Counterfeit Christ — Delivery Transcript

2 Corinthians 11:1–15 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, May 29, 2022 · *Every Thought Captive*

Watch or listen: Subsplash (video & audio) · YouTube

> ⚠️ ***AUTO-GENERATED TRANSCRIPT — verify against the audio before quoting publicly.*** *Produced from a Descript transcription of the Broadview Church sermon recording and lightly cleaned (filler words removed, obvious mis-hears of names and Scripture references corrected). No timestamps. This transcript follows the posted Broadview recording of the sermon. That recording is from a different service than the YouTube livestream linked at the start of the message (the 11:00 a.m. livestream), so the wording in the video differs in places. The posted recording begins partway into Wes's introduction, so the transcript does too. Scripture readings follow the CSB, which Wes was reading from in 2022. This is not a publication-ready manuscript and it is not Wes's exact words for print. Check any line against the recording before it goes on a graphic, in an email, or in a book.*

I thought since we were at the end of chapter 16 of the book of Revelation, it was a natural stopping point, and since we are recognizing our graduating seniors today, I wanted to bring a word that I thought might be helpful to them, but also in line with some of what we've been discussing as a church throughout the book of the Revelation and really throughout the rest of the New Testament: there are repeated warnings for Christians to be on guard against false teachers and false teaching. And in particular, false teaching as it relates to the person of Jesus.

And there's no shortage of people today who say all sorts of things about Jesus. He's, believe it or not, a pretty popular figure in our culture still today. I know in places like England and Europe Christianity has kind of lost its influence in a big way. Maybe people are a lot more indifferent to the person of Jesus in places like that. But today, even though I would not say we're a Christian society by any stretch of the imagination, there is still this desire for most people to say, you know, I respect Jesus, I like Jesus, I think Jesus is a good moral teacher or whatnot.

And one of the things that Jesus said would represent the end times or the days leading up to his second coming would be an increase in the number of people who claim to be the Christ. And a lot of times when people talk about antichrist, they think of anti in terms of against. Someone that's against Jesus, against Christianity, trying to wipe them out. But that's really not the full range of that word, anti, at least not in the Greek New Testament. It can sometimes also include the idea of instead of, or a replacement of.

And that's really the way the Bible describes this false Christ, this antichrist, that he is going to seek to supplant and replace the biblical picture of the real Christ, that Jesus is presented in Scripture as a certain way and that this other figure will come in and this other movement will say, Don't go that way, go this way. I know he's promising salvation, but this is real salvation. I know he's promising you utopia, but this is the real way to arrive at that kind of life. And people will be persuaded by that and fall prey to that.

And certainly as graduates as you go into this next season of life, whether it's higher education or starting your own business or, you know, just being out on your own, making your own choices, you will have to develop a faith for yourself, an adult faith that you own, an adult faith that can get you through your adult problems. Because adult problems are unavoidable. And there will be a temptation, I believe, just like there is for every person, to say, The faith that I had growing up, or the faith that I, you know, I believe because of my trust in God's Word and the way the Bible presents Jesus— I'd much rather believe in that kind of Jesus.

I'd much rather be kind of with this bandwagon, go with this movement because it'll make my life easier in way X, Y, or Z, and there's a danger to that. And Jesus says, beware of those kinds of movements, those kind of people who will lead you away from the biblical picture of Christ. Because there's no life there. There's only life in his name. And so, if you're taking notes, the most— if not one of the most— important things about you is that you know the real Jesus. And not just know him, pray a prayer when you're young, get baptized, go to heaven when you die, but to really know him, to be rightly related to him, to experience his presence in your life and to walk according to his design and in his wisdom.

And so this morning we're going to look at what it means to reject the counterfeit Jesus. So it's one thing to know the real Jesus, but how do you reject the counterfeit? So let's read the passage. It's in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, starting in verse 1: "I wish you would put up with a little foolishness from me." This is Paul writing to a group of Christians in a city called Corinth. The church had all kinds of problems, and in this particular instance they were believing some false teachers and so he writes to them and says, Let me be a little foolish with you for just a minute and he says that because he's about to be very strong in his words with these Christians.

So "put up with a little foolishness from me. Yes, do put up with me! For I am jealous for you"— I'm not jealous of you, but I'm jealous for you— "with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband— to present a pure virgin to Christ." And all the men in the church went, Oh, you know, no. He's talking about spiritually, I want you to be pure. Spiritually, you've been given to Christ in marriage. And if you're a guy, you're saying, how am I getting married? How am I a bride?

