

The Story / The Heart of the Story
Sermon 3: “No Ordinary Man” (ch 24)
March 15, 2015

“I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded his empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.” ... That was Napoleon.

“Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of school, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.” ... That was the conclusion of Philip Schaff, Historian.

“I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.” ... That was from H. G. Wells, War of the Worlds ...

“Familiarity breeds contempt.” Ever hear that one? Now usually it means that the longer you know someone, the more aware you are of their weaknesses, and they don’t look so good any more. I’ll bet most of you ladies, and nearly every one of you guys once thought that the person you married was nearly perfect. But after a few years of marriage, they start looking very, very ordinary ... or worse. Now, guys, this is not one of those places where you let them know you agree with me, okay?

Well, that’s not what I mean by “familiarity breeds contempt” when I apply it to Jesus. You see, the more you dig into Jesus, the more “perfect” he looks. But sometimes familiarity breeds complacency. Sometimes we get so familiar with the extraordinary that it begins to feel ordinary.

- Kentucky fans actually expect these kids to win by 30 every game. We tend to feel a bit disappointed with less.
- How about these little things? They are “blow your mind” amazing. My contacts, calendars, clock, camera; my messages, mail; my books, Bible, radio, TV, movies; I shop here, pay my bills here, read the news here, check the weather here, use the GPS in it when I drive. I’m even using it to run the slides on this TV this morning. Isn’t that cool! And it’s a phone, too! And I get annoyed when it moves too slowly, or loses signal, or locks up. Really! I get annoyed with this! Familiarity breeds complacency.

We do the same with people. We begin to take for granted those who love us; and then we stand by a casket and we mourn what might have been, or what should have been. And we do the same with Jesus. Worship – our worship of the “in the beginning God” -- becomes a routine. The Lord’s Supper – the broken body and shed blood of Jesus -- becomes a ritual. The stories of his life – some of us have heard them so many times, they just don’t dazzle us any more. His words – some of us have heard them so many times, they don’t stir us any more. Really?! The single most amazing person ever, the single most important life ever, the single most important decision ever (what to do with him) – and we tend to yawn. Really?! So many of us blow him off, or give him left-overs. So many of us want to treat him with respect, but not devotion. Really?! He doesn’t give us that option, guys. When you come face to face with the real Jesus, you either love him, or hate him. There really is no in between.

Now, we are up to week 24 of The Story. We’re kind of unpacking the storyline of the Bible in 31 weeks, and we are up to chapter 24. It’s called, “No Ordinary Man.” No kidding! That’s the understatement of all time, don’t you think? Well, we are going to kind of laser in on the middle part of Jesus’ ministry today. The Bible tells us a little bit about his birth, which was enough to prove that he is no ordinary man. It tells us a whole lot more about his death, and his resurrection, which move him way past an ordinary man. But we’re going to look at what he was doing for the three years he kind of “did ministry.” Even that part proved to them, and to us, that Jesus was no ordinary man. Guys, there was something about Jesus that dazzled them. There is something about Jesus that makes you take sides – if you really listen. You either bend your knees, or you go to war.

Was it his teaching, that dazzled them? Was it what he said, or how he said it? The most famous of Jesus' "sermons" is the Sermon on the Mount. Here's what it says at the end. It says, "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching." (Mt 7.28) His teaching was different. It was more captivating than anything they had ever heard. They would come by the thousands to hear him. They'd sit there all day listening to him – skipping meals. Kind of like here at Capital City: people crowd in here by the thousands, and they are willing to sit and listen all day! That's ... humor. You guys are usually pretty patient as long as you can eat lunch before the game. What was it about his words that dazzled them?

Were his jokes that good? Some of you guys don't think of Jesus as funny, do you? Well, he's got a sense of humor. ... Look around! He made you guys! You guys hear the old joke about a guy who goes to prison? On his first day he's sitting in the mess hall when some guy shouts out, "24!" And everyone roars with laughter. A few minutes later another guy says, "57!" Again, everyone is laughing. Later he asks his cellmate what's going on. The guys explain that there is only one book in the prison library; a joke book. It's called, "100 Jokes Sure to Bring a Laugh." All the inmates had read the book so many times they had it memorized. So they just shout out the number, and everyone knows which joke it is, and they laugh. So the new guy checks out the book, and reads it, and memorizes a few he thought were really funny. The next day at lunch he waits until the time was right and he shouts, "16!" Not a sound, not even a chuckle. Well he is embarrassed; so he tries again: "73." Nothing. So when he gets back to his cell he asks his buddy, "What's going on? No one laughed!" His buddy says, "Well ... some people can tell a joke and some can't."

Well, Jesus could tell a joke. That sounds sacrilegious to some people, doesn't it? Do you think Jesus was funny ... on purpose ... sometimes? We take some of his words so literally we just miss the humor.

- "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?" Guys, that's funny.
- Or, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" If you can't picture that in your head, you don't get it. It's funny!

- Or, “They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.”

