

Introduction: Pg. ____ The List... (Easter Plans)

Yesterday morning, Marsha and I were returning from a short vacation with some of our closest friends, and after sitting at the gate in the airport for a few minutes, our seat numbers were called to board the plane. I quickly grabbed my belongings, bag check, coffee check, key lime pie (which was my breakfast - for real) check, wife check. I was ready to go. And about 10 seconds later, someone taps me on the shoulder and says: "Does this belong to you?" (Hold it up) Clearly, the wallet that I assumed was bag was not in my bag and if not for a really kind man, I would have had a very rough day yesterday.

Immediately, I was filled with gratitude. I quickly gave him a fist pump and a man hug. Then went back over to him about 30 seconds later to commend his integrity and say thank you once again. Life was great! That is until I looked into the tired eyes of my beautiful wife who was biting her tongue to trying not chide my irresponsibility...

Now, my mind was immediately filled with excuses as to how that could have happened. As we are walking down the jet bridge, the excuses start to flood my mind:

- it's early; we got up at 4:30am to get to the airport.
- My hands were full; someone should have been helping me.
- I hate having stuff in my pockets. Who doesn't?
- I'm still in vacation mode; I'll be more responsible in a few hours when we touch down in Boston.
- And, worst of all, I thought you had it; shouldn't *you* be carrying *my* wallet.

Thankfully, I didn't voice any of those thoughts because you know and I know that would have only made the situation a lot worse.

I actually owned it, this time; confessed my stupidity and irresponsibility (more than once), and continued to board the plane having escaped the disaster of losing my wallet and having escaped the constructive criticism of my wife, by the grace of God.

I must tell though, there have been plenty of other times when those sorry excuses have been expressed in sorry, calculated attempts at self-justification.

We've all been there. And perhaps this week, even today, you will be there as well. Justifying our actions comes second nature:

- I really haven't been eating that bad this week.
- Well, I'm not as bad as them...
- Well, I would not have done that if I would not have had such a rough night last night. You know, if I would have gotten more sleep, I'd be a nicer person today.

It is *so* easy for us to justify the choices we make and the lifestyle we choose to live. We are *so* quick to assume we are right and to suspect anyone who points to contrary evidence.

We are all Picassos in the art of self-justification

This is what we have going on in John 8. Those who failed to embrace Jesus painted a masterpiece in self-justification.

All of this was set in motion by another huge statement by Jesus beginning in 31. Look back at *verse 30* to get a sense of the situation as Jesus continued to teach those gathered in Jerusalem. Then he goes on to say in vv. 31-32.

“Freedom.”
John 8:31-59

Once again, Jesus’ words provoke “his antagonists” to anger. This time it is the reference to Freedom, which implies that those who reject his teaching are in bondage.

Here’s what I want to do... I want to examine the response of the misbelievers and then take a deeper look at the statement that provoked the response. Their response is going to teach us our need to...

I. Recognize our unending quest for self-justification.

Politically speaking, they knew they were not free. Rome had ruled Jerusalem for nearly 100 years. That tells us they must have understood Jesus to be referring to spiritual realities, and for Jesus to imply that they had some level of spiritual deficiency, much less to assert they were spiritually enslaved, was too much for them to handle!

They were incredulous. They refused to believe Jesus. To put it into terms we know very well: they operated with an “I’m all set” mentality.

There are many reasons people persist in their rejection of the words of Christ. One at the top of the list is pride and the desire for self-justification. Nobody, and I mean nobody, likes to be wrong. It is not natural for us to immediately say: “I blew it.” Have you been listening to these politicians? Wow! Picasso! I didn’t say that; Yes, you did. But I didn’t mean that. You’re a liar. He’s calling me a liar; I get to respond. Will someone attack me, please?

