

SEQUOYAH HILLS
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“Rediscover Jesus: Standing on Tip Toes is NOT Enough!”

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As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

Mark 1: 29-34

A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, "If you choose, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

Mark 1: 40-45

Can you remember a time in your life when you were standing on your tip toes? Was it during a parade and you stood on your tip toes to watch the bands and floats go by? Or was it during the Master's Golf Tournament in Augusta, Georgia and you stood on your tip toes to get a glimpse of Tiger Woods as he walked up the 18th fairway? Or was it at Neyland Stadium and you got a glimpse of a Hall of Fame football player returning to the place he played college football and you stood on tip toes.... to get a glimpse of the **GREAT Peyton Manning!**

My son Toby and I were in New York City, and we saw hundreds of women of all ages standing on their top toes to get a glimpse of several men who were having lunch at the St. Regis Hotel across the street from the church I pastored there. Electricity was in the air! There was a buzz of excitement! Just then we saw them.... Brad Pitt, George Clooney and Clint Eastwood emerging from the hotel and the whole crowd of women of all ages erupted in applause and screaming and squealing, and a few even offered marriage proposals!

In our scripture passage for today everyone was standing on their tip toes! Mark tells us that the whole city was gathered around the door! That is a big statement, the WHOLE CITY of Capernaum was standing around the door of Simon and Andrew's house. Why would that be? Well, just a few hours earlier Jesus had healed Simon's Mother-in-law in Simon's house. She had a fever. People could die of a fever in that day - people can die of a fever from Covid in our day, too. The miracle of healing that Jesus performed was the talk of Capernaum. There was a buzz all over the city. In Capernaum the houses were so close together that if you sneezed in one house, they said "God bless you," in another. So when something big happened like a healing, the news spread like wildfire! So by evening, when the sabbath day was over, the entire city brought their sick and infirmed to the door of Simon and Andrew's house hoping beyond hope that their mother or daughter or husband or father could be healed by Jesus! If we had lived in Capernaum in those days, who would we have brought to Jesus for healing that day?

Would we have brought our Mom with Parkinson's? Or, our Dad who is in the early stages of Alzheimer's? Or our sister with breast cancer, or our daughter with a drug abuse issue? Imagine that Jesus was talking with them and working them, and we are at the doorstep standing on our tip toes and craning our necks to see into the room because we want to see our family member healed! The people standing at the door of Simon's and Andrew's house on their tip toes had these same hopes and dreams that we would have had! They wanted desperately to be spectators to a miracle!

But here's the truth of the gospel. Jesus doesn't want us to be spectators to a miracle. He wants us to be more than spectators. He wants us to be disciples; he wants us to put our trust in him to be participants in the life and ministry of Jesus and not spectators. He doesn't want a crowd contagion. He doesn't want to be a rock star! He does not want to draw attention to himself. Instead, he wants to point to God, and he wants his followers to know God!

So, Jesus does two curious things. First, when he casts out the demons, he does not permit them to speak because they knew him. Jesus did not want the demons to tell anyone what had happened to them. Secondly, when he healed a leper, Jesus told him not to say anything to anyone except the priest. But, the leper told everyone that he was healed, so that Jesus could not go into any cities any longer because of the crowd contagion and he had to reside in the countryside because the crowds of curiosity seekers who wanted to get a glimpse of him were so enormous.

Here's the question of this text. Why didn't Jesus want anyone to know about him? Scholars call this the Messianic Secret. Jesus did not want curiosity seekers to stand on their tip toes and watch him like he was a circus performer. If Jesus is merely a miracle worker than that will take away from his primary work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and dying on the cross for our sins. Karl Barth, the 20th century German theologian, described Jesus's primary work in this way. "Jesus was the man who was born to die!" Barth said that Jesus rejected anything that got in the way of his primary work that God gave him to do!

For example, do you remember the three temptations when Jesus was in the wilderness? The Devil tempted Jesus to turn the stones to bread; to jump off the pinnacle of the temple and God will give his angels charge of you and, to bow down and worship Satan and all the Kingdoms

of the world will be his. I believe that Jesus could have done any of these things. These were real temptations. He was tempted by them! And do you remember on the cross how the crowd yelled at him “If you are the Son of God come down from the cross and save yourself”? And I believe that he could have done it! But if he had succumbed to these temptations, he would not be our savior! To be our savior he had to die on the cross, so that God could raise him from the dead, and he could conquer sin and death.