It’s funny! It’s not slapstick. But Jesus is funny. He is witty, sarcastic. He uses word play, and irony, and hyperbole. And he delivered his lines with impeccable timing. Great teachers use humor. Was that it? Is that what took their breath away? Kind of a first century Will Farrell? I don’t think so.

How about his ability to tell a story? What is his story telling that amazed them? He was a master. We call them parables today. He painted pictures with words that you just don’t forget. I can throw out the titles – and most of you know the stories, by heart – 2000 years later. I don’t remember my own stories the next day!

- The Good Samaritan.
- The Prodigal Son.
- The Mustard Seed.

I can start telling one of his stories, and after just a few words, you already know how it goes. In fact, hundreds of our stories are just adaptations of his. They were so simple, and so deep. He could set his hook in you before you even knew he was fishing for you. Was that it? A lot of great teachers are great storytellers. Is that what amazed them? Is that what took their breath away? I don’t think so.

Was it his genius at the sound bite? I’m telling you guys, in just one line he could nail it. The reporters would be all over him today. Listen to these ... “Aphorisms”: 2000 years later and they still bite.

- “Judge not, or ___ you will be judged.”
- Or, “Let him who is without sin ___ cast the first stone.”
- Or, “The first will be last, and the ___ last will be first.”
- Or, “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and ___ lose his soul.”

There are a boatload of them! They stick! “Do unto others.” “Blessed are the poor, the meek, the peacemakers.” “Unless you become like little children.” Jesus would be a 21st century twitter star. Millions of followers, millions of retweets.

Some people try to picture Jesus as a well meaning but naïve guru who wandered around tossing out these gems of folk wisdom, sparking a movement he never would have predicted. That's so stupid. He could take the deepest ideas and word them so a child could catch it. And in the next breath he would confound the smartest people in the world. The early church fathers said that his words are like a river in which a gnat can swim safely, and in which an elephant can drown. Guys, I've spent my adult life trying to understand and teach what Jesus said. I have 3 degrees in this stuff – and I discover something new in his words every week! For 2000 years some of the very best minds in history have tried to understand and teach what Jesus said. Nobody – nobody – can get it all. And nobody can say it so simply, and go so deep.

Is that what took their breath away about Jesus? Is that what amazed them when he taught? Was it his humor? Was it his ability to tell a story? Was it his ability to say something in a way you'll never forget? Was it his ability to captivate the most simple, and still confound the most wise? All that is true. And yet ... that is not what amazed them most.

I only read you the first part of what it said. It says, "The crowds were amazed at his teaching." Do you know why? It says, "For he taught with authority -- real authority -- quite unlike their teachers." It was this ... "authority" ... with which he spoke, about everything. Now I don't think that means Jesus yelled a lot. Some guys think that if you yell it, it has more authority. "BLESSED are the poor in spirit!" A little fist pounding. A handkerchief to mop the sweat. To tell you the truth, I don't like getting yelled at. And I don't think getting louder gives you any more authority. No, there was something else about his teaching that gave it authority, that made him no ordinary teacher...

Have you ever noticed that the smartest guys you know – the really smart ones – know how much they don't know? The best teachers are always willing to admit that there is a whole lot they just don't know. Ever hear of Socrates? Considered one of the smartest guys in history. Did you know that what made him so wise was that he knew better than anyone else what he didn't know? Socrates knew he knew almost nothing. That's why he was so smart. Most people don't know how little they know. I had a weird conversation with one of the smartest professors I ever studied under – Scott Bartchy. I was studying a passage in 1 Corinthians, and the

more I studied, the more puzzled I got. I had more questions after studying it than I had before I started! I told Dr. Bartchy how frustrated I was, and he just laughed at me. He said, "Steve, I know a whole lot less today than I did when I was your age. But what I do know I'd die for." Now he was one smart man.

Do you know what's weird about Jesus? Jesus never said, "I don't know" – except for the date he's coming back. Jesus never said, "I don't know." One of the little phrases you get used to when you read the stories of Jesus is this one. He keeps saying, "Truly I say to you," or "Truly truly I say to you." 75 times in the gospels. "I'm telling you the truth." "I'm telling you how things work." He is saying, "I know. I know! I know how things are. I know how things work. I know about economics, about money. I know about the human heart, about love, and hate, and forgiveness. I know about marriage, I know about singleness. I'll spare you countless heartaches if you'll live the way I show you." And it didn't impress them as arrogance. Jesus just ... knew.

And he didn't have to quote any authorities to back him up. Back then when the rabbis taught, they always tried backing up what they said by telling you about all the authorities who agreed with them. We still do that today. We list our references, show our bibliography, we try to back up what we say by quoting some authority. That's the way lawyers and judges work. They try to base their arguments and their decisions on some legal precedent. Not Jesus. He just says, "Here's how it is," "Truly I say to you," he says. And that's enough. And that knocked their socks off! He had this quality about him, usually only found in a genius or a psychotic, of being so convinced he was right that he could not be swayed, no matter who opposed him.