Look at the ways these people respond with self-justifying words. They start by highlighting their... *Read 33-41a*

1) Cultural Identity (33-41a)

- Hey, we are Abraham’s children. The man of faith. The father of our nation. The man who built this nation. We are connected to him. We’re all set.
- Pointing to your family tree will not lead you to a vibrant relationship with God.
- But my mother is a woman of prayer. My grandmother and grandfather are very devout. If they’re in with God, can’t I slide in on their VIP pass?
- They thought their cultural identity would make them ok in God’s sight. They thought their religious identity and action would be enough.
 - Going to church is not enough.
 - Putting Christian or Catholic on your census registration is not enough.
 - Saying a few prayers, not enough.
 - Knowing a lot about the Bible, not enough.
 - Wearing a religious symbol around your neck or tatted on your skin, not enough.
- Please hear this. I always fear there will be people who join us on Sundays and assume by their very presence that they are consequently “all set” with God.
- A man’s fascination with the moon does not make him an astronaut; nor does hanging out in a garage for a couple of hours a week make someone a mechanic.
- What counts is being set free by the truth of Jesus. In verses 41-47, they point to an even more common assumption about how people can rightly relate to God.

2) Moral Lifestyle (41b-47)

- *Read 41b-47*
- Their self-justification degenerates to personal accusation.
 - You're a Samaritan. Not purely an ethnic Jew.
 - You're illegitimate. Who do you think you are? You come from immoral stock. Your mother was pregnant before she was properly married.
 - Surely we are on God's side because we had a moral upbringing and continue to have a high sense of morality.
- People often assume their apparent moral lifestyle will get them in with God. "My good deeds outweigh my bad deeds. I wasn't that bad . . . in comparison with them."
- Here are four problems with this mentality:
 1. It fails to recognize God's holiness, perfection, and glory. If we could see how perfect God is, we would understand even the slightest sin is enough to keep us out his presence. Related to that, we also
 2. It fails to recognize the depth of our sinfulness. Not just wrong action, but wrong motives (2 Great Commandments: Love God; Love Neighbor).
 3. It fails to recognize common grace. God gives everyone a moral compass, a sense of right and wrong. Augustine puts it like this in his *Confessions*: "I had my back to the light and my face toward the things which are illuminated. So my face, by which I was enabled to see the things lit up, was not itself illuminated." You can experience good and even do good things and not be good.
 4. It fails to recognize the reason for the cross. Why did Jesus die? Because we're good people. Oh, they've got this; they don't need me to die for them.
- Justifying ourselves by our cultural identity or apparent moral lifestyle is not enough to earn something that can never be earned.
 - Most of us would find it very hard to believe we could make a wrong assumption for years.
 - It takes huge humility to say, I have been wrong.

T: The first step is to see our need before God and end the quest of self-justification. Our second step is to receive what he desires to give us through Jesus.

II. Experience freedom by dwelling in the Word of Jesus.

"If you abide in my word," - (ESV) You are the real thing. (Sincerity...)

The picture is someone who dwells in the words of Christ and allows the words of Christ to dwell in them. This is what Colossians 3:16 instructs us to do: **"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly..."**

What does it mean to dwell?

- When you dwell somewhere, you live there. You stay... You linger...
- When we dwell in his word, it means his "word finds a place in us." (Verse 37)
 - Here's a humbling truth, and hope this helps you today. Here is Jesus Christ, the Word (as John introduces him in the very first verse of this book) and the very Maker of Words, says, "My word finds no place in you."
 - What does this tell us? "It was not the persuasiveness or power of Jesus' words that determined how people responded to him, but the spiritual condition of their own hearts." (ESV/Carson?)
- To dwell in the word of Christ is to actually obey what he says.
 - "If you hold to my teaching..." (NIV)
 - "If you continue in my word..." (NASB)

- This is how we demonstrate that we really belong to him: In that culture, and we really see this today. *"The measure of any disciple [was] the ability to hold to 'fully absorb his masters's teaching' and 'was drawing on it to spread it abroad.'"* (See Kostenberger)
- Look at what Jesus says in verse 39: When God says Go, we go. When God says to sacrifice that which is dearest to us, we do so, even when it doesn't make sense," we trust him.
- If we really follow Christ, we are going to strive to continue in his Word, with the strength he provides us each day.

How can we dwell in the Words of Jesus?

