

Outsiders
Speaking Up in a PC World
November 4, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Congregational Songs – Oceans / One Thing Remains / T&G

Video – Behind the Scenes

Feature – Called Me Higher / Offering

Good morning everyone. Let's pray together.

Father, it is good to know you.

It is good to belong to you.

It is good to be safe inside of your love;
inside of your grace and your mercy.

But you have not called us inside for our
sake alone.

You have called us inside so that we can
share the goodness of who you are with

those still on the outside.

I pray that what I say in the next few minutes will be truly helpful in that task.

And I ask that in the name of the ultimate insider, Jesus, who loved outsiders so much that He gave his life for them.

Amen.

Recap

If you were here either of the last two weeks, you that we're in the middle of a series called *Outsiders* ... which, our current political and cultural environment, is a term that often carries a negative and exclusionary connotation. In the thinking that predominates our world these days, the goal is for *outsiders to remain as outsiders* and, in fact, *the further out they are* the better!

But in the mindset of those who know and follow

Jesus, an *outsider* – someone who does *not* know or follow Jesus; someone who’s not part of the tribe called “Christian” ... In the mindset of those who know and follow Jesus, the hope isn’t that outsiders will move further out. Instead, the hope is that *outsiders* might someday become *insiders*.

That’s because – and Jesus himself made this point abundantly clear on many occasions ...

In the same way that lost things matter to people, lost people (which is another way of referring to “outsiders”) matter to God.

In the same way that the things you and I sometimes lose matter to us so much that we’ll drop everything to go look for them, lost people matter to God ... which is why He himself embarked on an all-out search and rescue mission by coming to live among us as the man, Jesus of Nazareth.

And when Jesus walked this earth, He invited his disciples to join Him in that mission; to live a life

that was about more than just their lives.

He invited them – as He invites those who follow Him today – to a *Grander Vision* where the ultimate prize isn't perks ... or paydays ... or positions ... or personal pleasure. Instead the prize is *people*.

People in your life and mine ...

- Who are hurting
- Who are searching for happiness
- Who don't know how much they matter
- Who doubt that God even exists
- Who are angry with God and believe He is angry at them.

The prize of the *Grander Vision* is people who do not know and follow Jesus; outsiders who God wants to become insiders by trusting in and following Jesus.

Now, when we talked about that last week, we said

that, for some (like the first disciples), pursuing the Grander Vision means leaving a career and investing full-time vocational energy in the cause.

But, for most of us, it *doesn't* mean that. Instead, it means recognizing that we have been strategically placed by God in locations and relationships and careers where He wants us to represent Jesus.

The question is ... *how can we maximize our impact right where we are?*

Well, last week we used a little equation from Mark Mittleberg's book, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*.

$$\mathbf{MI = HP + CP + CC}$$

Maximum Impact (MI) happens when you combine ...

- “High Potency” with ...

- “Close Proximity” with ...
- “Clear Communication”

High Potency plus Close Proximity plus Clear Communication equals Maximum Impact as an “Ambassador for Christ” (which is how the Apostle Paul describes this particular calling).

Now, as we said last week, *High Potency* means that your relationship with Jesus is strong and influencing your life. That’s important because you can’t give away what you don’t have.

Close Proximity (or CP) means that you are relationally connected to people who are outside of the faith ... which can become more challenging the longer you’re a Christian because it’s more comfortable to stay inside the “holy huddle” with other believers.

Finally, *Clear Communication (or CC)* means that you are able to explain who Jesus is and what He has done for the world and for you. In other words,

you're able to tell God's story and your story and you're able to give reasons for why you believe.

Now, this one tends to be more challenging than the other two because it requires us to have some idea in advance of what to say to people ...

... and, you *do know* that those of us who are Christians are *supposed* to be able to talk to people about our faith, right?

The Apostle Peter put it like this:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ...

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

So today and next Sunday we're going to talk about giving answers and reasons for the hope we have in Jesus.

