

02/26/12

Telling it Like it Is

- do you like stories where someone rises out of obscurity to make a difference?
 - if you follow sports, you already know where this one's going...
 - Linsanity...
 - one media report said it this way..
 - **For those living on another planet the last 3 weeks, Jeremy Lin is the 6-3, 200 pound point guard for the New York Knicks - an Asian-American by way of Harvard.**
 - **Until two weeks ago week, he was parked at the end of the Knicks bench and lived on the couch at his brother's apartment in Manhattan's Lower East Side.**
 - **But with his team struggling, the undrafted, largely unwanted Lin got a shot to play. He promptly went on a transcendent tear averaging 24.6 points and 9.2 assists over an eleven-game stretch and ended up on the cover of Sports Illustrated.**
 - **That's just the start. A Lin autograph on Ebay, once \$29 now goes for \$1,500 plus. According to Forbes, Lin is now the fastest growing athletic brand - \$14 million and climbing.**
 - **Lin replied, "No," when asked if he could believe this was happening to him at a recent press conference.**
 - **Lin grew up in Northern California, the son of engineers born in Taiwan. Despite leading his team to a state championship in high school was shunned by top college programs. So he enrolled at Harvard, and led the Crimson in scoring his senior year, only to be ignored again come NBA draft day.**
 - **Cut by two NBA teams, the Golden State Warriors and the Houston Rockets, he was on the verge of being released in New York when head coach Mike D'Antoni made a desperate move - one that's since turned Madison Square Garden into the theatre of the absurd.**
 - **"You just watch him," D'Antoni said, "you're in awe."**
 - **The 23-year-old has arrived at the perfect time: into a post-Super Bowl void and a social media world captivated by his unlikely rise. His last name, Lin, has become an open invitation to incredible, joyful, plays on words: Thril-lin, Linsanity, Lin-sational, and Lin-credible.**
 - **Reacting to the play on words, Lin said, "I didn't know that you could turn Lin into so many things."**
 - **There's no telling how long this show will last, how long a poster boy for underdogs of every age and race will shine. But for now...quite frankly...it is a beautiful "Lin" to see.**
- by the way – I hope I haven't poisoned his career – after I used Tim Tebow in an introduction...Denver lost their next couple of games...
- but don't you love it when someone rises out of obscurity and accomplishes something that makes a difference?...here's one of the immediate impacts...
- you may know that because of a cable TV dispute, many people in NY City weren't able to get Knicks games...that didn't matter a whole lot, because the Knicks weren't doing very well...that's all changed...
- **MSG, "Linsanity" returns to Time Warner Cable**
 - **By Liana B. Baker**
 - **Fri Feb 17, 2012 7:00pm EST**

- **(Reuters) - In his biggest feat off the basketball court yet, Jeremy Lin has helped restore New York Knicks games to more than 1 million TV viewers in New York.**
 - **After a blackout that lasted a month and a half, Time Warner Cable Inc subscribers will be able to watch the New York Knicks and New York Rangers hockey games, thanks to a new agreement struck with Madison Square Garden Co, which owns the MSG Network sports channel, the companies said late on Friday.**
 - **The tentative agreement kicks into effect in time for Friday night's Knicks and New Orleans Hornets game.**
- how many times have you ever heard of an athlete's performance single-handedly ending a cable TV contract dispute?...
- that's called rising out of obscurity and accomplishing something amazing...
- what's also interesting about this story is that someone else has arisen from obscurity as well...because now we're learning that a sports analyst actually went on record and predicted that Jeremy Lin was an excellent player several years ago...when everyone else was doubting him and cutting him...
- and you might – are we talking about some high paid analyst working out of a fancy office somewhere?...
- no, we're actually talking about this guy...
- one news report said -- **Over the last few days, Ed Weiland has achieved a level of recognition unusual for a FedEx deliveryman. That's because in addition to his FedEx job, Weiland contributes to the site hoopsanalyst.com, and a couple years back, wrote this. Weiland, with a great deal more success than many, many people who followed, thought that a certain point guard out of Harvard currently sparking the Knicks to their best basketball of the season might just have a future in the NBA.**
- **Truck Driver's Analysis Predicted Lin's Potential as a Professional**
By BENJAMIN HOFFMAN, Published: February 16, 2012
- **Before the 2010 N.B.A. draft, Weiland examined Lin's body of work as a college player at Harvard and concluded that he might be among the best point guards available.**
 - **At the time, Weiland was essentially ignored. Now he looks like a prophet.**
 - **He has seen his own profile soar as Linsanity has taken hold of the N.B.A.; the increased traffic to the HoopsAnalyst site crashed its servers multiple times.**
- **If you look hard enough on the Internet, you can find blogs predicting breakouts for more players than you can possibly remember. But it was the specificity of Weiland's argument for Lin that set his analysis apart.**
- **In it, Weiland equated the chances of finding a star point guard in the 2010 draft to winning the lottery.**
- **"The best candidate to pull off such a surprise might be Harvard's Jeremy Lin," Weiland wrote. "The reason is two numbers Lin posted: 2-point FG pct and RSB40."**