He's not talking physically or biologically. He's saying spiritually, you've entered into a covenant with Jesus Christ. My goal as your pastor or this apostle is to help you get to that day of judgment with a pure devotion, with no distractions or divergence in your affections for Jesus. But even though that's what I want and that's what you need, "I fear that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning"— the serpent being, in Genesis 3, the devil, deceived Adam and Eve by his cunning— "your minds may be seduced from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

For if a person comes and preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you had not received, or a different gospel, which you had not accepted, you put up with it splendidly!" So, real quick, what's going on? You've got a group of false teachers in Corinth who were being tolerated by this church, them basically saying, Well, these guys have got really good speaking skills, and he's tall, or he's cool, and he's way better than Paul was in terms of his effectiveness at persuasion. And everybody else likes these people.

And I know they get a little bit wrong when it comes to this thing or that thing about the gospel. But they're just so fun to listen to. And Paul is essentially saying, you're in danger if you continue to tolerate that kind of attitude because these so-called apostles are actually false apostles. Now, these false apostles were not just coming in after Paul and leading people astray. They were actually attacking Paul directly. And a lot of the book of 2 Corinthians is Paul defending himself against these so-called super-apostles. And that's what he does in verse 5.

He says, "Now I consider myself in no way inferior to those 'super-apostles.' Even if I am untrained in public speaking, I am certainly not untrained in knowledge. Indeed, we have in every way made that clear to you in everything. Or did I commit a sin by humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by taking pay from them to minister to you. When I was present with you and in need, I did not burden anyone, since the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my needs.

I have kept myself, and will keep myself, from burdening you in any way. As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I don't love you? God knows I do!" So why are they attacking Paul? They're saying Paul is small, he was literally a small person. He's blind, whatever the case may have been. He's not a good public speaker. He's not a real apostle because he doesn't charge you money like we do. Literally, that was what was going on.

He's not gifted as a speaker like I am. I'm blessed by God. I've got amazing public speaking skills. Paul does not. And Paul's essentially saying, who cares if I can't speak like they speak? They are preaching lies. I'm preaching truth. It's much more important for you to have

what's true, not what's pleasurable to hear. And the fact that I don't take money in no way invalidates my claim to an apostleship. He's saying, I didn't charge you money so that there wouldn't be an obstacle for you to say, Well, he's only in it for the money, or he's only trying to persuade us so that we'll make him rich.

Paul's saying, you don't have that ground because I preached to you free of charge. Now it doesn't mean Paul is against financial compensation for pastors. He in 1 Timothy[1] talks about not muzzling an ox while it's treading grain. So there's a ground for paying people who preach the gospel. Especially if that's their only source of income. But what he's saying is I removed that right from my own ministry so that you wouldn't have a ground to accuse me of any kind of bad motives. Then he concludes in verses 12 to 15: "But I will continue to do what I am doing, in order to deny an opportunity to those who want to be regarded as our equals in what they boast about."

Here's the key line: "For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no great surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will be according to their works." So I want us to camp in on that last verse that we just read, and chapter 11, verse 4. When Paul basically accuses them of tolerating bad doctrine, he says, if people come to you and they're preaching a different Jesus, which we didn't preach, and they're giving you a different spirit that we didn't or that you didn't first receive, talking about the Holy Spirit, I think.

Or they preach a different gospel, which you didn't accept, even though these people are preaching a different Jesus and a different spirit and a different gospel, you're still tolerating it. You're putting up with it. And you're basically celebrating the fact that you're so tolerant. They did the same thing with the guy who was sleeping with his mother-in-law[2] in the church. That's, you know, gross. But they were like, Look how tolerant we are. Look, we're so accepting. We'll let people sleep with their mother-in-law and still let them come to church and take the Lord's Supper.

And Paul said, That is not something to be proud of. And listening to this false doctrine and letting your church be corrupted by people who are preaching false doctrine is also not something to be proud of. You've got to get your act together. You've got to wake up. There's danger to letting this kind of thing persist. And it was true in the first century and it's true today, whether you're a graduating senior or whether you're, you know, 50 years old, or whether you're, you know, a graduating senior like, I'm a senior citizen going to heaven.