A PC World

And to do that we need to begin by acknowledging that you and I now live in a “PC world.”ⁱ

And by “P.C.” I don’t mean “personal computer” or “politically correct” (though we *do* live in a world where political correctness seems to be the standard by which communication is measured).

Instead, by “P.C.” I mean *post-Christian*.

You and I live in a world that has moved beyond Christianity – both in “religious practice” (so to speak) and in recognizing its overwhelmingly positive influence in shaping our lives.

One author defines it like this:

“A post-Christian society is not merely a society in which agnosticism or atheism is the prevailing fundamental belief.

It is a society rooted in the history, culture, and practices of Christianity but in which the religious beliefs of Christianity have been either rejected or, worse, forgotten.”ⁱⁱ

In contrast to a *non*-Christian society, where the majority may have never heard the gospel and, therefore, have few to no preconceived notions about Christianity or the Bible, in a post-Christian society, the majority *have* been exposed to Christianity (in our case, for generations). But they are opting for a different worldview—a different narrative through which to make sense of the world.

For post-Christians, science, philosophy, and reason are the go-tos for worldviews and decision making. They have little or no tolerance for faith-based answers to fact-based questions.

In post-Christian society, people “kind of know” the Bible stories. They just don’t believe them. Or they don’t believe them anymore.

That's the world we walk *into* when we walk *out* later this morning: post-Christian.

More personally, this means (if you're a Christian) that most of the "outsiders" with whom you are in "close proximity" have a post-Christian mindset; a post-Christian way of looking at the world.

- According to the Barna Group (a research firm that studies these kinds of things), 48 percent of Americans qualify as "post-Christian" in their beliefs and practices. That's nearly 120 million people.
- According to the Pew Research Religious Landscape Study, nearly a quarter of Americans claim no religious affiliation, representing a seven-point jump in just seven years.ⁱⁱⁱ That's just under fifty-six million people.

By the way, this group has been nicknamed the “nones” because whenever they are surveyed about their religious affiliation, they check “None of the Above.”

But it’s not just the world that post-Christians and “nones” see differently. The way they look at the Bible has also changed.

In a society that almost worships science and rationalism, it is an increasingly hard pill to swallow that a seemingly random assortment of ancient stories, poems, sermons, prophecies, and letters, written and compiled over the course of 3,000 years, is somehow the sacred “Word of God.”

That’s why in 2011, 10 percent of Americans qualified as skeptics when it came to the Bible. In 2016, just five years later, that number had more than doubled. Currently, 22 percent of Americans do not believe the Bible has any divine foundations.

Of course, the current percentage is not the real story. The real story is the *rate* at which our culture is dismissing the Bible as uninspired, untrue, and irrelevant.

Actually, that's not totally true. The *real* story of interest and concern (if you're a follower of Jesus) that these trends are most pronounced in *younger people*, particularly millennials.

Surveys show that young Americans are more likely to be religiously unaffiliated than older Americans, with millennials comprising 44 percent of the “nones.”

But it doesn't stop there. 27 percent of millennial non-Christians believe “the Bible is a dangerous book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people.”^{iv} Almost a third of young adults believe *that* about the book that most of us believe to be the foundation of our faith!

So, how did this happen? How did we go from a

predominantly Christian culture to post-Christian culture especially among millennials?

There are lots of reasons but the answer that best seems to account for all the facts is that the version of faith this generation of “nones” grew up with left them unprepared to deal with academia and adulthood.

Half of currently identified “nones” raised in a religion acknowledge *lack of belief* as the reason they walked away from religion. Science, logic, and lack of evidence were offered as explanations for the evaporation of faith.

This is especially true for those who pursued education beyond high school where they ran into the writings of journalists, scientists, and atheistic scholars like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, and the late Christopher Hitchens.

Their faith – or at least the version they grew up with – could not withstand the challenges of the

modern scientific world.

Boldness

Now, I know we've kind of drilled down deep on this (some of you – your eyes are glazing over) but I think it's very important to be clear about the world in which we live and (if we're Christians) the world in which we're trying to present and represent Jesus.

