

Sermon: Our Contemporary, Convenient and Comfortable Jesus!!

Reading: Matthew 10: 32-42

Introduction.

If I asked you to describe Jesus, what words would you use to describe Him? How we speak of Jesus and what we focus on from His teachings reveals how we choose to live our life as His followers.

As preachers and teachers we have a great weight of responsibility to ensure we present the right view of Jesus when we preach and teach. There is a greater weight of judgment on us if we present a false Jesus or teach a false doctrine which leads others to lose faith, fall into sin or dismiss Jesus as irrelevant, because we have spoken wrongly. We will one day have to give an account before Almighty God. This is why the book of James says, 'Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly' (**James 1:1**).

Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite were the 3 friends of Job who visited him at his darkest moment. Job lost everything, his health, wealth and children were all taken from him, it was the darkest episode in Job's life. His 3 friends hearing of his calamity came to be with him in his hour of need. His friends began to offer Job advice and explain why all this calamity had probably happened to him. At the end of the book we discover God rebukes Eliphaz, Bildad and Zopar because each spoke wrongly and misrepresented God in what they said!

Today's scriptures lead us to take a look at Jesus which we find hard to understand. I want to tread carefully as I go. I don't want to misrepresent Jesus but I'm also aware some may think I am doing so as I consider the challenging words Jesus speaks in this passage today.

Which Jesus do we follow?

It seems people have different views of Jesus. Do we prefer the western churches contemporary Jesus, the one who loves everyone unconditionally, never offends anyone, gentle, meek and mild? As a Minister and preachers this Jesus is easy to preach in our churches today, we condense him into a series of soundbites, a Jesus who fits comfortably with our lifestyle, not too many challenges and with no demands. The contemporary Jesus is a culturally sensitive and convenient, easy to preach.

However when read the gospels we encounter Jesus in a whole new way, consider those who met Him and how they responded.....

Peter asked Jesus to depart from him recognising himself as a sinful man, living amongst sinful people. Peter couldn't bear for Jesus to look at him. The eyes of Jesus pierced into his very soul and every thought was laid bare. Peter could hide nothing from Jesus.

Zachaeus the tax collector knew he needed to amend his life when encountering Jesus.

Thomas fell to his knees worshipping Jesus saying, 'My Lord and my God'.

John the beloved disciple, when he met the resurrected and glorified Jesus at the revelation John says, he fell as a dead man at His feet. Do any of these encounters sound like the contemporary view of Jesus we hear so often? The problem for us in the West, it's so easy to believe in a false image of Jesus, we don't question it too much because the one we've created is a convenient Jesus.

Unlike the contemporary Jesus, the true Jesus didn't come to set up a community hub to solve the world's social problems. Nor did Jesus come to show us how we can live together

in harmony. Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, but He did come to make dead people alive. Those who were estranged from God, dead in their trespasses and sins once dead are now made alive in Christ. We are joined together to form His Church. When the Church awakens to the true Jesus, She becomes a force to be reckoned with. She challenges the very heart of culture and shatters the illusion of our self centred, self obsessed lifestyles and our over sexualised culture. Do you long to know the true Jesus rather than what contemporary culture has made Him? If we want to discover the true Jesus we have to read the gospels through the eyes of those who knew Him. When we do we soon discover a Jesus who was far more radical than we care to admit and far more challenging than we are comfortable to live with. So radical and uncompromising is Jesus the Pharisees and Sadducees plotted in vein to silence him, so radical was He the people rejected Him and cried 'crucify' Him. So radical is Jesus, even the church cant handle Him so have many have re-created a Jesus into a person who is compromising, comfortable and convenient.

Does you Jesus say these sorts of things?

Whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven...

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth...

I did not comet bring peace but a sword...

For I have come to turn a man against his father...

Daughter against her mother...

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;

Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me

If your Jesus doesn't say things like this, you may want to read the gospels for yourself and meet the real Jesus!

Context

In our passage today, Jesus is preparing His disciples to go out ahead of Him. Ensuring His disciples are aware of the challenges ahead and prepared for the opposition and divisions His message will cause. The disciples need to be ready for the trouble that will come. They need to be 100% for Jesus, if not they will be unprepared to face the challenges and in danger of falling away, disheartened, discouraged, doubting and disillusioned. Jesus is not sending out a UN task force to bring peace to the world, but says, '...I did not come to send peace, but a sword' (**Matt 10: 34**).

This statement from our Lord confused me for a long time, but not half as much as the question which troubled me every Christmas, why after 2 Millenia are we no closer to peace of earth? After all, on the night Jesus was laid in a manger the Christmas cards have the words blazoned on them, 'Peace on earth and good will to all men!' And even Isaiah the prophet's words Jesus the Messiah the, 'Prince of peace' (**Isa 9:9**).

Then the penny dropped, Jesus didn't come to bring world peace in His first coming, the angels did not sing peace on earth and good will to all men! Check out what the Scriptures actually says on the night the babe of Bethlehem was laid in the manger, The angels sang, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests' (**Luke 2:14**). Notice it doesn't say Jesus is going to bring world peace but peace will be on those whom His favour rests? This is very different.

Belief in false Jesus!

Unfortunately many people have given up on the Jesus, walking away from the faith because they couldn't find the answers to the questions that troubled them and couldn't reconcile the contemporary Christmas card Jesus with the problems facing the world.

