



## Christians & Culture

### February 13th, 2022

So we are in this series that's called "Did Jesus Really Mean That?" And as we are all on a journey, as our Bridge family, of being with Jesus and becoming like Jesus for the sake of the world, we've been going through this time of walking through the most famous sermon preached by the most famous person ever: the Sermon on the Mount.

In many ways, it's like the charter; it's like the Constitution of what it means to be "Kingdom people". And we've been walking through the Beatitudes. And if you're like me, I kind of grew up in a tradition, where we have the Old Testament and especially the Ten Commandments—we're supposed to do those. And then the New Testament version is the Beatitudes. And they both make me feel miserable when I read them. And we're reminded over the last few weeks that the Beatitudes are not rungs of a ladder of attainment, but our Kingdom availability for us who are Kingdom people.

So when we find ourselves singularly focused, we have blessedness. When we find ourselves beaten down in the meekness of interacting with a broken world, there's a declaration of blessedness to us. But then as we go through the Beatitudes as we end, then we have to ask ourselves, "Well, this is great—finding out who we are, in terms of our identity. How do we play that out?"

How do we play that out in a sea of cubicles? How do we play that out when our lives are online? How do we play that out when we may be the only followers of Jesus on the block where we live? How do we play that out in management and nonprofits? How does that play out in this world?

Well, I wish I could say that the Church—when I say Church, "big C" Church—has always had a wonderful relationship with an unbelieving world, that we've always been so effective.

Well, not always. In fact, I would argue there are different ways throughout history of how the Church relates to the world, to culture. And so I'm going to kind of go real quick in this introduction about different ways that the reputation the Church has sometimes with the unbelieving world.

The first one is what I call the "constant critic", where we can have a reputation. We say, "It's the joy of the Lord," but really we're like in the gospel of grumpiness all the time. And here's an image that I think of with the constant critic—Statler and Waldorf from the Muppets.

I love them. And here's these two guys. Well, they're not real. They're puppets. And they're in the balcony and they're always saying things like that, "It's not half bad. It's not half good either." I love these guys because they're always at a distance and they're just constantly pointing out, the constant critic, constant antagonism, constant cynicism, constantly going off and mourning about how bad the world is all the time.

Well, there's not only the constant critic, there can also be what I call the "comfortable isolation". And maybe the image here is what many people call "the Christian bubble", or basically in a culture of Christendom, where we wear Christian clothes, we say Christian things, we go to Christian concerts, we listen to Christian songs, and we navigate our whole life. Our main social hub is really in kind of this bubble all the way up to our casket. And we've really never thoroughly engaged unbelievers whatsoever. And we just kind of stay in that bubble.

Well, then I would say the next one could be what I call "camouflage by compromise". And the image I think here is, have you ever seen this image: Waldo? [Image appears of "Where's Waldo" book.] When I watch—no, when I read—no, when I look at Waldo, I get stressed because somewhere in this mosaic is Waldo, and the exercise is you spend an inordinate amount of time trying to find Waldo. And so that means that we have adopted a Christian faith that totally blends into the fabric and mosaic of culture. There's nothing different. We're singing the same song. And it's almost like we have this secret Christianity that can only be known by a census or some type of application that we might fill out. We may even say to certain applications, "I'm a Christian," but our lives are saying, "I'm actually an atheist." And so we're camouflaged by compromise.

I want to present to you these C-words that I think are better. What about if we were known to be courageous, consistent, clear, and have compassionate engagement? Courageous, consistent, clear and compassionate engagement? I realize there probably is a lot of us who would say this morning, "Rob, wrong crowd. I'm around unbelievers all the time." Being around unbelievers doesn't mean that you're engaged with unbelievers. There's a difference.

So here's my big idea that I want to propose. It's very short. Christ-followers are to engage and not just exist. The Lord did not redeem you and I to take up space on a planet, to take up oxygen, and

to wait for the hereafter and that is it. Charles Spurgeon used to say that a Christian who is not a missionary is an imposter. Christ-followers are to engage and not just exist.

