are concluding our series *Outrageous* in which we have been looking at some of the things that Jesus of Nazareth said and did in his earthly ministry and how those things still apply to us today. A lot of people think that Jesus was kind of a generic namby-pamby lets-all-just-be-nice-and-get-along spiritual guru who was somehow able to

attract a large following that somehow continues to exist to this day. But the truth is (and I explained why this is true in the first message of the series so I won't repeat it – you can check it out at our website or on our app if you missed it) ... the truth is that there is and has never been anyone like Jesus.

Furthermore, if you spend any amount of time at all looking at His teaching and His actions, you really have only three possible conclusions: "this guy is either a nut job ... or he's a master manipulator (a great liar) ... or ... He is who He says He is" which is:

- God in the flesh**
- The Messiah of Israel**
- The Savior of all who will come to Him not in their own righteousness and self-worth but as sinners in need of a**

savior.

Obviously, those of us who are Christians believe He is who He says He is and therefore, not only do we believe that He is alive, having risen from the dead on that first Easter Sunday, and is with us through the Holy Spirit; we also believe that what He says ought to be taken *seriously* ... even if it does seem outrageous to our way of thinking.

That especially includes His stunning invitation to *follow Him* and learn from Him and get to know Him *before* we decide to believe in Him – which is exactly the opposite of what most people think. Most people think the message of Jesus was “believe ... change ... and *then* you can follow Me” when in fact it was “follow Me – hang out with me, get to know me – and

if you decide to believe I am who I say I am, your faith in Me will empower you over time to change in the way God wants you to – even to the point of laying down your life for Me if necessary.”

That’s a huge point (Shannon talked about it in a message two weeks ago) – and we need to take it seriously ... just like we need to take seriously the unimaginable requirement (and we saw this last week) that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, we must be “born again from above” ... which means, as one commentator puts it:

“Not only must we *affirm* the supernatural *in Jesus*, we must also *experience* the supernatural *in ourselves*.”ⁱ

In other words, it’s not enough to say,

“Wow, God really was doing something amazing in Jesus.” Some of the religious leaders of His day were willing to admit that but Jesus told them, “that’s great ... I’m glad you feel that way ... but let me make it clear: *you must be given a new life from the Spirit.* You must be born again from above.”

As I pointed out last week, a lot of people in our day choke on that idea because the term “born again Christian” has, unfortunately, in recent decades become synonymous with conservative political ideology ... which means, for some of us, Jesus’ requirement is even more outrageous today than it was when He first said it!

But it’s still true. Even though you don’t have to have to become a conservative or a

fundamentalist or try to clean up your life before you can follow Jesus, there is a point where you *do* have to be born of the Spirit. That's the requirement.

And it happens, the New Testament says over and over again, when we move beyond merely believing in Jesus *intellectually* to the point where we personally *accept* Him as *our* savior and *our* Lord.

As the Apostle John put it:

He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth

***that comes from God.
John 1:11-13 (NLT)***

Believing in AND accepting Jesus produces the spiritual rebirth that comes from God.

So the question is ... how does one "accept Jesus?"

There's no magic formula. It just comes down to a very simple personal interaction between you and God. You pray and the Holy Spirit listens and responds by bringing you to life spiritually. In fact, the Bible says that when you do, the Spirit of God himself permanently comes to live in you and through you and literally becomes your spiritual life force (which is why it's called "eternal life.")

So ... *what do you pray* if you want to be born again from the Spirit?

Again, there are no magic words, but when you come to the point where you believe Jesus is who He said He was and you are ready to receive Him ... that's what you put into words. You say something (aloud or silently in your heart) like this:

Jesus, I believe that You are who you claimed to be.

I believe You are God in the flesh.

I believe You died on a cross.

I believe You rose from the dead.

You know, I'll bet some of you believe that but have never said it directly to Jesus. If you want to, you can say it to Him silently in your heart right now. I'll wait.

<pause>

And then you might say something like this:

**I agree with you that I am a sinner.
Even though I might be better than
some,
I am not totally righteous in Your sight.
I am unable to atone for my sin.**

**And I'll bet that some of you believe that
but have never said it directly to Jesus
directly before. If you want to, you can say
it to Him silently in your heart right now.
I'll wait.**

<pause>

**Finally, once you have declared that you
believe in Jesus and admitted that you
need Jesus, you open your heart and life to
Him.**

You might say something like this:

I accept what you did for me. You are my savior.

And I accept you. You are my Lord.

Come into my life and bring me into Yours.

Help me become who You want me to be.

