

Come and See

History of Red Letters

We're starting a new sermon series this morning, and it's called "Red Letters." Maybe you don't know what that's from. I want to do a little bit of teaching on that real quick.

At the beginning of the year, we asked you to participate in a Bible reading plan, and some of you jumped into our Bible Recap, which is covering the entire Bible in one year. Maybe, you've tuned in to our "5X5," which gives you the opportunity to read 5 chapters from the New Testament a week, and by the end of the year, you will have read the entire New Testament. Maybe you've been reading the verse of the day through YouVersion. Regardless, whatever plan it is that you've started on, you've probably come across some red letters — some words that are not in black ink, but red ink.

And if you're brand new to reading the Bible, then it may not make a whole lot of sense to you. Maybe it kind of caught you off guard. Maybe you don't know why the words are red. Maybe you do know why, but you don't know how it started.

Red letters in the New Testament Bible are considered direct quotes attributed to Jesus by the gospel writers. It's the words that they claim He said. The idea of printing the words of Christ in red originated from this guy named Louis Klopsch around 1900. He was, at the time, the editor of a magazine called The Christian Herald.

He was reading Jesus' words one day from Luke 22:20, which says: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." It gave him the idea to take this new covenant made through His blood, and to take words spoken by Jesus, and put them in red to signify this covenant that He made with us.

It took off. The idea caught on immediately. In fact, by the time he printed his first edition, which was in 1901, there were already three other major publishers who were working to do the same. So nowadays, it's incredibly normal. Most copies have Jesus' words in red, whether that's in print or digital form. It can be a quick, helpful guide as you're flipping through your New Testament. If you want just the things that Jesus said, it's easy to find His words.

First Red Letters

Now, this series that we're doing, called Red Letters, is going to focus predominantly on the book of John. John was one of Jesus' disciples and would later write about his time with Jesus on this earth.

In John's gospel, one of the first stories he tells is about a guy named John ... the Baptist — not John the gospel writer and disciple, but another guy named John ... the Baptist. John the Baptist is a prophet who will deny being anything more than a prophet, but he identifies Jesus as the Messiah the Jews were waiting for.

In John 1:36, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as, “the Lamb of God.” When John the Baptist says this, two of **HIS** disciples take notice. One disciple is Andrew, and the other is probably John, the guy who writes this gospel account. This is likely a firsthand account of the first words John heard Jesus say. So, these two guys who've been following John the Baptist around, hear this claim, and they walk away from John the Baptist and begin walking behind Jesus. In a very literal, physical sense, they begin following Jesus. And then never quit following Jesus.

Jesus' first words in red, in the gospel of John, are: "What do you want?" That's a great question for strangers who are following you around, right? These two guys, I think, are probably caught off guard. I don't know that they really know what they want. They're curious about who this guy is. They feel like they need to follow Him because John the Baptist just made a big deal about Him. They're curious. They want to know what's going on. Now He's confronted them, and they don't really have a reason to explain without it just being kind of weird and awkward.

So, they settle on this statement. They just say back to Him: "Where are you staying?" Which, I think, is still kind of weird. I think they're grasping, right? But Jesus responds with a very simple answer. He says: "Come and see."

Come, and you will see. We're told that they spent the day with Him. It was an invitation — not an invitation for you; it was an invitation for them. A very specific invitation for them to come see where He was staying. It's a very specific answer to a very specific couple of guys.

But I think it shows us something about the nature of God.

Just a few verses later, we're told Jesus met a guy the next day named Philip, and He says to Philip — it's the third thing written in red — “Follow me.” And it's an invitation. Not for you; it's an invitation for Philip. Like, it was something that He said directly to Philip — to a specific person, in a specific time, for a specific reason.

But I think it shows us something about the nature of God.

Transition

Here it is. This is the big idea. Jesus invited. He didn't force. He didn't power people into following Him. He didn't beg people to believe in Him. He didn't perform people into accepting Him. It's true that he taught with authority. It's true that Jesus wowed with His miracles and His signs. And it's true that there were times when Jesus attracted large crowds.

But ... for the person — for the individual who would come face-to-face with Jesus — they were offered an invitation.

Jesus offers us an invitation to participate, to experience, to learn, and to follow. He offers us an invitation into a relationship with Him, and it matches the pattern that God had set from the very beginning.

