

“When Christians Get it Wrong—Actually, When Christians Get it Right!”

Over the last five weeks we have tried to listen to young adults age 16 to 29 who could tell us what they have seen in Christians that has caused them to say "no thanks" to Christianity. 40% of this younger generation has said they are not interested in the church or the Christian faith. They may find Jesus interesting but not Christianity. Typically they like Jesus, but where they struggle is how they have seen Christianity lived out by Christian people. They have actually been repelled by Christians how they've seen Christianity lived out.

We have been trying to listen to these young people and to hear something from them with the idea that that might help us become more authentic Christians, more like Jesus Christ in the world. Today we wrap up this sermon series by asking a simple question: "What does it look like when Christians get right?"

What I want us to know today is that getting it right is not that complicated, but it does take work, it takes deliberate thought and deliberate action. I want us to know that getting it right is about remembering the basics. So today we're going to look at the essential teachings of Jesus. We're going to look at a summary of what Jesus taught as the goal of the Christian life. How to get it right.

You see, Jesus talks about the goal of the Christian life several times in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus said, **“The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these” (Mark 12:28-31).**

Jesus is boiling it down. He's saying, "If you want to get it right; if you want to be a godly person, a follower of mine, you can't say you love God and not love other people." One leads to the other. If you can't love your neighbor then you haven't yet figured out what the love of God looks like.

What does getting it wrong look like? It looks like this: Saying you love God, but not giving a rip about other people. What does getting it right look like? Loving God, loving others, serving the world.

And we've have to be clear that the love that Jesus is talking about is not some sappy, sweet and warm-fuzzy kind of love. Jesus said this about this kind of love in John chapter 15. **“This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:12-13).**

It's too easy to look at Bible passages like that and say, "I would do that, I would lay down my life, I would die for my friends and family." It's easy for us to say we would die for somebody because chances are we will never be asked to do that! So Jesus paints a very clear picture of what love looks like. He tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

Remember it? Man is beaten, robbed, left for dead along the road. Two religious professionals walk by, see him there, but they don't stop to help—they were busy, important professionals. You know, places go, people to see—they can't stop to help some poor sap who should have been more careful! They've got important **religious** things to do—they walk right on by a man in desperate need of help.

But a Samaritan stops. Jews hated Samaritans. This Samaritan stops, gets off his donkey, bandages the injured guy up, puts him on his donkey, takes him to an inn and pays for him to be taken care of. Two religious dudes walk past the injured man, an outsider stops and does everything in his power to help. Jesus says, "That's what love looks like."

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. preached on this the day before he was assassinated. He'd gone to Memphis Tennessee to stand up for the rights of sanitation workers (black and white) and in the evening he led a prayer service and he preached on this text. He said something very interesting in his sermon that night. He said that the religious leaders who walked on by the beaten man asked the wrong question. They asked this question: **What will happen to ME if I stop to help him?** The Samaritan got it right when he asked a different question. **What will happen to HIM if I don't stop to help?**

Which questions are you asking in your life? Are you asking the question regularly: What will happen to me if I stop? Or are you asking: What will happen to them if I don't stop? That's the difference between

getting it wrong and getting it right and that is what love looks like. And it's not about being ready to die for someone, it's about being ready to live for them, to sacrifice for them.

What's interesting is that this kind of compassion and self sacrifice is very compelling to young adults—it's compelling to everybody. When they see an openness, a concern, or care they find it remarkable and they don't forget. This kind of sacrificial love is a powerful witness to the reality of the Christian gospel. You make the gospel real and you incarnate it when you live it out this way.

I want you to hear from some young adults as they share what it looks like when Christians get right. **“When Christians Get it Right”**. Do you hear the sense of admiration these young people have for these Christians they have known, whether it was a grandparent, or a family member, or friend? So, if these young people knew you, would you be one of the Christians they describe as getting it wrong, or would you be one of the people they thought of when they think of Christians who get right? Do they see love in action in you?

There are a lot of Christians who get it right. In fact, I believe that most Christians get right a lot of the time. I believe there are millions of people who are fully devoted to God and to strive with all their heart to love God and to love their neighbor. What does it look like when we get it right. I've shown this before, but it's worth seeing again. (from Youtube: “A Game of Hope”)

When I think of Christians who get right I think of the Christians who started both of our hospitals here in Joplin. They were started in a time when the wealthy had doctors come to their home and hospitals were for the poor. Christians started them so everyone could have health care. They got it right!

Every bed for homeless people that will available to people tonight in Joplin is put out by Christians. As I worked on the Homelessness Study Committee for the Joplin City Council the table was surrounded by Christian organizations and agencies. Christians getting it right!

