

Victory of the Lamb – April 29, 2018 – Act II

Acts 9:1-20 Qualified – Are You For Real? – Pastor Bill Limmer

Thursday night was first round of the 2018 NFL Draft. Roger Goodell, Commissioner of the NFL walks out and says, “with the first pick of the 2018 NFL Draft, the Cleveland Browns selected Baker Mayfield, quarterback, Oklahoma. I didn’t hear him say that because I was in our Bible 101 Foundations class but I know that is what he said because it is a script that they follow. I knew the Packers had the 14th pick and that would probably be about the time I finished up with the Foundations class. So after class is over, I get in the car and turn on ESPN radio just in time to hear that the Packers traded down and were now picking 27th. Are you for real?? I didn’t mind missing the pick if I was in class but now I have to stay up late to find out who they picked. I get home and my daughter and I are watching the Brewers game, for some of you it was the Cubs game, and also flipping the channel over to the Bucks game. We also checked in on the draft just in time to find out Green Bay was on the clock. They had traded back up and were picking 18th. With the 18th pick in 2018 NFL Draft, the Green Bay Packers select Jaire Alexander, defensive back, Louisville. I don’t know that it is always true but it seems to me that like Jets Eagles fans love to boo their pick. I’m like, are you for real? The three day draft, that’s right three days (and I know some of you are saying “Are you for real?” The final pick is also known as Mr. Irrelevant. Are you ever feel irrelevant? Or worse like you are excluded, that you aren’t accepted. If so, I want you to know there is someone who accepts you, and wants you on his team, in his family – for real!

To highlight this, I want to share with you that this past week we received a list of candidates from our District President to be our next pastor. Resume 1. Strengths. I know better than everyone else. Don’t get upset, but with my education and background it’s true. You will see when I get there. Weaknesses: I have a sorted past. I ran rough shot with a gang for a while and because of that I don’t have a great reputation with outsiders. I may or may not have murdered more than a few people. - It’s like what I am supposed to do with that. Are you for real? I mean, do you want me to present that candidate to our leadership team? Is that who you want your next pastor to be?

Let’s check out what God’s word says, Acts 9:1-2 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” ⁵ “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ⁶ “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” . . . Verse 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” ¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.” Ananias is like, God, are you for real? This makes no sense at all. He is the last person. He is not Mr. Irrelevant, he is Mr. Persecutor. We are all afraid of him. ¹⁵ **But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.**

What makes a person qualified to be a pastor? Let's get a little more foundational and ask what makes a person qualified to be a Christian. Who would God pick to be on his team, in his family? Here is the thing you need to know, God doesn't accept application, he offers invitations. Back in the day, students would pick the rabbi they wanted to follow. Jesus however handpicked his followers. The disciples didn't pick Jesus, he picked them. Remember the kind of people he picked: crusty fishermen, a stealing tax collector, a revolutionary – people with a past. Do you know anyone with a past, maybe even a past that is kind of bleeding into the present.

Well let me tell you about Lizzy. And I have her permission to tell you her story. Lizzy is now in her mid 30's. And she has multi-colored tattoos running up both of her arms. She grew up in a Christian family but really didn't buy into it. Her parents were actually awesome, she just didn't get the whole Jesus thing. At the age of three she was molested at a daycare. She wouldn't tell anyone about that for years, a horrible event and a horrible secret to keep. She was very promiscuous in high school. And she was a trouble maker in school. By her own actions she was removed from one school after another. She began to drink and do drugs behind her loving parents back. She says by the age of 20 she was a full fledged alcoholic. At 21 she met a man who was going to be her Savior. They knew each other for a month before they eloped. Her husband was also a drug addict. Her marriage was full of physical and verbal abuse from both sides. Her and her husband were arrested in a different instance for felony assault. Even though she was guilty, her case was thrown out. In 2007 her mom invited her to a Christian Women's Conference. She was like, are you for real? She didn't want to go but she did. At the conference she felt a peace come over her and this started her down the road of sobriety. In 2010, while she was still married she met another man and had an affair with him. Her husband kicked her out. They reconciled but the abuse continued. He ended up leaving her for another woman. She went back to a very promiscuous lifestyle. She used people and she was used by people. She worked in the sex industry. She thought all she had to offer was her body. In 2011 she met another man and married him very quickly too. He was addicted to meth and cocaine. They broke up but she begged him to come back and he did and then a little while later he left her again. They were divorced. Lizzy was desperate for attention. Since her body was all she had to offer she had to be pretty. So she caught the eating disorders of anorexia and bulimia. She had plastic surgery. She said it this: paint the outside because everything on the inside was rotten. She concluded no one wants me, not even God, not after all I have done. After surgery she got addicted to the pain medication. She begged, borrowed and stolen to fuel her addiction. She was in the spinning out of control cycle. She ended up moving in with her cousin and they started reading the Bible. And as God said is the case, the words came to life. Her sin was too big for her, her pain was too big for her, her problems were too big for her, and she confessed, God I need you to do this for me. And you know what God did? He did not say, "are you for real?" He wrapped her arms around her not in disgust but in acceptance and forgiveness. Do you know a Lizzy? Are you Lizzy?