We're long past the time when we can say “the Bible says” and expect for an “outsider” to say “oh, wow, I didn't know that. Thank you for telling me.”

And we know that, right? We not only sense it culturally, we may have even had someone say “I don't care what your book says. Your book has a lot of weird stuff in it.”

And because we know that attitude is there and have maybe even experienced it personally,

there's a natural tendency to pull back from ever saying *anything* about our faith. After all, what could we say to a skeptical post-Christian millennial "none" that wouldn't sound like a Sunday School platitude?

Maybe ... maybe we should say what the believers living in the *pre-Christian* world said. After all, living in a *post-Christian* world is a lot like living in a *pre-Christian* world. In both situations there is very little cultural leverage.

In fact, in the *pre-Christian* world (and by that term I'm referring to the earliest days when Christianity was just beginning to form in Jerusalem and nowhere else in the world to be found) ...

In the *pre-Christian* world, not only was it culturally unpopular to be a Christian like it is today. It was actually *dangerous* to be a Christian. The leaders of the early church were even beaten and thrown into jail for their faith!

One of the earliest historians of the church – Luke, who wrote the New Testament book of Acts – tells us that after one of those incidents (and a threat that “if you guys keep speaking up about this, we’re going to beat you and imprison you again”) ... instead of pulling back, two of the leaders – Peter and John – called everyone together to pray.

And this is what they prayed:

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to be safe and protected from everything they might do to us.”

No ... that’s not what it says. ☺ They prayed ...

“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness ...”

Acts 4:29 (NIV)

And if you read the rest of the story as Luke tells it, this particular quality of boldness appears

again and again.

In fact, the very last sentence in his account says that ...

**The Apostle Paul, while under house arrest
in Rome ...**

*Proclaimed the kingdom of God and
taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—
with all boldness and without
hindrance! Acts 28:31 (NIV)*

In a pre-Christian world where there was little or no respect for them or their movement; where there was no institutional support and no cultural memory of how it used to be, Christians didn't back down from speaking up. They were bold.

But what, exactly, were they bold about? What were they speaking up about?

I mean, if those of us living in a post-Christian world are going to say what they were saying in

the *pre*-Christian world, that's a pretty important question.

First let me tell you what they *weren't* speaking up about.

They weren't speaking up in defense of their *political opinions*.

The Apostle Paul (who was a Roman citizen by birth) didn't go all over the Roman world saying, "you know, I think our Emperor is colluding with the enemy and our Roman senators should impeach him."

He didn't go round preaching, "all these immigrants buying Roman citizenship (and they were) is ruining the Empire and we need to put a stop to it."

Now, Paul and others *did* go round preaching that Jesus is Lord and not Caesar which definitely has political implications, but they were not commenting or debating or protesting to change

laws or public policy. Their focus was somewhere else.

These believers who lived in the pre-Christian world ...

Were also not speaking up *in judgement of “outsiders”* and their lifestyles.

In fact, Paul literally wrote that!

*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 1
Corinthians 5:12-13 (NIV)*

And that statement was written in the context of Paul telling Christians focus on and deal with *their own sin* instead of the sin of people who never claimed to be believers.

Finally, believers who lived in the pre-Christian world ...

... weren't speaking up to defend *the Bible* – in particular what we call the “Old Testament.”

Of course, they wouldn't have called it that because there wasn't yet a *New Testament*. To them, what we call the *Old Testament* was just “The Law and the Prophets and the Writings” or, even better, the Hebrew Scriptures.

In any case, the earliest evangelists were not traveling all over the Roman Empire and telling the Gentiles (or non-Jewish people) why they should believe in the Law and the Prophets and the Writings. In fact, if you look at the content of their preaching, they almost never referenced the Old Testament unless they were speaking to people who already believed in it, i.e. Jewish men and women.

And this point, I think, is critical to understand for any believer-in-Jesus living in a post-Christian world because, as we've seen, one of the greatest obstacles to faith, especially among younger

people is the Bible itself – in particular, the part we call the Old Testament.