- **While 2-point field-goal percentage is easy enough for a casual fan to figure out, RSB40 is not. It is a combination statistic for a player's rebounds, steals and blocks per 40 minutes.**
- **"These numbers show N.B.A. athleticism better than any other," Weiland said. "Because a high score in both shows dominance at the college level on both ends of the court."**
- **Weiland ranked Lin as the second best point guard available in the 2010 draft behind former Kentucky star John Wall. Wall was selected at the number one overall pick in that year's draft. Lin went undrafted.**
- by the way, Fed Ex has given Ed some time off to field all the media requests...
- don't you love it?...rising out of obscurity and accomplishing something that makes a difference...
- why are we talking about this this morning?...
 - it's because now we're going to look at the stories of two people in the Bible and this is exactly what happened to them...
 - and there are significant lessons for people like you and me to learn from what happened to them about the issue of core strength...
- please open your Bible to Luke 3...page 46 of the Bible under the chair in front of you
- this year we're talking about the issue of **Building Core Strength**...how do we become the kind of individuals and the kind of church where we're learning to make the main things the main things?...to be sure that we have the fundamentals in place?...
 - and as the stretching process of greater ministry opportunities all around us reveal weaknesses in the core – how do we shore all of that up so we're not a mile wide and an inch deep?
- what unfolds here can really help us answer those questions...
- read Luke 3:1-22
- this morning we're talking about **Building Core Strength by Being Willing to Tell it Like it Is**...
- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to be sure you are strong and ready when God wants to use you**

I. Embrace Cultural Difference as Ministry Opportunities.

- these first couple of verses aren't simply a history lesson...
- these names would have impacted Theophilus, the man to whom Luke was writing, in ways they might not impact us...
- and you may want to study some of this in a commentary or a Bible dictionary...there's a lot more to this part of the story than time allows us to tell...
- but three of the themes that would have probably struck Theophilus were...

A. Political persecution

- people like **Luke 3:1 - Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip...**
- I doubt that we can grasp how offensive it was for the Jewish nation to be living under Roman occupation...
- and having to deal with these Gentile idol worshippers who were living debauched lives and yet still ruling over them politically...

- that was the political situation in which the people of God found themselves in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar...around AD 26...
- add to that...

B. Religious oppression

- at the same time, the Pharisees and other Sadducees had amassed all sorts of religious rules and arguments that weighed on the people of God...
- **Luke 3:2 - in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.**
- you probably recognize several of these names because some of these people factor heavily into the story of Jesus' crucifixion...
- and you might say – but PV, the Pharisees and Sadducees aren't specifically mentioned here...
- that true, but this same kind of description of John the Baptist is also given in Mark 1 and Matthew 3...and Matthew tells us...
- **Matthew 3:7 - But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**
- here's a way to summarize what we're saying....
- **As the curtain rose on the ministries of John and Jesus, Israel was shrouded in deep darkness. It was the bleakest of times politically. The nation chafed under the oppressive rule of pagan idolaters. Israel, God's covenant nation, was now part of a minor province in a backwater region of the mighty Roman Empire. It was also the darkest of times spiritually. The Jewish people were crushed under the heavy burden of an apostate, legalistic, hypocritical religion dominated by corrupt, wicked spiritual leaders (cf. Matt. 23:1-33). Israel had not realized the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants; they possessed neither the land promised by the former, nor the kingdom promised by the latter. Engulfed in legalism, hypocrisy, and external ritual, the nation also failed to experience the New covenant blessings promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 37:26." The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Luke 1-5**
- now here's the point – the conditions described here were irritatingly perfect for someone to rise from obscurity and make a significant difference...
- and understand that this isn't just about John the Baptist rising from obscurity...it's about Jesus rising from obscurity...
 - because as far as we know, there was absolutely no public ministry for 30 years...
 - it's likely that John the Baptist's parents passed away during that time...
 - remember both Zacharias and Elizabeth were old and advanced in years when they received the news Elizabeth would give birth to John...
 - so he very well make have been orphaned at a very young age...
 - most Bible teachers believe that Joseph, the "father" of Jesus – humanly speaking, had already passed away because we read plenty about Mary during Jesus' public ministry but nothing about Joseph...
 - but the overall point is – from everything we know – both John the Baptist and Jesus lived in relative obscurity for 30 years as both the political persecution and the religious oppression intensified...
 - and just like Jeremy Lin...and just like Ed Weiland, no one would have seen them coming...

- and you could look at these first two verses as making any kind of ministry impossible...or making it incredibly delicious – the conditions were irritating perfect for significant ministry for someone ready to answer the call...
- now, let's push the pause button on this for a moment...and please understand...when we say – rise from obscurity to make a significant difference – we're not talking about glorifying yourself...or elevating yourself – this isn't so your brand can be the next one valued at 14 million dollars...
- but it's about being prepared when God wants to use you...
- and sometimes people let cultural differences or religious disagreements make them so discouraged that they conclude that God isn't at work anymore...when the fact of the matter is that He may be simply allowing all of that to be the dark backdrop for the bright ministry opportunity He is preparing for you...
 - and maybe that's just going to be a ministry opportunity with one person – but you and I will miss it if we see cultural differences as something to discourage us instead of energize us...
- there are two books I would encourage every person in our church to read...
 - **Culture Wars**
 - **Beyond Culture Wars**
- can I ask you this – are you in a situation right now that is irritating to you?...
- would it help you be stronger in your heart, in your core – if you remembered that maybe it's not just irritating, but it's irritatingly perfect – God may be preparing a breakout ministry opportunity for you...

