

Crossing the Border Christmas Series *Crossing the Border of Self-sufficiency* 12/16/2018

One of the most important lessons we can glean from the events surrounding Jesus' birth is that **God is in charge, not us**. One of the ways that's most evident is in a detail we often overlook in reading the gospel accounts. It occurs twice. So, let me read one of those accounts and then point out how God's supremacy is revealed in this account. This particular account involves the birth of John the Baptist.

Luke 1:57-64 (NIV) *When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. 58 Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy. 59 On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, 60 but his mother spoke up and said, "No! **He is to be called John.**" 61 They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who has that name." 62 Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. 63 He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone's astonishment he wrote, "**His name is John.**" 64 **Immediately** his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God.*

In a Jewish household in the first century in which Jesus was born, one of the absolute rights a father had was in naming his children. And every child was always named after someone within their family. But when the angel appeared to John the Baptist's father in the temple and told him that him and his wife, Elizabeth, were going to have a child the angel instructed him to name this child, John (**Luke 1:13**). Shortly after telling him that, the angel struck Zechariah dumb, and he was not able to speak until this very moment when he wrote on the board, "*His name is John*". Notice, they first asked Elizabeth what the child's name was, since Zechariah still couldn't speak. Don't you kind of wonder if Zechariah is starting to question whether he will ever be able to speak again. It's been 8 days since their son had been born and he's still not able to speak. But the moment he carries out the angel's instructions, concerning naming his son, he's able to speak and at once he begins praising God.

God took charge of the naming rights with Jesus as well. When the angel appeared to Joseph and confirmed to him that Mary was indeed pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Then the angel told Joseph to name his son Jesus, because he will save the people from their sins (**Matthew 1:21**)

If you expand your focus beyond the naming rights, you'll soon discover more and more evidence of God's sovereignty over everything in the events surrounding Jesus' birth.

- One of the most creative ways God revealed His sovereignty is in how God orchestrated Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem to fulfill the prophecy of Micah that the Messiah would be born in that town. It's about 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem and there's very little reason for them to go there, especially when Mary is about ready to give birth. So, God prompts Caesar Augustus to declare a census across the land which would require all people to travel to the town of their lineage – which for both Mary and Joseph would mean going to Bethlehem. So, God uses a non-Jew to carry out his plan.
- You see God's sovereignty in the angels' appearance to Mary to inform her that she would become pregnant with the Son of God. The angel doesn't ask Mary if this is all right with her, but states it as a fact. Of course, who would dare say no to an angel. But Mary's response is so perfect and a great model to us in how to live our lives everyday under God's sovereignty. She says, "*I am the Lord's servant, may it be to me as you have said.*" (Luke 1:38)
- You see God's **sovereignty** and **intentionality** when he invites two separate groups of people to see Jesus. He appears to the **lowly, stinky shepherds** in the field via angels and He invites the wise men via a unique occurrence in the heavens. Think about what that would have taken to arrange the alignment of the planets and stars to make a bold declaration to these wise men, who studied the

movements in the sky, that would prompt them to travel several months to see this King of the Jews. Imagine what would have been going through Mary and Joseph's minds when these shepherds showed up and then a while later these wise men showed up with likely an impressive entourage. Surely, Mary and Joseph had to have been amazed with God's sovereignty and creativity through each step of this.

- Additionally you've got Joseph being warned in a dream to take Mary and Jesus out of Bethlehem in order to save their lives from the murderous King Herod when, in his anger, he ordered the execution of the young babies in the city of Bethlehem.

I hope these examples have convinced you that one of the perceptions we ought to come away from the events surrounding Jesus' birth is that **God is sovereign and deserves our full allegiance**. Years ago there was a popular bumper sticker that read, "**God is my co-pilot**". If you have that on your car, you ought remove it or at least cover it up. Because if God is your co-pilot then that means that you believe that you're in charge of your life and God is there for the emergencies in your life. And I really believe that many people, whether they own that bumper sticker or not, live that way. They believe they are in charge of most of the decisions they make in their life, but that they will reach out to God when they can't seem to figure it out. God is there for **emergencies** and **crisis** in your life. Ironically enough, people that live this way often get angry at God when life isn't going the way they would like it to go. They take credit for the successes in their lives and God gets all the blame.

This sermon series I'm currently preaching is addressing the various walls or borders Jesus broke through. The border Jesus crossed when he left heaven to come down to earth was the **border of self-sufficiency**. You see, as long as you live your life with the belief that you're in charge, you'll never live a really victorious life because you're limited by your capabilities, however great or small they are. As long as God is merely your **handyman** or **Mr. Fixit**, then you'll never really experience the power of Paul's life principle which is, "*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*" (Philippians 4:13).

It's only when you're willing to give up everything to God's control that you're in a position where God can work out His plans for your life. Jesus made this quite clear in **Luke 9:23-24**

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it."

Taking up your cross in that culture always **meant death**. People didn't just carry around crosses for the fun of it or for exercise. People in the 1st century would be greatly confused by our practice of wearing crosses as a necklace. Because for them a cross always represented one of the most reprehensible forms of death ever known. We often use a phrase, "**That's my cross to bear**" referring to some sort of inconvenience we need to put up with. But bearing your cross never referred to an inconvenience. It always implied death. And so, Jesus is demanding from his followers is that they no longer live their agenda for their lives but that they live God's agenda for their life. They die to themselves and live for God. That's the symbolism behind the act of baptism. In Romans 6, Paul points out that baptism symbolizes you dying to yourself, being buried in a watery grave and then rising up out of the water a brand new person, filled with the presence of God and ready and excited to live a new life for God's glory and under His direction.

