

TALKING ABOUT JESUS PT 1.

Much of this message is based on a book called Good Faith by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons and the research it contains.

When we think of extremism we think of mass shootings and bombings. But a recent survey by Barna group in America shows something remarkable. They surveyed thousands of US adults and over 1000 faith leaders Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, Jewish rabbi, Muslim imam. One of its key findings is that Christians are considered irrelevant and extreme. (I realize that American scene is very different from NZ.) But in many ways the results are more remarkable because US has had in many places a stronger Christian heritage than NZ.

Today I want to look at why it is so difficult to talk about Jesus. Why are Christians no longer sharing their faith. Why do we see so few people coming to faith today? Some of you will remember hearing the message of sin, and repentance, and coming to faith, and yet that same message today seems to have no effect.

Romans 1:16-17 Pastors preach on this verse to try to motivate people to be talking about Jesus. All the Christians feel guilty but actually, nothing changes.

Christianity is irrelevant. Where does this perception come from?

1. Christian leaders are not credible anymore when it comes to the public sphere.
2. People can live a good life without Christianity. In addition, the life of a Christian does not look much different or better than they are living. So why not go for the good life without all the rules.
3. Many Christian ideas feel like normal life. Much of what we enjoy today was birthed and shaped out of Christianity. Schools, universities, hospitals, hospices, voting rights for woman, science art. All these things can be good, but people now can think. Well what more does Christianity have to offer. We have adopted all these good ideas.
4. Church based charities are irrelevant. There is an increasing push to end tax rebates for donations to religious organizations and even to tax the income of donations to churches. People often fail to realize how much work churches and trusts actually do in the community.
5. Christianity is irrelevant to real life. Christianity can be a private belief system but it has nothing to say to the wider world. It has no impact on society, or morals, or politics, or community services.

We know as Christians that we are to share our faith with others. However, what we need to realize is that for many in society, the message of Jesus seems totally irrelevant. The rule is do what you want as long as you don't hurt anyone. The gospel is not irrelevant but many believe it is.

Christianity is Extremist The second major finding was the Christianity was seen as extreme. The Survey listed things that people do for religious reasons. The % are for those who said these action are very or somewhat extreme.

- 93% using religion to justify violence
- 60% attempting to convert others to their faith.
(but 83% of those with no faith)
- 52% believing same sex relationships wrong
- 51% protesting policies that conflict with their religion
- 42% leaving a good job to work overseas mission field

45% of all those no faith said Christianity is extremist. Note that evangelism is considered extreme by 83%. That is talking about Jesus is an example of religious extremism. While we associate religious extremism with violence and blowing things up, most of society sees just talking about our faith as extreme.

Then they asked people about how difficult it would be to have a conversation with other minority groups. Most said they would struggle to have a conversation with a Muslim, a Mormon, an atheist, and evangelical and or someone from the LGBT community. The no faith segment said they would struggle most to talk to an evangelical. The evangelicals said they would struggle most to talk to a Muslim or the LGBT community. So this creates a major problem. We are commanded to go and make disciples and that means we have to talk to people. But we feel this apprehension in talking to people who are different from ourselves. We don't like talking to people who disagree with us.

Most people it seems, not just Christian, find it hard to talk to anyone who is not part of their group. So we have in society is a sort of consensus that you can believe what you want, as long as you keep it too yourself, don't hold it too tightly and and it does not impact on others in any way. Because no one likes to talk to others who will disagree with them.

Increasing Tension Results showed Christians feel misunderstood, marginalized, silenced, afraid to speak up, afraid to look stupid. They are worried about negative social media, or hostile traditional media. This is especially so for the next generation. Millennial's worry about the negative perception of their peers and are increasing sceptical about the Bible. Older boomers are wondering about their kids. Pastors are feeling the tension of declining population, of trying to influence people immersed in media culture. And low commitment levels. Churches are being pulled apart as they try to grapple with how to respond to the LGBT issues. Christians feel tension from media that is increasingly hostile.

There is an awareness that it is increasingly hard to live our your Christian faith. Christians have gone from being respected, to be tolerated, and now to be considered



harmful New common centre of society can be summed up like this.

