

TALKING ABOUT JESUS PT 3.

Next 3 weeks I want to explore more about our posture , how we relate to a hostile world. How do we live a good faith. A good faith is a faith that helps the world be as God intended it to be. A good faith means what we believe and what we say and what we do are integrated. What do we mean by good faith?

Good is a bit of Biblical theme; Creation was described as good. Orderly, abundant, generous, beautiful, life , relationships. In the New Testament, there is a theme as Christians we are to be agents of good.

Jesus Matthew 5:16

Paul Romans 12:2, 8:28, 14:7, Gal 5:22-23,6:9, Eph 2:10

Peter 1 Peter 2:9

James James 3:13

Goodness is for the benefit of others. So a good faith is a faith that is being a good influence in the world. Agents of God redemptive plan. A good faith means helping the world, people live in order, abundance, generosity, beautiful, flourishing life and relationships as God intended.

Yet increasingly we see that Christians are not seen as good. Our faith is seen as toxic. Why is that? 4 ways we can relate to the world around us.

Assimilate is when we embrace the claims of the culture we live in. We just fit into the culture.

Dominate is when Christians try to impose their morality on the culture around them. As society has moved away from Christians standards, Christians have lashed out and tried to re dominate themselves. This has not gone down well.

Withdraw. This would involve total withdraw to a commune

Accommodate Is where we are confident enough to live a very different way, and hold different beliefs, but support the right of every person to live by what they believe. We accommodate other view points, even when they hold a very different view.

Suggest 3 elements that make our faith good.

Good faith starts with loving God and loving others

Good faith believes the Bible, and God's plan for the world

Good faith is lived out in our day to day lives.

Good faith comes as we love well

1. We celebrate all that is good

We are very good at pointing out what is bad. We are against lots of things but we are not known for what we are for. Non-Christians consider Christians the most judgemental people they know.

We should be good at celebrating all that is good. If it is orderly, right, abundant, generous, beautiful we should be able to spot it a mile off. But we have this attitude that we should only celebrate things that are Christian. We should only celebrate good works if they lead someone coming to faith. We have a poor understanding of common grace.

Chuck Colson wrote a great book a few years ago called *How Now Shall We Live*. Here is what he said (paraphrased) about common grace.

Evangelism and renewal are both ordained by God for us. God exercises his sovereignty in two ways. Saving grace and common grace. We understand saving grace – it is how we come to faith as we understand what God has done for us on the cross. We can be agents of saving grace as we share our story and God story.

He goes on to say: Few of us understand common grace, which is how God sustains creation, and holds back sin and evil that threat to overwhelm the world. We are also agents of God's common grace when we sustain his creation, build families and communities, pursue science and create works of art, and bring healing from the result of the fall.

The first way we can love well is by calling out anything is good. Ultimately, all that is good comes from God anyway. There is much good in films, art, music, organization, people that is good. If it good , it is a foretaste of the kingdom. It is as God intended things to be. Goodness is a gift from God says James 1:17. The impact of food for a person who is hungry is not dependant on the motivation of the person who gives it. But if we do good to try to earn God's favour or to win the praise of others, then we are getting it wrong. Good works should cause others to praise God, not us. We do good works because of Jesus love for us.

2. Make space for those who have different views

This is where we come into conflict with how tolerance is seen today. True tolerance is the ability to acknowledge and permit opinions that we don't agree with. True tolerance means we live with people and ideas that we find appalling. Fake tolerance has become the new norm. We will tolerate you as long as your opinion falls within the range of what we deem acceptable. If you diverge from this you are a bigot and evil. If we are to be tolerant, we need to defend the rights of Muslims to have a mosque, and for the gay community to publically express pride in their identity. If we are to truly love people, we need to defend the rights of people to live by what they believe.

Making space for those with different views requires a humility that as Christians we have not always shown. We have been quick to shoot down other views as not being Biblical, but we have failed to truly listen.

Remember the 3 questions I have taught you over the last 5 years. When someone speaks something that you disagree with, ask What do you mean? Listen first. What lead you to that conclusion? Maybe it comes from pain. If the conclusion has come out of pain, then no about of logical



argument is going to make any difference. Then lastly, have you ever considered?

