

I have a six year old daughter that regularly dreams of getting married. Notice I said getting married, not being married--it's the wedding that has captured her attention. It's the flowers, the fancy hairdos, the beautiful dresses, and yes, even the kiss.

Up until recently, her experience of weddings has been limited to Disney movies with a beautiful princess and a dashing prince. But 5 weeks ago Anna came with us to see our youth pastor, Dave, and his fiancée, Amy get married. Since then, the wedding talk has gone to a whole new level. Anna is only six and I'm already dreading the day when my daughter begins to date. Fathers, can I get an "Amen!"?

I'm going to assume that many of us here in the room have been on a date or two before. I'm also going to assume that many of us have had a **D.T.R.** conversation. At some point in a dating relationship--perhaps after the 3rd date, perhaps after the 3rd month--there comes a moment when you need to **Define The Relationship**. You get honest with yourself and with the person you're dating--you talk about what you are feeling, where the relationship is going, and what you can expect going forward.

D.T.R.--Define The Relationship--this kind of conversation provides clarity and direction. This morning we're going to have one of these kinds of conversations; we're going to **Define The Relationship**--not between me and you, but between you and Jesus.

Last week Mardi brought our *I AM* series to close with Jesus' 7th and final *I AM* statement. And when you look at all seven statements, what you realize is that each statement says something important about Jesus' identity

When Jesus said "*I AM the Bread of Life*," He was making the claim that He is Life, He alone offers life, He alone can satisfy our soul cravings. When Jesus said "*I AM the Light of the World*," He was claiming to be the revelation of God--*if you are connected to Me*, says Jesus, *you will see God clearly, you will see yourself clearly, and you will have light to live by.*

When Jesus said "*I AM the Gate*," He was claiming to be the one entrance into relationship with God. When Jesus said "*I AM the Good Shepherd*," He was claiming to be the only One worth following--He was claiming to see us completely, to know us intimately, and to love us perfectly.

When Jesus said "*I AM the Resurrection and the Life*," He was claiming to be the Master over life and death. When Jesus said "*I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life*," He was claiming to be the only path God, the fullest revelation of God, and the only access to Life--real life, vibrant life, eternal life.

When Jesus said, *I AM the True Vine*, quoting Mardi now "He was saying, 'I am the One you need to be connected to...If you are going to be connected to God, and to God's community, you need to be connected to Me.'"

Seven exclusive statements, made by Jesus, to reveal His identity. Jesus makes it clear through these statements who He thought He was, but now the matter shifts to us--*who do you say He is?* All throughout this *I AM* series I've been saying that this is the most important question one can be asked. If what Jesus said is true, then turning to Him means embracing life, and, turning from Him means embracing death.

NSA is the kind of church where you can find a place to belong before you believe--this is the kind of place where we want you to continue to investigate the claims of Jesus. But this morning is one of those **Define The Relationship** moments that I trust will bring clarity and direction to all of us as we think about where we're at in relationship to Jesus.

Our text for this morning will be John 12--let me encourage you to turn there with me right now (that's page 1670 in the Blue Bible). As some of you know, today is Palm Sunday. This is the Sunday in the church calendar where we talk about Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem and the last week of His earthly life.

As you read through John 12, you can't help but notice a number of different responses to Jesus--each response indicates, reveals, defines their relationship to Jesus. This morning, we're going to walk through a few of these responses and see if we can't locate ourselves in the story and in the responses of the participants.

But before I do that, I want to coach you in how to listen this morning. Sometimes when I'm listening to advice or direction, my tendency is to think of all the other people I know who need to hear what I'm hearing. For example, when I'm encouraged to practice a life of forgiveness, my mind often rabbit trails and I find myself thinking: *It's too bad Craig isn't here, he really needs to hear this.*

Now it may be that Craig does need to hear such a message, but I want to give you permission this morning to set aside Craig's need, your neighbour, your friend, and your spouse's need and hone in on your own. This morning is about you and your relationship to Jesus. If you can keep your mind there for the next 20 minutes or so, I

believe that you'll walk out of here with some clarity.

