

“What Would Jesus Say to Rush Limbaugh?” 7/12-13/08 6 pm; 9 & 10:45 am
Ephesians 1:4-5, Matthew 16:24-26

INTRODUCTION

Rush Limbaugh, aka “El Rushbo,” “a harmless fuzzi-ball,” and “Supreme Commander of Operation Chaos,” has been the top-rated radio talk-show host in America for almost 20 years. August 1 will mark the 20th anniversary of his national radio program.

At 57, he is an American icon, although his fans and critics don’t agree on precisely what he is iconic for. He has been compared to Mark Twain, Jackie Gleason, and the Founding Fathers. Serious people have called him a serial liar and a moral philosopher, a partisan hack and a public intellectual, nothing more than a radio windbag and nothing less than the heart of the Republican Party.

Michael Harrison, the editor of the radio industry magazine, *Talkers*, offered: “He’s a phenomenon like the Beatles. Before Rush Limbaugh there was nothing like talk radio. He’s been to talk what Elvis was to rock ‘n’ roll. He saved the AM dial.”

Said Karl Rove, President Bush’s former Deputy Chief-of-Staff, “Rush has completely remade American politics by offering an alternative to the networks and CNN. For 20 years he has been the leader of his own parade.”

He is credited with mobilizing support for the Republican sweep of Congress in 1994 and the impeachment of President Bill Clinton in 1999. More recently, he used his influence to try to disrupt the 2008 Democratic presidential race by encouraging his listeners to vote for Hillary Clinton, to prolong infighting among Democrats.

He was born Rush Hudson Limbaugh III on January 12, 1951 in Cape Girardeau, Missouri to Rush & Millie Limbaugh. His father was a lawyer and a World War II fighter pilot. His family is filled with lawyers or judges including his grandfather, father, uncle, cousin and his brother David.

Rush began his career in radio as a teenager in 1967 in his hometown of Cape Girardeau, using the name Rusty Sharpe. After graduating from high school in 1969, he enrolled at Southeast Missouri State University, *strictly* to please his parents. He dropped out after two semesters. According to his mother, “He just didn’t seem interested in anything except radio.”

His father, whom Rush calls “the smartest man I ever met,” was a prominent Missouri lawyer who despaired of his son’s failures in school and his choice of vocation.

At first, his father’s concerns seemed justified. Rush lost radio jobs in several cities, working under different names and broadcast styles. In Pittsburgh, for example, he was a prankster, telling his audience that he could see them through a new experimental phone.

He did voices, humor and satire. From the beginning he had a knack for making people laugh.

After being fired in Kansas City, he quit radio to become an executive with the Kansas City Royals. Five years later, he went back to radio and was fired again.

He found a radio job in Sacramento where, for the first time, he started airing his conservative opinions and really developing his bombastic, politically incorrect, *El Rushbo* persona. The show was a hit.

He said things people had never heard on the radio: he mocked extreme feminists by calling them, “*feminazis*,” and skewered “*environmentalist wackos*” among others.

In August of 1988, he moved to New York and his show went national, and soon revolutionized radio in America. *Talkers* magazine puts Limbaugh’s weekly audience at 14 million, although Limbaugh himself estimates 20 million.

While Rush was in New York, William F. Buckley Jr., the publisher of *The National Review*, and the father of intellectual conservatism, saw the young broadcaster’s star power and took Limbaugh into his orbit. He cultivated him, promoted him and saw to it that he connected with the right people.

When Buckley died in February of this year, Limbaugh mourned him on the air and off. But he also had a sense that, with Buckley’s passing, he had become the movement’s elder statesman. Jay Nordlinger, a senior editor at *The National Review*, watched Limbaugh’s tutelage under Buckley, and he takes Limbaugh seriously as a passionate, articulate commentator and public intellectual. “I hired a lot of people over the years, fancy kids from elite schools, and I always asked, ‘How did you become a conservative?’ Many of them said, ‘Listening to Rush Limbaugh.’”

The Pew Research Center recently reported that, on a series of “news knowledge questions,” Limbaugh’s audience scored higher than National Public Radio listeners.

Limbaugh sees himself as a thinker as well as showman. “I take the responsibility that comes with my show very seriously. I want to persuade people with ideas. I don’t walk around thinking about my power. But in my heart and soul, I know I have become the intellectual engine of the conservative movement.”

In 2006, after years of addiction to painkillers, Limbaugh was charged in Florida with “doctor shopping” prescriptions. Limbaugh has stated his addiction to painkillers resulted from several years of severe back pain heightened by a botched surgery intended to correct those problems. He pleaded not guilty and cut a deal; the charges to be dismissed after 18 months if he continued rehabilitation and treatment with a therapist.