The Way of God

Go back to Genesis chapter 1, in the garden where God creates all the things, and then He creates man. When He created man, He created a specific place for them to live and he called it the Garden of Eden. In that place, in the middle of that garden, there were two trees that were side by side: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And He gave them a choice. One of them they were supposed to eat from. One of these trees they were not supposed to eat from. Because from the very beginning, God placed an emphasis on choice.

He didn't create robots to do exactly as He wanted. He created people in His image. They were capable of choosing what is good, but they were also capable of choosing what is not good. They were capable of choosing God's way, but He gave them the freedom to also choose not His way. They could choose their own way.

It's a huge gift ... and it's incredibly dangerous. It shows us something about the nature of God.

Now, Philip Yancey, who is a great thinker and writer on God, he calls God, "shy." It's kind of a strange thought to have, but what he suggests is that God tends to work behind the scenes. He finds ways to subtly reveal Himself.

And it's not what we would expect. We expect a god who makes grand gestures, who's seeking attention, who's wanting to prove Himself, the kind of god who makes big demands. Just like all the fake gods who have existed through history. They look like gods made ... in our image ... with a deep desire to seek attention for themselves.

But this real God, the true God, He allows humans to choose their relationship with Him. He doesn't force Himself upon us. He gives choice ... and invites us to make the right choice. And because He holds back, it means that humans have to actively seek Him out – even though he is very easy to find ... if we are serious about it. He would be awful and hide and seek. Because God doesn't try to hide from us – he just wants us to look for him. But He will not impose. He won't force you to see him. He invites us to live with Him and for Him. It's His pattern.

And so, you see at the beginning with Adam and Eve, and you see it throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Shortly after this early story in the book of Genesis — not many chapters later — you come across the story of a guy named Abram. Abram is a random guy at this point. There's not a whole lot of other history on him. The only thing we know about him is his genealogy and that his family moved to some far-off, distant land.

And then God comes to Abram in Genesis 12 and asks him to leave where he's now put down roots and just start traveling. God doesn't even tell him where he is going — just a simple, "I'll tell you when you get there." It's a fascinating story, but for whatever reason, Abram does — he goes along with it.

God makes a covenant with Abram. A covenant is just a binding agreement. It's an agreement between God and a person, and sometimes that person can represent a people. So, God makes

a covenant with Abram. He promises that He's going to bless Abram and his descendants ... which is a big idea because Abram has no descendants. He has no children ... and he's old. It's a big, big promise. God also says that his descendants are going to bless all people. It's a promise. It's a strange promise.

But it's part of a covenant. It's an agreement, which usually means that there's something from the other side as well — there's some responsibility that has to come back from the other direction. And in chapter 17, Genesis 17, this whole conversation about covenant comes back up again, and the deal for Abram is ... circumcision — which is weird. It's a really weird thing. But ... following God is going to cost you something.

By the way, God has made a new covenant with us, and it comes from our New Testament. It comes through Jesus, and He's promised to forgive us of our sins and to give us eternal life. Our end of the deal is belief, repentance, confession, and baptism. That's what we do to show that we're in on this deal — this agreement, this covenant — that He's made with us. We'll talk about that more, later.

Nonetheless, Abram agrees to this covenant, as wild as it is to request circumcision, and then he's given a new name. Abram becomes Abraham, and his wife Sarai gets a new name — her name is now Sarah. In the New Testament, Paul tells us in Romans that Abraham was a righteous man. The assumption is that God chose Abraham because he was righteous. But that's not what Paul says. Paul says that he was righteous not because of what he did — it was because of what he had believed ... and, more specifically, who he had believed.

He had a choice. He had an invitation, and he accepted it, and it made him righteous. And that's what God does.

Hundreds of years later, we come across the story of a guy named Moses. Moses is a descendant of Abraham. And deep into his story — it's a wild story that we could spend weeks talking about — but towards the middle of his story, he has this interaction with God where God asks him to lead a nation of slaves into freedom.

It's a wild story, and it doesn't really feel like an invitation. It's in Exodus 3:10, where God says, "I'm sending you." Like, God's already made up His mind. Like, "It's done. I chose you. This is what you're going to do." And Moses goes back and forth with Him for some time. It doesn't really feel like a choice situation. It doesn't feel like an invitation — it feels like a command.

But the reason that we know Moses's story is because he agrees to it. Moses was the descendant of Abraham, and he was part of that same covenant that God had made long before him. And yet, Moses still had a choice for himself. He's not automatically part of this promise because of Abraham. He had his own invitation, much like each of us.

And we know his story because he, eventually, accepted the opportunity.

