

I love that song, “Blessed Assurance”. I asked the band to do that for us today because I love it so much. In fact, the only song I think I like more than that song is the song “Jesus Loves Me, this I know because the Bible tells me so”. But I love that song “Blessed Assurance”, because the greatest thing in this world is to be saved. Right? Isn’t that the greatest thing in this world – to be saved? But the second greatest thing in this world is to know that you have been saved. To have that blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine. Heir of salvation, purchased by God; born of His Spirit, washed in His blood. This is my story.” I love that line, because as I said last week, we all have a story, don’t we? It sort of defines who we are. It defines our life. In fact, we said it last time that our life actually is a story. It is a story that we are writing every day. It’s a story that we are living out every day. This is your story. This is my story, so let’s live our story.

Folks, what we are learning through the gospel of John and through this series is how to live a better story. In fact, we are learning how to live a great story. We are figuring that out by looking at the life of a man by the name of John the Baptist. In fact, you remember last time, Jesus said, “Of those who have been born of woman, there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.” Translation: Jesus was saying that this man lived the greatest story ever. That is a remarkable statement. In fact, I want you to listen to what the angel said about John before he was even born. Talking to John’s future dad, listen to what he said: “But the angel said to him (Luke 1:13), But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid Zechariah. (Talking to John’s father.) Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John the Baptista. He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great (and this is the key) in the sight of the Lord.’ In the sight of God, he will be great.

I love that because before John was even born, before John did anything, good or bad, smart or stupid, God had already said, “This man is chosen, and he is chosen for greatness in the eyes of God.” Child of God, what I want you to know today is that same thing, the same truth is true of your life. You have been chosen by God, and you have been chosen for greatness. You have

been chosen for greatness in the eyes of God. You have been chosen by God to live a great story. That raises the question though, doesn't it, because if John is our model to live this great story, that raises this question: How did John do that? What did John do that Jesus would rise up and say, "This guy lived the greatest story ever." What did he do so that we can model what he did, and live a great story as well?

Here is what he did. He did a number of things, but this is the primary thing that John did that caused him to live a great story. He lived a great story by becoming the voice. Let me say that again: He lived a great story by becoming the voice. Listen to John 1:19: "Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah." Translation: "I'm not the main character of this story. God is the main character of this story. I'm just the supporting cast of the story." Verse 21: They asked him, "Then who are you? (23) John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, Make straight the way for the Lord." Stop there.

How many of you have ever seen the reality TV show called "The Voice"? For those of you who haven't, just to give you a little background, take a quick look at this video. (Video) My little wife, God bless her, loves that program. In fact, she loves all of those programs where people audition in competition. She likes "American Idol". She likes "America Has Got Talent", and her new favorite is "The Voice". Folks, I'm going to go ahead and confess, I watch "The Voice", because I like to sit and hold hands with Rhonda while she watches "The Voice". But I've got to tell you, "The Voice", unlike so many of the others, is very, very compelling, because picture it: The contestants audition to become The Voice for NBC that year, and if you have ever watched it, they audition before these rock star judges. The judges are Blake Shelton, a country-western singer, but I don't think I could name you one song that guy has ever written or sang. Blake Shelton. The other guy is Usher, who is a singer and a musician; and then there is Shakira and another guy named Adam Levine.

But these guys are rock stars. They are big names. But slip into the theme, because if you have ever watched it, you know that the judges sit in these red chairs that to me look like thrones; and they sit with their back to the contestant, which means they cannot see anything about that contestant. This is all sight unseen – the choices that they make. They can't see if that contestant is tall, or short. They can't see if he or she is male or female. They can't see if they are good looking or not good looking. They can't see if they are cool, or un-cool. They can't see anything on the outside. They can only hear what is coming from the inside, from the heart of that contestant.

It kind of reminds me of I Samuel 16:7 which says: "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Back to "The Voice", because as the person auditions, if one of the judges, or any of them, if they approve of that contestant, they hit this red button which automatically turns the chair around to face that contestant; which means "I approve of you, and I want you on my team." By the way folks, it is hard to watch when the person auditions and none of the judges turn around.