That's my next graduation. It's crucial that we have discernment. It is the need of the hour in 2022 in our culture, which is rapidly becoming post-Christian, anti-Christian, unchristian in so many different ways, it is absolutely crucial that we learn how to practice discernment. And as I said earlier, I think most people in our culture would be fine with Jesus so long as

they get to define him. So long as they make the terms, so long as Jesus is okay with my orientation and how I think about my sexuality, and so long as Jesus doesn't mess with my views on politics and these cultural hot topics, I love Jesus, I'm all about Jesus, but that's not the biblical Jesus.

The biblical Jesus doesn't allow himself to be remade into our image according to our liking. The biblical Jesus does have things that we all probably like about him, but he also has things that confront us, that challenge us, that maybe we don't agree with. And in our culture, that is not okay. The idea that there is one true truth, one true definition of Jesus, that itself is not okay. It is a truth claim, a claim to power that is anathema in our culture. And so what has happened as a result is that there have been all these other false Christs, these counterfeit Jesuses that have cropped up over the last several years, that are persuading people, sometimes even good Christian people to believe that vision of Jesus instead of the biblical vision of Jesus.

I come up with a couple of these. Some of these I got from a book called *Counterfeit Christs*. It was written by a Catholic apologist, and I haven't read the whole book but the idea kind of created in my mind an interesting thought experiment. So I made this little graphic here. You can tell I'm not a graphic designer by any means. You've got here up at the top, therapist Jesus. Therapist Jesus is the Jesus who sits down with you like this guy on the park bench and just listens to all of your problems.

And says, There, there now. I'm so sorry. That's terrible that happened to you. And never really challenges you, never really instructs you. Just affirms and sympathizes with you in your problems. He's the therapist Jesus. Now, how does that make you feel? And what do you think about that? The second, maybe similar, is hippie Jesus. He's the open-minded Jesus who accepts and affirms you no matter what, so long as you're living in your truth. He never challenges you in your sin or brokenness. He never calls you to some kind of standard.

He's just, It's cool, man. I'm cool, you're cool, we're cool. Peace, love, and happiness, very Oprah-esque approach to spirituality. The third one, touchdown Jesus. This is actually a picture of Jesus at Notre Dame University, if you didn't know that. He's saying, Whoo, way to go, Notre Dame. This Jesus enables you to run faster, jump higher, defeat your enemies, become the best athlete you can be. This Jesus is what leads some people to put on their locker Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Jesus Christ who gives me strength. And someone comes along, you say, You know that's about Paul being content in his bad circumstances.

No, it's about my bench press. I can do 300 pounds because I believe in Jesus. That's touchdown Jesus. Maybe a lot of adults don't believe in this Jesus, but it was very popular when I was growing up in high school. I still kind of, when I'm in the gym, sometimes think, Look, Jesus, help me get this up. That's touchdown Jesus. That's not necessarily the real

Jesus. Corporate Jesus. This Jesus is prevalent especially among adults, especially in kind of the Wall Street type of folks. Jesus is going to help me advance in my job, help me close the sale, manage my time, make connections, make friends, influence people.

Life coach Jesus, similar to therapist Jesus, but life coach Jesus will help you become your best self, teach you practical skills, guide you through tough decisions. There was a movie that came out a while back called *The Secret*. Anybody ever watch that movie? It's trash. I would not recommend it. But it's this idea that Jesus knew the secret. Jesus had like the special access to God and the universe and the, you know, the whatever and he was able to harness it and leverage it, and that's why he was so influential and you can be that too if you buy my book and give me money.

That's life coach Jesus. Then there's guru Jesus: a lot of Middle Eastern religions, the kind of New Age mysticism that is super prevalent in our culture, especially Hollywood elites. They're all about spiritual guru Jesus. He's anti-religion, anti-church, anti-pastor, anti-doctrine. Just wants you to find the God within, become God conscious. A lot of that's very popular in our culture. Then there's the moral philosopher Jesus. A lot of atheists are becoming this kind of Christian where they say, you know, I don't believe there's a literal God who created the universe. But we need God as a culture, and so let's adopt Christianity because Jesus has given us a compelling moral vision of the universe.

He's given us a good ethic that has served us well in the West and so they kind of advocate for moral philosopher Jesus and a lot of Christians are buying into this because I can keep my Christianity but not have to be unpopular by believing in God and all these other things. And so you've got to pick and choose the parts of Jesus you like and don't like. Then there are the political Jesuses. You can't talk about false Jesuses without these. You've got the Jesus on the left and the Jesus on the right.