The case became a national scandal. His enemies jeered that the white knight of American conservatism was a junkie. His fans feared the scandal might end his career. Limbaugh's lawyer hired a Florida psychologist to evaluate his client.

The psychologist said, "I assessed Rush, and I saw he had a problem he couldn't control." He recommended that Limbaugh check into the Meadows, a rehab center that specializes in celebrities.

Said the therapist, "They guarded his privacy, but other than that, he was treated like everybody else. Rush did individual therapy, took part in group sessions and got along with everybody."

When Limbaugh returned to the air after six weeks, he candidly and dryly discussed his addiction and legal status, told his listeners that he was not a victim, and then went on with the broadcast.

In a recent NY Times interview, he told the reporter, "I thank God for my addiction. It made me understand my shortcomings."

He added that he believed most of his shortcomings stemmed from his inability to love himself sufficiently. "I felt everyone who criticized me was right and I was wrong. ... My problem was born of immaturity and my childhood desire for acceptance. I learned in drug rehab that this was stunting and unrealistic. I was seeking acceptance from the wrong people."

He added, "I don't deal with the future anymore. I take things one day at a time."

Limbaugh is said to be admired by the religious right for many of his conservative principles and social positions, some of which are from the Bible. But he is far from pious on matters of adult behavior:

On August 4, 2005, Limbaugh said that homosexuality is not a moral issue because homosexuality is not a choice. He said that conservatives do not care what people do behind closed doors.

He has been married and divorced three times.

His sexual innuendos are crass and insulting, especially to women.

But, for all his ups and downs, Rush is as financially successful as ever. He just signed a new eight-year, \$400 million contract, plus a nine-figure signing bonus (which amounts to at least another \$100 million).

In 2003, he had an audience of nearly 20 million a week. However, public polls have shown that a strong majority of Americans have an unfavorable opinion of Limbaugh,

such as a Rasmussen Reports poll illustrating a 2-1 margin of unfavorable ratings, with 62% of those surveyed reporting an unfavorable opinion of Limbaugh.

He was the 1992, 1995, 2000, and 2005 recipient of the Marconi Radio Award for Syndicated Radio Personality of the Year, given by the National Association of Broadcasters, joining the syndicated Bob & Tom Show as the only other four-time winner of a Marconi award. He was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame in 1993. In 2002, industry publication *Talkers magazine* ranked him as the greatest radio talk show host of all time.

So, what would Jesus say to Rush Limbaugh?

Here's where He might begin. He might say, "Rush,

1. Receive your Heavenly Father's approval and acceptance

Although he has not stated this explicitly, it sounds to me like Rush has been carrying deep wounds from the lack of acceptance he received from his father.

Rush never fit his father's desired mold: he was not a good student, he did not complete college, he did not become a lawyer. His father did not approve of his seeking a career in radio. Yet, he deeply admired his father, calling him "the most intelligent man I ever knew."

Dick Adams, Rush's boyhood friend and high-school debate partner, said Rush's father "didn't suffer fools lightly, let's just put it like that. Many times I was over there when he called down Rush or David in harsh tones. There was usually a string of expletives attached."

"My father expected me to be a professional man," Limbaugh said. "The problem was, I hated school. I hated being told what to do. In the Boy Scouts I never got a single merit badge. In school my grades were terrible. I just didn't want to be there. I just wanted to be on the radio."

Rush's father hoped his son would grow out of this ambition.

Rush was miserable when his father insisted he attend college.

He spent the 1970s spinning records at radio stations around the country. But he never was able to hold on to a job.

Rush says that he was wounded by his father's disapproval, unable to make a real go of the radio business and unlucky in marriage. (Rush's dad saw his son go through two failed marriages).

Rush's father's death was two years after Rush's radio program was nationally syndicated in New York.

I wonder if Rush ever heard from his father, "Congratulations, son! I'm proud of you! You made it!" *It doesn't sound like it.*

I mentioned earlier that Rush said he has come to believe that most of his shortcomings stemmed from his inability to love himself sufficiently. "I felt everyone who criticized me was right and I was wrong. ... My problem was born of immaturity and my childhood desire for acceptance."

I've known many men who did not feel that they were ever accepted by their fathers. Women, too.

And, it can be especially difficult after the father has died because hope dies also. Hope of hearing the words, "*I love you. I'm proud of you. I enjoy being with you. I want you to be who God has called you to be. You have my blessing.*" Or words that equal that kind of blessing, acceptance.