You see, some people will try to tell you that Jesus was an good-natured wise man, and Paul was the genius who invented Christianity. But Paul didn't think that. He was brilliant, and he studied under the greatest teacher of his day – a guy named Gamaliel. But Paul was dazzled by Jesus. To Paul Jesus was no ordinary man. He said: "In Jesus lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2.3) That's something he would never say about himself, or Gamaliel, or any other man... No ordinary man ...

But it wasn't just the way Jesus taught. If you read chapter 24 in The Story last week – and I really hope you are doing your reading; it's great stuff. Besides showing how Jesus taught, there are all these miracle stories. Now listen. I'm not going to fiddle with the question of whether miracles are possible. Listen guys: if there is a God, miracles are possible; to think otherwise is stupid. If there is a God, miracles are possible; or your God is flat out incompetent. And if Jesus really is the Son of God – we'll get to that next week, then you have to admit that he had the ability, he had the power, to work some miracles. And boy, did he. If you read through chapter 24 last week, then you read about all these miracles:

- One time Jesus is on a boat with his disciples, and a storm blows in. They wake Jesus up, because he's sleeping – in a storm. Jesus gets up, calls his disciples a bunch of wusses, and then he says, to the storm... He says to the storm: "Shhh." And it does. Blew their minds. What man can boss storms around?
- When they get to land they come across this guy who is possessed by a demon. It's pretty cool! The guy sees Jesus, and he runs to him and he falls at his feet. And he begs him, "Leave me alone, please!" Well, that's not going to happen. Jesus says to the demon, "Get out." No arguing, no fuss, no exorcism ritual; just "Get out." And the demon does. Blew their minds. What man can boss demons around?
- When they get to one town the leader of the synagogue comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his daughter. He's desperate; she's dying. When Jesus gets there, it's too late ... they think. She's dead. Jesus says, "No she's not." They say, "That's cruel, Jesus, she's dead." Jesus says, "Let me see her." And when he sees her he says, "Get up." No shouting, no praying, no fuss, no rituals. Just, "Get up, little one." And she does. Blew their minds. What man can boss the dead around?
- Then he heals a woman who had had some kind of internal bleeding for 12 years. She touches him, and the bleeding stops. He touches the eyes of two blind guys. You know what happened. Blew their minds! What man heals people without praying, without chanting, without potions, without fuss. Just a touch.
- The chapter ends with Jesus feeding thousands of people with 5 loaves and two fish – they keep reaching into the Captain D bucket, and they keep pulling out filets and hushpuppies. And then Jesus

escapes the crowd by crossing the lake ... on foot! Are you serious? Blew their minds! What man can do that kind of stuff.

He has authority over the weather, he has authority over demons, he has authority over disease, he has authority over death. And he doesn't do it just a little. One time, it says, "When the people recognized Jesus, the news of his arrival spread quickly throughout the whole area, and soon people were bringing all their sick to be healed. They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed." (Matthew 14.35-36) And that happened a lot.

If you could have been there, for just one of the miracles, which one would you choose? Would you want to be on that boat, to see him hush a storm? Would you like to see him bust the tail of some demon? Would you watch him healing some blind guys, or some lepers? Would you want to be there to hear him tell a dead person to get up, and watch the dead guy do it? If you could have run ahead of the crowd to get a front row seat for one of the miracles, which one would you choose? I'd bet you'd pay good money today to see something like that, wouldn't you? Would you give up tickets to the tournament for a front row seat to some miracle of Jesus?

And the way he did them; it was kind of like the way he taught. Just ... sheer ... authority. He didn't do a lot of praying; he didn't chant any magic words; he didn't use any potions, or magic rocks; he didn't stick pins in any dolls, or use tarot cards or Ouija boards. He just said, "Shh," or "Get out," or "Get up." And they did. And here's where it left them. It says, "Even his disciples were amazed. (That happened a lot.) And they asked, "Who is this man?" He scared the bejeegers out of them! And he fascinated them. What man has the authority to boss storms around, or to boss demons around, or to boss disease around, or to boss the dead around?

Jesus told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28.18) No kidding! Don't you think the title "No ordinary man" is kind of the biggest understatement ever? "All authority, all power in heaven and on earth has been given to me," he says. That's ... a lot! And no one else, no other "great man" ever made a claim like that. Not Socrates, not Confucius, not Buddha, not Mohammad. And yet with Jesus, we believe him!

Listen guys, this is serious. This is as serious as it gets. The stories of Jesus talk about someone being stunned or amazed about 30 times. 27 of those times, the people are amazed at Jesus. 3 times, Jesus is amazed at one of us – because we had faith in him, we believed in him, we trusted him. Listen guys, it's easy to be amazed at Jesus. You just have to listen to him, you just have to watch him. What's 'to die for' is to see him amazed at you – because you have faith in him, because you believe in him, because you trust him. Don't just be amazed at Jesus – that just shows you have a brain. Let him be amazed at you – because you trust him, no matter what. That will matter forever!

One more piece. 5 times in the stories of Jesus, he tells us to believe in him. 20 times he tells us to follow him. Because ... Listen guys, it's not enough just to believe in him. Just believing him won't get you much. What he wants is for us to follow him. That's what life is all about. You buy that?