The Jesus on the left is the socialist Jesus or the Marxist Jesus. He's the Jesus who wants to help you overthrow your oppressors, identify the corruptions in the system, replace the system with something from Karl Marx, or something that's going to tear down the proletariat and empower— tear down the bourgeoisie and empower the proletariat. Did I get that right? Okay, I can't remember all the facts. Then there's the Jesus on the right. You can call him the Republican Jesus. I have the word fascist because it's like all the way to the right.

I'm being extreme in my definitions, but this Jesus doesn't tolerate sissies. He doesn't want any lazy people in his camp. He knows how to own the libs. He, you know, loves hunting, loves guns, loves all things macho man. And then there's the American Jesus. And this is the Jesus that literally gives you the American dream. If you'll just go to church and worship him and love him and do all that, then he'll give you a nice big house and a very pretty spouse and a nice car. And everything will go according to plan.

The problem with all of these competing visions of Jesus is they are incomplete. Some of them absolutely false. But if you're taking notes, a lot of these Jesuses, what they'll do is they'll hone in on one truth about Jesus at the expense of other true truths about Jesus. So yes, he is a wonderful counselor. The Scripture actually says he is a wonderful counselor, but he's not just someone to whom you talk about your problems, but also a king to whom you submit. He's not just someone who's wise, but he's someone who is authoritative.

He's King of kings and Lord of lords. He is a moral philosopher. He, through the Sermon on the Mount, gave us a compelling ethical vision for the world. But he doesn't just tell you how to live morally. He actually exposes in you your inability to live according to that moral standard and says, if you want salvation, you'll never get it by trying and working for it, you must receive it by grace through faith. And so it's true, but it's not all the way true. It's incomplete. They are partial at best.

These visions of Jesus are partial at best. A counterfeit is a partial picture of Jesus. At worst, they are a gross misrepresentation of who Jesus is and what he really stood for. So if that's true, then how do we spot the fakes? How do we separate the counterfeit Jesus from the real Jesus? I want to give you three principles or three facts about counterfeits. And then we're going to camp out at the end on the real Jesus and why we can know he's the real Jesus. The first fact or the first principle is this.

You got to know that the counterfeits are going to look, sound, feel like the real thing. And take Jesus out of it for just a minute— all counterfeits. If it's a good counterfeit, it's going to look, sound, and feel like the real thing. Counterfeit money from the naked eye, you probably wouldn't be able to tell if it's good counterfeit money. If it's Monopoly money, you know it's fake. But if it's good counterfeit money, it's kind of hard to tell. If it's a counterfeit Jesus, Paul says here in chapter 11, verse 14, the devil masquerades as an angel of light.

The devil will never lead you astray by saying— he'll never, like, come out with these big scary red horns and, I am so evil, follow me. I will make you healthy and wise. And you'll be like, I don't know if I want to buy any of that stuff. No, he won't do that. He comes as an angel of light. He plays on subtlety. He uses nuance. He plays real lightly at first on little prejudices, little areas of compromise, little sins, that says, Oh, it's not so bad. He kind of lulls you to sleep.

It's not what you think it is. And then eventually he drops the hammer and everything hits the fan. But at first it's an angel of light. It's looking like, sounding like, feeling like the real thing. And you've got to have that category in your mind. You've got to know that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Otherwise you'll never be alert. You'll never be on guard. You'll just kind of be floating around, Well, that's in the Christian bookstore, it must be fine. Or, You know, I watched that on Christian television, it must be okay.

You'll never be discerning knowing that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. He's in the church. He's in this culture. He's finding ways to infiltrate. And so you've got to know that going in. It's going to look, feel, and act like the same thing. The second principle is in order to spot a counterfeit, you've got to pay close attention to the details. And again, take Jesus out of it. Just think counterfeits for just a minute. If you're going to spot counterfeit money from real money, you'll never see it from the naked eye.

You've got to pay attention to the details. And what are some of the details that you should pay attention to if you're wanting to spot counterfeit money? Are there any bank tellers in the room this morning? Bank tellers, anyone? Okay. So what are some of the things you would look for? Things like what? All right. The feel, the texture. Whereas cheap printers are not able to do that. You've got the color, you've got the watermark. The threads, the little red and blue threads. Counterfeits a lot of times don't have that.

