Putting Your Life Together the Right Way

Is It All About You?

Years ago I brought a group of college students to stay at a cabin near a lake in the mountains. We had a retreat with Bible studies and times of prayer. The weather was beautiful and perfect for swimming at the lake, so we stayed the day there and had a picnic. Out in the water, we were all together, talking and laughing and watching the thousands of little minnows swim around our legs. I thought it would be funny to dunk one of the guys. I pushed him down under the water. He immediately began wildly flailing in a panic, so I quickly pulled him up out of the water. He was choking and frightened to death. No one was laughing and I learned a valuable lesson that day. What I thought was just having a good time never could be if it was at the expense of another person's dignity. It was not about me and a cheap effort to make people laugh. My life is not my own and never has been. A hero of the Bible realized that was so much sooner than I did and although he has a very cool nickname, John the Baptist, he never wanted anything more of his life than to be a witness to the greatest man who ever lived, who also is God. Our text today comes from the Gospel of John. **It came to be, a man having been sent from God, his name John. This one came for the purpose of being a witness in order that he might bear witness concerning the light so that all might believe through him. That one was not ever being the light but, so that he might bear witness concerning the light.** (John 1: 6-8) Our Big Idea comes from this verse. Make sure Christ is the light of your life.

I have often wondered why, in this particular part of John, the title "Light" is used to speak of Jesus rather than just His name or "Word" as is used earlier in the passage. My guess, and it is just a guess, is that the Bible is making it clear that Jesus is the center of attention, as a light in the middle of darkness is what captivates you. Light takes away the unknown and makes everything clear. The contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist is stark. John is not the light, not ever the light but Jesus is and John the Baptist was steadfast in that. Three times the passage states that John the Baptist was a witness to Jesus or the light. He was not the story, he was the means by which the story was revealed. The great storytellers recognize that it is all about the story, not the one telling the story. They don't try to be too clever by showing off their genius writing skills. Instead they let the stories they tell stand alone so that you become captivated by them rather than the creative metaphors and symbolism they add to the stories. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed, David did not feel any guilt it seemed. His lust for Bathsheba blinded him to the cruel crime he had committed. But then, one of his great friends, Nathan the prophet came and told David a story that captivated David's attention so intensely that it brought about David's repentance. Here it is as told by Nathan. **"There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."** (2 Samuel 12: 1b-4 NIV)

The glory in that story is not the skill Nathan used in telling it. It is not its literary brilliance. It is in the radiance of the light it shined. God blazed in it through and through. The story, being the message of God, was the center of attention and David could not look away from it until he discovered his own guilt. John the Baptist had the marvelous ability to make all he did, both in his preaching and even in his baptizing about Jesus. He said it in many ways and all throughout his brief ministry. Don't look at me. Look at Jesus. A most telling historical account says it all about the sort of life John the Baptist lived. As John's popularity began to skyrocket and people were coming from across Israel to be baptized by him, John said this of Jesus. **And this was his message: "After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."** (Mark 1: 7-8 NIV) John famously protested when Jesus came to him to be baptized and insisted he was unworthy to do so. But here is the marvelous aspect to this crucial moment in his life. When Jesus made it clear John the Baptist was to indeed baptize him, John, rather than holding firm to his principles, did in fact baptize Jesus because it was not about him and his beliefs, it was all about Jesus.

You may have a million well developed opinions about what you should do and how you should live. Everyone you know may agree with you. But if you are to be in the light and be a true follower of Jesus, you must stand on none of your principles but only live with Christ as your Lord. Let me share two examples from the Bible. The first is Samson.

He fell in love with a Philistine woman, this despite the fact that the word of God clearly stated that people of Israel were never to marry or be romantically involved with pagans. Samson of course destroyed his life by going after Delilah. It was all about Samson and what he wanted and even many Christians live this way. They decide that what they want to do is what God wants, even if the Bible clearly speaks against it. They are the light rather than Jesus. Years ago, the chairman of deacons of the first church where I served as pastor became angry and quit coming to our church services because I began to have the Lord's Supper during our regular Sunday morning worship services. I went to see if I could convince him to return to our church, but he refused. He said church for him was listening to cassette tapes of old Gospel tunes. He was the light rather than living in the light and not even the Bible was authoritative enough for him to return to the church.

I've heard many times Christian people tell me that they knew what was best despite the fact that they were clearly going against the Bible. For years, Christians have come and gone from churches based on what those churches do or don't provide them. The same is true of Christians and marriage, Christians and ministry. They leave both marriages and ministries because they aren't meeting their needs. Where is God in their thinking, in their decision making? Who really is the light. David was convinced he was the one to lead the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. He knew the timing was right when the ark of the covenant finally returned to Jerusalem or as it was called, "the City of David". **Now King David was told, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might,** (2 Samuel 6: 12-14 NIV) It seemed to David that his dream had been realized and his purpose in life was being fulfilled. But then the Lord told David that he was not to be the one to build the Temple. Many Christians come to this crisis point. Will I do what I want to do, something that seems good and right, or will I be loyal to Christ as my true Lord? David humbly acquiesced to the will of God, and you must also if you are to be truly happy and filled with contentment. Jesus is the light and you and I are not. Loyalty to Christ is the most important determination you will make in this life after you are born again. John the Baptist said it perfectly about his relationship with Jesus. **He must increase, but I must decrease.** (John 3: 30 NKJV)

Throughout the week, your loyalty to Jesus will be tested and you must decide if you are the light or He is. Here is a set of questions to ask yourself to see where you stand on this. I call this the John the Baptist loyalty test. 1. If I do this, will God get the credit or will I? 2. Does what I plan to do align with Scripture? 3. Will this encourage people to follow me or Jesus? 4. Am I willing to step away if God says stop? 5. Am I relying upon God to do this or am I depending on my own insight and resources? 6. Does this increase or diminish my devotion to Christ? 7. Will I lose my confidence in God if this fails or will even failure increase my devotion to Christ? Joshua said it well and it is crucial you also take this stand. **But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."** (Joshua 24 :15d NIV)
Let's recap with Our Big Idea. Make sure Christ is the light of your life. Will you be the light of your life or will Jesus? Is your loyalty to Christ or to what you want to do? You make the call. Will you join Joshua and his family and John the Baptist and pledge your undying loyalty to Jesus as the light of your life?