Let's take a look at the first response to Jesus, found in vs. 1-7. I'm going to characterize this first response as being that of the *Worshipper*.

1. The Worshipper (Mary):

We're told that six days before the Passover, the Feast during which Jesus would be crucified, He came to Bethany to visit some dear friends, Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Vs. 2 says, "*Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honour.*" If you remember, just a few months before, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead--I can assure you, no one in Bethany had forgotten about that.

Listen to verse 3. During dinner, "*Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*"

Nard was a precious spice that was imported from northern India--a pint of pure nard was both lavish and expensive. In vs. 5 we're told

that this perfume was valued at one year of wages for a day-labourer.¹² In our context today, with minimum wage set at \$10.25/hr, a year of wages would work out to just under \$25k. Do you know how many bottles of Old Spice you could buy for \$25k? **2,637.**

Mary took \$25k worth of perfume and emptied it out on Jesus. I can guarantee it was the fastest \$25k Mary had ever spent, but I suspect she would tell us it was also the best money she ever spent.

Whenever Mary appears in the Gospel record, she is presented to us as someone who is devoted to Jesus. She is not what we might term a moderate--she didn't listen to Jesus with a casual interest, she didn't dissect His teaching as a scientist might dissect a frog--*devotion* is the word that sums up Mary.

Judas responded with indignation: *What a waste! We could have used that for the poor--you just dumped out a year's worth of salary on Jesus' smelly feet!* John tells us that Judas's concern was less for the poor and more for himself--as the treasurer of Jesus' group, he liked to help himself to whatever money came in. Mary's devotion stands in stark contrast to Judas' self-interest.

Who is the *Worshipper* today? The *Worshipper* is the person who is experiencing the love of God, and is responding to His love. The *Worshipper* is the person who is beginning to understand the value of what they've been given. How does one say "thank you" to God for undeserved mercy, forgiveness, peace, restoration, hope, eternal

life?

The *Worshipper* isn't trying to pay God back--they understand that their debt has already been paid through the death of Jesus. What Jesus has done for us is worth more than anything we could give. The *Worshipper* has decided that the only appropriate response is to devote their life to following Jesus.

illus: Just a few weeks ago, Linda, our Children's Pastor, told me a great story from her ministry area. Our Children's Ministry financially supports two children through Compassion Canada--the donations our children raise ensure that these children have food, medication, access to school.

A few weeks ago one of our grade school kids came up to Linda with excitement on his face and \$20 in his hand. While he had been playing hockey at the rink, his dad had found a \$20 bill--our student concluded that since the money was found at his game, it was should be his money. And when his parents asked him what should be done with the money, he said that it should all go to support our Compassion kids. He gave the money away with great joy.

The *Worshipper* is the person who has determined that their strengths, their weaknesses, their time, their home, their money, their property--whatever one might be tempted to label as *MINE*--they have determined that all of it belongs to Jesus. And since they've

¹ Gary M. Burge, *The NIV Application Commentary: John*, 338.

² A labourer was paid a denarius a day (c.f. Matthew 20:2).

already made that decision, they've already decided that no "gift" is too big to offer to Jesus--it's all His anyway.

The worshipper has determined that at the heart of the matter is their own heart--they have decided that Jesus alone will possess it, direct it, and shape it. Are you the *Worshipper*? *Is this your heart's response to Jesus?*

Let's talk about the 2nd category of response...the *Opportunist*.

2. The Opportunist (the crowd):

Let me read verses 12-13, "*The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!"*"

Think about this--less than a week after the crowd hailed Jesus as King, another crowd shouted for His death. Now it's entirely possible that it was two different crowds: the pro-Jesus crowd and the anti-Jesus crowd. But if I were a betting man (and I'm not), I'd lay my money on option number three--I suspect that some of the same people who shouted "*Blessed is the King of Israel!*", just a few days later were shouting "*Crucify Him!*"

Is it really so hard to imagine? We can be fickle can't we? We have a tendency to be blown in whatever direction the wind is blowing--whatever suits us profoundly affects the choice we will make.

