

## **From My Window**

### **Taking the Teachings of Jesus Seriously**

From my window I see with joy that some Christians are reclaiming the teachings of Jesus.

For years, there has been an effort in our country to “market” Christianity in order to build huge “mega churches” by preaching a “salvation by faith-only” message. In other words, the evangelical “church growth” message either marginalized or omitted the teachings of Jesus as a requirement for Christian living.

One result of this “faith-only” message has been the rise of bitterness and division in our country. Another result has been the growing belief that Christians can and should determine their own personal and social values.

Here is a clear and insightful article written by an evangelical pastor that illustrates that some are now calling to take the teachings of Jesus seriously.

The author, Bryan Roberson, makes these key points:

1. Jesus, not the Bible, is God’s living Word
2. The only way to enter the Kingdom of God is through doing the will of God
3. Condemnation is not the teaching of Jesus
4. Christians are called to speak words of blessing to those who disagree with us

Why read the article? Because here is a clear call showing the way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,

Here is the article by Bryan Roberson:

### **4 Teachings of Jesus That His Followers (Almost) Never Take Seriously**

There are hundreds of teachings contained in the 4 Gospels of the New Testament, teachings that, if we obeyed, would absolutely flip our lives and world upside-down for the glory of God and the good of all people.

It’s no secret that those of us who claim to follow Jesus Christ consistently fall short of living up to the way of life of our Rabbi. Being a disciple of Jesus is a lifelong journey towards conforming ourselves to the image and way of life that Jesus taught. However, so often, followers of Jesus chose to blatantly ignore some of the clearest instruction of our Rabbi and obscure it with vague theology so that we can get off the hook. Other times, followers of Jesus are taught something explicitly contradictory to the plain words

of Jesus and then spend their lives obeying the instruction they received instead of the commands of Jesus.

However we end up at the place of disobedience, all of us who claim to be followers of Jesus struggle to obey the commands of our Lord. One of the most transformative periods in my faith was when I took time to re-read the Gospels of the New Testament and get reacquainted with Jesus' himself, in his own words. As I studied the words of Jesus, I discovered that so much of what he asks of us as his disciples is incredibly clear and yet so much of it was new to me. I had never heard it in church or Sunday school or actually heard someone teach the exact opposite of the words of Christ. It was during that season of my life where I took inventory of how I lived and what I believed and aligned to the person and teachings of Christ that my faith was radically transformed for the better.

Below I have compiled a short list of 4 clear teachings of Jesus that most of us who exist within Evangelicalism have either never heard, refuse to acknowledge, or believe the exact opposite of. It's my hope that by rereading these teachings of Christ, you will be inspired, like I have been, to return to the Gospels and begin to reshape your faith and life around the way and teachings of our Master, Jesus. Get ready and buckle up, because most of what Jesus says is pretty bold and potent. It'll shake up your faith!

### **1. Jesus, not the Bible, is God's living and active Word that brings life.**

*"You don't have His word living in you, because you don't believe the One He sent. You study the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me. And you are not willing to come to Me so that you may have life."- John 5:39-40 HCSB*

The Christian life is one that is fundamentally rooted in the reality that Jesus Christ is living and active. He interacts with us on a day to day basis and desires that we cultivate an intimate relationship with him. The more we commune with the Spirit of Christ, the more life and truth we are exposed to and are able to comprehend. However, for many Evangelicals, we rely more on the Bible than we do on the living and active Spirit of God within us. We fear that following the Spirit could lead to confusion and subjectivity and so we root our faith in the Bible.

The problem is that a faith that is rooted in the Scripture alone is not sustainable. It will dry up and wither on the vine. While the Bible is an important and authoritative guide for Christian faith and practice, it isn't the foundation or center of our faith- Jesus is. And if we truly believe that he is *alive*, we should also have faith that communing with him will produce spiritual life within us. He is the living Word that we can ask anything to and expect, in faith, to receive and answer. Sometimes he will speak through Scripture. Other times he will speak through our friends and family. Other times he will find unique and special ways to reveal himself to us. But in order to maintain a vibrant and living faith, we must not make the Bible our substitute for communion with the living Word of

God. Studying Scripture is valuable, but nowhere near as valuable as cultivating a day to day relationship with the God incarnate.

## **2. The only way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is through DOING the will of God.**

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21 ESV*

*“An expert in the law stood up to test Him, saying, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”“What is written in the law?” He asked him. “How do you read it?”He answered: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”You’ve answered correctly,” He told him. “Do this and you will live.”- Luke 10: 25-28 HCSB*

“We are saved by faith alone, apart from works!”

This is a very popular Protestant catch phrase. The doctrine of sola fide (faith alone) was developed by the Reformers in response to the Roman Catholic Churches corrupted teachings that emerged in the 16th Century teaching that one could gain favor with God and shave off years in Hell and Purgatory by giving money to the church or doing acts of penance. The intention of the doctrine of *faith alone* was very good- to correct the error that our salvation could be earned or that God’s grace could be manipulated. But like most doctrines that are formulated *in response* to another group’s doctrine, it often goes too far.

One of the clearest teachings throughout all four Gospel accounts is that the way to enter the Kingdom of God is through living in obedience to the Law of Christ. Time and time again, Jesus makes very clear statements that condemn those who think that they will be saved because they believe the right things or do the right religious rituals. Jesus responds to people who believe they are religious and deserve heaven by saying that their outward religiosity is detestable to God and the only thing God desires is that they would exercise their faith by obeying the command of God- to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly. (Micah 6:8)

Jesus says if anyone claims to be right with God but doesn’t serve the poor, needy, oppressed, marginalized, sick, diseased, and sinful, then they do not have a relationship with God. No matter what they proclaim with their lips. No matter how religious they may appear. Jesus says those who don’t obey will have no part in his Kingdom. He makes very clear that the way to “inherit eternal life” is through loving God and loving our neighbor.

