

The Counter-Cultural Call Of Christianity

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

It's been said that "Reason can be a good servant, but it's a lousy master." In fact, appearances can be deceiving, and what may seem obvious to one, may actually be quite the opposite in reality. Our culture is full of examples of this truth:

1. You want marriages to last – Don't live together
2. You want a healthy body – Drink water / move / sleep
3. You want financial stability – Generosity and Saving

I was talking with Bryan Seyler, from Disciple Lutheran Fellowship, soon after we came. We were discussing the sad truth that often, the more educated a person is, the dumber they get, including spiritually. He taught me an old Pennsylvania Dutch phrase for the problem, "Too smart, dumb."

A good example is a sign I recently saw at a local church. It read, "Need a Lifeguard? Ours walks on water." Now, I know for a fact that this particular denomination does not believe in Biblical miracles – they see them as metaphors or figures of speech. But to make this statement on their sign, they had to borrow from what we Biblical believers claim as truth. If you believe the Bible, then miracles aren't only possible—they're expected—and Jesus is probably already your "lifeguard." Sadly, most in that denomination have become, "Too smart, dumb."

It's amazing how a relatively intelligent, passionate person can approach an issue with what they believe to be an informed argument, only to end up making a case for the opposite side. Case in point, the Dobbs decision by the Supreme Court. I've recently watched several videos where the person in the video assumed they were making a "slam-dunk" argument supporting abortion and conservatives in general. But in fact, they end up *supporting* the case of a pro-life conservative:

- * If you really believe life starts at conception, then fathers should be liable for child support immediately.
- * If you believe a baby's life starts at conception, then a person should be guilty of 2 murders if they kill a pregnant woman.
- * And most recently, a video showed a woman currently in the US Army, vented on Tiktok that she wasn't sure she wanted to serve in the military of a nation that didn't support women being allowing abortion.

For most conservatives, and especially Biblical Christians, our answer would be, OKAY, to all three.

This past Thursday evening, we discussed a segment of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that also challenged the status quo of the culture. Jesus made His case that any true citizen of God's Kingdom should be generous, rather than self-seeking – forgiving rather than seeking revenge. Much of what Jesus taught was counter-intuitive...and very counter-cultural. It required that people re-evaluate

everything they had learned about retaliation and retribution, possibly even leaving them open to accusations of impotence and weakness. Rather than retaliation, Jesus called for forgiveness – and instead of revenge, God's Kingdom requires open-handedness.

But Jesus wasn't the only one to enforce such counter-intuitive behaviors on the believer. The apostle Peter shares just such a challenge in his first epistle, chapter 3:

1 Pet 3:8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

What? Give a blessing, that you may inherit a blessing? How in the world is my life going to be improved by improving someone else's life. That just doesn't make sense – at least to the human mind, in a world of "eye for an eye, and tooth for a tooth." But that's exactly what Jesus was confronting in Matthew 5. And Jesus also challenges the "obvious" assumptions of the Disciples in Luke 5 as well.

Luke 5:1-3 Now it happened that while the crowd was pressing around Him and listening to the word of God, He was standing by the lake of Gennesaret; 2 and He saw two boats lying at the edge of the lake; but the fishermen had gotten out of them and were washing their nets. 3 And He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.

Jesus, seeing that the fishermen had finished for the day, gets into a boat on the shore, and asks Simon to take Him out a little ways so He can preach more effectively (*sound travels well over water*). The implied result is that Simon simply did as Jesus asked; "*And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.*"

Simon's unquestioning obedience allowed Jesus to minister to those who followed Him. Jesus wasn't talking about fishing at this point...He was simply "teaching."

But even so, apparently Simon wasn't impressed, and He certainly didn't trust Jesus' knowledge of fishing.

Luke 5:4-5 When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." 5 Simon answered and said, "Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets."

Simon played along with Jesus' request. But Jesus was on Simon's turf now – fishing, something Simon both knew and understood. However, something inside Simon drove him to listen to this seemingly confused man. In the end, Simon's compliance resulted in personal blessing.

Luke 5:6-7 When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; 7 so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.

Simon was challenged by Jesus to, as C.S. Lewis once wrote, "*Come further up, come further in!*" What Jesus

asked was counter-intuitive – counter-cultural. As a fisherman, Simon knew better – for they had “worked hard all night and caught nothing.” And they’d already washed their nets for the day – they were done!

So why Simon responded in faith, we don’t know - other than the working of the Holy Spirit. All we know is that his obedience, weary as it was, was rewarded miraculously. Simon Peter was changed.

Luke 5:8-10 But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”⁹ For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken;¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”

In a moment, Simon Peter was transformed into a true worshipper; one who worships in Spirit and in truth. Simon acknowledged who God was, and who he was (a sinful man!); and fell at Jesus’ feet in humble remorse. And this realization was no longer counter-intuitive, IT MADE PERFECT SENSE. Simon was no longer looking at Jesus with eyes that could only see the materially obvious. He had gone from “too smart dumb” to “formerly dumb – smart.” Sometimes it all boils down to how we see the world – our Worldview.

Simon’s former superiority was transformed to amazement. As a result, Jesus gave him a promotion, which the whole company accepted in turn with great joy.

Luke 5:10b-11 “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”¹¹ When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

None of them knew what lay ahead, but they committed themselves to follow Jesus, come what may. They hadn’t sought this apprenticeship, but they accepted it, none-the-less. Verse 11 tells us, “They left everything and followed Him.”

At that point, it didn’t matter what appeared to be right, or what the culture may have expected. Pleasing “men” wasn’t that important... pleasing a MAN had become very important. And it was Jesus’ counter-intuitive, counter-cultural request that had opened their eyes to what was smart, and what was dumb. It was smart to follow Jesus, and dumb not to.

May we move from “too smart, dumb” – to “formerly dumb, smart,” as the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.