And the lack of that has driven many to derive their sense of acceptance only solely upon professional success which is often shown in an over-done driven-ness, or inability to enjoy success and the broader joys of life.

As important as acceptance from one's parents is, there is an acceptance that is even more important. It is the acceptance that comes from God the Father, the perfect Father.

OPEN to Ephesians 1:4-5 (**PAGE** 1817)

Ephesians 1:4-5 "**Long ago, even before He made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in His eyes.**
5 His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure." (NLT)

God sent His Son, Jesus, to become human, to die for our sins, so that they could be paid for and so that God could freely and with all integrity, adopt us as sons and daughters. We do not merit God's acceptance through our performance.

We do not merit our Heavenly Father's acceptance through perfect obedience.

We do receive His acceptance by receiving the only means by which we can be reunited; faith in Jesus Christ and faith in what He has done for us.

We say, "Father, I want to be fully accepted by You. So, I accept Jesus' payment for my sins. Please forgive me. I cannot earn my own forgiveness."

And the Father accepts us. And, He loves us as much as He loves Jesus Himself. That's what Jesus says in John 17:23 ... that God loves those who put their trust in Jesus, in the same way that He loves Jesus.

And when we disobey Him, when we fall short, He helps us. He doesn't reject us. He forgives us as we admit our sins.

With God, we live and work out a relationship that is never threatened by rejection, always marked by acceptance.

I think this is where Jesus might begin. He might say, Rush, quit trying to earn your father's favor, and

1. Receive your Heavenly Father's approval and acceptance

Then, #2, I think Jesus might say, "Rush,

2. Become as radically committed to Me as you are to conservatism

TURN to Matthew 16:24-26 (**PAGE** 1524)

Listen to some statements Rush has made, over the past 15 years, about his perspective and beliefs about God:

1993: "Jesus holds the answers to all of the everyday problems that you face. I am talking about an acceptance and belief in Jesus, Heaven, and God. I guess you can deal with your problems on your own without these beliefs, but it's much, much tougher. With those beliefs, you realize how insignificant the budget-deficit debate is, in comparison with the big picture." (Rush Limbaugh, interviewed in The Door (Nov.-Dec. 1993). Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no. 1).

2000: December 21, he stated that he received many e-mails from listeners inquiring whether he is saved or born again and warning that he should not say or do certain things if he truly knows the Lord. He replied, "It infuriates me." He added that though he is conservative he is not particularly religious. (www.wayoflife.org)

2008: And then, in early 2008, "I thank God for my addiction. It made me understand my shortcomings."

Jesus might say, "Rush, become as radically committed to Me as you are to conservatism."

Matthew 16:24-26 **"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."**

25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it.

26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

This statement by Jesus is a radical statement. He says that faith in Him is a life of whole-hearted, whole-life following of Him. It's setting our hearts and minds to follow, and when we get distracted, to confess it and refocus again.

Jesus says that this involves:

self-denial: say “no” to my self-centered desires and “yes” to God’s desires for my life.

take up his cross and follow Me: The cross is the symbol of ultimate obedience and following Jesus’ will, as He followed His Father’s will.

And, here is the amazing, counter-intuitive result: Jesus promises we will actually gain instead of losing ... we will discover the fulfilling life we desire.

I don’t know if you’ve ever heard Rush Limbaugh when he’s waxing eloquent on a subject. He’s intense, humorous, insightful, he is an amazing wordsmith, intensely focused on making the case.

I think Jesus might say, “*Rush, be that passionate in following Me! Be as radically committed to Me as you are to conservatism ... and watch what I will do with your life!*”

3. Learn to disagree without being harsh and insulting

“Rush, you often proclaim that you have ‘Talent on loan from God.’ That’s true. Use it in a manner that honors Me.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 **“If I could speak in any language in Heaven or on Earth but didn't love others, I would only be making meaningless noise like a loud gong or a clanging cymbal.**

2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I knew all the mysteries of the future and knew everything about everything, but didn't love others, what good would I be? And if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, without love I would be no good to anybody.

3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would be of no value whatsoever.” (NLT)

CONCLUSION

Let's take a minute and look at our own lives. How do you rate, on a scale of one-three in these three areas?

1. Receiving your Heavenly Father's approval and acceptance

2. Becoming as radically committed to Jesus as you are to (your greatest passion in life)

3. Learning to disagree without being harsh and insulting

"Father in Heaven, thank You for Your complete and unswerving love for me! I open my life to Jesus, so that He can forgive me and make me a part of Your eternal family... where I will always be accepted and loved by You. Thank You! In Jesus' Name, Amen."

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