Years later, Moses will lead the nation of Israel up to the edge of the land God had promised them. He dies before they're able to get into it — that's a whole other story — and he hands over the reins to this young man named Joshua.

Now, Joshua was also a descendant of Abraham. He's part of this same covenant. Joshua, early on in his youth, made a decision to accept God's invitation to serve Him. But later in his life, at the end of Joshua's life, he gives a last message out to the nation of Israel before he dies. When he communicates the nature of our God and His invitation to us, he says it in this way: "Choose this day whom you will serve."

Choose this day whom you will serve. Because your family history and your nationality — they aren't going to be enough to make that decision for you. It's a choice that you make. It's an opportunity of choice. It's an invitation.

It looks like the very beginning with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You have a choice, and it has to be answered by the individual. They can't claim to follow God because Abraham had followed God. Just like you can't claim to follow God because your great-great-great-granddaddy followed God. And the Israelites can't claim to follow God simply because they were Israelites. Just like you don't get to claim to follow God because you were born into it.

The opportunity of choice is a choice that can only be made by you. This invitation is an invitation that only you can answer for yourself. It's not like a wedding invitation that you get in your mail, and you put it on your refrigerator, and it sits there for weeks until your wife finally makes the RSVP for you. That's not how this works. There's a responsibility on your part.

Back to Jesus

So, it's no surprise when Jesus shows up, he almost seems ... shy. There's nothing special about him. He's born to a lowly family. He learns to work with his father in the family business doing their craft. And when he decides to begin his march to the cross, when he decides that he's going to be a teacher and that he's going to gather these people around him, he doesn't necessarily focus on drawing attention to himself.

Now, he got big attention. He did spectacular things. He did miracles and healings. But he also frequently told people who saw stuff to keep it to themselves. Almost like he was ... shy.

The people who were closest to Jesus were invited in. Not coerced; not begged — they were invited. The people who followed him — who were actively trying to do life with him and life for him — they made the choice to follow him for themselves. But, not all who are invited accept the invitation.

We don't know how many people turned it down. We don't know how many people missed the opportunity to be followers of Jesus. But we do know that it happened at least a few times. There was this one guy in Matthew 19 — we call him the rich young ruler — who Jesus gave a

very plain "come and see" and "follow me" kind of a moment. He turned it down because, in his mind, the stakes were too high. I wonder how many people Jesus offered this to who said "no," who missed the opportunity. To them, the cost was too high. But ... if Jesus is God ... the cost is too high to not say "yes." We mostly know the stories of those who said yes.

That same invitation is laid out for you. You're invited to come and see who Jesus is. You have to count the cost both ways.

You need to know Jesus isn't going to force himself into your life, but he's not going to hide from you either. He's going to reveal himself to you in small ways — ways to catch your attention, ways to pique your curiosity. You're invited to learn. You're invited to understand. You're invited to see what Jesus was all about. You're invited to see God's overarching plan for us all.

And ultimately, that's going to lead you to the next invitation — to follow. You're invited to believe him. You're invited to make a decision. You're invited to follow him.

Transition

So where are you at? Think about your relationship with Jesus. Maybe you are you curious about what Jesus has done for you. Are you curious about who this Jesus guy is?

Maybe you're more than that. Maybe you're past curious. Maybe you're actively seeking him out. Maybe you are answering the invitation to "come and see." You're trying to find out more about him. You're looking into who he is and what he's done. You're pursuing him to some extent. You're digging. You're trying to find out who he is.

Maybe you've been seeking, but it's time for you to deal with that next invitation — the invitation to follow. Maybe it's time to make a decision. Have you, in your life, made a decision to follow Jesus? And if not, why not?

Now, I mentioned earlier that we are under a new covenant. In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with Abraham, but everyone after him had the personal, individual opportunity to either opt in or opt out. They had a right to follow, or they had a right to refuse.

The Old Testament is largely the story of people — individuals — who led the nation either in a direction to follow God or in a direction to not follow God, especially the stories around the kings of Israel and Judah. They had a right to follow. They had a right to refuse.

The same is true in the New Testament, and it's that covenant that Klopsch was reading about that led him to putting Jesus's words in red. It's Luke 22:20 that says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." God, through Jesus, promises forgiveness for sin, and he promises eternal life after death. He accomplishes all of this through his sacrificial death, and he proves the power of his reign over death through his resurrection and

walking out of the tomb. We celebrate this on a weekly basis with bread and juice, where we remember his body and his blood.

But we have an end of the deal – of the covenant – as well. We get to participate in this covenant. We participate in his death, his burial, and his resurrection through belief, repentance, confession, and baptism. It's our end of the deal.

