



HOW TO LOVE JESUS WITHOUT LOSING THE GOSPEL

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I read a detective novel the other day telling the story of a New York detective hired to follow an emotionally unstable man. The detective followed the man for weeks, but then the man went missing. So the detective then camped outside of the house he assumed this man would go to, and he remained there for months. The private investigator was so worried about missing the again that he learned to live in an ally across the street from it. He ate scraps out of the dumpster, and slept in 45 second intervals throughout the day. But the man never came.

In desperation the detective crawled out of his hole a debilitated man. His appearance was unkempt, his clothes tattered, his person smelling like the rotten underbelly of a Manhattan trash-heap. He returned to his home and found his landlord has leased it out in his absence. He then visited an old friend's house and the friend explained to him that three months ago the man he was tailing had jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge. It was all over the papers and the news. But the detective never saw these. The irony of the story is that no one was more obsessed with seeing this man than this detective, yet he was the only person in all New York to miss him.

I think we are at a unique cross roads in the Western church. In our day we have so much access to so called Jesus-centered teaching, podcasts, lectures, music and social media accounts. The irony of this story is amidst all of this availability, we are in danger of losing the gospel. I'm not just talking about in the public sphere, I'm talking in our churches, in our devotions, in our worship songs, and in our own lives.

In one sense I don't deny that I am a product of this Jesus saturated Christian culture. But one thing I have noticed more and more, specifically in the last two years, is that we are learning to communicate Jesus language without possessing a Jesus theology. Is it possible to have so much Jesus and so little gospel? Can we be so wet with ardent worship and yet at the same time so empty of true repentance?

Unfortunately I think the answer to these questions is yes. Listen here to God's word to the people of Israel in **2 Kings 17:32-33, 41**. The feared God, they had worship directed towards God, but it didn't displace the idols in their hearts. I think the book of 1 Corinthians is really an extended treatise on the danger of this dichotomy. Because look at what Paul's says of the Corinthians church in **1 Cor. 1:4-9**. Who wouldn't want that as their walk-up music? And yet despite this Jesus rich language Paul goes on to address some issues in this church: sexual immorality, lawsuits amongst believers, relationship problems, idolatry, works based theology, gender issues, gluttony at the Lord's table, abuse of spiritual gifts and divisions inside the church (to name a few).

Paul's critique of all these issues is a movement back to the nature of Jesus' gospel. Paul sees a church who has all the language, all the assembly, and all the fervor of a Jesus-centered church, but their life and their doctrine prove their lack. So here is what I want to do with us today in chapters 2 and 3. My main point today is also my prayer for Sovereign Hope Church. That we would know: **How to Love Jesus without Losing the Gospel**.

Let's begin by looking at **1 Cor. 2:6-9**. Paul begins by speaking about his desire for the mature believers. Paul wants to impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God. For Paul's churches he wants to pull back the veil of God's cosmic existence and reveal to them the splendor of what God has prepared for those who love him.

What is it do you think that God has for you in salvation? To ask a better question, how is it that we would know the love of God towards us? Paul is going to answer this question for us in **1 Cor. 2:10-16**. Paul's answer here is the first way in which we can Love Jesus without Losing the Gospel we must: **Know the Love of God through the Mind of Christ**.

Mature believers do not think about God in the same way the natural person does because they have been given the mind of Christ. Now let me make an important distinction here for clarity sake. Paul does not say that the spiritually mature have become mindful of Christ. Instead he says, they have the mind of Christ.

To be mindful of Jesus is to know Jesus. To be mindful of Jesus is to sing a song and be able to place this Jesus you are singing about in a proper historical context. At some level, everyone in this room is mindful of Jesus right now because I'm talking about him. But to have the mind of Christ is to think about God the Father in the same way God the Son does.

You see Paul here describes God's revelation of his love as a work done by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is part of him, and therefore it is God's Spirit which best knows and can communicate the love of God and the things of God to the people of God. But it is Jesus who gives us access to this searching and interpreting Spirit of God. For Jesus was the first person to ever live in this fallen world with the full and continued presence of the Holy Spirit inside of him. This is why Pentecost was such a landmark event, for the first time God's Holy Spirit filled God's people in a permanent and abiding way only after the work of Jesus was completed for their sake.

