



It's A Small World

Pastor Daryl Largis – January 3, 2016

Well, did you ever have one of those moments in your life that you heard something, saw something, or experienced something that changed your perspective from that day forward? I'm not talking about something catastrophic, I'm just talking about something just going through the normal course of the day. And sometimes that happens, where just going through the normal course of the day, we'll see something or hear something, and it changes our perspective, kind of from that day forward.

And the first time that had happened to me was when I was a young boy. I was ten years old, and I had a good friend of mine, and one of the things that we liked to do was go to the movies. And given where we lived, we would walk to the movies. Now it wasn't one those stories where, you know, it's up hill both ways and all this stuff, no. But we would walk to the movie, and as ten-year old boys would do, you know, part of the adventure was getting there, right? I mean, you'd try not to get into too much trouble but, you know, you find ways and means of entertaining yourself along the way. So we made it to the theater and we get our popcorn, we get our pop, we're sitting there and waiting for the movie to start, and talking with my friend about, you know, what we're going to do that summer. It was late

spring, summer hadn't quite arrived yet, and talking about all the things we were going to do.

And I hear this noise, this sound that I'd never heard before. And you know, I kept talking with my friend and I heard it again and I was just like, what is that? And so I looked up on the screen and I saw a couple of guys dressed in what can't really be described as a uniform, it was more like body armor, and they were wearing these funky white helmets, and they had these weapons, and they were shooting lasers. And I was just like wow, I've never seen anything like that. I mean, you've watched certain things on TV and read certain things, but to actually see it where it looked real, it was kind of the first time. And then, the next scene these two guys are, they're fighting with swords that glowed! And I was just totally blown away by it. And many of you can realize by now that I'm talking about the first movie trailer for the original Star Wars. And I can't even tell you what movie we saw that day. I don't even remember that. But I can certainly remember the trailer, because that's all we talked about, that's all we talked about through the whole movie was wow what was that, did you see that? That was awesome! And we spent the whole summer role-playing and doing this and doing that, and it was great, and we couldn't wait for the movie to come out.

And we, along with pretty much all of our friends and most of the living world I think at that point in time eventually did see that movie. And in seeing that movie, it did a couple of things. One, it made, it made the world a little bit smaller. And here's what I mean by that, in that when we would go places or I'd talk with people, even though I might not know them, they

knew about the movie. And so it gave us a point of connection. It gave us some common ground. And so the world, if you will, got a little bit smaller as it relates to that. And things that we have just in our normal course of a given day, can do those things to us. They can make our world a little bit smaller.

Another example would be this morning. I was on my smart phone checking on a delivery as we all do, right, you know, this has got to get it here, it's got to show up, and I was assured that the delivery was gonna' happen today. In fact, I was assured that the delivery was going to happen, like, right now. And sure enough, I'm glad it's here, right? So there we go. I'm glad it showed up because this is my sermon outline. Just kidding, just kidding. But technology has a way of doing that. Technology has a way of making our world much, much smaller.

You know, here over the last couple of weeks, I've been in video conference calls on my tablet with people in Argentina and people in Bangkok, Thailand at the same time. Literally around the world connected via video at the same time. Our world's getting smaller, isn't it?

Now why do I say all that? And what does that matter for us today? Well, I think for the church, it matters greatly as it relates to the missiological ramifications, both opportunities and challenges. And what do I mean by missiological? You're going like, I don't even know how to spell that. Well, missiology is just this. It is the study of how God's Word, his people, the gospel move in and through a group of people, a nation, a culture. And I think, given that our world is indeed shrinking, in a sense, it presents some

opportunities for us from a missiological perspective. I mean, there really isn't anyone today, anywhere or even at any point in time that we can't touch with technology, as long as they have access to WIFI right? I mean, you can get a hold of just about anybody anywhere at any time. Great opportunity for us.

However, there's a flip side to that. It also means that the world, as we know it, can touch us. That what was there now can be here. What was over there, now it can be next door. And so while, yeah, the world is smaller, and we can touch more of it. The world is smaller, and it also means that the world can touch us. And are we prepared for that? Is the church prepared for that? Are you, am I, our families, how about our country? Is it prepared for that?

