

Jesus, God's Message to us – Matthew 12:15-21
10th October 2010 at 10:00am

Introduction

Good morning everyone

Does this remind you of anyone?

Boring

They don't drink. They don't dance. They don't swear.

They pretend not to have sex.

They don't know how to have fun, so they're trying to ruin it for the rest of us.

They give away their money and go to church on Sundays as if it was a social club.

Frankly, my golf club is more fun.

And it's cheaper

The whole thing is a crutch

They're stupid and simple-minded. How can anyone really believe that stuff? It's superstitious mumbo-jumbo.

(*'Thank God it's Monday'* p 44)

Ring any bells?

It's a sad fact that those of us who go to church often give Christianity a bad name. It's bad enough that we too easily project a negative image of what it means to be a Christian

But what makes it really serious, is the possibility that we can mislead people about Jesus himself

This morning we're going to start by looking at why it is that Jesus' followers, so often portray a completely wrong image of him

Then we'll look at what a true picture should be – by studying one of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus to be found anywhere in the Bible

And finally we'll look at what needs to happen if we're to close the gap between these two

Got that? Why we can give the wrong picture of Jesus; what's the right picture of Jesus; and how we can close the gap

The wrong picture of Jesus

So, why is it that Jesus' followers often paint such a very different picture to the real Jesus?

Why is it that Jesus' followers can appear to be a huddle of mushy, simple-minded, ineffectual, boring, and hypocritical people, when he is so different?

Well the shameful truth is this: it's mainly because many of his so-called followers don't really know him.

In some cases, they don't even know some of the most basic things about him

They don't know who he really is

They don't know why he came to live on earth

They don't know why he had to die

The shocking fact is that many of his followers don't correctly reflect Jesus or accurately portray his message because they don't know really know him or his character

Many Christians today defend doctrines or ideas about Jesus that they insist are true, even though they've never seriously examined them in the Bible for themselves
They're merely passing on what they've learned from others.

In most cases it's the blind leading the blind

You know it's no wonder that there seem to be fewer and fewer Christians in the so-called Christian West, if no one here has any idea who Jesus really is...
If even some of his own followers don't know the most basic things about him!

Let me give you a statement about Jesus and I want you to decide whether it's true or not

Here's the statement: *Jesus came to earth to give us a moral code to live by, so that we can get to heaven.*

Is this a correct statement about Jesus, do you think? Is it?

No it isn't. It's wrong! Wrong!

The idea that Jesus came to earth to show us how to live – to give us a moral code to live by, so that we can get to heaven, is an example of a basic but a very common misconception about Jesus.

It's a common misconception even among churchgoers and I suspect that there'll be people here in church this morning who will still believe that statement. Despite what I've just said!

But it's absolutely not true

Jesus didn't come so that we could work our way to heaven – he came to give us a free pass to heaven

Jesus has done all the work that's necessary on that cross. We have nothing left to do.

In any case, even if we want to work our way to heaven, we can't do it

You see trying to get to heaven under our own steam is a bit like trying to swim the Atlantic Ocean.

It's crazy and impossible but that's effectively what every religion except Christianity is telling their followers to do!

They're telling them that to get to heaven, that to please God, they need to do better by working harder at following the rules of their particular religion

Imagine the scene:

*The very best contenders from every faith lined up there on a beach in Cornwall, limbering up, getting those religious muscles warmed up
And then off they go, trying to swim to the US*

*It's not going to work is it?
No one's going to make it
The first people would probably drop out after only a few miles
Maybe some people would make ten miles
A few maybe twenty or thirty
But no one's get to get all the way across*

Understand this: just as no one can swim across the Atlantic, none of us, no one, not a single person can get anywhere near heaven by their own efforts....

*But the Christian view is totally different
Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, what happens is this:
God reaches over from the far side, he reaches all the way across to that beach in Cornwall, and he says, "Here take my hand and I'll carry you across in my arms. Because of what my son, Jesus, has done for you, there's absolutely nothing that you need to do, except to accept my offer and rest in my arms*

Unlike other religions Christianity isn't about trying harder, it's about a relationship!