Isn’t it astonishing, then, how many Christians today have been taught that salvation comes through right believing instead of right practice- a message that is fundamentally

contrary to the words of Jesus. (And even more to his little brother James who says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” James 2:24 ESV)

### **3. Condemnation isn't Jesus' style.**

*“I have not come to condemn the world, but to save it.”* John 3:17 ESV

*“Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.”*- John 8:11 ESV

Many modern day Evangelical preachers spend a lot of time talking about the kinds of people that God is opposed to and who he condemns. They spend time talking about how to transition from a position of condemnation before God to a position of Grace through believing the right things about Jesus. They often talk about those who disagree or live contrary to their understanding of what is “righteous” as those who are under condemnation from God.

But what's funny is that as one examines the teachings and life of Jesus, we find him not only befriending, loving, and affirming some of his societies most despised and vile people, but chastising the religious leaders who condemned them for their sin. Whether it is Jesus' conversation with Rabbi Nicodemus in John 3 where Christ explains that it is his mission to redeem the world and not to condemn it or the instance where a woman is caught in the act of adultery and is taken outside to be stoned by the religious officials (as the law required) and Jesus steps in to stop the condemnation and proclaim freedom and forgiveness to the broken woman, it is clear that Jesus is not in the condemning business. Instead, it seems Christ is in the business of restoring humanity to the most broken and wicked of people. It seems that his passion is to see the weak, sick, and broken become strong, healthy, and whole in his Kingdom. It seems that he spends very little time (almost none) telling sinners why they're wrong or speaking words of condemnation over them, but rather practically loving and extending grace to the most screwed up of individuals. Maybe we Evangelicals, who are known for our condemnation of entire people groups with whom we disagree, could learn something from Jesus on this point.

### **4. You're supposed to sacrifice yourself and speak words of blessings for those you disagree with the most.**

*“Love Your Enemies and Bless Those Who Persecute You”* Matthew 5:44 ESV

It seems like every week there is a new major controversy taking place within the Church. Most of the time, the situation revolves around one group of Christians disagreeing with another and then taking to the internet to write slanderous posts about the other. If it's not infighting, then it is Christians engaging in culture wars, working to defeat those whom we disagree with politically and socially by painting them as soul-less monsters. But that response is absolutely contrary to the way of Jesus. Jesus calls

his followers to love the people they disagree with most and to speak blessings over them when all we really want to do is curse them out. No matter what the situation is or what kind of enemy we have, Christians are called to bless the people who hurt us the most. This includes in theological battles, political disagreements, national wars, and personal conflicts. Christians are called to a radical position of nonviolence and forgiveness, grace, and even blessing of our enemies. There is no way around it. And when Christians chose to ignore these clear teachings, our hypocrisy is glaringly obvious to the watching world. Want some proof? Take a couple minutes to watch this clip of the famous Agnostic Comedian, Bill Maher, talk about Christian's refusal to obey the teaching of Jesus. (Contains explicit language)

That video may be hard to stomach but Bill Maher is 100% correct. "If you ignore every single thing Jesus commanded you to do, you're not a Christian."

The point of this post is to encourage those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus to reexamine how we are living our lives and practicing our faith. It is so easy to get so caught up in the flow that we fail to recognize just how far away from shore we have been carried. The words of Jesus are pretty darn clear, but oftentimes in our zealotry for our faith, we often get pulled away from the basics and eventually end up living in a way that we *believe* is honoring to God, but is actually contradictory to everything he has taught us.

In this post, I have offered just four examples. There are hundreds of teachings contained in the 4 Gospels of the New Testament, teachings that, if we obeyed, would absolutely flip our lives and world upside-down for the glory of God and the good of all people. What the Church as a whole and Evangelicals in particular desperately need in this age is a return to the plain teachings of Jesus. We need to be willing to set aside out theological debates and meanderings for a season and focus on simply reading, conforming, and obeying the will of Christ, both as revealed in Scripture and as we are led by his Spirit. The world is desperately longing to encounter Jesus through us and for far too long we have been giving them a cheap knock off that we have exported under his name. But it's clear to everyone that what is passing for Christianity today is almost totally divorced from the teachings of Jesus Christ.

My prayer is that we would all turn our faces towards our risen Savior and seek to selflessly follow his commands. I am convinced that the Jesus' way is the only way that will heal our broken world. I am convinced that the whole earth is groaning as it waits for men and women to take of their crosses and follow in the way of redemption. I am convinced that when those of us who call ourselves "Christian" re-orient ourselves in Jesus, the power of God will flow through us in an unprecedented and miraculous way that will bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Oh how I long for that day.

*"Those who aren't following Jesus aren't his followers. It's that simple. Followers follow, and those who don't follow aren't followers. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it." — Scot McKnight*

The author of this article, Bryan Robertson, currently serves as the Lead Pastor of Missiongathering Christian Church in San Diego, CA and is the author or contributing author to seven books including *Nomad: A Spirituality For Traveling Light* (2016), *True Inclusion: Creating Communities of Radical Embrace* (2018), and *Our Witness: The Unheard Stories of LGBT+ Christians* (2018).

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