And I want to spend some time this morning talking about a group of people who are getting a lot of press in America today. Now they've been around for a long time, but today? Getting a lot of press. And unfortunately, for us, most of that which we hear, most of that which we see is geared to stimulate an emotional or even a political response. Not a biblical one, and certainly not a Christ-centered one. And what I want to do today is to help us better understand some things about this particular group of people, so that we can have a Christ-centered response, a biblically informed response to them.

And who am I talking about? Well, we can be talking about any number of groups of people around the world. But specifically today, I want to talk about Islam. And I know as soon as I say that, there's a reaction that you

have, largely based upon what you've seen, or maybe what you've heard. But most of us do not have a decent understanding of even what is it? What is it? What do they believe? And when we do come into contact with somebody who believes that, a Muslim, what do we do? How do we respond? What does that look like? And I think it's important for us, as a church, as Christ-followers, to have a good response for that. And not to be swayed emotionally, and not to be swayed politically, but to be swayed, if you will, biblically.

So what I want to do here in the next few minutes is just talk a little bit about Islam. What it is, what it's not. But I'm going to compare it to orthodox Christianity, so we get a kind of a side by side. But before I do, we need to be reminded of two things. The first is this, is that God - God - created every man, every woman, every child in His own image. In His own image. Every human that's ever walked this planet, born and unborn has the image of God stamped on them. Now marred by sin, we get all that, but underneath it all - underneath it all - is the image of God.

Scripture in Genesis one, twenty-seven specifically states, "So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them." We can't forget that. And why that matters is, is that every person who walks the face of this earth has value because God created them and they carry His image. Every person has value.

The second thing that we need to remember is that God desires that every person has an opportunity to be reconciled to himself. Peter talks to this in 2 Peter three, nine: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some

understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you," (I'm glad he was patient with me) "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Every man, every woman, every child to be reconciled to him through Christ. That is God's heart.

And so whenever we talk about people who don't believe like we believe, we need to remember these two things. They've been created in the image of God and that God desires to see them reconciled to himself.

So, let me just start by asking a couple of questions. A person who is following the Islamic religion, if you will, is called a Muslim. Most of us understand that. And so, if I were to ask you a question, do most Muslims, and again, I'm not the expert here, I've done some study, I've done some writing on it, and we're only going to hit a few things. For me to be able to unpack everything as it relates to it, impossible task. We're just going to hit on a few highlights today. But I think they're important ones for us to have an understanding. And I'm going to try to keep, to the best of my ability, down the mainstream, if you will. Noting that Islam is very complex, very diverse, much like Christianity is, and you can get caught up in talking about this, and we're going to try to stay down the middle, if you will.

But, do most Muslims believe in a god? And I think most of them say yeah, they do. And that is true. Most Muslims do believe in a god. And in fact, most Muslims would be readily agreeable to say that they believe in the same god that Christians believe. And you might have heard that, read that. Somebody might have even told you that. But as Christians, Christ-followers, we need to be very careful in agreeing to that statement,

because there's a lot embedded in that statement, and we need to ask better questions as it relates to well, the Islamic god is described as what? Well, from the perspective of the Quran, the Islamic god is strictly monotheistic, meaning it is, there is but god. The Quran specifically states that god is not God the Father. The Quran also states that Jesus is not God. We'll talk more about that in just a moment. And so for us, to agree with the statement that the Islamic god is the same as what we believe in the Bible, it is not. They are two different things. They are not the same god.

Orthodox Christianity, the God that reveals himself in the Bible and through Jesus Christ is eternal, is transcendent, is omnipotent, is personal and manifests himself in three distinct persons, God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. Now Pastor Jerry, back in April - April 2015, April nineteenth - did a whole sermon talking about God. There was a series which we were in called Foundations, and if you want to hear a lot more on this, as who God is, from an orthodox Christian perspective, I would encourage you to pull up that message on our website and watch it. Pastor Jerry does a great job in describing and walking through who God is based on what we know, and based upon what the Bible says.