The Scripture today tells us, Jesus did not come to bring peace but a sword! The sword of His Word, the gospel message actually divides! Not only opinion, but also relationships, as close as mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. This sounds shocking, but this is the reality. Those who are not for Jesus are against Him. This divides loyalties.

The peace the angelic beings were rejoicing and singing about was the peace God was making through His Son for mankind who have lost their way, lost in their rebellion and blinded and deceived by sin. It is peace with God which is the Good News, not peace in the world. The Scriptures tell us God will indeed one day make everything new, not just peace on earth, but a new heaven and a new earth. John records the words from heaven as trustworthy and true and says, 'I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God' (**Rev 21:2-3**).

We are warned in Scripture not to love the things of this world for everything is fading and wasting away, we should not hold on to that what can be taken, stolen, lost or rust over that which is eternal. Our love for God must be over everything of the world. John writing to the churches says this, 'Do not love the world or anything in the world, if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (**1 John 2:15**). This leads me on to the most challenging part of Jesus teaching in today's reading.

What the lack of peace and chaos in the world reveals to us clearly is the love for the things of this world over the love of God which causes us to live our lives for the things of the world and not for the love of God. When our hearts reject the creator for the created the world become consumed with, pride, jealousy, greed, coveting, strife lust and seeking power etc etc. When we recognise the problems of the world is actually the problem of the heart we realise this is the root of all our problems. The love of self becomes the prominent focus rather than lovers of God. The church was never meant to solve the problems of the world and bring in peace, however the Church is called to speak the message of hope of peace not peace in the world but peace with God, this brings about true peace for mankind's restlessness, and brings true peace to our soul and spirit.

The picture is much clearer

The preaching of the gospel is important, it's the way Jesus did it and it's the way generations before us have done it. It's the way Jesus taught us to! Preaching reveals the deceitfulness of sin, explains the restlessness in the heart and the emptiness so many feel in their soul which is solely due to a separation from Almighty God. When the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. This is the main reason the gospel is not nor will ever be tolerated by the secular world. The world is offended by the gospel of the cross and the preachers who speak about it. Jesus says the Spirit will convict the world of its sin, judgment and God's righteousness, as a result the world will not nor can it accept the Spirit or the gospel.

So the Church is not on a peace mission but a mission of saving souls. We must remember it is not the gospel which offends, but the deceit of the sin which is being defended, the lie which is being defended! It's not the gospel which offends but the conviction it brings. Preaching the gospel exposes the sin. The Good News when people repent and believe is that peace comes from God which passes all understanding, settles the restless spirit, fills the empty heart and gives light to the soul.

Does God want me to hate my family?

Read again verse 37 which says, 'Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me' (**Matt 10:37**). The short answer to this question is of course not. That would break the fifth Commandment and Jesus does not teach hatred, He is no hate preacher. Jesus is however radical and revolutionary, not promoting hatred as some may think but promoting a radical love that by comparison to loving everything else looks like hate!

Let me explain, Jesus is using a hyperbolic illustration to make a point. Using an extreme example to make sure the point is remembered. If you read further on in the verses we discover Jesus gives examples of a king and a builder who did not complete their tasks for they failed to count the cost. Jesus tells the disciples, count the cost before you begin, otherwise you wont make it. Your love for me must be greater than anything else in the world, if it's not you will fall away because you cant serve two masters.

In some cultures to become a Christian is dangerous and the new believer may face exclusion from their communities and families. There are countries and communities where to be a Christian not only brings about persecution but also risk to your life!

The question Jesus is asking of us is simple, does our love for Him eclipse everything else? Does Jesus comes first? This is not to say that we neglect our children, parents, brothers and sisters etc, but our love for Jesus should make all other loves pale in comparison. So if you have great love for your parents, loving Jesus is not less!

God's call on our life is greater than anything else in this world, whether career, home, location, family ties, etc. This is what Jesus means by taking up your cross to follow Him. A cross is sacrificial. Jesus gave up heaven, His power and authority, taking on the role of a servant and laying down his life for ours. Jesus demonstrating His radical love for us by submitting to the cruel nails, that love makes everything else in the world pale by comparison. Can we give up our life for Him? It's only when we seek Hm with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength do we discover He is the ultimate prize of salvation and truly worth the cost. We will only seek Him wholeheartedly when we grow to love Him supremely above everything else.

Summary

I began by asking how would we describe Jesus? There is a danger in the western culture of "Manufacturing a god of your own: a god who is all mercy, but not just; a god who is all love, but not holy; a god who as a heaven for every body, but a hell for none; a god who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a god is an idol of your own, as truly an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all." **J.C. Ryle** . The more we think and behave like Jesus the more radical our lives will become, as we grow more like Him in every way. This is something we can't do of ourselves, we must allow the Spirit of Christ to dwell in us and let the Holy Spirit shape and mould us. So if we want a deeper relationship with Jesus we must become more like Him. To make anything other than Christ the standard of Christianity is to create a false religion.

Is our Jesus the radical Jesus of the Gospels, who was bold, courageous and straight talking, honest and true. Who laid down His life to save ours and didn't hesitate in thinking about it. The Jesus who strode into the temple overturning the tables because it was misrepresenting God. Which Jesus do we follow? Im more confident following the Jesus of the gospels who is courageous and prepared to lay His life down for me, than the comfortable, humanitarian, environmentalist, comfortable and convenient Jesus we hear so much about today? Let the true Jesus come forth. **Amen.**