

<b>Series:</b> Why Church Matters	<b>Reference:</b> 2 Corinthians 5:16-21	<b>Title:</b> It Represents Jesus	<b>Date:</b> 07.28.2019
<b>Website Writeup:</b> We begin a 4-week series on Why Church Matters today. And we begin by seeing that the Church matters because it represents Jesus - and in that, our whole perspective gloriously gets turned on its head!			

## COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

We begin a new short 4-week series today, *Why Church Matters*. What it is & why it's important. **We begin looking at 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, in which we see **Church Matters Because It Represents Jesus...****

*<sup>16</sup> So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ & gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. **And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

**In Scripture our perspective changes towards Jesus.** Paul begins by saying, *“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”*

In the beginning of their interaction with Jesus, the Apostles & Disciples may've regarded Jesus as just another teacher. There were many Rabbi's & Teachers they could've *chosen* to follow. But it's important to remember, they didn't *choose* Him - He *chose* them! This unique rabbi went out of His way to pursue & invite them into relationship with Himself. God's always been pursuing people making the first steps in relationship & reconciliation. *If we know Jesus at all, it's...because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:4-5)*

Before I knew Christ, I began reading the Scriptures in Ecclesiastes which resonated with me. I had tried everything to satisfy that God shaped hole in my life, but only ended in despair. Which is what Ecclesiastes communicates - everything under the sun dissatisfies this internal longing for salvation, purpose & life. Pleasures, relationships & work pursued, devoid of God's reign over them, lead only to bondage or despair in the end. I then began exploring Jesus' words in the Gospel narratives. I was confronted with a person like no other. He saw right through me & I couldn't lie to Him, nor hide from His stare. And although He was unsettling at first, I found His words brought comfort,

life & a challenge like no other even though they convicted me. My view of Jesus changed as I read & began to see Him behind every word of the Scriptures.

It's been attributed to Augustine as saying, "*The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.*" Meaning, the Old Testament's pregnant with & points to the coming Messiah, and in the New Testament, Jesus is revealed as such. I began to see that Truth in the Scriptures which upset my world & changed the trajectory of my life. But, I not only saw Him in the Scriptures, but also in everything! My perspective changed towards Jesus, not as just 'a good teacher', but as God incarnate, Savior of the world & the only one who could fill the longing I experienced & had tried to fill with all the other stuff of life.

The Disciples/Apostles view of Jesus changed as a result of his ministry, teaching, death, resurrection & ascension. This was made full in Pentecost upon receiving the Holy Spirit. The difference in the Disciples after Pentecost is significant - they're suddenly **filled, focused & fearless** - their purpose had become Jesus & His message of reconciliation. They exist no longer for themselves, their pet causes, desires, or even their own safety. Rather, they now exist for the kingdom reign of God in people through Christ's message of reconciliation - God's Glory & God's Mission!

Simon, one of the disciples was a Zealot. A radical religious political group fighting for emancipation from Rome & willing to die for it. Some call them the first terrorists. They began The Great Jewish Revolt of AD 66, ending with them held up in Masada, where almost a 1000 committed suicide, rather than be captured by Rome.

But after Pentecost, all zeal dissipated, or we might say, was redirected in healthy ways towards Jesus & their purpose in Him. Simon saw Christ now as central - the answer to all the worlds ills. His pet political cause was no longer as important as Christ's reign in the hearts of people. His zeal before meeting Jesus divided people, but now his zeal centered on bringing people into unity under Jesus - the only one who can truly establish peace between peoples!

It doesn't go unnoticed, Jesus chose Simon, a Zealot, and Matthew, a Tax Collector - two men who would've been mortal enemies - but in Jesus there was peace among the 12.

Simon's issue was one of justice before Christ, but the Disciples realized, justice is a natural byproduct of the reign of Christ. So, justice as a concept wasn't Simon's central pursuit any longer, rather it was Jesus reign among the nations. Because when people come to & grow in Christ they naturally become just people. In worldly logic, it seems right to fight for justice through the voting booth, or overthrowing what we perceive as unjust systems, but it's never lasting, and not always that easy given the sinfulness of the human heart. Lasting justice only happens when people give their lives to & follow Jesus teachings & commands as outlined by the Scriptures. So justice ceases to be Simon's cause, Jesus does, since only unity under Christ brings true justice.