But know this, the god of Islam and the God of Christianity are two different things. They are not the same, they are not the same, and we need to be very careful for the sake of building a bridge or trying to have a conversation, and agreeing to something that is not true. Muslims view a trinitarian outlook of God as blasphemy. Straight up. And so their view of god is much different than ours, and we need to be very clear of that.

Well, how about the Bible? Do most Muslims believe in the Bible? Well, the answer is yeah. Most Muslims do believe in the Bible. However, we need to go a little bit deeper as it relates to what do they believe about the Bible. Well, they only believe certain things about the Bible. Specifically, that which was written by Moses, the torah, the books of the Law, Psalms, and some of the gospels. However, they believe the gospels are heavily corrupted. And so, when we talk with and or interact with Muslims and they say we believe in the Bible, you've gotta' go a little deeper than that. Well, what do you believe about that? Because we believe, from an orthodox Christian perspective, that the Bible is the inspired authoritative only infallible word from God to humanity.

Pastor Jonathan Drake in that same series I mentioned earlier did a whole sermon on just the Bible. On April twelfth I think is when he gave that sermon. So if you want to know more about the Bible, where it came from, how do we know this is it, how do we know what's in it, should be in it, where did it come from? Listen to that sermon. Pastor Jonathan does a great job in unpacking that.

How about Jesus? Do most Muslims believe in Jesus? They do believe in Jesus. However, they only believe in Jesus as a man, as a prophet, a great prophet, but a prophet nonetheless, second only to Mohammed. They also believe that Jesus was not crucified. That Judas actually took his place. They also believe that Jesus was taken up to heaven and will return one day. And when he returns one day, he's actually, according to their eschatology, he's going to evangelize Jews and Christians to become Muslim. That is their view of Jesus.

Well, that is significantly different than our view of Jesus. We view him as God. Jesus himself states "if you have seen me, you have seen God".

Hebrews testifies to the fact that Jesus is the exact representation of God. His nature, his exact nature, is Jesus. Colossians - "the fullness of God dwells in Jesus". Jesus is God with skin on, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life. He did suffer . He did die. He was crucified. He did rise from the dead, conquering sin and death. And because of that, you and I have hope. And because of that, you and I can be now reconciled to God the Father, and have assurance of salvation. And we're going to talk more about that here in just a moment.

What about sin? Do most Muslims believe in sin? Well they do. But they don't believe in it in the same way you and I do. They believe that people are born with a clean slate. And that any sin that you may commit, you can rectify with their god. It's one of the reasons why they pray five times a day. They don't believe in original sin, that is sin that is passed down because of the fall of Adam and Eve - that there's a depravity, if you will, born into each and every human being that causes them or will result in them sinning. They don't believe in that. And because of that, they don't feel that they need a savior. And so in their construct, they don't see a need for Jesus when they feel that they can get forgiveness. Or at least they hope they get forgiveness. They don't know for sure that they actually can get forgiveness. And so there's a fair amount of uncertainty that they live with in terms of their relationship with the god in which they believe in.

How about this one? We've heard our own president and the president prior to him say that Islam is a religion of peace. Heard that, right? But it's

hard when you hear that, and then you look at things on the internet and things on TV when you see all this violence. You're like, what's up with that? If they're saying it's a religion of peace, what's all this violence? And it's worth noting that most of the violence committed by Muslims is against other Muslims. And I'll talk to that here in just a moment. But if you look at what the foundations of Islam are, they have what they call their pillars, and there's five that most everybody agrees to - five pillars. And if you just look at those five pillars, you could come away and say, you know what? I could see where somebody could call this a religion of peace.

However, some within the stream of Islam have added additional pillars. One of those is jihad. Not all Muslims have, but some have, and jihad is holy war. Some say well that's just personally. Others have taken that to mean publicly as a way to accomplish the spread of Islam. And so we need to be very careful as Christians, and as Americans for that matter, in lumping all of Muslims and all of Islam into one camp or another. It's not that simple. It is not that simple. It is very complex. And so we need to be careful in making general broad statements about this and about that.

There are two main streams within the framework of Islam. One is Shiite and one is Sunni. And in fact, even today there's a rift that is brewing in the Middle East relating to this. Saudi Arabia, which is a Sunni nation, did something - they executed a Shiite cleric. Iran, which is a Shiite nation, is taking great offense to that. And so you've had this perpetual warring if you will, between these two factions within Islam for a long time.