Baptism

So, let's talk about baptism. Here's what we believe: We believe that baptism is not an optional ritual. It's an act of initiation. It signifies our inclusion into God's family. It's a public announcement that we are not ashamed to be part of God's family. It declares your faith. It's sharing Christ's burial and resurrection. It symbolizes death to your old life. It announces new life in Christ. It's a physical picture of a spiritual truth.

We know that baptism is seen a lot of different ways. People have all sorts of different perspectives on what baptism is supposed to be. Different churches teach baptism in very different ways. We know there can be a lot of confusion.

Let's simplify by looking at a few things that baptism is not:

It's not someone else's choice. It's not something that anyone else can decide for you. It's why we don't baptize infants. We do baby dedications, where we acknowledge that, as parents, we're going to work to raise our children toward Jesus. But we can't make a decision for these children to follow Jesus. It's something they make on their own.

Baptism is not a bath, as if something special is happening in the water that washes away your sins. We've had people who've said stuff before like, "You'll have to clean out the baptistry after I've been baptized." And we laugh and most of the time we understand that it's being said tongue in cheek. But the water isn't special. There's nothing in it that is taking away your sin — it's the blood of Jesus that cleanses us.

Baptism isn't about membership with the club. There isn't anything in the Bible that exemplifies church membership through baptism. Sometimes churches treat baptism like it's a part of membership. It's not.

Baptism is not salvation. Getting dunked doesn't save you. God saves you by grace when you respond to him with faith. But baptism is how we respond to him by faith. It's a part of that response. It's not the full response, but it is a part of the response — an expected part of the response.

And so, there are lots of things that baptism isn't. What about what baptism is.

It's an act of obedience. It's an act of obedience by those who are old enough to make that decision for themselves. We call it the age of accountability. It's when a child or an adult is able

to recognize their need for a savior. But it's also that act of obedience because Jesus tells us to do this. And so, we aren't just accepting him as a savior; we're also accepting him as a Lord. And so, when we are baptized, we're obeying him as the authority over our life.

Baptism is a spiritual cleansing. It's not a spiritual bath, but it's a spiritual cleansing. It's a starting over from head to toe. It's a removal of sin in a very spiritual way.

Baptism is a burial and a death and a resurrection. It's where our old self dies. When we go into the water, we die to our life of sin before knowing Jesus. We acknowledge that we are full of sin, that we're in desperate need of a savior, and that we're no longer going to live as isolated from God. Baptism is also being buried with him, and then coming back to life with him as well. It's why this is referred to as a new birth. That's why we talk about being born again — because we're resurrected to a new and different kind of life.

Baptism is a public confession. Discipleship isn't supposed to be a secret. And so, when we're baptized, it's connecting us to Christ and to Christ's family. It's a public display. It's a public communication of what it is that we believe and our commitment to that belief.

And you should know this: there is no example in the New Testament of a Jesus follower who isn't baptized. It's the expectation — it's assumed. As you read through the New Testament, you're not going to find any examples of people suggesting baptism isn't necessary. The guys who wrote about what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus and what it looks like to live after Jesus's resurrection and ascension back into heaven were so serious about baptism that it was assumed you had been baptized if you called yourself a Christian.

It's a natural progression. It's just what you do.

It happened on the first day of the church taking off. The first people who are converted on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts, ask "What should we do?" How do we respond to this convicting news that has cut us to the core, where we realize we screwed up, and we need help, and we need to accept this Savior that God has sent for us? What do we do?

And the answer is: Repent and be baptized. Prove it. Make a public confession of what it is that you believe.

So, baptism is the pattern. It's the norm of what the New Testament teaches about what it looks like when you've decided to follow Jesus. It's a mark of what it means to be a Jesus follower. You're born again.

God has given you an invitation of choice. He will not impose himself on you, but he will invite you to follow him. He will reveal himself enough to you to encourage you to make a decision. And so, you may be curious. Can you take your curiosity to the point where you're seeking? And if you're seeking him, make a decision. Count the cost of saying "yes," ... and of saying "no."

Next week, we're going to have what we're calling Baptism Sunday. Doc is going to go even deeper into this idea of being born again. We'll have some baptisms next week — we've already got a few scheduled. If you want to be a part of that, come up and let's have a conversation. If you want to be baptized today, we have everything you need to make that happen as well.

What are you waiting for? You've been invited. You've been called by God into a relationship with him.

Let's do it. No holding back.