Maybe Saul's, Lizzy's, stories are yours or maybe you have one of your own, a past, a past that is maybe bleeding into the present. Made up of sinful choices, a life filled with consequences of sin, our own and those of others. There are sins of the flesh and there are sins of the spirit. Sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Sins of the flesh – lust, greed, gluttony, drunkenness, laziness. Sins of the spirit are pride, arrogance, self-righteousness, judgmentalism. They are generally not as colorful as the sins of the flesh. They don't provoke nearly as much gossip – perhaps because gossip is itself a sin of the spirit. Sins of the spirit lead us to be blind. To think it is possible to love God and hate people. Years ago, I was at a conference where I learned the lesson of the rock. You actually read the story of the rock in John 8. So I grabbed up this rock. We walk through life with a stone in our hand if we have judgmental thoughts, superior attitude, impatient words, bitter resentments, little room for love. People all around us in southeastern Wisconsin, are trembling in brokenness, guilt, fear, lostness. To accept people is to be for

them. It is to recognize that it is a good thing they are alive, and to want the best for them. It doesn't mean to approve of everything they do. It means to continue to want the best for them no matter what they do.

The Pain is real, the struggle is real, the hurt is real. We are all odd balls and sin balls, each in our own way. Maybe like me, you have a heart that is a dark closet of fear, or pain and shame, regret, remorse. Hopeful that rocks don't get thrown at me and my sins in the media and on social media. For surely, I would be ripped and torn apart, left humiliated and shamed. Maybe you have a heart, like me that needs to be set free. Jesus says to you and me about our fails, "You owe, I will pay." For real. Jesus says to you about the fails of others, "They owe, I will pay. For real.

Jesus allowed himself to be paraded out in public, carrying the cross, shamed, mocked, ridiculed, beaten to a pulp, humiliated and then finally crucified. And this not for anything he had done but for me and for all the evil that I have said, done and thought; and for all the good I have never said, did or even thought and for you. For real!

I want you to know there is room at the foot of the cross. There is nothing you can do to go to far from God's forgiveness. **"Even though your sins are as scarlet they shall be as white as snow."** You see there is thing called grace. Grace qualifies the unqualified. Grace is for you, no matter who you are, what you have done. For real.

In football there is a stat called a YAC (yards after the catch). This tells us how far the receiver runs after he has the ball. Saul in his Act I, is the guy with resume about being a know it all, gang member with a bad reputation and party to murder. But in his Act II he became known as the Apostle Paul and went on one world missionary journey after another sharing the love and grace of Jesus. He is the author of at least 13 books in the New Testament. Lizzy, with her past, she carries out a ministry on twitter with thousands of followers. People have trouble with grace because they say not after what I have done. They feel they have disqualified themselves. Sometimes people have trouble with grace because of what has been done to them and feel disqualified by others. Sometimes people struggle with grace because of what life has become. People sometimes think God doesn't want anything to do with them because of what they have done, and they think God has disqualified them. Know anyone like that deep down. Grace is for you. For real.

This is what we are all about here at Victory! Our mission is to share Christ's victory with today's people, loving people enough to meet them where they are. That's what Jesus did for you for me – for real! So no matter who you are or what your background, welcome to Victory, welcome to grace – welcome home. For real.