They knew salvation was found only in Jesus, not in a political or religious system, a better economy, or any other cause. In Christ, the racial, political, religious, economic & dividing walls of even gender, all break down. Because of who Jesus is, they viewed everyone in the light of Him & His kingdom reign.

I liked a quote from Deniqua Washington's talk at the Vineyard conference in Dayton, where she said, *"The wickedness of sins cannot be stronger than the work of Jesus on the cross. Both abused & abuser are invited to the table of God's justice."* That sentiment should be central to the justice movement given if all attention is on the abused, the gospel is all but lost, and we only become hateful.

Because people aren't the enemy as 'those on the other side of issue', rather all humanity has intrinsic value in Christ. Hatred's no longer an option for the Christian. Their perspective changed to seeing only people who need Jesus, because in Him every person finds their ultimate value, fulness & purpose; reconciliation with God. Christ's reign in the human heart creates a just mindset. As a result, faulty systems change. People focused on Jesus naturally begin, through Divine conviction, to act in ways which are just & caring of others.

So, as a result of having proper perspective on Jesus, Paul says, *"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. In other words **We now see all people through Jesus' eyes.** Because of who Jesus is, He changes our perspective on people through His creation standards & purpose of humankind. That's why Matthew 28:18-20 is our ultimate call, where Jesus says, "All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

So we approach life with that end in mind - the kingdom reign of Christ in the lives of people. The Christian may not be perfect & still in process of Spiritual Formation, but we unify under Christ & His Lordship in life. It's not about us, it's about Him. It's why Paul warned Timothy as we saw last week against 'false teachers', because the Gospel message, and its purity, are that important to uphold. *It's why Hebrews 13:7-9 urges us to, <sup>7</sup> Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life & imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup> Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. <sup>9</sup> Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.*

Stick to the message even when the world around you vacillates between competing thoughts. A kingdom-reign-perspective-change of Jesus brings with it a change of perspective towards people & the world. It's why Paul says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (v17)* As a new creation in Christ, we take on Jesus view of life - He has all authority to command & lead in life. He's supreme in all things & upholds all Scriptural teaching, Old & New Testament alike.

*As He said in Matthew 5:17-18, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven & earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.”*

Meaning, when we incise what we don't like from the Scriptures, picking & choosing what we like & don't like on any issue, we're not acting in line with Jesus. We're not regarding Him as supreme in all things. We rob Him of Lordship - putting ourselves in the place of God. And in so doing, we're not living in unity with the Church any longer, but actually work against it. Kicking against the goads, like Jesus said to Paul after knocking Him off his horse. As if He says to us what he said to Paul, “In the crusade of your particular cause, you think you're fighting *for* me, but you're actually fighting *against* me.” Jesus is the Head, the Bridegroom of the Church. He establishes humble leadership to guard & lead in Truth, and Scripture urges us to follow Him in all ways.

Galatians 3:26-29 says this about us...<sup>26</sup>*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith,* <sup>27</sup>*for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.* <sup>28</sup>*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male & female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* <sup>29</sup>*If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

*And 1 Corinthians 12 says, <sup>13</sup>For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body - whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free - and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup>Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

Dressed out in Jesus, clothed in Him, one of many parts representing Jesus as a whole. In that there's no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, black or white, male or female - all those issues & barriers fall away since we're all one in Jesus! Men value Women. Women value Men. Rich value Poor. Poor value Rich. Black values White. White values Black. No cultural, political, or economic boundaries in Jesus!

A naturally diverse group of peoples representing all nations, but diversity isn't our goal - Jesus is! All spiritual children of Abraham equally receiving the promises of God. If we want to fight against racism, or hatred of any people group, then we follow Matthew 28:18-20 bringing people into the light of Christ, teaching them to obey all He's commanded! But there's the rub...Jesus gets to define our purpose, direction, what's life-giving, healthy & good for all - and some simply don't want to submit their life to His direction.

But those of us who do submit, we don't pervert the Gospel to the point our sinful brokenness goes unchallenged. We come to Jesus realizing our sinful brokenness is to be healed & removed by Jesus. Our politics & social status don't trump our biblical worldview - we're all one in Jesus! We don't just *talk* unity, like children playing 'House'. Claiming Jesus, loosely attending church, all the while holding onto various beliefs contrary to the teachings & commands of Jesus. Rather, we sacrifice wrong attitudes, choices & behaviors at the cross & turn to follow Jesus in obedience. Our hearts & minds

get transformed to Jesus standards of true life in all areas, and we live out of that. As Phil Strout says, 'We pivot on God's promises & God's commands.'