In fact, as I was preparing for this message, I looked back at a series I did seven years ago, in 2012, where I asked those who were part of North Heartland at that time to give me a list of things that caused them to have doubts about their faith.

That survey revealed many issues but, one of the biggest had to do with the Bible.

Some people said they struggled with how to interpret the Bible or how certain writings got in and others were left out but, by far, the greatest collection of doubts had to do with *what is actually recorded in the Bible*.

People wondered ...

- Are stories and miracles real?
- Do I have to believe everything in the whole

Bible is literal, i.e. do I have to be ‘all in’?”

In fact, I’ll never forget having a lunch around that time with a young man who had just started attending North Heartland. He was very curious about Christianity and at one point in our conversation he literally asked, “to be a Christian, do I have to believe some of the crazy stuff in the Bible – like the world being created in six days?”

I remember being caught off guard by his question because, as a Christian from the time I was a teenager and having been taught that the Bible is the Word of God, I’d never questioned that. But he had been raised very differently. He’d been educated very differently ... from a *post-Christian* perspective.

In that survey I did seven years ago, people wondered ...

- Why is there such a dichotomy between Old and New Testaments? For example, how could a loving God tell the Israelites to wipe out entire cities and towns?”

One person summed the whole thing up very well when he/she wrote:

“My doubt about some things in the OT makes me doubt the whole thing. I find it hard to defend certain aspects of the Bible and tend to just say ‘I don't know, I just believe.’ But doubt does creep in.”

- Maybe you feel that way, too.
- Maybe you know someone who feels that way.
- Maybe you know someone who has rejected Christianity because they feel that way.

If you do, I have good news for you (and them).

The believers-in-Jesus who lived in a pre-

Christian world ...

- Weren't being bold about their political opinions
- And they weren't being bold in their moral judgement of "outsiders"
- And they weren't being bold in defending the Hebrew Scriptures

What they were bold about was *Jesus* – who He was and what He had done.

Remember how Luke ended his account of the initial expansion of Christianity?

He [meaning Paul] proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Acts 28:31 (NIV)

In one of his own letters to a group of non-Jewish believers in the city of Corinth ...

Paul wrote:

When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn't use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God's secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 (NLT)

In other words ...

- “I didn't come to talk to you about your politics.”
- “I didn't come to judge you for your blatant immorality. After all, I myself am the chief of sinners: for years, I persecuted Christians before becoming one.”
- “And I didn't come to convince you to believe in the literalness of the Hebrew Bible.”

“Instead, I came to tell you about *Jesus*, the One who was crucified.”

Of course, what makes the “Jesus who was crucified” worth talking about isn’t simply that He was crucified. After all, lots of Jewish young men were crucified in those days.

What makes the “Jesus who was crucified” worth talking about is what happened *after* His crucifixion – His *resurrection*.

And this is the point I want you to see.

In a Christian-world, where people have been raised to believe that the whole Bible is God’s Word cover-to-cover, it might make sense to debate and defend the whole thing.

But in a post-Christian world, where people have been raised to *doubt* the Bible it makes a lot more sense to do what believers in the pre-Christian world did before there even was a Bible: focus on

Jesus and, in particular, His resurrection.

Now don't hear what I'm not saying.

- I'm not saying "the Old Testament isn't really inspired scripture. It isn't God's Word, so just forget about it."
- And I'm not saying "if you're a Christian, there's no value in you, personally, trying to read and understand the Old Testament."

What I'm saying is ... when you as a Christian living in a *post-Christian* world have the opportunity to give an outsider to the faith the reason for the hope that lies within you, you should do what the Christians living in the *pre-Christian* world did.

Keep the main thing the main thing.

- And the main thing is not your political opinions (as much as you believe in them).

- It's not what you think about standards of morality (as correct as you may be).
- And it's not your ability to defend the Bible, particularly the Old Testament (as much as you believe it is divinely inspired).