But for you to notice those kinds of things, you've got to actually pay attention. You've got to look really, really close. You've got to use your little magic marker and swipe it to make sure it doesn't— I don't know about that. I always see them put the— why do they mark that? It'll show up a different color. If it's a counterfeit, it'll show up. Okay, there you go. So there you go. Point is details matter, and you've got to pay close attention to those details, and the same is true theologically when it comes to a counterfeit Jesus.

There will be people who get a lot of things about Jesus right. In fact, there's so much of an idea in the church today: Well, if we all love Jesus and want to advance the gospel and we all agree on the majors, why are we getting all out of sorts on these little theological things? Why are we trying to focus on doctrine and all these things? Let's just— we all believe in Jesus. We all love Jesus. We all want to preach the gospel. Well, that's not sufficient. I'm sorry. There are people who get a lot of the broad strokes right, but the details matter because it's at the level of the details— the ways that they get Jesus wrong on the details make him way, way wrong and will lead to devastating consequences down the road.

Paul has this category in his mind. There are people who say Jesus, who preach Jesus, who maybe have lifestyles that are moral and all of those things. But they are still false apostles. They're deceitful workers. They're disguising themselves as apostles, even though they're really not. If you're taking notes, if you get certain things about Jesus wrong, it doesn't matter what else you get right. Now that's not to say there aren't secondary matters. There are secondary debates about Jesus that are harmless in a lot of ways. It's hard to know. But there are other details about Jesus that absolutely matter.

They had whole councils, and actually burned heretics at the stake. I don't advocate that, but they were serious about those details because if you get corrupted at that detail, the whole thing gets messed up. For example, was he truly God and truly man? Or was he just a man? Or was he just God? That's a big important detail. I know it's theological. I know it's

nuanced. I know it's hard to discuss. But if you get that wrong on either side, you got a host of problems. Now, we don't know what these people were preaching.

We don't know how they got it wrong. We don't even know if they knew they were being deceitful. I sometimes wonder, these people who were preaching in Corinth, did they know that they were false? Because there is certainly evidence in the New Testament to suggest that you can be a false teacher and not know it. You can be deceived about Jesus and think that you are preaching the truth and doing what's right. Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount there at the end in Matthew chapter 7 said on the day of judgment there will be many people, many who will say to me, Lord, did we not preach in your name?

Did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name? And he'll say, Depart from me. I don't know you. And so you've got to understand this category of people exists. They may not even know that they're being deceptive. And so what they say matters, and you paying attention to the details of what they say really matters. Now if you're taking notes, I don't know what's next. If you get Jesus wrong, it doesn't matter what else you get right. When paying attention to these details, one of the other things I think it's important for you to consider is that content is king.

There is, I think, a temptation in a lot of people to say if they have a good lifestyle, if they're morally blameless, if they're passionate and sincere, then I'll just kind of tolerate them even though I don't agree with what they're saying. Content is king. They can have morally blameless lives, be absolutely sincere, but still be very, very wrong about certain things about Jesus and the wrong things that they get about Jesus have absolutely devastating consequences. In other words, you could be a very sincere, passionate, morally virtuous heretic. World's full of them.

So content is king. And one of the ways I'm confident in saying that is because there's an example in Philippians chapter 1, where Paul was in prison and there were people who were preaching the biblical gospel out of selfish ambition and bad motives. In other words, they were sinful people with sinful motivations. But they were preaching the biblical gospel, and what Paul says about those people illustrates that for him, content trumps character. At least as it relates to identifying the counterfeit from the real. Look at what he says in Philippians chapter 1.

He says, "To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will." So two types of preachers, the sinfully motivated and the sincerely motivated. The sincere, "These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; the others," on the other hand, "proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment." Look what he says next. It's absolutely amazing. Who cares? "What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice."

Now, let me be very careful here. Is Paul minimizing their sin? Absolutely not. Is he justifying it? Is he saying, so long as you preach the biblical gospel, you can live like the devil; it doesn't matter to me? No, he's not saying that at all. He's not justifying their immorality. But what he is saying, I think, is if the content's wrong, it doesn't matter what else is right. They can have morally blameless lives, they can be absolutely sincere. When it comes to the gospel, content is king. And so make sure the people you're listening to, the people who are influencing you, the people that you love to listen to because they're just so easy on the ears, and I get so much practical help out of what they're saying, make sure the content is right.