We're a diverse people, unified under Christ, learning to obey all He teaches & commands. As we're baptized, we say to the world - I'm one of His, a part of His Body which is the Glorious Church on earth, working in unity with its convictions derived from the Scriptures, not from culture, or even what we may 'feel' is correct in life. Since feelings & worldly philosophies aren't necessarily facts. To trust in our own ability to discern truth without God's lead in all matters of life is dangerous to ourselves & others.

The cultural speak & group-think, which has always governed the world, drives against the life-giving healthy holiness & purity which Scripture direct us towards. The Christian needs to go back to the Scriptures, *realizing as it says in 2 Timothy 3:16 & 17, <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed & is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

*So our perspective on Jesus shifts, understanding as Paul says, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." (v19) As a matter of fact, he says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (v21) In Christ you are justified, made new, reconciled with God, no longer under wrath, and loved children. As a result, our perspective on all people changes, we don't regard them in a worldly manner any longer, but as valued beings needing reconciliation with God as experienced ourselves.*

*We become **Ambassadors of Christ who've been given the ministry of reconciliation.** As it says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ & gave us the ministry of reconciliation." (v18) Jesus modeled ministry. He opened the door for it in His willingness to suffer for the world. He empowered us to this end with the Scriptures, His Church & His Spirit! And He's handed over the ministry of reconciliation to the local church to reach all people groups of the world with Christ's message.*

*We represent Jesus in how we view Him, His Church & other people who need Him still, everything is measured off this. Our unity is based on the authoritative trustworthy Word of God, and the foundational beliefs of the Christian Church as derived from the Scriptures.*

*When we can understand passages like Ephesians 4:4-6, <sup>4</sup> There is one body & one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God & Father of all, who is over all & through all & in all. **Then we can live out our purpose as found in Matthew 28:18-20 to go & make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit teaching them to obey all Jesus commands.***

In conclusion, (1) **the Church Matters Because It Represents Jesus.** (2) **The Scriptures change our perspective on Jesus** as God incarnate, who enters our reality, suffers, dies & rises again to bringing healing & salvation to anyone who might receive it. (3) **Jesus changes our perspective on all people** - all our causes & desires fold into & get reprioritized in Him & His calling on our lives - He becomes central. We're transformed by His person & Word to us (Rm 12:1-2). We're no longer divisive. All barriers fall in Christ as we invite people into the unity of His Body, the Church, where only true peace & unity can be found. (4) In the end, this says to all believers, **We are ambassadors of Christ given the ministry of reconciliation** (*"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."* [v20])

God's still going out of His way to pursue people, using the Church to reconcile the world to Himself in Jesus. Remember, the Disciples didn't pursue Jesus, He pursued them. Some were fishing, tax collecting, sitting under a tree, and Jesus rolled up & said 'Follow me'. You are the righteousness of God due to Jesus' redemptive work on the cross & conquering of the grave. You are treasured, valued, entrusted with the very words of God, and called to the task of speaking & living this out so others can enjoy freedom in Jesus too. So, the question is, like the Disciples after Pentecost, are you **filled, focused & fearless** for Jesus?

I gave you all a 3X5 card 4 Sundays ago to write down people you can be praying for & influencing towards Jesus - I hope you are. Discipling other Christians deeper into his purpose for them, and sharing Jesus with others who don't yet know Him.

If you weren't here for that sermon, go back & listen to July 7<sup>th</sup> online - begin to disciple others & share your faith. Since, your faith will always be dry until you begin to give it away.

People will not naturally pursue Christ, sometimes you have to roll up in their lives while they're working, sitting at a bar, playing with their kids at the park, or standing on the sidewalk talking with neighbors - will you be filled, focused & fearless to fulfill your purpose of bringing the message of reconciliation to them? Not getting caught up in all the hype of current issues, but placing your focus on Jesus' supremacy in life & your call as His Ambassador.

Don't talk to them about border walls, immigrant children, the election, Trump, Joe Biden, or any of your hot button issues or causes - talk to them about life. Be genuinely interested in them. Ask them questions. Offer to pray for them, and even if all you can muster is, "Hey, would you ever consider coming to church with me? I think you'd enjoy it." That's more than most people have done! Do something, do one thing this week towards influencing someone towards Jesus! And I don't just mean praying for others from behind closed doors - do that - but also get out - actually do & say something to somebody about this wonderful Truth of Jesus' salvation & freedom in life!