Probably one of my heroes in the faith is a guy by the name of John Stott, a British theologian. To this day, I believe he's written the best book on the cross of Christ that's ever been written outside of Scripture. And years ago, before he died, he came to America and he was preaching a sermon in America. And this is what he said. He said, "You know what your own country is like. I'm a visitor, and I wouldn't presume to speak about America. But I know what Great Britain is like. I know something about the growing dishonesty, corruption, immorality, violence, pornography, the diminishing respect for human life, and the increase in abortion. Whose fault is it? Let me put it like this. If the house is dark at night, there is no sense in blaming the house. That's what happens when the sun goes down. The question to ask is, where is the light? If meat goes bad, there's no sense in blaming the meat. That is what happens when the bacteria are allowed to breed unchecked. The question to ask is, where is the salt? If society becomes corrupt like a dark knight or stinking fish, there's no sense in blaming society. That's what happens when fallen human society is left to itself and human evil is unrestrained and unchecked. The question to ask is, where is the Church?"

Where is the Church? So really over the next few moments, that's really what I want to talk about: what does it mean to engage? When we engage people who are far from faith—they have even no desire to have anything to do with the gospel—how do we engage?

Well, here's the first one. It needs to be a distinctive engagement. In Matthew 5, we're going to start reading in verse 13. So for those of you who have your devices, or for those of you who have something called a book, a Bible, for those of you who've memorized this, we're going to be 5:13-20. And here's what Jesus says.

"You are the salt of the earth. But if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.

The first thing I want to point out here: do you notice that our Lord is not saying, "You have salt. You have light." He says, no, "You are salt. You are light." What the Lord does in his people, he makes them intrinsically salt. He makes them intrinsically light. If you're like me, when I think about engaging unbelievers and trying to reach people for Christ, I usually go, "Okay, I need to get

another book. I need to go to another website. I need to listen to another podcast. I need to go to another conference."

Could we dare to believe that just the raw fact of being bought by Jesus, we're already equipped to reach other people? I believe that with all of my heart. It's a distinctive engagement. When you think of salt, when you think of light, those are distinctive things.

First of all, let's talk about salt. Salt was a prized commodity in this culture. When they're living in a culture where there really is no refrigeration, the only way they could slow down the natural decay of meat was to put salt into that meat. And so one of the purposes of salt was to preserve.

The other thing that salt would do, they would use it as a poison, as fertilizer. When there were weeds on their land, it was very common at this time of the world to put salt to get after the weeds. Well, those of us who are followers of Christ, we are always called to literally kill sin or it be killing you in our life.

The other thing that it does, it gives pizzazz. I've been waiting over 30 years to say pizzazz in a sermon. That's all I want you to know.

But salt preserves. It also poisons those things that need to be poisoned. But it offers pizzazz. But here's what's interesting. Then it says, "It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet," because saltiness, how can it be restored?

In this time, in this culture, when salt cannot be used is when it was mixed with sediment and rock. Because over time the salt would be leached out and it'd be good for nothing. My friends, could it be that the broad Church of Jesus Christ is not as effective as she could be because we have many who profess Jesus, but we're actually mixing our faith with Jesus with things that have nothing to do with Jesus?

We say we love Jesus, but actually we worship our family at the same level. We say we love Jesus, but yet we're still holding on to addictions and enslaving sin at the same time. We say we love Jesus, but then there are other parts of his Word that we outright reject. And when we do this pingpong match over and over again and we make our allegiance to Jesus in competition with other things, our witness goes flatline.

I know this is basic: the unbelieving world does not want to experience the same things they're already experiencing. They don't want to join people with more gossip. They don't want to join people with more backstabbing. They don't want to join more people who do not care about their lives. They want something, what? Different. It's a distinctive engagement.

I read this not too long ago about a gang in Chicago years ago; they were called the OA Gang, and they were known for their violence. They were known to be very ruthless. And they literally just owned the whole block of a certain part of Chicago. Well, there was this Baptist Church where all these men got together within the church, and they were like, "We need to do something about this."

So they did something radical. I don't know if you've ever heard of it—it's called pray. And they got together and they started praying for their block. And then, all these men, two by two, went to the block, took rotations, and would go up to these gang members, and they would just say, "Hey, I'm such and such. I go to this church. How can I pray for your family? How's the baby doing? How can I pray for your children?"

