



Sunday, November 26, 2023
Seven churches wrap up

We have just successfully taken the past 8 weeks to walk through the 7 messages that Jesus had to 7 specific churches in the first century. Now, some of these messages were encouraging while others were challenging and still others were quite tragic. However, in all of these messages we learned that this was Jesus' way of bringing correction and discipline to the churches, not judgement. That these messages were an expression of His great love for them as He was giving them opportunity to course-correct. And in all of these, the general understanding is that the encouragements and the challenges to these 7 churches were not just for these specific churches, but for the overall church as well. It's no doubt that - like each of the 7 churches - we too are living in a broken society where sin is celebrated and truth is relative. For us, this has perhaps been one of the most challenging seasons that our generation has faced to date. But the reality is that Jesus Christ is our Source and has been and will continue to be the well that we draw all of our strength from.

And so today, after preaching each one of these messages, I've taken some time to prayerfully consider this next most vital question: What is Jesus now saying to us? So, as I've prayerfully considered the challenges that each of these churches faced, I've noticed that although there might be a lot of similarities between us and them in certain areas, there are three specific ones that stand out to me, especially for the current season that we at Kingsview find ourselves in.

1.*

The first thing that all of these churches were called to back then is the same thing that we are called to today: discipleship. Why? Because it's in the Bible. You've heard me say it before and I'll say it again, after the resurrection, one of the last things that Jesus said to His disciples before He

ascended back to the Father was to go into the world and make disciples. It's recorded in two verses:

Matthew 28:19-20

'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen.'

Mark 16:15

'And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'

This message is so important, that like many other churches, we have built it into the vision and mission statement of this church:

VISION: Our vision is to be a community led by the Holy Spirit, where people feel at home, find healing from past and present hurts, and are trained, equipped and released to make disciples by using the gifts given to them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

MISSION: Our mission is to raise disciples who raise disciples to impact their community, city, and the world for the cause of Christ.

The key in discipleship focuses on the process involved in moving people from simply believers of Jesus Christ to becoming followers of Jesus Christ. And we see a clear example of this through an obscure passage in the book of Acts:

Acts 16:1 says:

'Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.'

Although this is a seemingly random verse about the introductions of Timothy's family, this is actually a significant passage, because in it, we see the clear distinction made for believers in Jesus Christ and followers of Jesus Christ.

Notice that Timothy here is identified as a disciple. This is the Greek word 'Mathetes' which means, 'one who follows one's teachings - similar to what a pupil or student would do with a teacher.' Next we see Timothy's mother identified as a believer. This is the Greek word, 'Pistos' which simply

means, 'one who trusts in God's promises.'

It is clearly evident in this verse that both Timothy and his mother love Jesus. There is no question about that. However, the delineation between one being labeled as a believer and the other a disciple is worth noting because it shows us that there is actually process involved in faith and discipleship that starts with belief and ideally moves into following.

I remember being a kid in grade 2 or 3 and I was swinging on the swings and my friend was swinging with me and I was telling him about Jesus and if memory serves me correctly, I remember leading him to the lord and praying with him. It was amazing, and I basically walked away and said I had to go home for lunch or something like that. I figured that was it. He was saved and he didn't need anything else - he's good to go. Years later as my faith matured, I realized that process is key. That belief in Jesus - as represented by Timothy's mother - is only the beginning of the faith journey. That belief in Jesus Christ must move into relationship with Jesus Christ as we then choose to follow Him.

In theology language we actually use two terms for this process. They are justification and sanctification. Justification is the initial point of belief into the faith journey through salvation. And sanctification then is the life-long process of living out your salvation.

(See picture below)

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The dot represents the point of belief and the line is how that belief then informs the decisions you make and the life you live.

Example: becoming a father. The point is the moment I became a dad but that wasn't the be all / end all. From that point forward being a father informed every decision I would make and how I would live my life moving forward. I could not just celebrate the fact that I was now a dad but live like I was living before.

