

“An Inconvenient Gospel”

Is it easy to follow Christ? It is certainly easy enough to slap a Jesus fish sticker on the back of our cars and change our Facebook religious status to “Christian.” But is BEING a Christian easy?

Today we’re going to talk about an inconvenient Gospel. Forget a Sunday morning faith that costs you nothing; forget about a “Close your eyes bow your heads and lift up your hands if you believe in Jesus faith” that is cheap and easy. If you can’t open your eyes and shout it from the rooftops that you believe in Christ then you have no right to bear his name. The Gospel is not easy; it was never easy, and it was never promised to be easy. But it is truth, and it is life. So today, we’re going to talk about our faith a little bit, and we’re going to look at the inconvenience of claiming the Christian gospel.

What does the term Gospel mean anyway? We hear it often enough; we call the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the gospel. The word actually come from the old English word, godspel, which literally means “good news” or “glad tidings.” The word “godspel” is based on the Greek word “euangelion” which means “good message.” And so GOSPEL or GODSPEL means “good news.” And what is the “good news” in Scripture? Simply this: for God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. A musical came out in 1973 called Godspell which gives a modern version of the life of Jesus. In this clip we’re going to see, John the Baptist calls people all over the city of New York leave their jobs and lives and become baptized in a very unusual way by singing “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

Watch movie clip

As we can see, the gospel is exciting! It's provoking, it's motivating! It makes people move and act foolishly in the eyes of the humanity! It is the good news that this life is not all that we have; there is joy beyond all of the junk of this world.

Eternity and salvation, though, are just one part of the Gospel. Jesus was not just interested in a heavenly future. He was and is very much interested in our present state. He has a heart for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned, the lonely, the sad, and the scared. Is it any wonder that the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself?"

In Matthew 25:34-36, Jesus tells a story about God's judgment at the end of times. He gives blessings and the gift of heaven to those who took care of their neighbors while here on earth. He says to them,

"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Jesus' mission is seriously about serving others who have real needs, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. He is not just concerned about gaining followers; he also wants to see justice on earth, that all people are given the opportunity to live blessed and well, that happiness is not just meant for the wealthy or well off. Later on in

the New Testament, James even gives a warning to those who would ignore others in need. In James 2:15-17 he says:

“¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

We are called, then, to share the Gospel of salvation and the Gospel of help and healing to the world. It is no good for us to give people Jesus but let them starve to death.

So this is the gospel and it all sounds great; it’s putting it into practice which ultimately becomes the challenge. It is living and being and sharing the Gospel which becomes inconvenient.

And what makes it inconvenient? It is certainly easy enough for me to receive it; after all, I am given free, eternal life, which I don’t have to earn. And on top of that, Christians are supposed to love and support me. That’s awesome; there’s nothing inconvenient about that at all.

Receiving the Gospel is not inconvenient, but responding to it is. Because we are given so great a gift, we must honor the giver by sharing it with others. This is not a treasure to keep to ourselves, but one that we are to share with the world.

The thing is, though, there are not always perfect or obvious opportunity to share the gospel.

In our passage today, Jesus serves those around Him, even though, in many respects, circumstances weren’t all that great. In fact, we see two instances where Jesus shares this inconvenient Gospel.

We find the first instance in verse 13, in which Matthew writes, “...when Jesus heard what happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.” What was it that Jesus had heard about? In the scene just before this verse, his friend and cousin had just been beheaded for calling down judgment on King Herod. Jesus hears about what happened, and he reacts like anyone else would, by going off to be alone.

It was only natural that Jesus was seeking solitude after this event. Many of us react to traumatic events by searching for somewhere to be alone. Our dog Quinn has a bit of a barking issue; for anyone who has come over to our house, you would probably notice that she barks at you, even though the next minute she’ll be your best friend. In order to curb this habit, we borrowed a bark collar from Sam that would spray citronella in her face anytime that she barked. The first time that collar went off Quinn was so upset that she hid in the closet for the rest of the night.

I think that Jesus just wanted to be alone with His father; he knew that John was going to be with Him in heaven, but that doesn’t mean that he was untouched or unaffected. He needed to mourn but people needed him, and so they followed him. Rather than chastise them or run away, he took the time to heal their sick.

If there were any point in life in which it would be alright for somebody to not want to share the gospel, it would probably be during a mourning period. And yet, Jesus showed us through this action that God, above all else, loves His people; even above when it’s inconvenient, Jesus cared enough for the crowd to forego his own needs and to share the gospel of hope and healing with them.

The second instance in which Jesus worked through inconvenience starts in verse 15. In fact, it is the entire reason why the miracle of multiplying bread and fish was even necessary. Matthew writes that, “As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus continued to heal as the day grew later and later, and it came to a point where the people would have to leave to seek out food for the night. They were out in the Boonies, not near any large cities. And unfortunately for them there were no 24 hour Tim Horton’s available at the time, though I imagine an iced Cappuccino would’ve been nice after spending the day outside in the sun. The disciples simply did not have enough food to feed the 5000 people that were in attendance. But, if they were sent away then the time for healing and potential teaching would be over. And so yet again, Jesus dealt with that inconvenience, and broke the loaves and fishes and fed everybody.