Sammy was telling us earlier that his son actually was a competitor, a contestant, on this show. He sang before these four famous judges. Sammy and Linda are saying, "Please, please turn around." But none of the judges turned around. Folks, when that happens, the person is left standing there in total rejection. By the way, that is something God never does, is turn His back on us. Amen? He never does that. At any rate, if these judges turn around, it's a big deal, because again, these are like idols to these people. Check this out: Unlike on American Idol, the judge not only chooses the person to be on their team, but also commits to coach that person to become The Voice. Let me say that again: They not only choose the person, but they commit to coach that person to become The Voice. In fact, once that judge chooses you, you go on that judge's team. It's like Team Usher; it's like Team Shelton. You go on their team and the judge then comes alongside of you to coach you through the process so that you can become The Voice. Folks, here is my point: Once Usher, or Blake, or one of these guys sitting on these thrones, once they turn their chair around and say, "I approve of you. I choose you", and once that person

becomes The Voice that is a path to living a great career. Once they become The Voice, that becomes an open door for them, many times, for living a storied career.

Now, let me turn a corner and draw an analogy to all of that imagery, because, get this, the moment that you trusted Christ as your Savior, Jesus turned His throne around and said, “I approve of you. All of your sins have now been washed away, and I approve of you.” Beyond that, Jesus then chooses you to be on His team. If you are a believer, you are now on team God. You are now on team Jesus. Let me tell you something about that choice. Jesus chose you before you did anything good. In fact, He chose you knowing you were going to do some pretty stupid stuff in the future, didn’t He? It is sort of like before you ever sang a note before God, on key or off key; before you tried out for the part; before you could audition before God, God hit the button and turned His throne around and said, “I choose you. I want you on my team.” He made that choice. In fact, I want you to listen to what Jesus said about that. He said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you. Not only that but I have appointed you.” That is a Greek word that literally means “I called you.” Some translations say “I ordained you.” Do you realize, Child of God, that you have been ordained just as much as I have? You have been ordained by God so that you might go and bear fruit that will last. Translation: Jesus said, “I turned my chair around and I have chosen you. You have the part.”

Folks, that is so powerful, because many of us, if not all of us to some degree, sort of go through our life trying to get people to approve of us, trying to get people to choose us on their team; trying to get people to turn their chair around to face us. It is sort of like we audition before them. Many times, many of you have gone through this. All of have at some degree or other, you auditioned before somebody and they don’t turn their chair around. They don’t give you their approval. For some of you that was your dad, your mom, your brothers, your relatives, your peers, it’s people on your job, it’s your employer, It’s your employees. But they don’t turn around and approve of you. As hard as that is, it is a deeper problem, because for many people they push that same thing up on God.

Many people go through life trying to get God to approve of them; trying to get God to turn His chair around to accept them. Many of you do that. It's like you go through your life auditioning before God. You say, "God look at what I am not doing anymore. Do you approve of me now? God, watch what I have started doing. Do you approve of me now? God, I'm religious. Will you turn your chair around now? God I've started doing religious stuff. Would you approve of me?" It's like we are always trying to audition before God. It is like we are always trying out before God. But Child of God, what I want you to know is that God is saying, "Cancel the audition. You have the part." God has already turned His chair around and said, "I want you on my team. You have a part to play." So, listen: What does that mean to us? It means you have God's favor. Live in it. You have the part. Play it. You have been ordained to be The Voice, so go and be the voice for God. Just like John the Baptist was ordained by God; called by God to be The Voice. Just like that, you have been called. You have been chosen by God to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the Lord." That is your calling.

Here is my proposition for you today. Becoming the voice for God is the pathway to living a great story. Let me say that again: Once you accept the part, you have the part, but once you take that part and play that part of being the voice for God, I'm telling you, it is the pathway for living a great story. So, that raises a question, doesn't it? You say, "Rick, how do I become The Voice? How do I do that?" We are going to find out as we go back to the gospel of John, and specifically back to the life of John the Baptist. I want to give you two truths that you need to know and that I need to know, that we need to embrace if we are going to become like John the Baptist, the voice for God in Miami Dade County. If we are going to be the voice for God in this city, here is what we need to know.

