

Radical Week 3- To our Glory or to God's?

- I. Before we get into our topic this morning, I want to make one clarifying point from last week. If you were here, I called out several well-known pastors by name such as Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyers. This isn't something I do often. I don't get my kicks dragging pastors' or church leaders' names through the mud. I didn't do this because I am jealous of their multi-million-dollar mansions, private aircraft, personal tailors, or solid golden toilet fixtures. Okay, I am slightly jealous of that. How they use their money is between them, God and their congregations. And I was not saying that these pastors don't have anything redeeming to say, good advice on particular topics, or even are necessarily bad people. They are all unquestionably gifted speakers. My point is that at the very heart of their teaching, their understanding of the gospel, which is the core of Christianity, is fatally flawed. It would be like if I was a Boy Scout leader and instead of helping young men live up to the ideals of service to God and to country, learning honesty and integrity, helping old ladies cross the road, etc., my focus was on helping young boys become millionaires by the time they were 25. I might be a nice guy, might rock my Boy Scout uniform, might even have a few things to offer regarding scouting, but at my core, I am not a good and faithful Scout leader as I am getting the main message wrong. That is the issue I have with the Joel Osteens, Joyce Meyers and Crenflo Dollars of the world.

- II. But enough about them. Moving on. How many of us watch the HDTV Reality Show *House Hunters*? This is a show where couples are looking at moving into a particular city and typically have very specific amenities they want for their new home. Sometimes beach front, sometimes a stainless-steel kitchen or if they are like my family, they prefer not to have a kitchen at all. It's just wasted space. Well, now I have found the show I have been waiting for. Let's watch the following. **Video-** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT70cA-7qMk> Okay, I hope everyone realizes by now that this isn't to be taken seriously although it does raise a critical question for us. As we continue to look Platte's book Radical with the subtitle "Taking Your Faith Back from the American Dream" we have to ask this morning, are Christians being conditioned in the United States to become committed Jesus followers or religious consumers? Should worship and the church itself become like a Golden Corral of the religious world (**image**). Trying to offer something for everyone to meet our needs? Let's read **Matthew 16:24 in the New Living Translation**. How do Jesus' words here jell with the idea that if we can just make people happy, comfortable, and provide for their wants, we can become a "successful" church? Successful as typically defined in our culture as one that is big, moneyed and a has a full-service coffee bar. In Jesus' call to follow Him in Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, Jesus doesn't say one word about making sure our creature comforts are met. In what is considered the Lord's Prayer, He promises our daily bread or basic necessities if we would but ask, but says nothing about making sure we have tweetable sermons or easy access exits.

- III. I listened to an interview recently where one of the most popular pastors in our country said something like this; "I know how to plant and grow a church in United States. Buy an old warehouse, hook it up with speakers and ensure you have good acoustics and cool vibe. Have a rocking band playing cutting edge Christian music complete with guitars and drums.

Let me give 30 minute sermons with some jokes and just the right amount of biblical content, not too heavy but enough to draw a tear or two, and *I will fill that place*. But what I still don't know how to do after all these years, is make disciples (followers of Jesus.) That I am still working on." What this pastor is getting at and what Platte is saying in chapter three of his book is the same. American Christian leaders think we have found the secret sauce in building the kingdom of God when in fact we simply discovered the blueprints for building our own kingdom or kingdoms.

- IV. It goes back again to how we have taken the gospel, God's redemption and calling, and have paired it with our culture. Platte reminds us that the man who coined the term "American Dream" was James Truslow Adams. **(image)** Adams describes the American dream in 1931 as one where "***each man and woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable and be recognized by others for what they are.***" My immediate response when hearing that is "Well, that is a good and noble dream or vision for our country." Compare that to countries where there is a small ruling elite and your opportunity to move up in the world is not based on your hard work, abilities or skills but often your family name. In this context, I can embrace Adam and this American dream. But here is the danger for Jesus followers in this vision. It is all based on self. What can I accomplish and how can I be recognized for that accomplishment? As we have talked about on many occasions, this whole thing is really not about you. And it certainly isn't about me. It's about Him. Like the Psalmist declares in **Psalm 105:1 NIV**. Make God's name known, not us, not even G3 and definitely not Ron Garner, but Jesus.
- V. There is this great story in the Old Testament 2 Kings Chapter 5. We don't have time to read it all but let me give you the RRV-Ron Revised Version. But please look it up later so you can make sure I didn't botch it. There is this guy, Naaman, and he is an awesome warrior in the Syrian Army. He kicks biblical butt and takes names. And he is actually a decent guy except for one major character flaw, his pride. Everyone loves Naaman. The king, the army he leads, and his mother. Ok, the bible doesn't say this but I am just guessing. But Naaman has a problem. He has leprosy. That is not going to help him with the ladies. When I say ladies, I just mean one lady, his wife. Namaan couldn't lead his army long with this...so he was facing retirement at the least and a lonely disfiguring disease that would eventually kill him from infection at the worst. Things were not looking good when a servant girl told him about Elisha the prophet who lived in neighboring Israel that just might be able to heal him. After getting permission from his King, along with a bundle of gold and silver for the healing, he set off. Eventually he finds Elisha's house. I have no idea how they did this prior to Google directions. It would be like me saying to you, "Hey, I am going to walk over to South Carolina and go find a guy named Tom" with no cell phone or even a phone book. But Namaan finds the house and he is in for a surprise. Namaan, a *muy importante* general in the Syrian Army, is used to being treated like royalty. He expects Elisha to run out and do his healing prophet kind of thing. Or at least do a drive thru healing so he doesn't have to get off his horse. But instead Elisha sends out a servant and tells Namaan to go jump in a lake...actually, the Jordan River...and dip himself seven times. A good biblical number. Namaan will have none of it. He essentially says, "He wants me to do what? Go dunk myself

in that nasty cesspool? Who knows what is growing in there. It's a bacteria farm! I could have done that back in Syria where our rivers are much cleaner. This is just crazy! " And storms off. But before he gets too far one of his servants says something along the lines, "Come on boss man, what would it hurt to give it a try?" Namaan, probably because he went through all that trouble to get there, actually listened. Did the seven times dip, and of course, it worked. He was cleansed, or else the story wouldn't be in the bible, right?

