

## **St Martins C3 – August 11, 2024**

### **Why Would I Want to Be A Christian? – Answering Big Questions**

#### **Sermon Summary:**

Christianity is not always well regarded. We have an issue with our 'brand' - the sum total of what people think about when they think about Christianity.

So, when sharing your faith, don't be surprised if someone says: "Why would I want to be a Christian when you all seem judgmental, hypocritical and miserable? Or homophobic bigoted and narrow-minded. Or out of touch with reality and anti-fun." Some may think this criticism is part of the persecution all Christians face.

#### **Read John 15:18-20; Acts 2:44-47**

The world will hate us when we reflect Christ because they oppose Him. If the world is hating us because we are actually departing from his teaching, or we're just being awful, that is another thing altogether.

But where we are defined by love and generosity and sincerity, we can expect some positive response, particularly from the poor, the marginalised and the suffering. Because we bring a message of hope and forgiveness.

This question does not reject God, it rejects us. We don't even get to the point where people are rejecting God's

message, they look at us and reject God's message because of us.

So how should we respond?

### **1) Listen and Be Humble**

Hear them out. Listen with humility because, as Proverbs says "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." If someone has seen things or experienced things that are real and unacceptable, then express regret. Be prepared to agree with them that anything done in the name of Christ that is not worthy of Him is not acceptable.

### **2) Explain the Standard**

While we must strive to represent Christ in our lives, not everyone who claims to be genuine is genuine. There are counterfeits. And even among those of us who are the genuine article, none of us represent Christ perfectly. We sin and fall short, let's be honest we're still learning. We still make mistakes. And yet we understand the standard we are striving for. That standard is outrageous love.

**Read Romans 3:23; Philippians 1:6; John 13:34-35; 1 Peter 2:11-12**

### **3) Be an Example.**

You need to, by the way you live your life, show whoever is asking this question that God is real and working in your life. You need to show that you are not judgmental, hypocritical and miserable. We need to walk with Him and allow Him to make us into walking billboards for His love and joy.

## **Connect Group Material:**

### Key Point

For others to see that Christians are not judgmental, hypocritical and miserable we need to represent God well.

### Questions

What stood out to you from this week's message?

What does this message tell you about God and humans?

What are the reasons people face rejection as Christians?

Why do people see Christians as judgmental, hypocritical and miserable?

How would you respond to this: "I'm not interested in Christianity because Christians are not very good people"?

Pretend someone came to you and said they hated Christians, how could you humbly listen and hear their heart?

What does a true Christian look like?

How could you effectively explain to a non-believer that Christians are sinners who get things wrong?

What areas in your life would you like to see change so that you can be an example to others of true Christianity?

How can we change others' perceptions of Christians?

## **Monday Devotion: Be Salt and Light**

***Read Matthew 5:1-16***

At the beginning of Jesus' great teaching, known as the Sermon on the Mount, he presents a counter-culture way to live known as the Beatitudes. As he goes through the list it is clear that he wants his followers to have very different values to the world around them. They were not to grasp for greatness instead they were to hunger for humility.

Yet, the result of this self-defacing way of life was not a quiet and withdrawn life. Instead, he tells them, they would light up the whole world. There would be something so attractive about their way of doing life that all around would be drawn to what they were doing and praise God.

Today we are also called to represent God to those in our lives. This means following Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for many, embracing the lowest of positions so that all might find life and freedom in eternal measure.

There are people around us right now who are searching for more to this life. They are desperate to know if there is a way to live that will bring satisfaction and freedom. As we follow Jesus' way of humility, we can show them what it looks like.

### **Pray**

- Ask Jesus to help you be like him in your deepest values
- Pray for those around you who are hungry for God

## **Tuesday Devotion: Be Compelling**

### **Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

To reconcile with someone is to take a relationship that was lost and broken and to make it right again. Here Paul says that the result of being brought close to God is that you want to bring others to God.

We struggle with this idea in our culture. Who am I to tell you what is best for you? But we are not doing this because we think we are morally superior to others. We're also not doing it because of guilt or to earn a reward. No. Instead, we are sharing with someone what has been so good for us.

We often think that no one in our world is interested in this message, but the truth is that God is moving in our world and there are people we interact with every day who are open to this message of reconciliation.

It is our responsibility to make sure this message we share is compelling. To plead with anyone who will listen about the greatness of a life lived for God. This means looking for the appropriate opportunities and stepping out with boldness as those who represent Christ.

#### **Pray:**

- That God would give us a compelling message to share with others and the boldness to share it
- That people would be receptive to this message

## **Wednesday Devotion: Be Careful**

### **Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-13**

It is easy to look at the world around us and see how others are living that is not God's way. In our enthusiasm to see the Kingdom of God come now, it might seem appropriate to condemn the ways of the world and force all people towards God's way of doing life.

Paul tells us to be very careful of that approach - it represents spiritual pride. Startlingly he says we need to look inward and sort out our issues and not worry about the world at all.

He says the only one who has the right to judge the world is God. It is our job to ensure that those in the church are representing God well, but not to tell the world how to live.

One reason we shouldn't name sins outsiders are doing and condemn them is that even if they stopped those behaviours they would still be condemned if they have no relationship with Jesus. That is the issue we must present to the world. We should be giving all we have to bring others into a relationship with him and this begins by sorting out our issues.

### **Pray:**

- That we would wisely share Christ with the world
- That we would not have spiritual pride

## **Thursday Devotion: Be Different**

### **Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11**

When people look at our church from the outside will they be attracted to it? The church in Corinth struggled with several issues: spiritual apathy, sexual sin, and behavioural issues. A key problem was infighting. Paul wrote to them to address some of these issues and call them to a new standard.

Paul tells them how they behave is shaming them as a church and is inconsistent with the life of the Kingdom of God. They have been saved and they should not behave that way anymore.

Paul says believers should rather be wronged than bring shame upon the church by fighting. There will be times when we as a church disagree with each other or leadership. We must resolve these issues in a spirit of love. Holding onto grudges and poisoning others with our bitterness is anti-Christian behaviour.

If you are holding a grudge against someone, repent to God and work with the person involved to resolve the issue and show the world the power of the love of Jesus through the unity of his people and forgiveness for each other.

#### **Pray:**

- The church would represent God well by forgiving
- Surrender all behaviour incompatible with God's way

## **Friday Devotion: Be Ready**

### **Read Ephesians 5:1-19**

In this passage, Paul speaks to the church in Ephesus about the nature of a transformed life. They are to be imitators of God (1), have lives filled with Christ's love (2), have changed behaviour (3-5), and be in the light (6-14). He then encourages them to live wisely, not as fools and to be filled with the Holy Spirit (15, 18).

Paul then tells them to, "make the most of every opportunity in these evil days." (16) Paul is setting up a contrast between the world in which Christians live and the behaviour of those who belong to Jesus. As the world gets darker our light shines brighter. As some get drunk and ruin their lives, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and experience true joy.

This will lead to many opportunities to share what our lives show: that the life lived for God is the only thing that satisfies. Be ready for the opportunities. Be prepared to speak and let people know what you have that they can have as well. Then they will not only experience the aroma of Christ, but they will taste and see that the Lord is good.

### **Pray:**

- For the grace to live an attractive life, because you are surrendered to Christ
- For opportunities to share what about your life is so different than the world around you