It's the same with Christianity. Once we become Christians, the Bible says that it is as if we are born again and are a new creation. This is a new state of being for us and now informs how we live our lives moving forward. This is why it is completely normal that when someone gets saved, their friends, family or co-workers say that they notice a change for the positive, because once you realize the transformative power of believing in Jesus, it informs every decision you make from that point forward and moves you into a realm of following Him.

Because when you truly believe something it will inevitably change you and inform how you live your life.

We often see this in sports language where believers might wear a Hamilton tie cats hat here and there and no one knows whether they are a fan or they were just gifted the hat or they won that in a case of beer. Who knows right? But true fans have spent money on their gear and have sacrificed for it. They are clothed head to toe, not only with a hat, but with a signed jersey, they have the facepaint, the embroidered socks and gloves, the towels with stitched logos on front and back and so much more. So much so that even if the tiecats aren't in the grey cup final, they'll still show up to church on grey cup sunday all decked out in their tie-cat gear! Now that is a fan!

And so, in similar fashion, a disciple of Jesus is one who puts on the team Jesus jersey and is clothed head to toe with the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - as they now follow Jesus by living their lives for Him: which is also marked by disciplines such as: reading His Word, rejecting sinful behaviour, repenting of sinful behaviour, praying, worshipping, serving, becoming a regular part of the church, living lives of self-sacrifice not self-indulgence, loving others as yourself, standing for truth, and the list goes on and on.... etc

But you see, far too many Christians only have a Jesus hat that they put on and take off in the context of their choosing. They put it on and take it off when they feel like it. They're not willing to move from believing in Jesus to following Jesus. And what I believe the Lord is saying to His church today is that the church needs more followers of Jesus Christ. Men and women of God, who are willing to stand for truth. Men and women of God, who are willing to put on the team Jesus jersey and not take it off.

Why?? Because ultimately we are called to let others know about the love of Jesus so that they too will have opportunity to accept the love and life that He offers.

You see, over the next 5-7 years the city of Hamilton/Stoney Creek has projected 80,000 homes to be built in the Elfrida and surrounding area. And it's already happening full steam ahead. Let's just pretend that each home has 2 occupants. That's 160,000 people. It's like a whole new city within a city filled with people that need to know about Jesus.

Every. Single. One of them.

Seems like a lot doesn't it. Pretty overwhelming too right? Like....even if we were able to have 1% of those people where would we put 1600 addition people? We can't afford a new building, or an addition or build/buy somewhere.....it's the kind of thing that keeps a pastor up at night.....

You know what else sounds overwhelming too?

How about walking on water, but Peter stepped out of the boat and did it, didn't he? How about facing a Philistine giant with nothing but a sling and 5 stones instead of the armour of a warrior, but a shepherd boy named David did just that and struck that giant down dead. How about being told to walk around a city seven times, and instead of drawing your sword to declare battle, you're supposed to blow a horn and trust that the city walls would fall? But you know who did it? Joshua. And you know what happened? The walls fell and Joshua moved in and conquered Jericho. You know what else is overwhelming??? What about having the Lord tell you to overtake one of the most wicked armies ever and then telling you that the 300,000 warriors that you have aren't good enough so he whittles it down to 300 and then tells you to light some torches and bang some pots together to get the job done. Well.....Gideon took up the challenge and lo and behold it worked and those 300 took out the entire army.

They didn't get there by simply sitting in their chairs and 'believing' it could be done. They got up, took steps of faith and followed Jesus. And guess what, Jesus showed up and boy did He ever! Some of us here are so afraid of following Jesus, because we don't want to let go of what we know. But it is time to recognize the salvation that He has given you and turn your heart to Him and follow Him with every step you take. Every word you speak. Some of you have been that closet Jesus fan for far too long now. You have the jersey but you only wear it at home or in your basement or at church. The Jesus jersey is meant to be worn day in and day out as it literally informs every decision we make and every action we take!