Now, the truth is that even if you understand this key principle and try to live it, you're probably incapable of living it with your strength and your will. Because our sinful selves almost always will rebel. Our sinful selves don't like submitting to anyone. We generally don't like people telling us what to do or how to live. And so, you and I both need God to transform our hearts and wills. We need God, through the Holy Spirit, to first incline our hearts to want Him in charge and then to help us constantly live that way. When the wise men showed up at Herod's palace inquiring about the location of the King of the Jews, his jealous nature rose up within him and he tried to eliminate this new competition to his throne. Similarly, we tend to resent God, or anyone else being in charge of our lives. If a preacher preaches a sermon on tithing many will resent that because it borders on meddling in my private affairs.

How dare you tell me how to spend my money. But God says, that if you're one of his followers, then He has every right to control every area of your life.

And that's one of the main reasons Jesus came. To rescue us from our self-focus and our self-glorifying agendas.

The image of cute baby Jesus lying peacefully in a manger for us to love and appreciate might warm our hearts but when we begin to see how that challenges the way we live our lives – it can become uncomfortable, it can make us begin to squirm. Especially if we take God's demand on our time, our money, our thought life, our actions when no one else is watching, seriously. Then Jesus lying in a manger can become disturbing. It rocked the lives of Mary and Joseph and it ought to rock our lives as well.

Jesus told his disciples and us that apart from Him we can't do anything ([John 15:5](#)). Notice he didn't say that we could do very little, or that we can't do any great things. In his opinion, we can't do anything.

And this principle is especially powerful when God uses even your weaknesses to show His power. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:7** *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."* I'm reminded of that verse every time we do the Live Nativity. When I see many of you who it's clear have great trouble walking and yet you continue to show up year after year and brave the elements and continue to serve. Thank you. You're an ongoing testimony and encouragement to me.

Ben Patterson is the campus chaplain at Westmont College in California. He tells the story of while pastoring a church he experienced a ruptured disk in his back, which resulted in him being confined to his bed for 6 weeks. He was so heavily medicated that he couldn't read and spent most of that time lying flat on his back. Being in that position he was quite limited in what he could do so he began spending large amounts of time every day praying through the church directory. It became the highlight of his day and he found himself drawing closer to the Lord and more in love and appreciative of the people within his congregation. As his recovery was coming to an end he writes that he was praying and told the Lord, *"you know it has been wonderful these prolonged times we've spent together. It's too bad I don't have time to do this when I'm well."*

God answered back swiftly and bluntly, *"Ben, you have just as much time when you're well as when you're sick. It's the same 24 hours in either case. The trouble with you is that when you're well, you think you're in charge. When you're sick, you know you're not."* Wow, most of us could use a wakeup call from the Lord like that.

In the book of Revelation, God writes a letter to several churches. One of the letters hits home regarding the topic of today's sermon. It's the letter to church at Laodicea. He writes:

Revelation 3:14-20 (NIV) *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*

What made the Christians in this church lukewarm and useless to the Lord? **Their self-sufficiency.** They had become successful in life and were quite proud of all they'd accomplished. But they weren't depending upon God, and thus He wasn't able to use them individually or as a church in the powerful ways He'd imagined and hoped to do. But notice that God hasn't given up on them. He's warning them but He's still standing outside the door of their lives or the church knocking and hoping that they will open the door and invite Him in and allow God to take charge of their lives.

I end with the question: Are there areas of your life where you're living like you're in charge and thus short circuiting what God wants to do in your life? If so, this is a good time to repent of that **sin of pride and self-sufficiency** and allow Jesus to take charge of your life as you yield your life to Him.

Pray

Announcements:

As we close our service I want us to recite together a slightly modified song that Frank Sinatra made famous back in 1969 entitled "I Did It My Way". I've slightly modified the lyrics in order to remind us of our need to allow God to be in charge of our lives. Please join me as we close our service by reading these lyrics together.

I Did It God's Way

And now, the end is near
And so I face the final curtain
My friend, I'll say it clear
I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.

I've lived a life that's full
I traveled each and every highway
And more, much more than this
I did it **God's** way.

Crossing the Border of _____ - _____

Who was in charge of naming a child in Jesus' time? _____

Who named John the Baptist and Jesus? _____

God's sovereignty revealed in Jesus' birth:

- Mary and Joseph traveling to _____
- When an angel revelation to _____
- God's personal invitation to _____ & _____
- God warned Joseph to flee to _____

What's the problem with the statement: **"God is my co-pilot"**?
Is God your co-pilot or pilot?

*"I can do all things through _____ who gives me strength."
(Philippians 4:13)*

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up
their _____ and follow me.." (Luke 9:23)*

How has God shown His power in your weakness?

In what areas of your life are you withholding God's control?

- Money?
- Time?
- Priorities?
- Unforgiveness?
- Desires?
- Speech?
- Others?

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