1. To find yourself look in
2. People should not criticize others life choices
3. To be fulfilled in life, pursue what you desire the most
4. Enjoying yourself is the highest goal in life
5. People can believe what they want so long as those beliefs don't affect society
6. Any kind of sexual expression between consenting adults is OK

This is in contrast to God's moral order.

1. To find yourself, discover the truth outside of yourself in Jesus
2. Loving others does not always mean staying silent
3. Fulfilment is found in giving of ourselves to bless others
4. The highest goal in life is to glorify God.
5. God gives people freedom to believe what they want, but those beliefs always affect society
6. God designed boundaries for sex so that humans could flourish.

One of the challenges is that the world's moral code has made its way into the church. So now, worship is about how I feel, and church is about what I get from it. The church has accepted the world's sexual code. We should keep our faith to ourselves. If you turn up to church then you are being faithful, but do not try to influence the world around you. God wants you to have the very best, and wants to bless you financially and physically. Can you see how the church has been captured by the moral code of our culture?

It is not easy living in a way that is counter culture. We are saturated with a media that is continually reinforcing the world's moral code of desire and craving for that pleasure, that experience, that fulfilment. But if the church embraces the world's code, then what do we have to offer? We will have nothing unless people can see something very different.

This totally contrasting world view can make it seem that we are on the wrong side of history. But history also put things into perspective. This competition for world views is not a new one. 100 years before Jesus and Roman philosopher named Lucretius wrote a very long poem arguing the pleasure was the ultimate purpose of life. Avoid pain, and pursue pleasure in whatever way you can.

Pleasure is not bad. We are to enjoy this world. But if we make it our ultimate goal, we are making ourselves god. This is why we are finding ourselves on the outer with our culture. But now when as Christians we say that pleasure and self fulfilment are destructive, then we are not just seen as irrelevant or extreme. Now it is evil. If we try to stand in the way of a persons ultimate purpose in life of self fulfilment then Christianity is evil. We are to sit down, shut up and keep our faith to ourselves.

100 years later along comes Jesus. In addition, he taught something radically different. God's purpose for human life is renewal. Redemption, restoration, recreation. We are not to avoid pain or suffering but to endure them because God is using those experiences to renew us and to bless others.

Two competing views of life. One view leads to life. One view leads to death. Sometimes it might feel as if the Christian faith is on the wrong side of history. But over the centuries the core morals and concepts of faith have stood the test, as all kinds of competing philosophies comes along. We need to remember this. WE might think we are losing the battle, but history shows that God's church is not been defeated, and actually the church and the kingdom is growing.

We are called to challenge this age of self fulfilment and pleasure seeking. That means we have to love our neighbour enough to be able to offer a different way. Most Christians say they have no non-Christin friends. That suggests we have so separated from the world, we are of no use. We have to believe the Jesus truly is the answer for this world. Do we truly believe the gospel is good news? I believe many Christians have lost all confidence in the gospel, and the power of God to bring change. In addition, we have to figure out how to live with grace in a world that is hostile. The number one perception of Christians is that we are judgemental and against things. We have to learn to live as if we are in exile. We have to live like Daniel, who figured out how to live in Babylon, and yet maintain his faith.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTuoYdx0A2A&list=PLqSLKDPUBSeO7Yc32tClKgecXalbAdQfT&index=4>

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Do you agree with the 2 main points of the Barna survey? Would the results be the same in NZ?
- The survey found that people find it difficult to talk to people who have very different views from their own. Discuss this.
- Where can you see the influence of new moral code of society on yourself? On church? How do we counter this?
- Do you find it hard to talk about Jesus with others? Why?
- Why is it that most Christians have so few non Christian friends? How do we solve this issue?
- Do you think Christians have lost confidence in the power of the gospel? Discuss Raki's testimony.
- Christians are viewed by many as judgemental, yet we are called to live graciously. Is the view of many justified. What does living graciously mean in a hostile world?
- Spend some time praying for those you know, and are in close proximity to, who do not know Jesus



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