That's what discernment requires. Discernment doesn't measure truth against sincerity or popularity. Discernment measures truth against truth. Content is king. You can be a passionate, virtuous, sincere heretic. All right. Last thing, fact number three, widespread faith in a counterfeit has devastating consequences. We know this to be true just with counterfeits in general. You guys remember Bernie Madoff? He had a Ponzi scheme. It's a counterfeit approach to investment. Whenever that scheme was exposed for the fraud that it was, it had a big negative impact on the financial sector as a whole because a lot of people had a lot of money in his lies and his deception.

If you take counterfeit money and you built a whole country on counterfeit currency and then it's finally exposed that the currency is counterfeit. Well, that has devastating consequences for the people who adopted it and who bought into it. The same is true spiritually when it comes to the biblical Jesus. Our culture in a lot of ways has adopted a counterfeit Christ. Many people are kind of pressing into that. There are books being written, whole industries being created around these counterfeit visions of Jesus, and they are going to culminate in a destination that is devastating in its consequences.

In fact, according to the apostle Paul, he says in verses 2 and 3,[3] that this adopting of a counterfeit is equal with spiritual adultery. He says, I'm jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you in marriage to one husband, being Jesus. I am working to present you as pure in your devotion to Jesus, but I fear that, verse three, just as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your minds may be seduced from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. So when you put your faith in a counterfeit Christ, you're engaging yourself in an act of spiritual adultery.

That's a big deal. He's not just saying you can debate the secondary matters, it's no big deal. He's saying no, on the major things, When it comes to the gospel, when it comes to who Christ is, when it comes to what it means to walk in the Spirit, and who is the Holy Spirit and those kinds of things. Those are very important discussions and deviating from the truth on those matters amounts to spiritual adultery. And I'm afraid, he says, that some of you are being deceived just like the serpent deceived Eve.

And Satan's a master deceiver. He talks about Satan as that serpent that's throwing us back to Genesis chapter three in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were standing there and Satan comes along. You notice Satan doesn't come along with— he doesn't show his cards right out front. He's very sneaky. He says, Did God really say? He puts doubt in them. Did you really hear it accurately? God is afraid that you're going to be like him. Don't you want to be stronger? Don't you want to be more knowledgeable? He's playing on their insecurities, he's playing on their fears, he does it today.

He plays on our prejudices, he plays on those little areas of moral compromise. He's a master deceiver. He doesn't come out of the gate— then he drops the hammer, then he sows the division, or then he sows the devastation, and that's exactly what is going to happen with these false teachers. Paul says in verse 15, their end is destruction, and your end will be destruction as well. They're going to be paid according to their works. And so what about you today? Do you know the counterfeit or do you know the real Jesus?

Maybe for you this morning you'd say, I believe in the real Jesus. I, you know, I don't want to be with any counterfeits. But I don't want to be someone that's mean or judgmental. I don't want to, you know, say that anyone shouldn't listen to anybody. And so I'm just going to tolerate it. Paul makes very clear in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, the mere toleration of it is itself enough to put you in danger. You tolerate it splendidly. He's being facetious. He's saying, you are so proud of yourself for being so tolerant, but you're actually sowing the seeds for your own destruction.

Their end is destruction and your end will be as well. And so the need of the hour is that we be discerning. You've got to learn to practice discernment. Now what does discernment look like? One principle about discernment, then we're done. True biblical discernment does not merit an idea based on its popularity or its social consequence. True biblical discernment merits an idea based on truth, namely the standard of God's truth in His Word. And so for you this morning, when you think about discernment, you've got to kind of separate yourself from the tide of the culture because our culture is so polarized, we're so divided into these political camps.

These days someone will say, I don't believe that because they do. And if that side believes it, I reject it. Even if there's merit to the idea. So for them, they don't merit the idea based on truth. They merit the idea based on tribalism. Well, if they're for it, I'm against it. And if they're against it, I'm for it. Even if God's Word says, Well, maybe you should. Maybe you should believe that. Maybe you shouldn't believe that. Even if your tribe believes it, maybe you shouldn't. And so true biblical discernment is sometimes going to require you to have to stand alone.

Maybe true biblical discernment is going to separate you from the tribes and put you somewhere in the middle where you've got to think carefully and with nuance and be

unapologetic about biblical truths even when it's not agreeable with this camp or that camp. But that's what the calling of a Christ follower is. It's to stand with Jesus, let God be found true and every man a liar. My kingdom is not of this world, my home is not here, my home is in heaven. The counterfeit will be a partial representation of the truth or a gross misrepresentation.