And let me just quickly explain where they come from, because you potentially may run into some who's a Shiite or some who's a Sunni. Sunnis comprise most of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. And they believe that the leaders of their religion and the leaders of their government - they don't necessarily distinguish between the two - are elected from the community, if you will. The Ummah they call it. Shiites on the other hand, believe that leaders can only be determined by blood line, meaning that there is a direct connection between that person and Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. And as a result, you have these two factions that view what should be the proper leadership, and who should be the governing authorities in these places. And it causes a lot of turmoil. And so when you see that, that, in very simplistic terms is what's going on there.

Another way to look at Islam is to view it as it is book centered. What do I mean by that? They believe that the full revelation of god, their god, is contained in the Quran. The full revelation of their god is contained in the Quran. And as a result of that, there are laws and there are things of which that come out of the Quran that Muslims must do. It is - not exclusively, but predominately - a works based religious system. And a word to describe that is orthopraxy, meaning the right kind of practice. Do the right things. Now, you don't hear this term orthopraxy, but what you do hear and probably have heard is Sharia law. Well Sharia law is nothing more than the Quran basically saying Muslims must do these things - the right things - the orthopraxy, and that becomes Sharia law. And it's supposed to speak into not only your private life, but your public life.

All right, let's compare that now to Christianity. Christianity is person centered, meaning our belief is that the full revelation of God is in a person, that being Jesus Christ. That Jesus is the full revelation of God. Now we have the Bible, which adds context to that, but the full revelation of God is Jesus. And because of that, we have what we call orthodoxy, which is the right kind of beliefs. And when we believe in Jesus based on what Scripture says, we are indwelt with the Spirit of God, and are transformed as a result of that, and now live a different life producing fruit and are now free of sin. And we live because of grace. And it's an inside out, not an outside in. And so you have these two things - law on one hand, and grace on the other hand.

So why do I tell you all that? What do we do with all that? And again, there's a lot more, but just with that. You've got to remember - God created every man, every woman, every child in His image. He decided and wants and desires for every person to come to faith in Jesus and to be reconciled unto himself. Muslims, in the construct in which they live, and the views in which they hold, have a hard time fully understanding grace, mercy, and love from God. They don't get that. They don't understand. Why would God put skin on and enter into humanity and sacrifice himself? They don't have a good concept for that. But you and I as Christians, that is the basis of our hope is that we follow and worship a God that not only loves us, but has proven His love by putting skin on and entering into our mess and sacrificing himself to enable us to be reconciled to Him, and to have assurance of that and not to question and not to doubt. We have a hope

that is certain. We have a salvation that is certain. Jesus completed all of the work on the cross, not just some of it - all of it.

And as his people, those of us that have been transformed by the Spirit of God living in us, by putting their faith and hope and trust in Jesus - we are the primary instruments God has chosen today to reveal to the world His love. You and I are the primary instruments that God has chosen today to declare to the world that Jesus in fact is the Son of God, because of the personal transformation that has taken place in those of us who have put our faith and trust in Him. We need to remember that.

So our world is getting smaller. Our world in fact is getting real small. And the likelihood of you, of me, running into people who believe differently than you and I is 100% in the world in which we live in. Now, will they be Muslim? They might be. They might be Hindu, they might be - who knows? But our world is getting smaller.

But this isn't the first time that that's happened. When you look at what happened to the early church, the world in which the early church was birthed was in the process, in the context in which it was, of getting really small. And here's what I mean by that. The Roman empire connected pretty much the known world at that point in time. And that which was way over here could make it all the way over here. And that which was over here could find its way across the Roman empire all the way to over here. And the church benefited from that. The gospel spread as a result of that. But it also means that there were things that came along with that,

and that things over here - you know what? Those ideas, those people, well they showed up in certain places.