I want to welcome all of those who are joining us online today, and all of those who are watching at our campuses. I want to give us two truths. How many of you have your listening guides. Wave those in the air. I want to give you two important truths that will enable you to become the voice of God. Here they are. Here is what you need to know. Number one: It is through our voice

that people believe. It is through our voice that people believe. With that in mind, let's pick up John's gospel today, beginning with verse 4. I love this:

"In Him (in Jesus; in God) was life." The word there is *zoe* in the Greek. It doesn't just mean biological life. That is part of it, but it also means life that is meaningful. It means life that has zest. It means life that has purpose; and it also implies everlasting life. All of that kind of life resides in God; resides in Christ. Watch this: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness does not understand it." You say, "Meaning what?" Meaning there was this gap between people and Jesus, and the gap was, they didn't comprehend Him. They didn't comprehend His love. They didn't comprehend His mercy. They didn't comprehend His goodness. They didn't comprehend His forgiveness. They didn't comprehend that He had come as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. So there was this gap between people and Jesus that created unbelief. So, the people were actually far, far, far removed from Jesus.

What I want you to watch is how God bridged the gap between the people and Jesus; how He bridged this gap of their unbelief. This is how He did it. Listen to verse 6. It says: "Once an angel sent from God." Is that what it says? Did God put an angel in there to bridge the gap? No. It says: "There was a man." Not a superman; just a man sent from God that had kind of a regular name. His name was John. In other words, folks, God put John in the gap. Verse 7: "He came as a witness to testify concerning the light." Get it: God filled the gap of unbelief between people and Jesus with John. Namely: John's voice. Specifically: John's witness and John's testimony. Listen to verse 6: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that (and here is the key word) through him (that is, through John) all might believe."

Now, put your thinking caps on, because the words "through him all might believe"; that is through John all might believe. The word "through" is very significant. It is a translation of the Greek word *dia*, and *dia* carries the idea of something that bridges the gap between two things so

that they get connected. In other words, what was going on here was this gap between people and Jesus, and the gap was they didn't comprehend Him. They didn't believe in Him. So God fills the gap of people's unbelief with John's voice; with John's witness; with John's testimony. I love that! It is sort of like John's voice and John's witness was like this causeway from the people over to Jesus. It was like a causeway so the people who were far away from God would hear that God loved them; would hear that God had a plan for them; would hear that God was forgiving; would hear that Christ came to take away their sins, and so that by hearing John's voice and hearing John's testimony they would be connected to Christ. Does that make sense? Get it?

I live downtown now. You all know that. I live downtown Miami, and way across the water there is Miami Beach. Us people in downtown Miami, we are way far removed from Miami Beach, and all the water and the waves over there. But do you know what there is? There is the MacArthur causeway that bridges the water that separates the downtown people from Miami Beach, so that we can cross over. Listen folks: That is what John's voice was. It bridged that gap of unbelief as he told people about Christ's love, mercy, and kindness. He said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." That was bridging the gap. I want you to write this down. Just like John, Child of God, our voice is a causeway to belief. Our voice is a causeway to people believing. Listen to the verse again: "He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, that through him (that is by John) all might believe." Get it: Again, John's voice, John's witness, John's testimony about God's love and Jesus' mercy and kindness was the bridge that spanned the gap from unbelief to belief.

What I am telling you folks, just like that, your voice, and my voice – we are called to be the voice – is what will span the gap between the unbelief that exists in Miami Dade and people coming to Christ. Do you know why people aren't coming to Christ? They don't understand it. They don't comprehend it. They don't know what He did, what He was, what He came to do. So many people in our city don't understand that God loves them; that He cares for them; that He has a plan for their life; that Jesus came to take away their sin. That is what's creating the

separation. It is our voice that fills that gap and spans that causeway. You know we have a vision in this church. I'm talking about all of our campuses, and even all of you that are watching online. We have a vision to reach fifty thousand people in this city. I'm telling you, that is never going to happen if you don't play the part. At some point we have got to tell people. We have to be the voice just like John was, because without our voice, people will remain isolated from belief. Without our voice, all it takes for us to do this is to speak up. It is always easier to shut up than speak up, isn't it? If we don't do that, people are going to stay isolated far from God.