Who is the opportunist today? The *Opportunist* is the person who look at life through the lens of their own self-interest. They regularly ask the question: *What will I get out of this?*

More than cheering for Jesus, the crowd was cheering for themselves, for their own dream, for freedom from the Romans--on the surface it looked like worship but it was just words, not devotion. When it became clear that Jesus wouldn't march on the Roman garrison--when their dream died, their allegiance shifted. *If Jesus' isn't going to help my cause, He's dead to me already--crucify Him!*

I am the *Opportunist* every time I see Jesus in terms of what what I can get from Him--a colossal vending machine in the sky. I am the *Opportunist* every time I am angry that He isn't doing what I want.

God, I thought we had a private deal--I worship and you give me what I want. You give me the boyfriend or girlfriend that I want, the spouse that I want, the kids that I want. God I'll worship but you need to come through when it comes to the job, the car, and the house that I want. I'd be willing to follow you Jesus as long as you keep me free from debt, sickness, and pain of any kind.

Now, few of us are ever honest enough to say these kinds of things out loud, but when things don't go the way we wanted, expected, or prayed, what lies beneath bubbles to the surface. I have seen many people wander away from Jesus because the life they hoped for was not the life He gave. Jesus is not an all-powerful genie that can be bent to our wishes--He is someone altogether different.

Are you the *Opportunist*? *Is this your heart's response to Jesus?*

Let's look at the 3rd response, that of the *Competitor*.

3. The Competitor (the Pharisees):

Turn your attention to verses 17-19. *“17 Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. 18 Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. 19 So the Pharisees said to one another, “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!”*

Who is the *Competitor* today? This person may not try to wipe Jesus out, but they are convinced that Jesus is a threat--a threat to their own power or self-interest. When they look at Jesus, what they see is a rival.

illus: a few months ago, Naomi was talking with a fellow Nurse at Lions Gate Hospital, who happened to be born and raised in mainland China. This nurse knew that Naomi was a Christian, and asked her why she believed in Jesus. Naomi took a few moments to share why she had put her trust in Jesus, and then asked this nurse what she thought about life, faith, and God.

The nurse replied: *I can remember sitting in my school classroom and hearing my teachers repeatedly shout: There is no God! There is no God!* She said, *I now realize that not everything they told me about the world is true, but every time I start to think about whether there is a God, I can still hear them shouting “There is no God!”*

Naomi followed up with what I think is a great question. She asked, *“What do you think that shouting was all about?”* The other nurse

replied, *“I think they were afraid...the government was afraid, they wanted to be #1 in people's lives, not God.”*

illus: Have I ever told you about my all-time least favourite bumper sticker? *God is my Co-Pilot.* Seriously? The God of the Universe, the One who made you, the One who is all-powerful and all-knowing is your CO-pilate. *Just sit back and relax God...I've got the wheel on this one...I'll let you know if I need Your help...no one likes a back-seat driver, You know what I'm saying God?*

The *Competitor* wants Jesus' influence minimized, marginalized, contained. *I'll take three pound of Jesus please...just enough to take the edge off, but not so much that He gets out of hand.* We are the *Competitor* every time we delay Him, deny Him, or ignore Him. There can be only one Lord and Master of your life--who will it be?

Are you the *Competitor*? *Is this your heart's response to Jesus?*

Let's turn now to the final response to Jesus, found in verses 42-43--here we encounter the *Fence-Sitter*.

4. The Fence-Sitter (secret followers):

vs. 37-40 tell us that in spite of all the miraculous things Jesus did, there were many who refused to believe in Him. And yet, in verse 42 and 43 we read about others, *“Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees [religious leaders] they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved human praise more than praise from God.”*

Who is the *Fence-Sitter* today? The *Fence-Sitter* is the person who believes but hasn't really committed. They are double-minded, that is, they are of two minds. They believe that Jesus is who He says He is, they believe that His way is the way to live, but they haven't really committed to Jesus, privately or publicly.