And it's interesting that Paul, in one of his letters, spoke specifically to some things along these lines. And so turn with me if you will to the book of Colossians. And so this is a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church at Colossae. And because the world was getting smaller, if you will, there were some things that were pressing in on the church at that point in time - mainly three. You had ascetics, you had mystics, and you had gnostics pressing in on the church at that point in time, challenging a number of things as it relates to faith, but specifically challenging the deity of Jesus Christ. And so when you read the beginning two chapters of Colossians, Paul goes into great detail explaining the deity of Jesus. The purpose of God - what did Jesus come and do? Who is he? Worth reading!

But Paul also knew that it wouldn't be the last thing that would press in on the church. He also knew that there'd probably be other things that would be coming down the Romans road, if you will. And I think what he told the church then, applies to us now. And so pick up with me in the fourth chapter, beginning in the second verse. "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

I think there's four things we can glean from that passage - that Paul is saying, hey, when there are things that the church comes up against, here's what you should do. The first is we need to watch. We need to pay attention. We need to be vigilant into what's going on around us. What is happening in our community? What's happening in our nation? What's happening in our world? The church needs to know these things. We need to watch. We need to pay attention.

The second thing that we need to do is we need to pray. We need to pray not only for ourselves. God, give me the opportunity to interact with some people who don't see things the way I do. We also need to pray for those who are doing that in other places. Just like Paul asked the church to pray for them. But thirdly, we need to pray for the church at large. That the church would understand that its primary role is to join God on His mission to declare to the world the reality of the gospel.

But there's a third thing that Paul says we should do. We should demonstrate - take advantage, make the most of every opportunity, every opportunity that's afforded to you and I with those who are outside, if you will, the family of Christianity. We need to take advantage of those, and demonstrate the reality of the gospel.

And then lastly we need to do this: we need to declare the grace story. How you, how I came to faith in what God has done since that point in time in the context of God's story.

We need to watch. We need to pray. We need to demonstrate. And we need to declare.

Now, we sit up here every Sunday and we give you some application points, right? You write them down and everything's good and we leave here and we go, does that really work? If I really do this, does it really work? I mean does something actually come of these things? Well I can definitely tell you that the answer to that is yes. And I'm going to share with you a couple of quick stories on exactly how watching, praying, demonstrating, and declaring and how God can get in the middle of that and do some amazing things.

A handful of years ago I was in a country, in a continent far from here that was predominately, not exclusively, but predominately Muslim. And I was up on a hill, and I was at a building standing on a loading dock outside. And I was shooting a video to cast some vision for what we thought we were going to do as a church and with some other partners there as it relates to reaching that community. And as I was standing on this loading dock, I heard something. It was the Muslim call to prayer. And for those of you that have ever heard it, it's unmistakable. And what I was able to see, standing on this dock was a valley. And in this valley was a village, several thousand people living in this village.

And the call to prayer went out, and I was looking to see what was happening in this village and out walks a man to my left, your right, all dressed in white. He was the imam for that village. And he began to walk down the main street of that village. And as he did, people would come out of their homes and they would get behind him. And by the time he got to the end of the village, several hundred people were following him, and they were headed to the mosque for service.

And I stood there that day and I was like, God, how on earth, how on earth is your gospel going to reach that? How is your gospel going to penetrate that? Your word says that you don't want any to perish, and that all to come to repentance. How is that going to happen? I didn't know. I got on the plane, man, I was wrecked by it. Come home, still thinking about it. How's that going to work? I didn't know.

Fast forward about two and a half years, and I hear a story from that same place. One of our partners had placed two missionaries in that village. And they had become friends with that imam. And just come to find out that that imam had a need. What he wanted, he wanted to learn to speak and to write the English language. And the Christian missionary couple agreed to teach him - with one provision. That they would study the book of John in the gospel.

And so they began to do that, and over the course of weeks and months they went at it. And the imam began to learn how to speak and write in English. And he got to a place where he asked a very interesting question. He said, I need to learn more about this Jesus that I'm learning about in this book. Can you help me with that? And the missionary couple said, you know what? We can. In fact, there's a movie we'd like to show you. It's called the Jesus film. And in fact, the movie is in your native language. Why don't you go round up your friends, and in a couple of days we'll watch this movie.

So sure enough, in a couple of days that imam walked through the village. People came up behind him. They walked up the hill. They got into that

building and they watched the Jesus film. That is how God was going to deliver the gospel to them. An amazing testimony that involves being watchful, being prayerful, somebody demonstrating love and care, but then being in a position to declare the gospel.