In the movie “Millions,” which came out a few years ago, director Danny Boyle tells the story of a young English boy who comes into possession of millions of pounds, the English currency, only a week or so before Europe was going to switch over to the Euro. The boy has the ability to see and speak to dead saints, and they tell him how he should properly spend the money in order to help others. One of the saints that the boy encounters during the movie is St. Peter. During their discussion, Peter tells Damian, the boy, about what really happened when they fed the 5,000. Jesus broke the bread and gave a blessing over it and the fish and began passing the baskets around.

Miraculously, people would pass the basket around without taking any

food. Either they did not want to be the ones to take the bread and fish or they wanted to make sure that others had an opportunity to eat. By the end, the baskets made it all the way through the crowd without anybody taking anything. It's kind of an interesting retelling of the event, but the question remains, why would the director have chosen to demythologize this episode? Is it because our modern sensibilities tell us that miracles cannot be real?

Assuming that we do accept this miracle as legitimate, the question still needs to be answered, how exactly does Jesus feeding the 5,000 apply to us? Maybe it validates that Jesus is powerful, that he is who he says is. But we certainly cannot see ourselves in the shoes of Jesus, performing miracles and healing in the same way that He did. And I wouldn't say that's what we are called to do either. However, we are called to feed the hungry. Recall the verse read earlier from Matthew which says *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."* Jesus makes it clear that physically helping others in His name is an entrance requirement into heaven. Calling on the name of Jesus is not enough; we have live out the Gospel as well. Just earlier this spring, a group of 30 students from our own Church raised enough money for World Vision to give out 2690 meals. We fed over half of the 5,000 through our efforts. And it wasn't especially convenient for anyone. The students had to petition their family and neighbors for money, which for many can be extremely awkward. Then they were asked to not eat for 30 hours so that they could understand what a typical day is in the life of a kid in an underdeveloped country, and on top of that, many of them did not sleep that night. It wasn't the easiest thing we've ever done, but it was extremely meaningful, and it made a small impact in the world.

This fall a group of people from Oak Grove will be joining a group from the community and traveling to Haiti in order to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Island through medical help. I imagine that this will be an amazing and impactful trip for those going, but if we're really honest, it's not the most convenient thing to do. Many going have kids that they are leaving at home; work has to be taken off, passports have to be obtained. It's not convenient, but it is our calling.

But what about sharing and being the gospel in our everyday lives. Large events are one thing, but they can be planned on and prepared for. What about those opportunities that we are given every single day to share the gospel. Do we take those chances? Are we open to God's leading in those areas? A friend of mine, one of the most open and genuinely spiritual people that I know, was telling Erin and I about a time that he felt God leading him while at the zoo. For whatever reason, God was telling him that he needed to pray for a man who was near him at the food court. Now, no matter how spiritual you are, talking to a stranger is uncomfortable, let alone asking them if you can pray for them. But our friend pushed through the inconvenience and prayed for the man. He was genuinely receptive to it. I don't know the impact of his prayer. What I do know is that God places us in situations for different reasons, and he gives us many opportunities to share and be the gospel. We just need to be open to his calling.

In Luke 14:15-24, Jesus tells a parable about a man who was preparing a great banquet. He had the servants summon those guests that were invited, but they created excuses, such as "I just bought a field and I need to take care of it," or "I just bought some oxen and I really wanted to test them out" and "I just got married so I cannot come." The master became furious that those he had privileged with an invitation

were rejecting him with weak excuses, so he sent his servants out into the streets and alleys in the city and into the back roads of the country to gather anybody who might be interested in joining him. Now, I understand that Jesus was making a comment about how the Israelites, God's chosen people, had rejected the invitation to be a part of God's Kingdom, and so the invitation was now being given over to the Gentiles. However, I think that there is another powerful truth in this passage. Sometimes, I think we are just too busy to be a real part of the Kingdom of God. I think we have plenty of reasons why we aren't participating in the work of God. Maybe we just bought a new house, and were planning on taking the weekend to repaint the bedroom. Maybe we just bought a new Honda Civic and wanted to take it for a test drive. After all, it's a beautiful afternoon out. Or maybe we just got married, or have a new boyfriend or girlfriend, or just had a kid or grandkid, and after all, it's alright for them to take up all of our attention.

Are any of these bad things: NO. But they can be, if we allow them to take away focus from our central purpose in life, which is to make disciples of all nations.

Let's be honest, the Gospel seems pretty inconvenient when compared to the demands that go along with work, family, school, sports, etc. How are we supposed to fit another important thing into our life when everything seems so important? The reality is, it is not an option; if we call ourselves Christians, then we are called to be, go, do, spread, share the love of Christ through words, actions, service, etc. Because we are given the privilege of being part of the wealthiest two percent in the entire world and the knowledge that life only comes through knowing

and following Jesus Christ, there is nothing so inconvenient that we cannot share His gospel.