You see, Jesus didn't come to bring a message, Jesus was the message.
Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1)
Jesus doesn't point to anyone else. He says: "Come to me" (Matthew 11:28)
"I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)

If we have a wrong picture of Jesus
If we don't understand who he is and what he's done for us
We're in danger of denying ourselves the most satisfying and lasting relationship that we can ever have

The right picture of Jesus

We've seen a wrong picture of Jesus. Now let's look at a right one.

To do this – to see what he's really like, we're going to have a look at one of the most beautiful descriptions of Jesus anywhere in the Bible. You might want to follow this in your pew Bibles on page 977:

¹⁸*"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.*

¹⁹*He will not quarrel or cry out; no-one will hear his voice in the streets.*

²⁰*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.*

²¹*In his name the nations will put their hope."*

You know it's a stunning indictment of the modern world, that a brief 2700 year old description of Jesus, written by the prophet Isaiah approximately 700 years before Jesus was born, gives a more accurate picture of Jesus than many of his followers today understand!

These few verses in Mathew 12, give us five of the most outstanding characteristics of Jesus the Servant, whom the world despises but whom God dearly loves.

Let's do a short study of them

Firstly, Jesus carried out God's plan (12:15-17; 18c)

Jesus made it his first priority to fulfil God's will. He said: *"I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me"* (John 6:38)

In our passage, Jesus demonstrates this by healing the sick (v15); by telling those he healed not to tell others who he was, because the time was not yet right (v16); and proclaiming God's message of justice and deliverance from sin for the whole world (v18).

Secondly, Jesus was commended by the Father (12:18a)

Jesus Christ is God's perfect servant. Verse 18, tells us that he is loved by God, who delights in him.

The Greek word used for servant here (*Pais*), is not the usual word for "servant" and is often translated "son." In secular Greek it was used of an especially intimate servant who was trusted and loved like a son.

Verse 18 also says that Jesus was specifically chosen.

Jesus is the Father's beloved as was seen at his Baptism and the Transfiguration (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5) and he pleased God in every way

Thirdly, Jesus was commissioned by the Holy Spirit (12:18b c.f. Luke 4:18-21)

We see in verse 18, that God put his Spirit on him. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to live a sinless life.

We must never forget that Jesus, as well as being divine, was fully human

He experienced hunger and thirst – just as we do

He became tired and felt pain and sorrow – just as we do

He was tempted – just as we are

And yet he was absolutely sinless – which of course we're not! (c.f. Hebrews 4:15)

Fourthly, Jesus was confident in his calling (12:19-20)

We can see this from verses 19 and 20. Jesus' confidence is seen in his approach:

He doesn't trample those who are weak and poor in spirit. And he won't put out a flickering candle.

A few years ago at a Men's Ashburnham weekend, a group of us were on our way for an early morning swim in the lake, when Gid Cox spotted an extinct fire from the night before. Being Gid he couldn't resist investigating further! He went over to it and felt the very faintest evidence of residual heat. Immediately, all thoughts of the swim were gone and he set about reviving the fire. Sometime later, as the rest of us returned from our swim, there

were the first signs of flickering flames and warming heat. Gid had been able to see life where there appeared to be none.

Jesus sees the same potential for life in us.

Where the world sees people whose lives are broken and worn out, as simply battered reeds or smouldering wicks, ready to be thrown out and replaced, Jesus sees people who need loving and bringing back to life.

Fifthly and finally, Jesus will complete his victory over sin and Satan (12:20b-21)

Verses 20 and 21 say that Jesus will *“lead justice to victory and in his name the nations will put their hope”*

It’s confidence in the knowledge that Jesus has completed his work on earth, and will come back again at the end of history, that gives us hope in a world that is broken and bruised by injustice and pain.

Remember those Chilean miners who’ve been trapped underground for more than 65 days? No expense or effort is being spared to rescue them. In the same way Jesus will never give up on us. Never.