Now let me share one more story with you quickly, and then we'll be out of here. On that same trip, I went to a village - poor village. I mean, unbelievably poor. The children there significantly malnourished. Struggling with all sorts of disease - most of them water borne disease and it became readily apparent that one of the significant needs in that village was a new clean water well. So we determined that we were going to work with our partners to make that happen.

Now in this village there was a Christian pastor. He was not well liked. In fact he was treated very poorly by the village given the village was predominately Muslim. All of the surrounding villages were Muslim. All of the elders in that village were Muslim and they didn't like him there but they tolerated him being there. And I went into his church, the place where he met, tiny little room. I mean it's not bigger than probably this right here. The roof was falling down. I could barely walk through it. But yet he was faithful. We told him that we would be back, and we told him that we would bring clean water to that village.

So fast forward about eighteen months, and I got another opportunity to go to that village to be there for the commissioning of that water well. And it was, as you can well imagine, a huge community event. And so we were standing on the platform - concrete pad that the water well sits on and the

whole entire village surrounded this concrete pad. And I got to pray for the village, pray for hopefully how God would use this water well to bless them. And my friend who works for another organization of who we do a lot with, then presented the gospel. And while he was presenting the gospel, several imams from surrounding villages showed up. And they were walking around the outside of all these people chanting and praying while we were in the middle praying and proclaiming. A little tense. Now I'm not sure what those imams were saying, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't the gospel. Right?

So we get done with that, and there's this huge celebration. You know, we're pumping the water. Kids are throwing it, drinking it. You know, it was great. The village elders come up to me, five of them, and they say we want to tell you something. I'm like, o.k. Because you said you were going to bring clean water to this village and you did, we now believe, all of us, the elders, we all believe the living water, as in Jesus Christ, that your friend Brian was talking about. That's worth clapping for.

When we watch, when we pray, when we demonstrate, we can then declare. That is how we have a response as a church, as a people, who follow Christ and believe in the Bible when it comes to those that don't. To make the most of every opportunity. And I'll leave you with this thought. As our world gets smaller - and it is getting smaller - our love needs to be bigger! As our world gets smaller - and it is - our love needs to be bigger.

Now there may be some of you in this room that, for the first time you've heard something about Jesus that either you've heard before or it landed

differently today. I hope so. And I hope that God spoke to you in a tangible way today - because I can tell you this: the God I want to worship, the God I want to follow is the one who came after me. The one who entered into my mess and said I love you even when I didn't love him. That's the God we follow. That's the Jesus we follow. Who, in spite of our mess, and in spite of our sin, said I love you. So much so I am willing to die for you.

I'm going to pray here in just a moment. And if that's you and you're believing that for the first time, I would encourage you with all the faith that you have to accept what God has done in Jesus and to come by our Fireside Room and talk to some people there. They just want to pray with you. They want to give you some additional information. Not going to sign you up for anything - they just want to help you. The most incredible decision that you can make in your lifetime.

And for the rest of us, how do we respond when the world gets small and we have things pressing in on us that are different maybe? New? We watch. We pray. We demonstrate God's love. We take the most, make the most out of every opportunity. And then we declare God's grace in our own life in the context of his story.

So let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for today. Lord we thank you for how you call us, how you invite us, how you, by your wisdom have chosen to use us broken vessels, imperfect people - but yet filled with your Spirit to be agents of yours in this world. To declare the reality of a transformed life. To declare the reality that Jesus Christ is in fact Lord of lords and to declare that we are free from sin and have assurances of

salvation. May we do so humbly. May we do so in a way, Father, that demonstrates your love. And Lord, I pray that you would give us opportunities, even this week, to do just that. And for those here, Father, who are wrestling with their faith at this point in time, Lord, I pray that you would meet them where they're at. That you would give them the faith that they need. That you would give them the courage they so need to say I believe. I believe with all of my heart that Jesus in fact came, died, rose again and because of that I can be reconciled to you. We thank you, Father. We love you and we ask these things all in your Son's most precious, precious name - Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Savior. Amen.