And I'll bet that some of you want that but have never said it directly to Jesus directly before. If you'd like, you can say it to Him silently in your heart right now. I'll wait.

<pause>

Seems very simple doesn't it? And it is – and at least on our end. God does all the work. We don't do anything but believe. That's why the Apostles went around preaching "it is by grace you are saved

through faith. It's a gift. You can't do anything to earn it."

Going Public

Now, whenever a person comes to the place where they both believe in Jesus *and* receive Him, it's such a monumental event that it's easy to conclude that it's the end point ... the destination of our spiritual journey ... that everything in life has been pointing in this direction and leading in this direction and now, we've finally arrived.

And it *is* a super-big deal ... such a big deal, Jesus said, that the angels in Heaven rejoice. They throw a party in your honor! And right now, there's a celebration going on for some of you who just this morning expressed your belief in Jesus and accepted

Him as *your* savior and *your* Lord.

But that's not the end point or the destination. Believing in and accepting Jesus – being born again from above – is really *the beginning of a new life*. You are now “in Christ” ... which is how the Apostles phrased it over and over in their teaching.

The idea is that before Jesus you were one person and now, because of Him and your faith in Him, you are another person. And the rest of your life will be a process of becoming less and less of who you were “in the flesh” and more and more of who you are “in Christ.” Not that you will lose your basic personality or your talents and abilities but that those things – everything, in fact – will be transformed so that the Spirit of Jesus in you begins to come out of

you but in ways that are still uniquely you.

That's what Paul meant when he wrote:

We all are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

And, obviously, there's a lot to that process and we could spend a lot of time talking about it (which is actually the intention of the message most Sundays).

But, this morning, I want us to focus just on the idea that when we accept Christ we're not arriving, we're beginning. We're not at the ending point. We're at the starting point.

Now, here's what's interesting about this

idea of the starting point: *Jesus had something to say about how people should go public with the fact that they have come to that point.* And like so many other things He said, it too is a bit outrageous especially when you consider ... well, let me first show you what He said and then we'll talk about that.

Moments before Jesus returned to Heaven, He made a special request of His followers.

He said:

“Go and make disciples of all the nations. Have them walk the church aisle in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20 (NOT)

Wait a minute, that's not right. Here's what He really said.

He said:

"Go and make disciples of all the nations. Have them raise their hands or check a box in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19-20 (NOT)

I don't know who keeps putting these goofy versions into my slides!

Here's what He really said:

"Go and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father

***and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.”
Matthew 28:19-20 (NIRV)***

For everyone who has come to the point where they have not only believed in Jesus but also accepted Him in the way we talked about (and in the way some of you just did!): a personal interaction; a prayer where we say what we believe, we admit who we are and then accept Jesus and what He did for us ... for everyone who is at the beginning point of a new life in Him, Jesus has a request. *Go public with it by being baptized.* In fact, it's the very first thing He wants us to do.

So, why does Jesus want us to do that? It's because baptism is a way of visualizing and publicly declaring to others what is

now true about us because we have been born again from above.

See, the original Greek word for baptize is *baptizo* which means to dunk, dip, or submerge ... which, by the way, is how we do it here at NHCC. When we dunk people under the water we are, first of all, painting a picture of what happened to Jesus:

- **He was alive**
- **Then He was dead and buried**
- **Then He was raised again on the third day.**

And more importantly, we are also visualizing what has happened to the person.

- **This is the original "them" before**

Jesus.

- **This is that “them” being put “in Christ” and washed clean of all their sins (past present and future) because they have believed in and received Him.**
- **And this is now the new “them” – one who is raised to new life and is now a citizen of God’s Kingdom.**

In fact, when we baptize people this is why we say “buried with Christ ... raised with Christ.” Not that there is any magic in those words but that’s what’s being presented and represented visually.

Having said that let me also say that, obviously, there are other Christian traditions that sprinkle or pour when they do baptisms and what I’m saying isn’t

meant to denigrate them. In fact, in certain circumstances where people can't go under the water for health reasons, we've done it those ways ourselves. But we believe (along with many other churches) that taking the word *baptizo* literally is the best way to help people honor Jesus' request.

Cultural Understandings

Of course, having said *that* ... I should add that the real issue with Jesus' request these days isn't so much the method of baptism; the real issue is with how baptism is understood in our culture. Jesus had a pretty clear picture in His mind when He made the request, but many people have another.

- 1. Some people see baptism as *optional***

because “we are saved by grace not by works.”

They say “well, I’m not going to argue with you, baptism is obviously a good spiritual experience. I’ve seen people baptized – it’s amazing for them. But, let’s be clear: we all know that baptism is not what saves us, so it’s kind of optional. If it’s going to cause me stress to do it or if I just don’t want to then, really, I don’t have to.

