Message: Things Aren’t Always As They Seem

Show the Youtube Video of Susan Boyle’s audition on “Britain’s Got Talent.”

Message
Susan Boyle has become an internet video sensation. That may be the single most watched viral video ever. My definition of a viral video is a video you see on Youtube and you like it, so you tell a friend, who watches it, and she tells a friend, and so on. One of the most famous viral videos of all time is “Evolution of Dance,” which has been watched over 130 million times since 2006. Susan Boyle’s video has been watched more than 130 million times in less than two weeks! That show you saw aired live two weeks ago Saturday night!

Of course, a great viral video can be watched by one person several times over. I watched “Evolution of Dance” several times, and I have watched the Boyle video many times. The truth is, my kids are becoming a bit concerned about me: “Uh oh, Dad’s watching the Boyle video again. What’s up with that?” Some of you have done the same thing, which made me wonder: How do you know you’ve watched the Susan Boyle video too many times?

You may have watched that Susan Boyle video too many times when...
- You start speaking with a British accent
- You start crying even before you replay it the next time.
- You know the words to “I Dreamed A Dream” by heart.
- You can recite the judge’s comments before they speak them.
- Your family removes the sound card from your computer.

So, what is the draw of that video? I’ve been pondering that for days. Part of it is the back story. Susan Boyle is a single, unemployed, 47-year old who visits the elderly of her church and who lives alone in Blackburn, Scotland with her cat, “Pebbles.” The youngest of nine children, she cared for her ill mother until her mother passed a couple of years ago. She promised her mother she’d do something with her life, and so she decided to audition for the show, “Britain’s Got Talent.” That plot is better than what you see in most movies!

Another part of the pull of the video is the song she chose, “I dreamed a dream.” In her interview with Larry King, she said she chose the song because: “It fit the circumstances. It fit what I was feeling at the time.” The choice of song was compelling. Naturally, she sang the song very well, and the editing of the video—the camera shots of audience response, the background music--was very effective.

But the single greatest draw of the video may be the underdog factor, the “loser turned hero” story. She was badly underestimated. Judge Amanda Holden said “Everyone was against you.” Prior to her singing, virtually everyone misjudged her ability, especially the judges (except for Simon, who knew “from the moment she stepped out on that stage”!) People laughed or rolled their eyes.
When plain-looking Susan Boyle marched out on to that stage and spoke a few words, she appeared to be clueless, and from that, the crowd and the judges assumed she was powerless, talent-less. They were badly mistaken. There is something fun about an underdog who makes all the experts look a bit silly. We tend to love that kind of story. Perhaps it is because we were created by a God loves that kind of story. God loves underdog stories. He loves it when someone who looks weak turns out to be strong, when an idea that looks silly turns out to be brilliant. There is a great description in the Bible about God’s love for underdogs and for the unexpected. Listen to this:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength. 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (The Bible, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 NIV)

One phrase immediately jumps off the page at me:

“Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

What does that mean? Think back to the video. Susan Boyle made foolish the wisdom of the audience, of the judges. When she stepped up and said she wanted to be a professional singer, the wisdom of every person in that room said “no way.” Everyone was so wise. Everyone was a brilliant judge of talent. Then she made their wisdom look foolish. In the words of judge Piers Morgan, “When you stood up there with that cheeky grin and said I want to be like Elaine Paige, everybody was laughing. No one is laughing now.” The laugh was on everyone but Susan.

Judge Amanda Holden called her own misjudgment “the biggest wake-up call ever.” It should be for all of us. All of us are more arrogant than we believe. All of us think we are smarter than we really are. We put more confidence in our opinions than is warranted. I’ll get more specific because the Bible does. Every one of us
has at some point chosen our own wisdom over God’s wisdom. We’ve determined, or at least acted like, we are smarter than God. We have overestimated our wisdom and underestimated His.

What is remarkable is that God lets us do this. God, in his grace and wisdom, allows us to judge for ourselves—to reason, to draw conclusions, to choose. Put another way, God puts himself out there—on a stage, so to speak—and we are given the opportunity to embrace him or reject him.

God’s wisdom is to save people through a message that—at first glance—seems foolish or offensive. The message is often brushed off. When Susan Boyle stood in front of that crowd, I observed two kinds of responses. You could see them facially, in the audience. When she said she wanted to be a professional singer, the camera honed in on a gal who turned and smirked at her friends. They laughed. (Don’t judge them, by the way. Almost every one of us would have done or did do the same thing.) So, one response to her was laughter. Her desire to be a professional singer was foolish.