They did this for 20 years. Right now, in 2022, that gang is no longer there. Why? Because they engaged and they held onto their distinctive faith in Christ.

Light. What this says: "A city on a hill cannot be hidden." In this culture, a lot of houses and a lot of buildings would literally be built out of limestone and on the side of the hilly country. So, that sun would just reflect off all of these structures. And so there'd be a city on a hill that cannot be hidden.

So let's talk about light. I want to show you a satellite image. This is from outer space. And this is a picture of one of my favorite cities in the whole world, New York City.

If you see this area right here, that is Times Square from space. Let me give you perspective. The amount of power that Times Square uses at peak performance is 161 megawatts. Here's another perspective: that's enough to power over 160,000 homes. That's a lot of power. That is more than twice all the casinos in Las Vegas combined.

Now, that's a lot of power, but it's not as much power as somebody else that I know. Hey Bridge, online, Columbia... More people in the Islamic world have come to Christ in the last 35 years than in the entire 2,000 years of Church history. That's power. In China, right now in China, it is estimated that there are now more self avowed disciples of Jesus than members of the Communist Party.

Even the most conservative estimates suggest that China will soon have more Christians than any country on the planet. That's power. Across the planet, followers of Jesus are increasing by more than 80,000 people every day. That's power.

Last week in Columbia, we had a guy by the name of Ben. Last week, Ben collided with his depravity. He collided with his own sinfulness. And so last week, on a Sunday morning, he gets up, and he just starts watching these random sermons online. And he happens to find our video where we talk about baptism. He gets up, comes to Columbia, goes through our door, into our auditorium. John Howard, who is one of our Connections team members, greets him, welcomes him, and he goes up to John and he says, "Hey, I want to be baptized. How do we make that happen?" So John walks him through the gospel, walks him through baptism, and Ben was baptized last week. What is that called? Power. It's power.

And so, it's a distinctive engagement that can mean anything from actively inviting unbelievers to your home for a meal, intentionally getting involved with your HOA, to be a Christian presence and influence, maybe creating an art studio for creatives. It could be starting a nonprofit that addresses a need in the community.

I want to encourage you today, when you go to restaurants, literally, right after you order, ask the server, "Hey, before you go, we're getting ready to pray. How can we pray for you?" You will be amazed at what they will share. And Christians, would you please make sure that you tip well? I'm serious. And so it's a distinctive engagement.

But not only is it a distinctive engagement—it's a virtuous engagement. The word "virtue" just literally means "moral excellence". This is what the book of Matthew says. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 5, now starting at verse 16.

"In the same way, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to God who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven."

One of my personal concerns about modern faith is we can rightly emphasize grace, but really, really downplay behavior that should come out of that grace.

I understand it. Please know, before anyone accuses me of heresy, I'm a grace junkie. I love thinking about grace. I love talking about grace. I love dialoguing about grace. I love songs that talk about grace. I think grace is actually amazing. I love grace.

But sometimes, we can be fearful about talking about any type of behavior of holiness. We need to talk about behavior that grace creates in a person's life. See, Jesus was starting to have a reputation that he was against the law, that he was abolishing the law. Jesus actually says here, "Nope. I am not even changing one thing, even the slip of a pin. I am not changing one ounce of the law."

What is the relationship of grace and the law? Well, just to give a little primer about the law: first of all, Jesus is the coauthor, along with the Father and the Spirit, of the law. We don't have God the Father in the Old Testament and then Jesus comes on the scene. The Son of God has always existed.

The law was given to help God's people flourish after their exodus from Egyptian slavery. The law was given as a reminder of God's character. The law can be divided between the moral law, which is like the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and a ceremonial law, which is the entire five first five books of the Old Testament. The law was also given as a mirror to show our sinfulness. The law was given as a shadow of good things to come—Hebrews 10. The law was given as a teacher that brings us to someone else—Galatians 3. So, it also says in Hebrews 10, that through the Holy Spirit, God writes his law into our what? Hearts.

