

Fame

What do Ryan Kaji, Dude Perfect, and Pewdiepie all have in common? They are all Youtube famous making millions simply by posting videos online. Let's start with the most famous and rich Youtuber Ryan Kaji. He created Ryan's World for kids - I saw an interesting clip about a science experiment and bacteria. What has more bacteria a soccer ball, mom's teeth or my sisters shoe. For creating such clips he earns \$26 million dollars as the highest paid Youtuber. Then there's Dude Perfect, a bunch of 30 year olds who learned how to never grow up. They have perfected trick shots, and gained multiple Guinness book of world record titles - such as most pencils snapped in 1 minute and most 1 handed catches of a football in a minute. For all of this \$20 million. Pewdiepie is a Swedish internet comedian making funny videos to the tune of \$13 million. After reading this I quickly searched how to make successful Youtube video. Or consider Instagram. The social media platform for a younger generation. For every post Dwayne the Rock Johnson gets \$650,000, a soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo gets \$750,000, and for every post Kylie Jenner \$1 million dollars. Welcome to 2020. Where the dreams of many children nowadays is to become Youtube sensations. When I was growing up kids wanted to be professional athletes and movie stars, and now they want Instagram and Youtube followers.

Now perhaps like me you cannot relate as much to those people or platforms, but chances are you do know or have heard of Facebook. Social media has changed our society. If you're familiar with Facebook you know what it is like to post something and see how many likes or the lack of likes it gets. You know what it is to rise and fall with many likes or a lack thereof. Keep checking back - do you like me now? This week I was at a Leadership Conference and I was hearing of how the next generations have been changed with technology and social media. And some have referred to a loneliness epidemic. Less and less true friends, even though Facebook friends are at all time high. There is a correlation between your time spent on social media, and the greater feelings of loneliness. What is also being exposed is how fake these formats are. You get photoshopped, edited, bite sized pieces of what others want you to see - not the full picture. You see usually one side, whatever voice they've decided is best for the format. And so the reality is that this (*You can be famous without being known.*) *You cannot be truly known through social media.* Another Pastor Craig Groeschel said "we're living for likes and longing for love."

We are in week 3 of this series chasing carrots. We're looking at the things that many people chase after that seem to offer so much, when the reality is they offer so very little. We've talked about perfectionism, comfort, and now consider fame. Psychologists would say that many who want to be famous have had periods where they felt neglected or abandoned. And what is so great in gathering at church is to hear God answer one of our greatest needs. And that is the need to be known. When it comes to that consider what God has said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." (Jer 1:5) This is what he said to a prophet named Jeremiah and also to us. Before you could take a personality test or become youtube famous. Before your mom and dad picked your name I knew you. I still know the very hairs and your head. And what's going

on in your life. Every detail you walked in with I know. And I love you. Love you completely as shown through sending my Son, and his death on the cross. So that Tauren Wells can write a song that reminds us with God we are fully known and fully loved. And where people struggle to do this - cause they can love pretty full because they know in part - or they can know fully and then struggle to love. In Jesus and because of Him we are known fully and loved fully. How great is our God.

But we want to hop of the hamster wheel of fame. We want to sink this idea a little deeper. And to do so we are going to take a look at a man who had fame, and didn't handle it so well. We're going to take a look at Gideon. He is a leader at the time it is so bad for the Israelites that they live in mountain sides and caves. Reminds me of Petra where my Dad is visiting right now - pretty interesting. But pretty bad when you have to hide that way. Yet God used Gideon to take 300 people vs 135,000 Midianites and win the battle. God raised him up this way confusing the Midianite army and giving his people the victory. What we have this morning is after Gideon because battle famous. What the people wanted to do, and what he proposed. So he starts so good. God is the ruler. Ahh but remember me just a little. Could you turn to your neighbor and say, "God is worthy of all glory."

