

“The Most Staggering Thing Jesus Ever Said”

John 14:7-14

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
October 17, 2004

Recently I taught three classes at Parkview High School. Students can take a religion class as an elective if they choose. The teacher, Mr. Everett Bracken, asked me to teach for a day and I was pleased to do so. Three of our church members are taking the class, Ragan Helms, Sara Stewart and Rachel Barton.

The class was winding up their study of the Gospels, so I tried to reinforce some of the things that Mr. Bracken taught them. I asked several questions about the Gospels and was thrilled to see how much they knew. After a few minutes reviewing the Gospels, I asked them what they thought the writers wanted us to know about Jesus. For you see, I agree with Anglican Bishop and New Testament scholar N. T. Wright who believes that the Gospels were not written for a single, narrowly focused community but for everyone. The Gospel writers were writing to all that would come after them, including us. So, what did they want us to know about Jesus?

They wanted us to know that **Jesus can help us better understand who God is, teach us what it means to live a Spirit-filled life and help us live this kind of life.** Let me elaborate this morning.

A little girl was drawing with her crayons when her brother asked her what she was doing. “I’m drawing a picture of God,” she told him. He laughed and said, “Nobody knows what God looks like,” to which she replied, “They will when I get finished.”

There is a lot of talk in our culture about God even among skeptics. Since the beginning of time, people have been curious and wondered what He is like. Who has been the most informative and helpful on this quest? The Gospel writers would have no trouble answering this question. It is Jesus.

“Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered, ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say show us the Father? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves’ ” John 14:8-11.

To the ancient world, this was the most staggering thing that Jesus said. The Greeks referred to God as The Invisible. The Jews believed that no one could see God and live. Man has always been fascinated by the transcendence of God, the difference and distance between them. And yet, with utter simplicity and reassuring confidence Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” As Bill Hull writes, “So complete was the mutual indwelling of Father and Son that the words and works of Jesus were the words and works of God.”

If this is true and I believe it is, then I like the God that Jesus reveals. He is righteous, just, merciful, kind, approachable, reasonable, strong and faithful.

Occasionally I talk to someone that does not believe in God and ask them, “Tell me about the God you do not believe in.” After describing that God, I usually reply, “I don’t believe in that God either. You’ve just described an insensitive, indifferent or cruel God. I certainly understand why you have rejected that God. However, this is not the portrait of God that Jesus reveals in the Gospels. Let me tell you about that God.”

I am indebted to the Gospel writers for making this possible. I shudder to think which concept of God would most influence us if it were not for the Gospels.

The Gospel writers also wanted us to know that Jesus can teach and show us how to live a Godly life. Jesus revealed the heart, mind and message of God by fleshing out the Gospel.

Through his own life he showed us how a spirit-filled person arranges values and priorities, relates to others, deals with enemies, handles problems, overcomes temptation and prepares for death.

If you want to know what God thinks, listen to Jesus. If you want to know what God would do in your situation, look at Jesus. We have no better example of what it means to be a person of faith and live a Godly life. We need no better example!

Again, we are indebted to the Gospel writers for sharing the life of Jesus with us. We need specific examples of what it means to honor God with our lives and they provide them.

I also think the writers wanted us to know that Jesus can help us live a Godly life. Not only can he enlighten and inspire us but he can also enable us to follow him.

“I tell you the truth, anyone that has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it” John 14:12-14.

What do you need in order to follow Christ, be like him and advance the Kingdom of God? Courage. Determination. Discipline. A change of heart. Victory over temptation. A role model. Encouragement. A support group. A vision. Confidence.

Whatever you need, he will provide it. This same Jesus that glorified his Father through everything he did will help us to do the same. The grace and power seen in Jesus through the Gospel writers are available to us through the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. We can ask for anything that Jesus would have requested and it will be provided. I know this seems incredible, but it is true. It must break his heart, though, that we don't ask for more than we do and are content with far less than Jesus planned to give us.

Why don't we do what Jesus did, and even more, like he said we would? I like Tony Campolo's answer to this question. What Jesus did was not done to demonstrate his power as much as his love. When we love as much as Jesus did, we'll do what he did. When we care about people as deeply as he did, we'll fulfill this promise.

A few years ago, Tony Campolo was waiting for a plane in a small airport in Farmington, New Mexico. There were only four or five people in the waiting room and one was an elderly lady that was very unhappy. As a matter of fact, she was rude at times. She brought a friend or family member to the airport and was going to leave after the plane arrived.

Dr. Campolo began talking to her with the intention of getting her to smile and laugh. After several attempts and with great effort, he succeeded. She began conversing in a polite manner and even began laughing. Everyone in the room was amazed, especially when she began laughing uncontrollably.

After the plane arrived, she said goodbye to the person she accompanied and left the building. She got in her car to leave but then came back into the waiting room where Dr. Campolo was. She approached him and said, “Mister, you could not have possibly known this, but it was three years ago today that my husband of fifty-four years died. I have been grieving since then and it dawned on me as I was going to the car that this was the first time in three years I have laughed. I needed this and wanted to come back to say thank you.”

Do you want to be the catalyst for a miracle this week? Find someone that is lonely, confused, scared or angry and love that person like Jesus does. You'll be amazed at what will happen.