And it *is* true that baptism does not save you. Nothing you do will save you. But that doesn’t lessen the fact that your baptism matters to Jesus. This is one of those things where He says, “It might sound like it’s unimportant to you, but it’s important to Me that you do it.”

2. Some people see baptism as something

we do *later* when we are “more worthy.”

They say, “I’d love to be baptized, but the truth is, I have to get my life together first because I have this thing, I have this issue, and once I clean that up and get my act together, then I’ll be ready to get baptized.”

Of course, if it really was possible to somehow become more worthy, you wouldn’t need Jesus to save you in the first place! And that’s actually what the waters of baptism are all about.

- **We’re saying that we have admitted to Jesus, “I am screwed up. I’m a mess, I’m dirty and I can’t save myself.”**
- **We’re saying “I have come to Jesus just as I am and said to him, ‘take this**

mess and do what you can.'"

Baptism is not about our worthiness. It's about His.

3. Finally, in this culture, a lot of people see baptism as *something parents do for their children*.

... which is why a lot of us in this room today were baptized as infants. I was.

And this, quite frankly, is where for a lot of us the idea of baptism (as Jesus requested it) grinds the hardest because *it goes against our family tradition* ... and it would be considered a slap in the face insult if we were to follow the biblical pattern and be baptized again.

What do you mean by "the biblical pattern, Rick?"

Well, just what Jesus said: make disciples – invite people to follow and believe – and then baptize them ... which is why *27 times* in the Book of Acts, the pattern is people (grownups, actually) *first* believe *then* they are baptized as a sign of that belief.

For example, in chapter 8 there's this guy traveling in a chariot down the road from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. He's a high-ranking official in the Ethiopian government, but he is also very interested in spiritual things. He has a copy of the scroll of Isaiah, and in those days the common people did not have scrolls of the book of Isaiah. So, this guy is very wealthy, and he has invested a lot in trying to find out "is there a God? What's the deal? Maybe the Jewish people have an answer."

At the same time, there's a Christian guy named Philip who is traveling down the same road and the Holy Spirit says to him, "Hey, look, at the next stop sign (I don't know if they had stop signs in those days or not) what I want you to do is when that chariot comes to a stop, I want you to go over to that chariot and help that guy."

And the Bible says Philip does it. He goes over to this guy and says, "I know this might be crazy, but I just had this impression from God that I'm supposed to help you with something." And he realizes the guy is reading the scroll of Isaiah, and he's blown away that this guy owns a scroll, and he asks him, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

The guy says, "I have no idea what it's

saying, but I want to know. Can you help me?"

Philip says "yeah, I can help you," and the guy says, "come on up here in the chariot and we'll ride together."

Verse 35 says

Philip began with that very passage of Scripture (that the guy was reading from Isaiah) and told him the good news about Jesus.

Acts 8:35 (NIV)

And verse 36 says ...

As they rode along, they came to some water, and this [high-ranking, rich, well-to-do official] said, "Look! There's some water!" Acts

8:36 (NIV)

And, then, this high-ranking Ethiopian official asks the question that I want to put in front of you this morning. He asks the question that is the reason for everything I have said so far this morning. He asks the question that explains why we have the baptism pool set up on our stage this morning.

He asks ...

“What prevents me from being baptized?”

“I understand, based on what you’re telling me Philip, what Jesus came to do. I believe He did it. And I accept Him as *my* savior and my Lord. And here’s water. So, why can’t we do the deal, right now, right this minute? What prevents me from being

baptized?”

Apparently, the answer was “nothing” because the Bible says that ...

He commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the official, and Philip baptized him. Acts 8:38 (ESV)

Now, here’s the deal. Some of you are just like that guy in the chariot. You have believed and you have accepted Jesus as your savior and Lord. But you have not been baptized ... at least, not according to the biblical pattern. You’ve told yourself that it’s optional; or that it’s something you’ll do later; or that you’ll offend your family if you get baptized.

And let me say something about that real

quick because over the years I have run into many people who have a very honest struggle with that issue. Here's how I think about it for me personally because, as I said, I was baptized as a baby and then, when I was 15 years old after I had believed in and received Jesus for myself, I went public for myself and was baptized again.

Here's how I think about it. When my parents took me to the Catholic Church when I was a baby and said, "We want to christen this little guy Richard Andrew McGinniss, Jr." what they were doing was inviting God to work in my life. And their hope (and the hope of the Catholic Church) was that one day I would decide to follow Jesus for myself. And when I got baptized of my own choice at age 15, that was the ultimate full-circle fulfillment of that hope

because I was saying, "This is now *my* faith. *I'm personally* owning this."