So this means that if you are a believer, you have been filled with the Holy Spirit through Jesus. But maturity comes when you learn to use this wonderful gift to have right thoughts about what God has done for you in love through Jesus. We have a special revelation, believers know God in a special way. And this is where we begin to see a diluting of the gospel in our culture's practice.

Here we have this ability to see inside the mind of God. The author of love. The giver of life. The creator of human experience and human language. And yet, I have found in many of my own sermons, and in many of the songs I myself have sang, that our language of God resembles more of culture's experience of love instead of a gospel experience of love. I'm going to come back to this more in a bit, but love language unless connected to the depth of God, as revealed by the Holy Spirit and given through the work of Christ, will always sound superficial and weird.

I would argue that if you could take a sermon or a song and replace any God or Jesus words with the name of your boyfriend or girlfriend, we have drifted away from knowing God in the same way Jesus knows God. We don't need a lover, we need a savior. As one author says, "Revelation bends down without being distorted." But I think too many churches today have bent down in the name of contextualization, and instead of returning back to the full mind of God, they have chosen to make their home in the lower levels. We've swapped the starting line for the podium and it benefits no one. I'm going to come back to what this looks like in a bit, but let's move on.

It's funny that Paul begins talking about mature believers who know the love of God through the mind of Christ, because he uses it as a bait and switch for the Corinthians. It is easy for us to read what we just read and assume that we have that mind among us. But it is our actions and our fruit which determine if that is really true. Paul knows this and what we are going to see next is the second thought we must have if we want to love Jesus without losing the gospel: **Do Not Mistake Jesus for a Mascot.**

1 Cor. 3:1-9. So here we see the ever famous "I follow Paul and I follow Apollos" passage. What this shows is that this Jesus informed church in Corinth has disconnected the person of Jesus from the work of Jesus.

I was just at a conference of Christian pastors and churches and for two and a half days the keynote speaker spoke to us about Jesus in the context of evangelism and mission. He shared wonderful stories of the work his mission organization is doing, and I am humbled and grateful for the immense work this group has done around the globe. But it was his message that struck me as odd. He talked a lot about Jesus, spoke highly of following Jesus, loving Jesus and sharing the good news about Jesus to everyone you could. But there was no compelling reason for why we should do any of it. There was a lot of Jesus, but there was no good news.

That's because the person of Jesus if disconnected from the work of Jesus becomes a mascot for solidarity instead of a means of salvation and endurance. I really do think that Satan could have listened to much of that

conference and have been unconcerned with most of it. The Devil isn't threatened by the belief that Jesus lives and Jesus loves. He is threatened by the works which Jesus life and Jesus love set forth to do. When we lose these works we lose any sense of right worship because we lose any sort of reasonable response to God's love.

This is the exact point Paul made in **1 Cor. 1:12-13**. To disconnect Jesus from his work on the cross for ruined sinners is to lose the gospel. Now again it is not to say that I or Sovereign Hope has the true and elitist gospel. I want to say this with great humility, but also with great urgency. A quarter of my work week is spent meeting with students just like you at the University of Montana. I meet students who attend various churches, stream various pastors, and whose social media bio and content is Jesus related, but when I ask them to explain who Jesus is and why it is important, they are left rambling about love and forgiveness without any sort of concrete hope.

But when we say Jesus is Lord we are communicating his activity involved in establishing his sovereign rule. When we worship Jesus Christ, we are not merely worshiping Jesus in his full name, we are worshiping his role as messiah, prophesied in the Old Testament, born of a virgin, living a sinless life, dying a sinners death, atoning for sins, rising again and now ascended to the right hand of God. Brand name Jesus may sell, but he will never save. Biblical Jesus may be lesser known, but he is the only means of salvation.

The message of the gospel is a simple message, but it is also a specific message. Take for instance the simple, but complete gospel Paul gives for us in 1 Corinthians 15, For I delivered to you as of first importance that Christ died for ours since in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures. It is a belief not only in the person of Jesus, but the work that Jesus did to ransom sinners in accordance with God's plan through his death and resurrection. If you are not a Christian in here, this is the message you need to hear, because this is the message that saves you, satisfies you and changes you.

I could be wrong on this, but I wonder if we were to provide to a non-Christian the top selling Christian books of our day and the top played Christian songs of our day, how many of them from that content alone would be given a saving gospel message. Would it match Paul's words? Would it echo Paul's message?