II. Work on the Depth of Your Ministry and Trust God for the Breadth.

- it's very important for us right now to recognize...

A. The power of the wilderness.

- **Luke 3:2 - ...the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.**

- that's a direct fulfillment of an old testament prophecy...

- **Luke 3:4 as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.**

- what must it have been like for John, and for Jesus, to know who they were...and yet to spend this significant a period of time waiting?...preparing?...it's hard to fathom...
- but I wonder how many people here today will say – that's where I feel like I am today...I'm in the wilderness...
 - I'm in a dead end job...
 - or I've received a bad diagnosis...
 - I'm struggling financially...
 - I'm lonely...
 - I'm in an estranged condition with someone...
- and here's the message from this text – just work on the depth of your life and be ready when God chooses to use you if that's His plan for you...

- we just finished our BCTC a week or so ago and its interesting when folks come here and they see how many people are providing counseling services for our community or how many other community-oriented ministries there are...
- what they don't see is when the counseling ministry started in a church basement on folding chairs and tables...
- and Pastor Good and Dr. Smith and those who worked with them continually said – we'll just work on the depth of what we're trying to do...
- if this church basement is the wilderness...then so be it --- if that's what God has called us to, and if that's where He wants us right now – we'll delight in that, we'll deepen our walk with Him and our knowledge of His Word...and see what happens...and please always remember this...

B. Be ready because the opportunity may surprise you.

- who knows when God might call you off what feels like the bench, and who knows how well you'll do?...
 - another delightful aspect of the Jeremy Linn story is that he is a committed follower of Christ...
- Jeremy Lin Gives 'All the Praise to God'**
By Audrey Barrick , Christian Post Reporter, February 11, 2012|4:58 pm
- **Jeremy Lin may have come out of Friday night's game against the Lakers a star with a career-high 38 points, seven assists and four rebounds. But he's not letting the "Linsanity" overcome the country without giving proper credit to God.**
 - **"I just give all the praise to God," Lin said after the game.**
 - **Point guard for the New York Knicks, Lin has become a household name overnight. He's being recognized for not only saving the season, but for being the first American player in the NBA to be of Chinese or of Taiwanese descent and for his outspoken Christianity.**
 - **He revealed on his Facebook at the start of the New Year that his resolution is to "love God more deeply and intimately by dec 31 than I did on jan 1." His current Twitter profile also states, "to know Him is to want to know Him more."**
 - **His path to the NBA hasn't been the most glamorous but he believes God has led him the entire way.**
 - **When he was with the Golden State Warriors last year, Lin testified at River of Life Christian Church that he considers everything in his life – including his coaches, his "tall" genes (6'3) and opportunities given to play – blessings from God.**
 - **"I look back and I realize these are His fingerprints all over my story," he said.**
- there's someone who has been working on the depth of his life and trusting God for the breadth of his ministry...
 - are there ways you're doing that? – for the purpose of being ready when God wants to call you out of the wilderness if that's in fact where you are
 - but what about when He does call you?

III. Be Prepared and Willing to Proclaim a Clear Biblical Message.

- yes, the Lord brought John out of obscurity and gave a ministry that would be forever remembered...but that didn't mean it was easy...
- he had to talk with them about...

A. The necessity of repentance

Luke 3:8 - Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

- now please remember what we saw a few moments ago...
- it was the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming out to them...
- and because they were so entrenched in their belief that their birthright and their good works would get them to heaven...they had to be confronted strongly because that is the only way they would have seen their need for a Savior...
- now, please keep this in mind – ministry isn't one size fits all...

- 1 Thessalonians 5:14 - We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

- but it is possible that the Lord may put you in a position where the message he wants you to lovingly but definitely deliver is the necessity of repentance...
 - of being willing to turn around and acknowledge ones sin and then and only then come to Christ in humble faith and willingness to obey...

B. The possibility of forgiveness.

- please don't miss that aspect of John's message...
- **Luke 3:3 - And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;**
- it was repenting of something bad in order to receive something that's good...
- **1 Thessalonians 1:9 - For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,**

C. The likelihood of being misunderstood.

- **Luke 3:15 - Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ,**
- we'll see how things go with Jeremy Linn – but if he continues to speak for Christ...it's likely that what happens to Tim Tebow will happen to him...
- are you prepared if that happens?...

D. The possibility of some amazing results.

Luke 3:21-22 - Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."

- might say – if John's baptism was for repentance and forgiveness of sins, why was Jesus baptized?...
- and the answer is – because baptism is all about identification and agreement...
 - agreement with John's message that repentance was necessary for salvation, and John's equally important emphasis that Jesus was in fact the Messiah sent from God