And, if you get baptized again, it's a not a slap in the face to your family or your tradition. It's an affirmation of what was done for you before you could even understand it.

The Invitation

So, once again, the question of the hour: *here is water – what prevents you from being baptized?*

Now, some of you came this morning prepared to be baptized. You picked up the packet last Sunday and you're ready.

But others of you ... you're listening to this message and you're thinking, "dang, I

wish you would have preached this last week so I would have been ready this week because, honestly Rick, everything you're saying applies directly to me. But, since you asked, what prevents me from being baptized is that ...

- 1. I didn't come dressed for baptism. I believe in Jesus but I'm not walking out of here soaking wet this morning!**
- 2. And I didn't bring clothes to change into.**
- 3. And my hair's going to get wet.**
- 4. And I don't have a towel.**
- 5. My makeup will run.**
- 6. My deodorant will wear off.**
- 7. Where am I going to put all my stuff? Purse, phone, wallet?**
- 8. If I do decide to get crazy and get baptized, I want my family to see it and they are not all here.**

9. And, I don't know what I'm going to do or where I'm going to go.

10. And it's weird to think someone would get baptized on the spot without thinking about it a lot.

And, I've got to tell you that those are very good points ... except for the last one because we just heard the story of someone who did that ... and, in fact, the book of Acts tells us that on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and the message of Christ was first proclaimed, 3,000 people on the spot accepted Jesus and were baptized right then.

So, this isn't some weird new thing we're doing. We're actually mimicking the very first church service that was ever held in the Christian faith.

But the other reasons to not get baptized today ... those are pretty good. They really are. But we have arranged to take care of every single one of them.

Just outside this auditorium in the adjoining hallway we have ...

- 1. Clothing and a place to change**
- 2. Hair stuff**
- 3. towels**
- 4. makeup**
- 5. deodorant**
- 6. We even have the stuff that ladies need that men don't need (if you know what I mean)**
- 7. A protected place to put your stuff. Cell phones, wallets, etc.**
- 8. And if you are here without your family and want them to see your baptism, we video every service and**

will make you a copy.

Friends, we have tried to think of everything that might prevent you from saying "yes." We've tried to remove every obstacle we can, because it matters, *it matters*, that you do what Jesus told you to do.

But, if you want to respond today ... there's nothing to stop you. We have water, we have volunteers to help you, we have a church that wants to support you. We even have a band that's going to come and get into place because we have a huge celebration that's going to happen here as people are baptized.

And in just a minute, they're going to do a song that I think expresses the kind of

desire that we've been talking about – a desire to say “yes” to Jesus. And while that song is playing, that's when you get up and move to the door. And when you get to the door, the people there will help you get ready and they'll bring you back in and we'll baptize you along with everyone else who responds while the band plays and we all sing together.

<< 2nd/3rd only >>

Now, I do need to say this – in this moment we're not going to baptize anyone younger than Middle School in this service. We've found it necessary to make sure one-on-one that our children especially understand what baptism is, so, parents, this is not your cue to go fetch your kids out of Adventureland because you've always wanted them to be baptized and now is the time. That's not what this is. If you have

elementary kids or younger, please don't bring them up here.

This is for teenagers and grownups. This is for people who for the first time this morning have said, "I'm in on this Jesus deal. I believe in him. I have received him." Or, maybe like people who say every time we do this kind of service, "I've been a believer in Jesus for 30 years and I've never been baptized."

So, this is it. This is your opportunity. If you feel a tug in your heart right now to say yes, let me assure you: *that is the Holy Spirit of God calling you.* It's not emotional manipulation, it's the presence of God drawing you and calling you. God has had this date on His calendar since before you were born, and you are here today because He wants you here today, so do not miss

this opportunity. As the scripture says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart."

So in this moment, when the band starts, move. Don't look around to see who else is moving. *You take responsibility for you.* Everything is ready for you. We've thought of everything. Nothing except you can prevent you from being baptized.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we give you this moment. Holy Spirit, we give you this time. I pray that people would have freedom to respond, to say, "Thank you God that You love me so much that You gave Jesus for me, and I can respond in this way." We ask that in Jesus name,

Amen.

Here we go. Music. Movement.

Feature – “We Believe”

Baptism/Worship

Worship Songs – Greater / Remind Me Who I Am
/ We Are

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week

2. Offering at the door

Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/what-happens-in-the-new-birth-part-2>