Almost all the meals provided to the poor in our city today will be provided by Christians who are trying to live out love to people in need.

The fact is that most of the hospitals, and schools, and service agencies in this country were started by Christian people or churches. You volunteer at many of these agencies here in Joplin.

Why do you do that? You do that because you are seeking to live out the love of Christ. In this church you have gone to Nicaragua, Romania, Estonia, Guatemala and beyond to work in areas where they get to see Jesus Christ in action in you. There are so many ways that we do that and it makes me proud of you as a congregation in the way that you live out your faith.

The majority of people went down to help muck out homes and clean out black mold after hurricane Katrina, were Christians living out their faith. One church I know has adopted two orphanages in Russia and has found homes for many of the orphans there. Another church has done work in Africa. And so many churches here in Joplin help with housing, and food, and clothing, and education for so many people, because they're trying to live out their faith. That's what it looks like to live out your faith—to get it right.

In the end, what's most compelling to individual non-religious people is not what we do together in total. That can be a very powerful witness, but when they meet a real-life Christian who is seeking to live out the love of Jesus Christ in tangible ways.

When I think about getting it right, I think about Maril Thompson. I call her my mother figure. We were neighbors for over 10 years, right back here behind the church. She is always taking care of people. For years she's looked in on the elderly neighbors across the street, helped them get around, helped when they've had knee replacements, and needed help taking insulin shots, and you name it. And she does that up and down the street. She's living out love.

There's Mike Robison who, as a social worker, saw kids in crisis, kids going into foster care because their parent had to go into the hospital, or into recovery, or some short term absence. He was elemental in starting Children's Haven so kids can have a safe place to be for a short amount of time, and parents don't have to worry that their family will be split up. He's living out love.

I think of Jim Gant who is down at Watered Gardens cleaning the toilets, and sorting clothes, and talking to people who are in deep need. He's living out love.

I think of my mom and how she and her husband have kind of adopted two mentally disabled adults. They pick them up for church. Have them over for meals. Make sure that they get medical care, and are connected in the community.

I think of one of our staff members down in Kids Day Out. Her name is Faith Mason and she and her small group decided to reach out to one of the most impoverished parts of Joplin. She and a few others do what they call Taco Tuesday. They go to Taco Bell and load up on tacos and go into the area around 2nd and Pearl. They hand out tacos and simply befriend the people that live there. They're not there to judge them or push Jesus on them. They're there long term--been doing it for a year and a half. Just loving the people, allowing them to keep their dignity even if they're making bad decisions. Taco Tuesday is Christians getting it right.

What I see in these people is love, lived out. Love that's deliberate. Love that takes concern to the next level. Love that says, "My life can be interrupted by someone else's need. My schedule can be interrupted by someone else's need. My plans can be interrupted by a crisis in your life, and you can count on me."

I don't know about you, but I am not nearly as interruptible as I need to be. How can you move through your ordinary days with an attitude that says, "Part of how I will love you God, and love others, is to be interruptible, so that I can serve. I will look with different eyes, not always asking, what will happen to me if I stop and help, but what will happen to them if I don't?"

So let me ask you this question once more. **When people look at you, what do they learn about Christianity? What kind of witness do they see?** If people are opting out of Christianity because they don't see Christians living out the love of Jesus, then we find ways to change that. Not to please them, but because that's what Jesus wants us to do.

We have been listening as young people have told us who they honestly see Christians. We have heard them say that we are hypocrites. I don't want to be a hypocrite anymore. We have heard them say that we seem heartless, insensitive to people who are suffering, and actually turn people away from God when we say that it is God who has done all of these terrible things in people's lives. I don't want this to be heartless anymore.

They say we seem arrogant when it comes to talking about people of other faiths. We seem to act as if no one else has any truth and so we make prideful pronouncements with our faith. I don't want us to be the kind of Christians who are arrogant anymore.

They say when it comes to politics, we are sometimes close minded. We don't listen to what other people have to say and we are defensive and threatened by anyone else's opinion that doesn't line up with ours. I don't want to be close minded anymore.

When it comes to their family and friends who are gay and lots of other people, all they see is judgmentalism. I don't want to be judgmental anymore.

I think we are called to strip off all of that stuff and replace it with something else. Paul put it this way, **"Put on your new nature...clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you...Above all, clothe yourselves with love" (Colossians 3:8-10).**

In other words, make sure that the first thing people see when they look at us, is something very different from arrogance and judgmentalism. My hope is that when people see you and when they see me, what they see first is the love of Christ lived out in human flesh. That is my prayer for you and me. And for today, that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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