What is happening is the world is becoming more and more divided. Bill Clinton once said we are becoming less racist, we are less homophobic. But we have one remaining bigotry. We don't want to be around anybody who disagrees with us. Social media reinforces this. We get in a little bubble of people who agree with us. And if we find people who disagree we cut them off.

As Christians we are not called to a standard of tolerance. (true tolerance, not fake one) That is the lowest bar. We are called to love our neighbour even when we vehemently disagree with their politics, or racist views or whatever. We are called to love not just our neighbour but our enemy. We are called to walk alongside people who hold radically different view from ourselves and we are to love them. That means listening, respecting their right to a different view, defending their right to a different view.

3. Truly see people

We love people when we see each person as a person created in the image of God, loved by God and having a hunger in their hearts. This is truly seeing people. But often it is not how we see people. We tend to label people and see them through a lens. The person is a Muslim. We then impose on them our image of what a Muslim is like.. That person is disabled. Or unemployed or whatever. We label people by what they do, and what kind of car they drive and where they take their holidays.

We don't truly see people for who they are. We see an image that they are projecting. Alternatively, we see the image that we project on them. Jesus saw people. He saw Zacchaeus. To everyone else he was a despised man, a hated traitor. To Jesus he was someone who was lonely and hungry for something more. Jesus saw the woman at the well. To everyone in the village she was the immoral woman. But Jesus saw a woman who was thirsty for wholeness. Jesus saw the woman who anointed his feet with oil. He didn't see someone who was socially embarrassing him, or someone who was a prostitute. He saw someone who had experienced forgiveness.

Seeing people means listening to other experience and pain. Why has the church been so slow in being agents of racial reconciliation. Because we have not stopped to listen to another cultures story. The church has been slow to see what God is doing in reconciliation in NZ. How we treat those on the margins – the disabled, those struggling with mental illness, those who are homeless is a test for how we see people.

Many people in the LGBT community harbour huge anger towards the church because of the judgmental spirit of some Christians. We have not loved this community. But people do not choose their sexual orientation. As Christians, we should have been at the forefront of speaking out against the abuse and discrimination towards the LBQT

community. We have seen this community through a lens and failed to see the plank in our own eye.

Jesus told a story of the good Samaritan. He didn't actually give it a title. 2000 years later it has little shock value. It is a nice story about being kind to others. But when Jesus told it, it was mind blowingly radical. He told the story in a response to the question Who is my neighbour?

So he tells a tale of two men, divided by race, religion and politics. They are brought together by the fact that one of them is dying by the roadside. The other one brings the Biblical idea of doing good. He got off his donkey and started to restore the man who was broken and bent and distorted. Very nice>Except. But the good man is not us.

The one who bring orderly, right abundant, generous, beautiful and flourishing goodness to the broken man is, if we are to translate it into today's culture, the bisexual, atheist, marijuana smoking sex worker.

And the broken man is us. It really is not a very nice story at all. It suggests lots of things. We are the broken person. We need the humility to see that. Then we would not be so arrogant and judgemental to those around us. We are broken by sin and need saving. We are broken because we don't see people as they are. We see them in categories of race and politics and religion. However, the good Samaritan just saw a person who was hurting.

It reinforces the idea of common grace. We should celebrate good where ever we see it. Christians don't have a monopoly on good. Good comes from God and God alone. We are not good. We have received God's goodness, and true goodness comes from God. Goodness points back to God.

Download or listen to this message at:
www.icbc.org.nz

REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Discuss the four ways we can relate to the culture around us? Which is most prevalent in the NZ church? Can you think of examples of each?
- Why do we find it easier to see what is wrong in our society than call out what is good? What is our fear if we call out good that is not "Christian"?
- Why is freedom of religion and belief a key Christian value?
- Discuss the new version of tolerance that is such a high value today. How do we model true tolerance? Why do we find this really difficult?
- How can we learn to truly see people, beyond the superficial?
- The Good Samaritan story was presented in a different way to try to get to its original shock value. What was your reaction?
- Why is our posture towards people and culture just as important as the words we say?
- Pray for opportunity to put into practise learnings this week.



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS



CENTRAL BAPTIST

LOVE GOD : LOVE OTHERS