For you and all of us, Proverbs 3:6 says:

'In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.'

It's time to grow, it's time to mature in your faith. It's time to follow Jesus like you've never followed Him before.

2.**

The second thing that I feel the Lord saying to us is in regards to the importance of His Word.

There is one verse that specifically comes to mind:

Joshua 1:8 says,

'This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.'

His Word is truth and sometimes His truth can be difficult to understand and even embrace because it doesn't line up with our culture or societal norms. But we cannot let culture or society dictate truth. The Word of God is our foundation and we align ourselves with Him because He alone is the foundation for truth.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ is our cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:7b teaches us that:

*"The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,"*

In construction, cornerstones are specific stones that set the alignment for every other stone to follow. If the cornerstone is off even a fraction, then every other stone is affected. And because Jesus is our cornerstone, and His teachings and instructions set the standard by which we are to live, our role then is to fall in line with Him and His Word. So in situations where His teachings are difficult to follow because the world is trying to convince us otherwise, we need to understand that the standard will not...can not...and is not going to change. The stones in the building NEVER dictate direction to the cornerstone. It is only the cornerstone that sets the alignment. The Cornerstone doesn't change. We do. Jesus sets the standard and we change our way of living in order to align with Him.

3.***

Do not leave your first Love.

The very first message to the very first church was in Ephesus where Jesus said, you are doing all of the right things, saying all of the right words performing all of the right actions, but you have left your first love. In essence, they were just going through the motions. There was no love in their heart for the lost, just duty and obligation. There was no love in their heart for the word anymore, just reciting phrases and memorizing scriptures. There was no love in their heart in their preaching, it was just oration and repetition. And so Jesus warned them that everything that they were doing

looked great on the outside, but it was doomed to fail because it wasn't right on the inside.

You see, maintaining a healthy relationship with Jesus is everything. Because everything is birthed out of that.

I think the best example I can think of is that of Mary and Martha. They're sisters and Jesus came to their house for a visit and both operated in very different manners. Martha was busy with serving and preparations. While these tasks were essential and well-intentioned, they became a source of distraction for her thus preventing her from focusing on Jesus, who was literally right in front of her. Mary, on the other hand sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to every word coming out of His mouth. When Martha complained about Mary not helping, Jesus responded, 'Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her' (Luke 10:42).

Mary knew the value of relationship with Jesus. There will always be work to do, but when Jesus is in your midst, sit down and listen to Him. You make time and space in the midst of busyness to sit in His presence and allow His love to flow over you.

Example: pause app

And so the reminder is to keep the main thing the main thing - which is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and mind. And out of that, we can then love our neighbour. But be very careful that you don't let loving your neighbour take priority over loving your God. Because if it does, then that's akin to idol worship, and we all know that we are to worship no other gods, but God.

This is how serious Jesus takes this. It's not just a little whoopsie, let me fix that kind of a deal. It's actually a call to 'repent and return' to your first love.

You see, whether you realize it or not, we are no longer living in a Christian nation and haven't been for quite some time. Many would say that Christianity has been rejected by our country, but the more I observe what is happening all around us, the more I would say that it's not only being rejected, but it is becoming more and more offensive to our country. Similar to what was happening in the 7 churches of the Revelation. It's a reminder to us today that our love for Christ has to be the foundation or we will not be able to stand. So it is all the more reason to not put our heads down and busy ourselves with the work of the Kingdom. Instead we need to pull our heads up and recognize that we need to be strong and the only place we can gain strength is in the waiting, loving arms

of Jesus. For behold He stands and knocks at the door of our hearts, waiting for all who answer to come in and dine with Him - to rest in Him. To gain their strength in Him and then to use that strength to change the world for Him!

3 points to consider as we close:

1. Move from belief to follow
2. Stand for truth by aligning ourselves with Christ
3. Fall in love with Jesus - every day

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