Listen to Roman 10:13. I read this verse a lot, especially as I am giving the plan of salvation. It says this: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." We all go "Yeah!" If they call on the name of the Lord, they will be saved. But listen to the next verse: "How then can they call on the one they have not believed in." There is the gap. How are they going to call on someone they don't even believe in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? How can they hear without someone testifying to them? It is a rhetorical question and the answer is obvious. If we don't testify, if we don't talk, if we don't become the voice in this city for God; if we don't speak up for Christ, people are not going to be saved. Make no mistake about it: Unless we play the role; you know, it's like Jesus is saying 'You've got the part. I'm choosing you. You are the voice.' If we don't play that part, if we don't assume the role of being the voice, I'm telling you: People of this city are going to remain isolated from God. They are going to remain far, far away from God. This is how significant your life is. This is how significant your story is. Your story is so important, it is so critical that it is a matter of life and death on an everlasting scale. In other words, people are going to live or die, spend eternity in heaven or separated from God forever, based on what we do, based on whether or not we play the part that God has given to us in His story.

Now, when I talk about this, I know it is a hard topic, because some of you are kind of looking at me like "Rick, I'm so glad God shows me who I truly am. I struggle with this idea of witnessing, of testifying. I struggle to speak up. It is easier for me to shut up. I struggle with the boldness thing. I'm not very bold. How do I overcome that?" Well, I've got great news for you. We have a

voice coach. Let me take you back to “The Voice” one more time because on “The Voice”, like I said, not only does the judge choose the person, but after he chooses them, he commits to coach that person to becoming The Voice. You know, you go on their team: Usher, Blake, or whoever – and they then come alongside of that person and coach them past the nerves, past the jitters, past the parts that they are not so good on, coach them past all of the challenges so that they can rise up and be The Voice that they have been chosen to be. What an image of what God wants to do in our lives.

God’s Spirit is our coach. God’s Presence is our coach. Listen to what Jesus said in John 14. He said, “I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” Now, I’ve got to tell you, I’m not crazy about that word counselor. I get the idea of somebody sitting here and I’m on the couch and they are counseling me. That is the image that I get. I think that is not a good translation. The original Greek word there – I always tell you the Bible was originally written in what is called koina Greek and translated over to English, Spanish, whatever – the original Greek word there is a compound Greek word paracletto. Let me break it down for you. Para in the Greek means beside. Caletto means to call. Paracletto then means to call somebody to your side, to help you, to coach you. What Jesus was saying was this: He was saying to all of those who had been chosen, “Look, I am calling someone to your side to be there to help you, to be there to encourage you, to be there to even coach you, to be what God wants you to be. Who is this coach? Listen to verse 15: “I will ask the Father and He will give you another paracletto, somebody called alongside to coach us, to be with you forever.” Who is the coach? The Spirit of truth.

I love that, because Jesus was saying that He would send us the Holy Spirit to coach us, and among the issues that He coaches us through what God calls us to do is how to play the part of being the voice of God. Here is how He coaches us. God’s Spirit coaches us from the inside. God’s Spirit coaches us from the inside out. Hang with me for a few more moments, because Jesus said ‘I am going to send the Spirit to be your coach’ and then in the very next verse, verse 17, He says this: “For He, talking about God’s Spirit, lives with you and He will be in you.” You

say, “Meaning what?” I say this all the time. “Meaning the moment that you trusted Christ as your Savior, at that very moment, God’s Spirit, or better yet, let’s put it this way, the Presence of the Almighty God took up His residence inside of you. Your body is the house of the Presence of God, and among the reasons that He is in you is to coach you, to encourage you, to become what God has called you and chosen you to be, namely to be The Voice.