Do any of you know the Grimm brothers fairy tales. I remember going to a children's play featuring many of the stories, and thinking how very dark these tales are. The Grimms lived up to their name. One of the details I didn't forget is that of Hansel and Gretel. And how living in a time without GPS was much harder. It's story about two children and not enough food during famine. What I remember is the cleverness of Hansel who used white stones, and bread crumbs so that no matter where they went they would not forget where they came from. They could trace their steps back home. The reason I bring up this imagery is because the problem with fame is that we don't always do what Hansel did, we don't leave a trail that reminds us of where we came from. *The problem with fame is we are tempted to forget how we got there.*

Such is the case with Gideon. When we first meet him he is incredibly humble if not insecure. The Lord shows up tell him that he is going to led the people over the army of Midian and he says, "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." (Jg 6:15) I am the least of the least how is that going to happen. He needs to be reassured time and time again. When they do fight God gives them the victory. They have jars and trumpets and when they create noise look at what happens. "When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the Lord caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords." (Jg 7:22) The Lord won the battle. And while all glory should go to the Lord what does Gideon do. He takes some. I won't rule, but give me some of the plunder and gold. He makes an ephod which is something used for religious ceremony perhaps something priests wore. And it is a trap. People worship it rather than God. Reminds me of the error of relics and icons. Many times people worshipped the items rather than the God it those people or items were supposed to remind the people of. What happened between the beginning of story and the end. He forgot how he got there and all the Lord had done for him.

What does this mean for us. The Lord reminds us if you do climb the ranks of fame and success - leave some bread crumbs. When things go your way and you find yourself on top. When success makes you popular because you scored the winning basket or you won the

spelling bee. When you feel the wave of popularity float up and the likes clicking. Do not forget. It's what he told his people as they were going to be famous conquerors taking over the promised land. He said, "You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deut 8:17-18) I consider also what Martin Luther taught us to say about God our Heavenly Father, "I believe that God created me and all that exists, and that he gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears and all my members, my mind and all my abilities."

Someone who is enjoying the limelight of fame right now is the Ravens Quarterback Lamar Jackson. He will most likely be the MVP for this season of football. And someone asked him recently why he stays so humble. He said, "The Lord, The Lord. I give him all his praise, glory, and honor. Without Him I could've been doing anything...If you feel like you're bigger than the Lord, that's when success dies. You gotta let him know he's the reason" And what is he doing. He's laying down bread crumbs each time. Every win and success. So he doesn't forget how he got there.

So is it possible we have forgotten at times how we got to where we are. I think a litmus test might be wherever you are feeling most secure. When the kids are doing well, man I really am doing a bang up job. When the bank account is full, I know some struggle but I really can do this. When feeling healthy - everyone should get on my plan. It's easy to overlook the Lord and forget all the graces his gives. So we repent today of all the times and ways we haven't give him the glory when things went our way. Whether outwardly speaking or internally processing.

For there is one who stands above. One to whom every knee shall someday bow. There is a name so great that whoever calls on it will be saved. That one is Jesus! I love how the book of Colossians states his supremacy. It says, "All things were created through him and for him." (1:16) We came here and have talents, abilities, and platforms great and small because of him. And why do we have them they are for him. For only he has done what is necessary to save mankind. Only he has made atonement for all sin through his cross. Only he has defeated the devil. Only he has power over death for life everlasting. And we are here from him and for him. If you are new to Christianity or just visiting we need to share with you the essence of this good news we preach. At it's core it's a belief that I do not deserve any glory. I have been and am a sinner fraught with personal failure. But Jesus is the reason we are here. Jesus is the reason for our salvation. And simply through faith do we receive his right standing, and the title as brother and sister of the most high God. Salvation is 100% through Jesus, and 0% me. So he gets 100% of the glory and I get 0%.

But being famous isn't in and of itself wrong. Afterall I was famous. I know most of you are probably here because of my fame. I was a winner on the Price is Right. This was back in 2008 when I was in Seminary. I won a bedroom set and some lawn tools. I used God's number 777 to win on contestant's row. And God for 10 seconds gave me a platform. Now the night before I had it all worked out how I was going to use this platform. I was getting ready for the day working on my speech if I got called up to spin the wheel. I was going to say, "I am so thankful for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and for the victory he won for all people at Easter." I thought it was good. But instead of panning to me they panned to the choir who sung a German song that know one knew. But here is what I was convinced of I was going to *Use the platform of fame to give God praise*. I didn't there so I'm just using the rest of my life to do that.