Jesus is God’s personal message of hope to us

But it’s only when we know him personally that we can grasp the riches that he offers us through his grace

Our stunning little passage this morning shows us Jesus as he really is.

He’s God’s divine and faithful servant, who carried out God’s plan, was commended by the Father and commissioned by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was confident in his calling and he’ll complete his victory over sin and Satan

Closing the gap

So we’ve seen a wrong picture of Jesus, and we’ve seen a right picture of Jesus

The problem of course is that there’s a massive gap between them

But before I suggest what we should do about this, let me explain why this gap is so serious And why closing it really does matter

The first and most serious reason why closing it really matters is this: it’s because if we’ve got a distorted picture of Jesus, we’ve probably got a distorted understanding of the gospel If we’re still trying to swim across the Atlantic then we’ve got something seriously wrong

But there are other reasons why closing it really matters:

If we don’t have a true picture of Jesus, we won’t be won’t be effective in sharing the gospel in our Lewes harvest field

And we won’t have the quality of life, including a sense of fulfilment, of peace, and of self-worth that we could have

The truth is that none of us has a distortion-free picture of Jesus; none of us can sit back in comfort here! So here are five very practical things we can do to help remedy the situation

Firstly, if you're not absolutely sure that you've got the right picture of Jesus, please come and speak to Steve or David or myself.

Alternatively go on one of our regular Alpha courses. They're a great way of finding out about the Christian faith in general, and Jesus in particular, in relaxed and friendly surroundings.

Secondly, get to know Jesus by reading about him. Starting reading the Bible regularly. Do use a good set of Bible Reading notes such as Every Day with Jesus, or Scripture Union ones. Again don't be afraid to seek out help if you need it

Thirdly, start to enjoy Jesus' company. Chat to him through the day. Talk to him in prayer. Tell him what's going well. Tell him where you're hurting. Share your future plans with him and ask him for his guidance on them.

Fourthly, consider joining a Home Group, if you're not already in one. It's a really good place to learn more about Jesus and should be a lot of fun. Come and see me and I'll find a group that's just right for you

Finally, make sure that your behaviour increasingly takes on the character of your Lord Jesus. Remember that nothing reveals our true self more than the way we treat others!

A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

A Christian Scientist came along and said: "You only think that you're in a pit".

A Pharisee said: "Only bad people fall into a pit".

A Fundamentalist said: "You deserve your pit".

A tax inspector asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

A Charismatic said: "Just confess that you're not in a pit".

An Optimist said: "Things could be worse".

A Pessimist said: "Things will get worse!"

Jesus, seeing the man, simply took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

This week will we treat people with kindness and thoughtfulness?

Or will we treat them with irritation, sarcasm and even contempt?

This week let's remember how Jesus treated those broken reeds and smouldering wicks and let's do the same

This week let's close that gap!

Conclusion

So let's recap

This morning we've seen that Jesus didn't come to bring a message, he was the message. Jesus is God's message to us and it's really important that we have a true picture of him

By not knowing Jesus properly

By not understanding that Jesus can meet all our deepest needs
And instead believing that we can in some way work, or earn, our way to heaven, we don't
only deny the power of the gospel in our own lives but just as seriously we can mislead
others too.

It really is all about Jesus!

*Apparently today will be one of the busiest days in this year's wedding calendar. Many
couples are hoping today's date of 10/10/10 will bring them luck.*

*One of the joys of being a Christian is that we've absolutely no need to rely on luck
whatsoever. Instead we can totally rely totally on Jesus.*

So your homework this week is simply this: work on getting to know Jesus better

Spend quality time with him

Read your Bible

Talk to him in prayer

And talk to other people about him

And don't forget to enjoy him. Jesus isn't a kill-joy!

Jesus came to give us life – real life – life in all its fullness (c.f. John 10:10)

Remember that he went to parties and drank wine

Jesus: mushy, simple-minded, ineffectual, boring, hypocritical?

I don't think so....

This week let's go out determined to show-case the real Jesus through the way we live our
lives and interact with others

And let's close that gap

Prayer