But human beings always want a dramatic sign. We want proof! We want a messiah who will meet our immediate needs and give us what we want! But Jesus had a greater purpose than simply meeting the immediate needs of the people. Jesus wanted to be faithful to God and be our savior. This is disappointing to us. We want a messiah to meet our immediate needs and to heal our diseases, but God had a greater purpose for Jesus’s life than meeting each one of our needs! God had a greater purpose for Jesus than to heal our diseases. And Jesus never promised to heal each one of our diseases. His healing power was simply a glimpse of his power. It was not the totality of his power. It was merely a sign of his greater power but his power was not an end in and of itself. It was simply a sign of the kind of power that Jesus had at his fingertips, that God gave to him, but he had to use that power in service to God and not to simply meet the immediate needs of the people.

Here’s the truth. Think about this. Simon’s mother in law in Mark chapter one was healed, but later she died. The leper was healed, but later he died! All of those people around the door at Simon and Andrew’s house, they died! And all the people Jesus healed, they died, too. And someday, we will die! So, the point is not that Jesus is a healer of everything that makes us sick? The question is, “Is Jesus our Savior?” If so, then to be our savior, he had to go to the cross and serve God’s greater purpose for his life.

Jesus had to let go of the agenda that the crowd had for his life and the agenda that the disciples had for his life and the agenda that the Devil had for his life. He chose to be faithful to God’s agenda for his life.

We must decide this too! Whose agenda will we serve? Our agenda, or the agenda of the crowd around us, or God’s agenda?

My friend George McCausland had to wrestle with this question. George was the Director of the largest YMCA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and by any measure, he was a huge success. But his job was enormous. George handled fundraising, program development, staffing, and he worked 65-70 hours per week. But, at the age of 43, he had a severe heart attack. George’s doctor told him that he was lucky to survive but that he must change his lifestyle. Instead of a 65-70+ hour work week, George had to cut back to a maximum of 40 hours. Instead of eating fatty foods, burgers, and chips, he had to eat vegetables, fruit, and grilled chicken ...NOT fried chicken! He had to take two full days off per week! In all honesty, George did not know if he could do it! He knew that he had to let go of control of so many things at the YMCA. So, he went home he made a life-changing decision. He sat on his back porch and he wrote God a letter: “Dear God,” he wrote, “ I hereby resign as General Manager of the universe. Love, George.” And George told me...” Wonder of

wonders...God accepted my resignation.” Is there anybody listening to this message who needs to resign as General Manager of the Universe?

God wants us to put our trust in Him. He wants us to let go of our agenda and trust God. He wants us to resign as General Manager of the Universe. He wants us to lean back on His Everlasting Arms and to let Him be our Savior. God does not want us to be a spectator or a curious bystander to God’s saving work. He wants us to let God love us.

A 2 ½ year old boy named David had a rare lung disease. To treat him, the Doctors and nurses put him in a tent where they could monitor the air that circulated, and they could isolate him. When I visited David in the hospital, his mother, Jane was there. David and I had met each other before, so we were waving to each other, and we played peek a boo with each other. When it was time for me to go, Jane told David that she was going to walk me to the elevator. David seemed to understand as he waved to me, and I waved to him. But when Jane and I went to the elevator, David screamed, and he yelled, and he wailed, and he pulled the tubes out of his arms. Blood and tears and sweat and mucous was everywhere. The nurses wondered what to do for David, but Jane was cool as a cucumber. She kicked her shoes off and she unzipped the tent, and she climbed into the tent. David was flailing and crying and waving his arms, but Jane asked a nurse for a cold cloth, and she wiped his brow and leaned back against the side of the tent and David lay down on her chest. Soon, David started to calm down! And I looked at Jane and her face and her blouse were covered with blood and sweat and tears and mucous. David leaned back on her arms, and he fell fast asleep. When I looked at Jane’s face, I saw the face of Jesus.

God wants us to lean back on the Everlasting Arms of Jesus. He doesn’t want us to be a spectator to the work of Jesus. That is why standing on our tip toes and letting Jesus be a circus performer, a Rock Star, who meets our immediate needs is not enough. God wants us to let Jesus be our Savior. That is why standing on our tip toes and watching Jesus meet our immediate needs is not enough! A-men.