Don’t miss this, because He coaches us relationally; He coaches us personally; He coaches us intimately. By that I mean, because God’s Presence is so close to us, literally inside of us, because of that He is able to coach us in a very personal and relational way. That means as you walk with God and God walks with you; as you talk with God and God talks with you; as you love God and God loves you; as you listen to God and God listens to you, what happens is, when you do that, is you just fall deeper and deeper in love with your Creator and with your Savior. Folks, when that happens, talking about Him becomes second nature. In other words, you don’t have to make yourself do it. You just want to do it. When you are in love with the Savior, you just want to talk about it.

I’m still in love with Rhonda, after a bunch of years. I’m not going to tell you how many, but a bunch of years. But, you know what – when I’m with people, I just talk about her. I brag about her. I can’t believe I’ve got a gal like this. How did it happen, you know. It just comes out naturally. I love her. It’s the same thing with Jesus. The more I fall in love with Him, the more I walk with Him day after day, it just comes out in my conversation. Some have the courage to do it, but I just want to do it, to be the voice. This is my story. It’s like the song says. This is my story; this is my song. Praising my Savior all the day long. That is what I live for. That is my story.

A few years ago FPL did a commercial trying to keep people from touching power lines and losing their life. They went asking people, “What do you live for?” “So you don’t touch that wire and kill yourself, what do you live for?” They would see somebody riding a bike, and they would say, “I live to ride.” Somebody on a motorcycle said, “I live to ride.” Somebody playing golf

said, “I live to play golf.” Somebody jogging said, “I live to jog.” Somebody shopping said, “I live to shop.” I remember watching that and thinking, “Seriously? Is that what you live for?” There is nothing wrong with any of those things. I enjoy some of those things, but they are not what I live for. They are not my story.

You see, God has called us to a greater story. He has called us to a story, a story where we have fallen in love with our Creator; where we have fallen in love with our Savior; and the more we fall in love with Him, the more His story becomes our story. If His story becomes our story, we love to tell people about His story, what He did, and our story, what He did for us. Let me tell you: When you take His story and combine it with your story, it is a powerful combination in bridging that gap and in bringing people who are far away from God into a close relationship with God.

Here is how we become a voice. Here is how we do it. First we tell people His story. Listen to verse 6: There was a man sent from God whose name was John. Verse 7: He came as a witness.” The word “witness” there comes from a Greek word that means one who tells the facts. In other words, when we witness for Christ, we are just telling the facts about Him. We are telling His story, right? Here is part of His story. Here are some of the facts. Here is what we give witness to. John says in verse 29: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward and he said (He’s becoming the voice.) He said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God takes away the sins of the world.’”

I’m telling you, if you are here today and you have never embraced Christ as your Savior, that is the greatest news you could ever hear: The Lamb of God can take away your sins; your past sins, your present sins, and your future sins. You see, it is your sins that separate you from God. It is my sins that separate me from God. What Christ does is He just reaches down and takes away your sins. There is no longer this barrier between you and your Creator; between you and your God. You and your God can have a relationship. We are a witness to that. We are a witness to

His story. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We need to tell people that; tell them the fact. He is the Son of God. He can take away your sins.

Next we tell them our story. Listen to verse 32: “Then John gave this testimony. He says, “I saw.” You see, the witness tells His story. Testimony is when you tell your story, what God has done in your life; what you have experienced since you came to Christ. I want to tell you, that is a powerful tool to help people bridge the gap of unbelief. I never get tired of telling people my story. My story is, I’ll give you the short version of it, I was sixteen years old, almost seventeen years old. My mother and dad had just separated, divorced, and were trying to get their marriage back together, which they never did. I was at home alone one night watching TV and two men knocked at the door. They were out being The Voice in my little town. They knocked on my door and after this and that and the other happened, but finally they shared the gospel with me, and that night in my house by myself with those two men, I knelt down by the sofa and I called on the Lord. I said, “Lord, I don’t know much about you, but Lord I want to be a part of your world, whatever that means. I know I’m a sinner. I want you to remove my sins and make me a Child of God.” No lights went off; no thunder happened; I didn’t cry; I didn’t jump, I just knew the facts. Life had changed. I got up from there and God put me on a new path. It has been a path of a better story. It has been a path of being a Child of God.