Are we saved by the Ten Commandments? Oh, no. But when we are saved, do we now have a natural desire to do the commandments? Absolutely.

A speed limit sign can change my behavior. That same speed limit sign cannot make me love it. And that's my problem. See, we not only have a distinctive engagement—we have a virtuous engagement.

I, one time, watched a video that was one of the most powerful videos I've ever seen. And it was a guy talking about what happened in his family when the Lord got a hold of his family. And he says when he was ten years old, he remembers his household was a wreck. It was so volatile. His mom

and dad hated each other. They were constantly going after each other, berating each other, yelling at each other. It was such a toxic, toxic home.

Well, somebody shared the news of Jesus with his dad, and the Lord got ahold of his dad. He didn't know scripture. He didn't know anything about church. All he knew: he was different. This is what this guy said: "My mom hadn't liked my dad as a sinner, and she liked him even less as a saint. After he became a Christian, my mom did everything she could to make his life difficult. Dad couldn't even read his Bible until mom went to sleep because she'd make his life so miserable when he did. But dad committed to aligning himself underneath God, did everything he could to show mom love in spite of how she treated him. Rather than divorce her, he loved her unconditionally. Month after month, mom tried anything and everything to break his focus on God and to get him to stop showing love to her.

"But nothing worked. Dad was calm, consistent, and caring. Around midnight one night, my mom came down the stairs with tears in her eyes. Dad was reading his Bible. When he saw her tears, he asked what was wrong. She told him she could not understand how the more she rejected him, the kinder he was to her.

"Then she said this: 'I want what you have because it must be real.' They both got down on their knees, and my dad led my mom to Christ. After that, he led all of us kids to the Lord, and he modeled"—there it is, virtue—"he modeled daily for us the valuing of making God and his Word our central focus. Had my dad lacked the courage to dedicate himself to God and our family, in spite of harsh opposition, my own home would have become a statistic. I would have ended up as a casualty. My children could have ended up that way too."

The guy who shared this, about when he was ten, his name is Tony Evans, and that boy eventually grew up and, I argue, is probably one of the greatest biblical preachers and expositors this nation has ever known. Why? Because of a virtuous engagement.

Not only do we have a distinct engagement, but also a virtuous engagement. It also is a joyous engagement. I didn't say a happy one, nor a deeper one. A joyous engagement. That's what it says in verse 20. The last verse, it says, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of heaven."

I do not blame you if I just said a joyous engagement, then I read that and you're, like, "Your points are off. Like, way off." Let me make my case that this is a joyous engagement. I can imagine the



audience that was hearing this from Jesus, and when they heard, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of scribes and Pharisees," I can believe that there's probably some of them that may have fainted, that may have fallen over. I can see in my mind's eye many in that crowd going, "Um, the scribes ceremonially wash themselves before copying Scripture. The Pharisees, they memorize the first five books of the Bible. They're known for their morality and their cleanliness. I'm out. I'm out. If you are saying, Christ, that my righteousness has to exceed them, I am absolutely out."

But there was a problem with their righteousness. See, my friends, their righteousness was skin deep and never got close to their heart. It was a righteousness that strove to manage sin instead of repenting of sin.

A few weeks ago, I was going through Matthew 23, and Matthew 23 is that chapter where Jesus literally goes off on the Pharisees. It's the "woe" chapter, where he's going, "Woe is this. Woe when you do this, woe when you do that," which is basically a kind of a literary idiom for "cursed are you."

And I just wrote down what he was saying to them. I was just writing down a list of the different woes that Jesus was saying to the Pharisees. And these are the things I wrote down.

Their talk of obedience surpassed their walk of obedience. Their desire for looking righteous was chosen over being righteous. They wanted human approval over the approval of God. They tried to hinder people from getting into the Kingdom who sinned differently than they do. They spent time and energy making people disciples of themselves instead of disciples of God. They throw money at hurting people without getting personally involved with hurting people. They are willing to die on hills of preference and opinion that do not matter in eternity. They use the cover up of living a false self to hide the mess of their true character. And the last thing I wrote, they would rather die in hardhearted self-righteousness than be melted by the extravagant kindness of the mercy of God.