In fact, you do realize that nowhere are Christians told to be prepared to defend a text or convince people to accept an authoritative book before considering the message of Jesus, right? And that nowhere are we told to defend the morality of every event recorded in the Old Testament.^v

The only thing we're told to defend is the reason for our hope.

And that reason – the main thing – is Jesus: who He is and what He has done, particularly His resurrection.

Because without that, none of this matters whatsoever.

As Paul put it:

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:14 (NIV)

In other words, “if this resurrection claim isn’t true, then you shouldn’t trust anything else we say about God. We’re full of it and you should get as far away as possible.”

Takeaways

Now, at this point, I could go one of three ways as I wrap this up.

#1. I could keep hammering on this point: that Jesus is the main thing and nothing else, not even the Bible itself.

So, I think I will for just a bit.

In his recent book, *Irresistible*, Andy Stanley writes:

“When scientific claims and archaeological discoveries threaten to undermine the credibility of the Old Testament, Christians often feel compelled to either rise up and defend the Bible or look the other way lest they see something that undermines their faith.

“Both responses are unnecessary and harmful. Both responses feed a false narrative regarding our faith. Our faith doesn’t teeter on the brink of extinction based on the archaeology or the history of the Old Testament.

“The faith of Jesus’ earliest followers did not rest on a historically, archaeologically, scientifically accurate book. Yours shouldn’t either. Neither should your kid’s. Neither

should the kids' in your church.

“When skeptics point out the violence, the misogyny, the scientific and historically unverifiable claims of the Hebrew Bible,” he concludes, “instead of trying to defend those things, we can shrug, give 'em our best confused look, and say, ‘I'm not sure why you're bringing this up. My Christian faith isn't based on any of that.’”

Because it isn't. Or it shouldn't be. Peter's wasn't. Paul's wasn't.^{vi}

Their faith and ours is based on Jesus – who he was and what He did.

I could also close this out by talking to you about why ...

#2. It is not irrational to believe in the resurrection of Jesus – that He literally was dead one day and then literally alive the next.

And I've done that many times over the years in more messages than I can count so, if you want a detailed in-depth treatment of the issue, just go to the media section of our app or website and look at the many Easter Sunday messages out there.

But if you want the Reader's Digest version, it goes something like this. It's actually five questions.

a. If Jesus' disciples invented the story, why are women the first eyewitnesses of the event?

In that day, in the Jewish culture, the testimony of women was not considered valid. Why would you include them in your story ... unless that's how it really happened?

b. What was the burst of energy that launched "The Church"?

How could it happen that the Romans execute the leader of a small, loosely-organized movement in

the most public, shameful, and painful way, leaving his followers to cower in fear but then, instead of that little cowering fearful group of followers disintegrating, *they start a movement* – a movement called “the church” – that not only survives intense persecution but thrives all over the Roman World in less than 200 years?

One author observes ...

“Never in so short a time has any other religious faith or for that matter any other set of ideas religious, political or otherwise without the aid of physical force achieved so commanding a position in such an important society as that of the Roman world.

“It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a tremendous burst of energy – virtually unparalleled in history – without which the future course of the religion is inexplicable.”

If not the real and literal resurrection of Jesus, what was that burst of energy? That's the question.

Here's another really good question.

c. How could a movement survive in that era of history and in that cultural setting with its primary proclamation being as we have seen: "He is risen from the dead"?

Both Jews *and* Gentiles were predisposed theologically and philosophically to reject the idea of bodily resurrection.

So for followers of Jesus to go around preaching "He is risen!" was the absolute worst strategy you could think of to start a new religion ... unless, of course, it was the truth.

And if it wasn't the truth, what other explanation is there for that being the central proclamation?

Here's another interesting question ...

d. What caused thousands of first-century Jews to suddenly start worshipping a human being (Jesus of Nazareth)?

The single most unique characteristic of Jewish theology was the belief that there were not “many gods” (which is what the Greeks and Romans and every other culture for thousands of years, had believed), but the belief that there was *only one God* who created everything.