It’s the same thing God wants to do for the people of this city. John said, “To all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.” That is a testimony: Children of God. When we take His story: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”, and we all have a story of our own; we take His story and combine it with our story, I’m telling you, it is powerful. It is how you can become The Voice. You don’t have to be a Bible scholar. You don’t have to be a theologian. You don’t have to know all the answers. If somebody asks you a question and you don’t know the answer, who cares? You don’t have to have all the answers. You can tell somebody, “You know what, I don’t know about that. I don’t know the answer to that, but I can tell you this. “Behold the Lamb who will take away the sins of

the world will take your sins away. Let me tell you what He did for me; He put me on a new path, changed my life. It's never been the same since. I can tell people that story.

I heard last week, Carlos was sharing with me, a lady had just got saved in our church, had just come to Christ. She showed up last week and brought four people with her, just by saying "Let me tell you what He did for me." Those four people walked the aisle with her last week. Very powerful! You see, Christ Fellowship, let me take you back to the vision. God has given us the vision to reach fifty thousand people. These are fifty thousand people who are far away from God. There is a gap between them and God. They don't understand it. They think He wants religion. He just wants a relationship. They think He wants to hang rules on them. He just wants to put a plan in their life, to put them on a path. It's up to you and me to take away the gap by talking, and telling them about His love, His mercy, His kindness, and His goodness. At some point, if we are going to reach fifty thousand people, we have to become The Voice. John said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Make straight the way for the Lord."

You say, "Rick, I don't even know where to start." Well, I want to help you take some baby steps, okay? You all look so serious and I kind of expected this. This is a part of living a great story. Let me give you some ways that will make this easier for you to do this. We always use the invite cards. This is a great way for you to become the voice. You know the old saying, "Don't leave home without them." I never leave home without these invite cards. I keep them in my wallet all the time. I tell my assistant: "Leave these on my desk so I can always have a fresh supply." It is just so easy. I live in a condo now, and I am walking down the hallway and I am always running into people at the elevator. "Hey there, how are you." "I'm fine", and no people are talking in the elevator but me. I talk all the way down. "I'm from Christ Fellowship." I don't even tell them I'm the pastor. That's death for sure, there. I say, "Let me invite you to Christ Fellowship. It's a great church. We've got a campus right over there." It is a simple way of becoming a voice for God. You give people this and it is like planting a seed. Your voice goes with them, and it helps to bridge the conversation to get it started. I can't tell you how many

times I've handed these to people and as soon as I handed it, they start crying. People are looking for God.

I want to give you another way. When you pick these up we usually say, "By the way, you know how many people we are expecting Easter? Thirty-thousand people!" If we get thirty thousand people, people's lives will get changed and we are well on our way to our vision of fifty thousand by twenty-twenty. You pick these up on your way out and be a voice for God. Help us get thirty-thousand people here. I want to give you another way that you can do this. We are going to get a bunch of these yard signs. You can just put them in your yard. This becomes a voice twenty-four seven. Do you know what I heard last week? A lady who saw one of these in the yard of her neighbor, one of our people had one of these in their yard. She was so distraught in her life, so hungry for God that she went across the street, knocked on the door and said, "I saw your sign about Christ. I need what you have." And they led her to the Lord and she was here last weekend. This is a voice twenty-four seven, folks. You just stick it out there and you are the voice. Right? Twenty-four seven!

By the way, one of the things I believe this will do is that it will help people recognize us. You know, Coca Cola has such name recognition that all you have to do is take a Coke machine and put it in the corner. When people walk by and they are thirsty, they will go to the Coke machine. I want people to so recognize the name of Christ Fellowship that when they get to the point in their life where they are thirsty for God, that this sign is like a Coke machine. They say, "I am thirsty for God. I want God. I've seen that sign Christ Fellowship. I'm going to go there and see if I can get a drink of water from the Savior."