- VI.** So what does Namaan have to do with anything? This is just one story of countless in the bible that point to that fact that we are not to depend on our own wisdom, our own strength, or how we want to do things, but rather depend on God and His ways. And if we keep reading the story we find that Namaan doesn't fall all over himself with adoration of Elisha, but rather of God Himself, the source of Elisha's power. And this should be the same with us. We shouldn't look to our abilities, our skills, our techniques, to live out our mission to help those who feel far from God, but rather to Jesus Himself. And when amazing things happen here at G3, we should realize that God is behind that too. Jesus tells us in the gospel of **John 15:5-8 NIV**. The key is what? Not that we do this Jesus thing alone but rather in deep connection with Him. Otherwise, it is a waste of time. Spinning our proverbial wheels.
- VII.** So here is the contrast... **American dream= make much of ourselves based on our abilities, skills and intelligence . Discipleship (following Jesus)= make much of God based on our dependence on His abilities, skills, and infinite intelligence, and goodness.** I will confess to you this morning that I fall into the American dream trap all the time. For example, when prepping for a sermon, at times I will agonize over an illustration or an explanation of Scripture or even a joke...or attempt at a joke. Usually they bomb but that hasn't stopped me yet. There is a part of me that thinks if I can just find that right balance, that right blend of bible teaching, illustration and humor, otherwise known as secret sauce of sermonizing, then I can not only help you in your walk with Jesus but we can also grow our numbers. Fill this sanctu/gym/auditorium. But do you see the fatal flaw in this kind of thinking? It is based on what I can do and it will invariably lead me to think that if our church does grow that I am really the one who did it. This would be growing a church based on a cult of personality rather than on the presence and experience of God. Now please understand, this doesn't mean that I shouldn't faithfully study the Scriptures, work hard on my sermons so I can present God's revelation as clear and as relevant as possible. But in the midst of that, I need to realize it must be by His power not my own art of persuasion that people are drawn to stay in this community and for us to live out our mission. And this is true for our entire church. Again, if we want to see people who feel far from God, people who have been hurt, people who feel alone, people who feel abandoned, people who are struggling with addictions, or people who feel called to be on this mission join us, we all need to come to terms with this truth. We can do nothing apart from Jesus. Nothing of eternal significance. Nada, not one cotton pickin' thing. If you want to get ahead in business, government, the private sector, etc. the American Dream rings true. But if we are talking about helping bring God's rule and ways to earth, then the American Dream just won't cut it.

VIII. I don't think there is anyone who more modeled this kind of God dependence than George Muller. Muller grew up in Germany in the early 1800s. Neither his teachers nor his priest ever considered George for a life of mission and ministry. He was known as a thief, a gambler, and general trouble maker. But when he was a young man at college, through a bible study he became a committed Christ follower. After spending several years in London as a missionary and then a pastor, he felt called to begin an orphanage for all the homeless children. Here is where things get interesting. Mueller wanted to demonstrate God's goodness, power and provision. He made it very clear to everyone that he would not ask for one cent for his orphanage. Instead he would pray and ask God instead. In his biography, there are dozens of stories like the following. The house mother who helped care for the orphans informed Mueller one morning that there was no more food left for breakfast. Instead of scrambling around trying to get donations, he told her to have all 300 children go to the dining hall and have a seat. Muller then stood and asked the boys to join him in prayer. He thanked God for the food which was not there yet and sat down. Not but a minute past and there was a knock on the door. A baker appeared at the door where he explained, "Mr. Mueller I couldn't sleep last night. I felt that you would need bread today so I got up early and made three batches for you and your orphans." And then, not a moment later, another man came to the door. He shared that his milk cart broke down right in front of the orphanage and the milk was going to spoil by the time he fixed the wheel and asked if they needed any. And they did indeed. Well it was established later that Mueller had the baker's wife threaten him to make bread for the orphans and he booby-trapped the route of the milk man but what an amazing story! Kidding. No, that actually occurred and was documented.

IX. The point of that story is not that we need to completely adopt Mueller's commitment never to ever ask anything from anyone except God. But I do think in both his case and in the case of Naaman we can learn that our true power and ability to help move the mission of our church forward is not be centered in our human ability, our skills, and resources but rather in Christ. And this is best brought about by prayer. I realize many of us feel inadequate in this area. Unsure what to say and how to say it. Listen to Max Lucado regarding this. **"Our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not in the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference."** Indeed, they do. Prayer enables ordinary people like Elisha and Mueller to do the extraordinary. And if we faithfully pray, He can do the same thing through us. Not to make our names known, but to be make God's name known...and enable us to continue to live out our mission to help those who feel far from God come home. Will you join me?

Challenge- Pray daily this week that God may help us live out our mission as individuals and as a church, as a whole. What does "help those who feel far from God come home" look like daily?