I'm writing that and you're listening to this. There are maybe some of you that just heard that list that I went through, and maybe you first reacted like I did when I was writing it: "Get 'em. That is right!"

Even as I'm reading this now. And if you listen rightly, you would come to the same conclusion: "I'm a goner. I'm guilty as charged, and my righteousness is supposed to exceed this, and it can't. Spiritually, I'm an absolute train wreck."

But there's good news.

Remember the moral law of the Old Testament? There was someone who lived the moral law. Remember the ceremonial law of the Torah, the Pentateuch? There was someone who was the sacrifice of the ceremonial law.

Recently I heard about a guy who has a really valuable baseball card from 1982, and there was a baseball card that right now is worth over \$1,000. And on the card it says "Future Stars". And it's a unique baseball card because there's three players on one card. Let me describe this for you.

The first is Jeff Snyder. He played one year of professional baseball, pitched in eleven games, gave up 13 earned runs in those eleven games. Just to translate that for you, it's really bad. The second player is Bobby Bonner. He played four years of baseball but only appeared in 61 games with eight runs batted in and zero home runs.

The third player on that baseball card played 21 years for the Baltimore Orioles and appeared in over 3,000 games. He came to bat over 11,000 times, collected over 3,000 hits and over 400 home runs and batted in almost 1,700 runs. His name: the legendary Cal Ripken.

Now, folks, what if Bobby Bonner came into this room today and he comes up on this stage and this is what he says: "My card is worth over \$1,000." You know what we would do? We would laugh. We would laugh. Do you know why we would laugh? We would go, "No, the value of your card is because of the performance of another. That's the reason why it's \$1,000."

So we do need a righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees. And thanks be to God, it is Jesus Christ who has exceeded righteousness for us. And he took on the wrath of the Father upon himself for punishment for our unrighteousness. And it was buried in the grave for three days, and he came out of the tomb but our sin did not because of the performance of another.

This is why it's a joyful engagement. When we don't engage unbelievers to earn our salvation, Jesus has already performed it for us. And so if something happens and they come to Christ, we can't get prideful because of the cross of Jesus, because he has saved us when we did not deserve it.

And let's say they reject us. Let's say they put us down. They go off on Facebook, on social media channels about how much they can't stand us. And they may call us bigoted and they may call us close-minded. We're okay, because the verdict of Jesus is the most important verdict in our life.

The great D.L. Moody said this years ago: "Law tells me how crooked I am. Grace comes along and straightens me out." Amen. Amen. That grace straightens us out.

So let's engage distinctively. Let's engage with the virtues of Christ. Let us engage as people of the empty tomb.

I honestly think that the Church of Jesus Christ, especially in America, is struggling with sadness. We have all kinds of resources to reach others. And I think the main reason we don't engage in each other is because we're not enjoying our Savior. My encouragement for you and me—let's enjoy this Christ. Let's just enjoy him. Let's just enjoy what he has done, the blood that he shed. And let's have a blood earnestness about us because we are free. Isn't that great? We're free. "There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ."

I've got plenty of evidence for condemnation, and I'm so thankful for his blood that's able to say there's no condemnation for Rob because he's in Christ. I'll take it any day. I'll take it any day.

So if you are online or in Columbia, and you're like, "I want this Christ, I want this Christ," do you understand, believe, and trust that there's nothing in you that could save yourself? Stop that project. It ends nowhere. You need the performance of another to do that for you.

And Jesus Christ lived for you. He died in your place. He rose again from the grave. And it's you saying, "I want to trust my life to you. I want you to be my leader." And you will be saved. New start, new birth, wiped clean. We want to encourage you this morning.

Lord, thank you for your goodness to us, and Jesus. I ask, God, that you would grant faith and repentance and salvation to those who are joining us either online, in Columbia, or here. Lord, I pray for those that maybe you brought here and they were at the brink of taking their own life. Lord, I pray that you would pursue them and help them to throw away that plan, to reach out. And Lord, I pray that you would adopt people for your glory. Lord, thank you for who you are. In your awesome and precious name, Amen.