

## Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> John: Real Love Casts Out Fear

Sermon Title: "Living the Beliefs"

Sermon Text: 1 John 1-1 John 2:6

Focus Statement: I want my listener to see Jesus as the center point of the Bible and consider living like Jesus as more of a loving way of life than a specific system of theological beliefs.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

There are several important matters to take note of in today's Scripture:

- First, that Christ existed as One with the Creator of all things and as "The Word of Life" before being embodied in Jesus two thousand years ago.
- Second, the appearance of Jesus in bodily form is cause for great joy because in his birth, life, death and resurrection he modelled the way of light and truth and ended for all time such false ideas as blood needing to be shed to address the problem of sin. In Jesus, forgiveness and right standing with God was redefined as a matter of grace through faith, period. For us and, as John said explicitly: "for the whole world."
- Third, the problem of sin is real and to be taken very seriously. (more on that specific point in a few weeks)
- Fourth, and most importantly to today's teaching—anyone who claims to be a Christian must actually seek to live as Jesus lived.

This last point, of course, is the big sticking point for Christian religion. One would think it to be so simple. Just read and live the teachings of Jesus. Done. But, wait a minute. There is a lot of other history, story, theology and content besides Jesus in the Bible. And, Jesus didn't actually write anything of the Bible. The four people who wrote gospel biographies sometimes framed the teachings of Jesus in different ways. And, then there is the Catholic and Orthodox Church movements that assert that they were given authority over scripture and 500 years ago the Protestant movement asserted that Scripture has authority over the church but has more than 44,000 different denominations who can't agree on what biblical authority actually means. So, like all of life, it's not that straight forward, is it?

Yet, John wrote these three letters with his longer gospel biography in mind to try to remind the first followers of Christ that it can be that the Christian life can be as simple as living like Jesus—if we are willing to see Jesus as the center point of all Scripture and consider living like Jesus as more of a loving way of life than a specific system of theological beliefs.

To be clear, I am not suggesting in any way that theological beliefs are un-important. They are essential to the Christian faith and experience just as theology is to other religions. Its essential. And, yet because of the way humans always have, and always will stray from Christ' most important theological beliefs and be inclined to create theological systems with layers upon layers of assumptions and certainties that give some groups power and importance over other groups—theological beliefs can and do become weaponized and exclusionary. Therefore, what I am noticing in John's letters and what I am pleading for today is humility in the way we approach our systems of theology and boldness in the way we live our lives by following the obvious ways Jesus lived his life.

How did Jesus live his life and what are the ways that we can imitate his character and ethics?

- We know that Jesus chose the path of learning from others as a child and into his young adulthood in a faith community in order to become wise alongside others.
- Jesus was formed by his faith tradition and Scriptures, but rarely actually quoted scripture. And, transcending or going beyond any type of fundamentalism or literalism, Jesus de-emphasized or

ignored some parts of Scripture in his tradition and used the Jewish practice of midrash or constantly asking questions of texts to keep spiritual meanings open in others.

- As a teacher Jesus called people to deep level interior change. He taught people how to see and live from the inside out.
- As a reformer Jesus reframed his religious tradition and particularly the scapegoating, sacrificial systems, and the long lists of holiness codes and rules. As demonstrated through his many miracles followed by sending people back into community—he re-taught that true holiness is about being set apart to connect with God and one another not being set apart to be separate from others.
- Jesus confronted hypocrisy in religious traditions as well as challenged social norms that were either unnecessary or destructive to a more loving and generous way of living. He was famous for eating with outsiders and taking the time to be with outcasts of society.
- The core teachings of Jesus emphasized compassion, mercy and justice in all circumstances. And, in both his teachings and ethics Jesus never demonized a group of people or pitted one group against another.
- Jesus shied away from and sometimes even shunned popularity. He intentionally left places of familiarity and growing fame to travel to out of the way, smaller, and seemingly less important places.
- Jesus spent time in solitude and prayer as a means to be grounded and listening to the Spirit of God.
- Jesus was tempted in the same ways we are tempted in day to day things—including the three big temptations where people abuse power the most: economic power, religious power, and political power.
- And, most shocking of all—Jesus taught and modelled spiritual, financial, and emotional generosity toward others, even toward his enemies whom he forgave while being rejected, tortured and killed.

Whew. That is a lot to take in and enough to meditate on for the rest of our lives. And, it all truly frames a generous and loving way of life more than a specific system of theological beliefs. Think about it. Jesus never placed stakes in the ground on almost all of the theological matters that have been so problematic in over 2,000 years of Christian religion such as: What's sacred or not sacred in terms of worship liturgies and goodness and beauty inside and outside of church life? Which form of baptism is the best and what's a sacrament and what's just a practice? Predestination versus free will? End times? Matters of race, gender, and sexual orientation?

I could go on. Not once did Jesus create dividing lines or exclusions around such matters but consistently put his stakes in the ground as to the three greatest commands being 1) Loving God and neighbor, 2) even to the ends of the earth, and 3) done in the manner with which Jesus loved God and neighbor.

John's line in today's Scripture "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" comes straight from John's Gospel where he quoted Jesus praying to God in front of his closest followers: "[Father] As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world." John 17:18. NIV

The adverb "as" in Greek is "kathos," which means "according to, or "in the same way." So, Christ followers are to do everything (day-to-day life, relationships, Christian mission, work, whatever) in the same manner with which Jesus was sent, embodied, and modeled God's grace, love, compassion, mercy, and justice for everyone.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. How has your faith been strengthened or weakened by the words and actions of other Christians?
2. What does "living like Jesus" mean to you? What parts of Jesus' character and ethics come easy for you and what are more difficult?
3. How do you understand and live in the tension around emphasizing a more loving way of life than a specific system of theological beliefs?