I wonder how many of us have delayed being baptized for months or years? Baptism is a beginning step, not a step for the spiritually mature--if you have professed your faith in Jesus then it's time for you to be baptized. If you've delayed on this one for years, then I want you to call me this week...we can take care of it by next Sunday.

We are the *Fence-Sitter* when we admire Jesus from a distance but do not follow Him in the details of our lives. Busyness, other priorities, what other people think--all of these distract the *Fence-Sitter* from giving their "yes" to Jesus. The *Fence-Sitter* always has a reason why today is not the right day to step off of the sidelines and onto the playing field.

The *Fence-Sitter* often experiences a war within their own soul--they want two mutually exclusive things: they want to follow Jesus, and, they want to play it safe, remain in control, and have the respect of the people around them. Trying to keep these two in tension doesn't lead to balance--it makes the soul sick--we've been made for devotion.

While Canadian society might tell us that our faith is best practiced in the privacy of our own home or church, Jesus tells us that our faith defines who we are wherever we are. God is not embarrassed to

associate with me, He calls me His adopted son--the question is, *am I embarrassed to risk public association with Him?*

Let me ask--are you the *Fence-Sitter*? *Is this your heart's response to Jesus?*

In this final section, verses 44-50, Jesus makes one final plea for faith...it is not too late. One last time before the cross, Jesus calls His listeners to an ultimate decision with eternal consequences--*put your trust in Me*, says Jesus. If all that Jesus has said about Himself is true, then embracing Him means embracing life, and, rejecting Him means embracing death.

In that sense, judgement has already begun, and so too has salvation. Gary Burge writes, "The consequences of our decisions [about Jesus] begin to work themselves upon our lives in the present. It's like a person with a curable disease. The antibiotic begins to reverse the effects of the disease at once; without it, the doom of the infection grows daily...To refuse the medication is to succumb to the disease. To refuse to have faith is to be swallowed by darkness."³

Let me plead with you for a moment--it's not too late to put your trust in Jesus--salvation can start for you today! It begins by admitting that you need God! Admit to God that you have tried to live life by your own rules, by your own strength, and that it hasn't been working--admit that you need Him for life. Then, put your trust in Jesus. Trust that Jesus is who He claimed, God in the flesh, God with us, God for us. And then confess that you need the mercy and

³ Burge, 360.

forgiveness Jesus offers through His death on the cross--Jesus died in our place, bearing our sin, our rebellion, and our failures.

It's not too late to put your trust in Jesus; you are not beyond His reach, beyond His mercy, beyond His love, or beyond His transforming power--salvation can start today.

But neither is it too late to address your heart's response to Jesus. Admitting that you are the *Opportunist*, or the *Competitor*, or the *Fence-sitter* doesn't mean that you are forever locked into the category. Repent! Turn around! Receive the grace of God!

You may have given up on yourself but Jesus hasn't given up on you. So stop pushing Him away, stop stalling, stop feeling sorry for yourself--let Him move you and shape you.

Worship: I've asked Alana and the team to come and play for a few minutes because I want to give you some time to think--to think about where you're at in relationship to Jesus. Perhaps you're ready to put your trust in Him for the first time, or perhaps you need to contemplate switching categories. Direct your thoughts to the Lord in these next few minutes and then we will conclude by singing one final song.

Benediction

May the Holy Spirit form *understanding* in you, that you may see the height and depth, the length and the breadth of the gift you've been given in Jesus.

May the Holy Spirit form *humility* in you, that you may never underestimate Jesus and never overestimate yourself.

May the Holy Spirit form *courage* in you, that you may follow Jesus in the details of your life, both privately and publicly.

May the Holy Spirit fill you, the love of God surround you, and the vision of Jesus lead you.

Amen.