But there was another kind of response. When she said that she wanted to be like the famous singer and actress, Elaine Paige, the cameras zoomed in on a gal who looked annoyed by the idea. The very suggestion bothered her. Susan’s desire to be as successful as Elaine Paige was absurd, even offensive. So, the two responses to Susan Boyle when she first got up were laughter and annoyance. Those are the two responses to God’s wisdom that the Bible notes here: “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” The idea offended some Jews and it was laughable to some Gentiles. That was the response two thousand years ago, and you see the same thing today.

Here is the core message of the Bible that God marches “out on the stage” for us. There is a God who has always been, but He is invisible. He spoke, and with His words, He made the incredible universe in which we live. He made people to be like Him and to enjoy Him, but they rebelled against Him and used their choice to go their own ways. The consequence was that their choice would be permanent, that they would live forever separated from God. But that broke God’s heart, so He decided to try to rescue them.

He decided to become a human and came to earth as a baby boy. His name was Jesus. He grew up, told us how much God loved us, and then he died on a Roman cross, and his death paid the penalty for the rebellion of every person who ever lived. All we have to do is to humble ourselves before Him, turn our hearts toward Him, and ask Him to forgive us, and then begin to follow Him as God. And if we do, God forgives us, and He embraces us as wayward kids who’ve come back home. He begins to change our lives, and we get to enjoy Him and a new earth forever!

That’s the core message of the Bible. When I verbalize it that way, sometimes it seems so “out there.” Have you had that feeling before? You are trying to talk to a friend about Jesus and what he’s done for us, and as you are listening to what you are saying, you know it sounds almost ridiculous. Invisible God. Loves us. Comes
to earth as a man. Dies. Comes back to life. His death pays the penalty of every person’s evil.

When you say it, it sounds crazy, even absurd. It’s like Susan Boyle saying she can sing like Elaine Paige. That can’t possibly be true. To be bluntly honest: At first glance, Jesus looks like he’s got nothing. He grew up dirt poor in a tiny town. His mom was expecting him before she was married. He ends up getting executed as a common criminal. Oh, and he’s God dying for the sins of the world. Jesus is terribly easy to underestimate. That’s the way God planned it. It is the ultimate underdog story, and people respond to him just as they did to Susan Boyle.

For some, Jesus on a cross is foolish, ridiculous. It isn’t logical. An invisible God who becomes a man? Please! Then, He dies and then comes back to life two days later? Come on! It seems like a fairy tale, a myth. Frankly, the whole idea seems laughable. Some disregard Jesus because the story sounds too far-fetched.

Others disregard Jesus on the stage because He offends them. When He stands on the stage and says he wants to save the world, some people roll their eyes, thinking “Like I need to be saved.” I don’t want someone to die for me; the idea bugs me anyway. No one should have to die. Or maybe someone thinks: “I don’t need to be saved. I’m a decent person, and I’m working to get better. It bothers me that someone thinks I need help.”

I have to warn you. God says that you’re mistaken. You are sitting in the crowd, and it looks like Jesus has got nothing. Just remember: Looks are deceiving, and you can be mistaken. Here’s my call to you. Don’t judge too quickly or too confidently. First, give Jesus a chance to sing in your life. Give Him a chance to show you you’re wrong. If you move past your initial judgment of Him and let Him sing, He will blow you away. He will begin to bring a life and a hope and a purpose and a joy to your life that you were not expecting.

I love the phrase: “To those who are being saved (the message of the cross) is the power of God.” It’s blowing us away. I love the present tense of that: those who are being saved. We are often too quick to use saved in the past tense. It’s a done deal. We rarely emphasize this “being saved.” Each of us who has turned to Jesus to forgive and rescue us is in process; we are “being saved.” On a related note, don’t get discouraged that the process isn’t finished yet. God is still working on you; You are being saved.

Just as there are those who are being saved, there are those who are perishing. There are those who have never turned to Jesus, who are in more danger than they think they are. They think they don’t need Him or maybe anyone for that matter. They have overestimated their own goodness and underestimated Jesus. It could be you. You have never given Jesus the chance to sing and prove your initial assessment wrong. But, you still have a chance. Jesus is still singing.

When Larry King interviewed Susan Boyle, he asked her this question: Did it bother you that people judged you before you sang on appearance, kinda sorta making
fun?” Here was her answer: “It didn’t bother me at all. I just got on with my act. That’s what you’re there for--to keep going.” Frankly, Jesus is doing the same thing. He knows that He looks weak to some. He knows that he looks silly to others. He knows he looks unnecessary to some, but it doesn’t bother him. He sings on, knowing that if people will give him the chance, he will blow them away.

You still have the chance to let him sing in your life. Don’t make the mistake of underestimating him.

**Wrap-up Song: Never Underestimate My Jesus**

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