- The words of Christ have been revealed to us in the Bible, which means to dwell in the Word is to spend quality time and quantity time with this Book.
- It is really incredibly simple, but often the most simple things are the most difficult to prioritize.
- So how much
 - are you reading the Bible these days?
 - are you studying the Bible these days? (Read for breadth; study for depth. Read fast and slow. Read large portions and short sections)
 - Are you hearing God's Word?
 - Are you meditating on God's Word?
 - Are you memorizing God's Word? Medimemo verse today... (John 8:31-32)
- Before some of you say, "Yeah, yeah, I know that... I've heard this before." We should all consider how much we really believe it is true? (That we find freedom here and life here and transformation here.). Before we say: "yeah, yeah, I know that." We should consider how much our lives are characterized by *dwelling* in his Word.
- Some people think they know the Word, but they never really spend time in it.
- Some people know the Word, but don't live it.
- Some people know the Word and live the Word, to a degree, but never really share it. (The List...)
- What about you?
 - Eh... I can take it or leave it.
 - Eh... I'll take pieces of Jesus, but not the whole story.

What is the result of dwelling in the Word?

Deeper Knowledge of the Truth

- As we receive Christ's truth, we come to know how true it is in our experience.
- When we live as God wants us to live, our knowledge of the truth increases.
- For example, the more we receive Jesus as the Bread of Life and see how he satisfies us, sustains us, energizes us, and delights us, the more we come to know just how true it is that Jesus is our bread of life.
- Psalm 119:100: "I have more understanding than the aged, for I keep your precepts."
- This is why it is so important to hang out with people who have journeyed with Jesus longer than you have. Not because they are chronologically older and have more life experience (though that is reason enough!), but because their journey has produced a depth of spiritual maturity that is attractive and contagious.
 - This is why our Groups are so important. Go to our Groups table and check one out...

T: Not only do we receive a deeper knowledge of the truth, we also receive the

Freedom in Life

- We were made to enjoy freedom. In the beginning, man enjoyed complete freedom from sin, and guilt, and death.

- But, ever since our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned against God, sin has weighed us down like an immense burden on our back.
- I almost get the **picture** of world class Sprinters who train by attaching a parachute to their back. (Cut the strings... Freedom From Resistance of the Wind to experience a Freedom to Run to their full capacity.)
- This freedom has two sides... Freedom from and Freedom for...

Freedom From: slavery of sin and death

- Sin is a disruption of shalom... It is our fundamental problem.
- Sin is falling short of God's standard of glory. He made us to perfectly reflect his glory and point to his greatness.
- But is it too strong to say we are slaves to sin?
 - No one wants to hear that they are living under the power of anything, but I want to encourage you to see Jesus as a kind physician. He is diagnosing the disease of sin, so that we can receive the cure.
 - "Anyone who practices sin" is a good translation.
 - A slave to sin means we are unable to escape the "enslaving power of sinful patterns of conduct."
 - People often assume that freedom of choice means freedom of the freedom of our will, but Jesus says we are slaves of sin, not free to please God, not free to honor him with our lives. Jesus is saying, we make choices consistent with our fallen, sinful nature. That is why we need a Liberator, a Savior, who can make us completely new from the inside-out.
- And when he does, we move not only experience "Freedom from," we move to...

Freedom For: a life-giving relationship with God

- Look back at verse 35.
 - We are sons and daughters of God. Can you believe the God of the universe wants a close - vibrant relationship with us?
 - A slave has no permanent relationship in the family. A son does. A son possesses an inheritance, and you can't imagine the inheritance that awaits us as those who belong to God.
- Now we experience true freedom.
 - D. A. Carson says: "True freedom is not the liberty to do anything we please, but the liberty to do what we ought; and it is genuine liberty because doing what we ought now pleases us."
 - Jesus turns burdens into pleasure and delight by giving us...
 - New loves (42)
 - New desires (44)
 - New joys (56)
- Now we want to honor our Father (48-50)

Conclusion: This passage has taught us that...

The Point: Freedom comes through Jesus and his Truth

- Receiving his divinity: "I am"
- Receiving his death-destroying life.