So, the idea that any of these people would get together and just decide start a new religion which not only worshipped Yahweh but also a man from Nazareth (or anywhere) is beyond hard to fathom.

The only way that would happen ... the only way that thousands of Jews would become worshippers of Jesus is for something dramatic to take place that would cause them to radically re-interpret overnight their core doctrine of “only

one God” to now mean that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was identical to the “one Lord”; that the “One Lord” had put on flesh, so to speak, and come to dwell among us.

What kind of dramatic occurrence could cause that kind of a theological shift to take place so rapidly?

Other than seeing Jesus alive in the flesh, I’m not sure what else could have that kind of effect.

One more question ...

e. Why were the Apostles willing to die for something that was “just a story?”

When you look back through history you see that virtually all of the early Christian leaders were greatly persecuted for their faith and many were actually killed. They were martyrs.

So, why would you suffer that way if you knew you had made the whole thing up so you could

keep the Jesus-thing going?

Now, my purpose in giving you those five questions isn't so much that I want you to memorize them for whenever you have the opportunity to give a reason for the hope you have (though that certainly would be a worthy endeavor, especially if you are intellectually-wired).

My purpose in this is to help you realize that, if you're a Christian (and even if you're not), *there actually is* a good reason (or five or 15) to believe that Jesus rose from the dead and that faith in Christ is not based on a feel-good fairytale or wishful thinking.

I want you to have *confidence* that your faith is based on an *event* – something remarkable and unique that happened in human history for which there is real historical evidence – and not just “the

Bible tells me so” (because we wouldn’t even have the Bible without the resurrection).

I want you to have confidence that your faith is based on an *event* and not just a warm feeling that “God is there for me” (because that feeling – as real as it is right now – might be gone tomorrow) and your faith will go with it.

So, I could leave you with that thought.

But what I’d *rather* do – and this won’t take very long at all ...

#3. Instead of giving you questions is to call the question.

This year we have spent so much time talking about Jesus – who He was, what He said, what He did including his death and resurrection. And I believe we have filled in some of the huge knowledge gaps that exist simply because we live in a post-Christian culture.

But this “Jesus thing” is about more than just knowing. It’s about believing and trusting and following. It’s about decision.

And I think that some of us here today or watching online need to stop dabbling and make the decision to become a Christian for real. It’s time for some of us to believe and receive Jesus, and then to declare that belief.

Now, as you can see, the band (Richard) is about to do a song for us that is a classic historic declaration of faith in Jesus. And as you listen, if you’re not a Christian and you want to become a Christian, I invite you to affirm in your mind the words you hear.

And if you are a Christian, you can do that same thing, too. It’ll be a good reminder of why you are a Christian.

And then I’ll come back and we’ll do one more thing before we leave.

Feature – Creed

Now, that song was a declaration of faith which is sometimes called “The Apostle’s Creed.”

And I’m sure that some of you affirmed it for the very first time. But there’s another more visible declaration of faith that Jesus himself told us to make.

It’s called baptism. And in a little over a month (December 16th to be exact), we’ll be setting up the baptismal pool right here on stage. And if you just expressed your faith in Christ internally, I encourage you to sign up and do it externally.

You’ll be hearing more details in the weeks to come.

Now, as we close this time together, we’re all going to sing a song together that reminds us of what the main thing is. And that’s the thought I

want you to leave with today so we're going sing it and then we're done until next week.

So, let's stand and sing.

Congregational Song – Resurrecting

Endnotes

ⁱ The following stats and observations are taken from various sections of Andy Stanley's recent book, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World* (p. 267-277). Zondervan. Kindle Edition. They are also repeated in this article: <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/19900-the-bible-says-so.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nationalreview.com/2013/12/our-post-christian-society-john-osullivan/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/unaffiliated-religious-nones/>

^{iv} <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-and-the-bible-3-surprising-insights/>

^v Stanley

^{vi} Stanley, Andy. *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World* (p. 298-290). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.