We all have platforms of influence to some degree as a mom or dad, student worker business man or woman. Some of them are pretty big - others in the community know us or at work know us. Some of you may have a pretty big platform someday. And what can that platform be used for? It can be a pulpit with a microphone to declare regularly the glory of God. To say with the Psalmist, "Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory." (Psalm 115:1) I love that Gideon did use this moment to redirect the people to God. They wanted him to be king and he said. The Lord will rule over you.

There is another danger though if fame is all that we seek, and to talk about this I want to bring you back to the world of dating and first impressions. If you've ever been on first date or job interview you know what it is - to say not exactly the whole truth as much as what a person wants to hear. I love music by (obscure artist) what do you think about it. Oh yeah - love them. We really need someone who can do this. How do you feel about it. You know I was born to do that very thing. But that's not just first dates and job interviews often there is this pressure to give into what people want to hear. *The quest for fame may lead you to conform to what other people want.*

Reminds me of a story from the Old Testament. There were three Jews living in Babylon and they had fame. They were leaders in Babylon. And the king had just built a statue and when music played everyone was supposed to bow down to it. But they didn't conform. Someone told the King this, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were defying the king's orders and were not bowing to the statue and doing what was commanded. And the King threatened that if they did not bow down they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. They could lose their positions, and their lives. And yet they still had this remarkable response, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. (Dan 3:17) They are not concerned about losing status, they are more concerned about what God says. Paul says this is how you are to do life. That here is what a Christian is all about, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Gal 1:10) We call that living for an audience of one. Rising and falling on what God says, not culture.

Today we celebrate the Chinese New Year and consider the great work of God in that country. Right now there are estimated 116 million Christians in China and the Gospel is spreading rapidly in underground churches. The communist government is feeling threatened with only 90 million in the Communist party. So they are imprisoning pastors like this man pastor Wang Yi. Many of our own pastors have been called back from Mainland China with government officials knocking on missionaries doors in the middle of the night. And can you imagine if the Christians there were simply conforming to what the government wanted? Ok you win! We will conform to your demands. No. If there is 1 or 100 million it is every Christian's duty to stand up and say I follow God, I speak for God, I endure for God regardless of what you think or do. If it means you don't like me, make funny of me, or imprison me. I live for God.

So I wonder is there any area of your life where you are conforming to what others want, rather than what God wants? Our is not to blend in, but to stand out. Driven by his voice no matter what society or culture calls popular. For it is God's voice that calls us loved.

Yes fame is a Carrot if you don't believe me. Believe Jim Carrey. For he said, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer." You can have a big name and still not feel like you have it. So what is better than famous?

I gathered with a bunch of pastors from our synod this past week. I love our church body and think it's a great one. Over 800 gathered to talk about leadership. And what's really interesting is that we have many wonderful pastors and none of them have really big names. Like my Seminary teacher, Professor Tiefel. I'm guessing most have not heard that name. In his upper 60s as the preacher for one of our worship services. And the sermon that man gave, how he spoke of the things of God! My family was there to witness and my wife went up to encourage him after blown away. I had already known - this is just what he does. He's good. My daughter to. This is a man who for years has faithfully served the Lord as a professor, pastor, choir director. And while not famous in the worlds eyes - has been better than that faithful to God. Yes *Faithful to God's calling is greater than famous.*

Because the reality is this he raises and lowers people. We saw that with Gideon. He was lowest and only God raised him up. He grants success or allows failures. And honestly many of us may not be famous or make millions as a Youtuber. But it doesn't change the mission. That my mission is to faithfully life up his name, the name of Jesus with whatever platform he gives. To say it another way *My business is to make much of Jesus, his business is to make whatever he wants out of me.* And Facebook famous or not, with likes galore - I am fully known by the one who also fully loves me. So are you! May it be enough. Amen.