But the biblical Jesus requires us to hold truths in tension. The biblical Jesus is truly God and truly man. The biblical Jesus tells you you are far more loved than you could have ever imagined, but you're also far more sinful than you could have ever dared imagine. The biblical Jesus does love you enough to lay down his life on a cross, but the biblical Jesus also shows you you were sinful enough and helpless enough that the only way for you to be saved was for someone else to stand in your place for your sin.

So which one is it? Is it God or is it man? Is it mercy or is it judgment? Are we loved by God or do we deserve God's wrath? Those feel like paradoxes. But the biblical Jesus is a Jesus in paradox. Biblical truth oftentimes is truth in the tension of paradox. But if you will become the kind of person who says, I want to be with the biblical Jesus, not the counterfeits, I don't care if I have to hold these truths in tension, I'm going to hold them in tension. And what that will do is it will create a humility in your heart.

And if you allow it to, it will drive you inevitably to the real Jesus and his cross. Because at the cross you see in perfect harmony God's mercy and God's judgment. That Jesus was fully man and fully God. In that he was man, he subjected himself to mortality, death, even death on the cross; but in that he was God, he paid for the sins of the world— not just a good man dying, but God making atonement for sin. He was sinless, perfect. At the cross, all of those paradoxes that are difficult to maintain, they culminate there.

And really show that Jesus truly is the way, the truth, and the life. And if you can have the courage to reject the counterfeits, hold those truths in tension and let them take you to the cross, even though it may be culturally unpopular, even though there may be consequences for maintaining true faith in the true Jesus, it will be absolutely worth it and will bring about your salvation. And this world may not appreciate it, but you're not living for this world. You're living for the world that is to come. This world will ultimately reject people who live in that way.

The ultimate antichrist will bring an ultimate hammer down on anyone who chooses to live that way. So you've got to decide today, What kind of person am I going to be? Am I going to be someone who knows the real Jesus, whatever the cost? And so as Taylor leads us in a time of response, I want us to spend a little bit of time reflecting whether or not we're willing to make that choice. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, you've never made a decision to trust in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior.

Maybe you grew up with one of the counterfeits. Maybe you thought, so long as I go to church and do all the right things, then I will be saved. The biblical Jesus doesn't save you in that way. The biblical Jesus exposes your sin and your helplessness and says the only way you can be saved is through repenting of your sin and trusting in me. Not in you, not in your history, not in your good works, but trusting in Christ and in Christ alone. And so if you've not received the miracle of salvation, you can come down and say, I want to give my life to Christ.

Maybe this morning you need to repent of kind of tolerating certain things that you know are toxic, they're poisonous to your spiritual health. But you've been putting up with it because I don't want to disenfranchise that person. I don't want to make my child angry. I don't want to be unpopular. I don't want to be one of those Christians. And so this morning it's, Lord, give me the courage to stand firm in the truth of the gospel and give me wisdom and discernment so that I can maintain my faith in the real Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this time and we pray now as we respond that you would give us discernment. It's so tempting, whether one side or the other, to just let what's popular, or what some persuasive person says, be the truth— and I don't even want what I'm doing to be that. We want your word to be the source of our truth. And so give us a love for your word. Give us a courage to defend it, to establish our lives, to build our lives on it. And give us the strength that we need to persevere through a culture that may not appreciate that and may reject it at every level.

Help us to be people who fear you more than we fear man, who fear the one who can destroy body and soul in hell more than the one who can destroy a career or popularity or whatever the case may be. The rubber really meets the road at this point, Lord. So we need your help, Holy Spirit, to strengthen us, to give us wisdom and discernment. And so would you give it in Jesus' name? Amen.

---

1. Transcript note: spoken as "second Timothy"; the "do not muzzle an ox" quotation is in 1 Timothy 5:18 (also 1 Corinthians 9:9, quoting Deuteronomy 25:4). Source: 1 Timothy 5:18 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "his mother-in-law" (twice); in 1 Corinthians 5:1 the man was sleeping with "his father's wife," that is, his stepmother. Source: 1 Corinthians 5:1 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "chapter two and three"; the passage quoted is 2 Corinthians 11:2–3. Source: 2 Corinthians 11:2–3 (CSB), BibleGateway. ↩