Now I may sound like a crank or pessimist here, but I want us to read Paul's next passage and I want us to soberly take it to heart. In this passage specifically, Paul is going to be talking to those who are ministering for the gospel, but it is not far or hard to build out these implications in our own ministry, discipleship efforts or devotional times. And what I want you to see in this passage is you must **Know that Jesus Must Be Built On. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.**

I want to break down very carefully what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying that for gospel ministers there is only one foundation: Jesus Christ. But on that foundation there are two types of people. Type one is the mature believer Paul talked about, who knows the love of God through the mind of Jesus and builds on that gospel foundation with gold and fine silver. But then there are those who build on that foundation with wood, straw and stubble.

It is true that both builders will be saved, but one will have an enduring and joy producing legacy in eternity, whereas the other will suffer loss, even though he himself will be saved. Believers, are you struck by the cosmic weight of this passage! It is possible to confess with clarity that Jesus died for my sins, but still miss the wonderful, God delighting, joy producing, eternity enjoying weight of the whole gospel of God!

The gospel isn't for casual tourists, it's for God hungry spelunkers to dive into its system and explore the height, depth and width of God's grace to us in Jesus Christ. The question for you is are you willing to go there and are you willing to take others there with you. What will you build on Jesus with?

Let me give you an illustration. I love coffee, and proudly wear the badge of coffee snob. But I remember the process of growing in this. I used to think I was coffee literate because I understood the basic flavors. I could tell you that coffee was dark, bitter, light or weak.

But then I was invited to a “coffee cupping.” This is an event put on by local roasters to showcase their beans. It is a full sensory experience. It starts out with a cup of dry, freshly ground beans. The Roaster then tells you to sniff it and write down any observations you had: smells like coffee flavored dirt. Then they poured hot water on the grinds. Again we were asked to smell and make notes: smells a little more like coffee, but still dirt-like. At this point I felt good about things. I was content in my ever elevating sophistication. Not only was I already a budding bean aficionado, but now I was going to kill whatever this cupping set out to accomplish. My pride would quickly collapse.

Then we got to taste the coffee, the Roaster told us to make more notes on flavor. I did. Then he asked for more. And I couldn't come up with anything. I realized quickly, I really didn't know what coffee tasted like. The Roaster then handed me a flavor wheel. This wheel listed flavors rotating from the center with more and more detailed descriptions.

Sure I could say it was dark, but what kind of dark? Did it taste burnt? Did it taste like tobacco? Was it ashy? What about the feel of it in your mouth? Did it feel thick, heavy, gritty? Light? Watery? Clean? As I was presented with this tool, my coffee experience changed instantly. One cup I had written up as “sour”, but then I tasted hints of citrus, it actually had lemony taste. Another cup (one previous listed as dark), became rich, with tastes of caramel and malt. A third having notes of lavender and honey.

The descriptions given on this card revolutionized my capacity to enjoy my cup of coffee. In one sense it became an academic exercise, trying to study and learn what the card was saying about the coffee. But it quickly gave way to a full experience. Instead of tasting four broad categories, I was learning to see and recognize the endless amount of subtle distinctions in each brew. But here is the kicker: it was the same beans in the same cup.

Same coffee, different experience. Same beans, new pleasure. What changed wasn't the coffee. What changed was me. I was able to have a better *experience* because I had a better *understanding* of what was already present.

The coffee story works well with this spiritual application because God has designed our food experience to relate to our gospel experience: “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8), “Your words were found, and I ate them, and they became to me my joy and delight!” (Jeremiah 15:16). To help us with this experience God has given us a flavor wheel for our own assistance: his word.

For example, Christians readily acknowledge we were sinful, but describe that sin. What does it taste like in God's word? Our sin made us worthless (Romans 3:12), hostile (Colossians 1:21), hateful (Titus 3:3), objects of God's wrath (Ephesians 2:3), evildoers (Ephesians 2:2), idolaters (Ephesians 5:5) and murderers (Matthew 15:19). Same sin, new experience of mercy.

Yes, God loves us through Jesus! But what do you taste in that love? Earlier I talked about our language resembling more of culture's experience than gospel experience. Here is what I mean: there is a very popular worship song which refers to God's love as a sloppy wet kiss. Seriously? Is this the best we can do? Through Christ we have been given access to the infinite and wonderful mind of God and we choose to describe predetermined plan of love-saturated salvation as if we are getting kissed by a teenager?

To know the love of God through the mind of Christ isn't to find some new spiritual plane of existence. It's simply learning to read the Bible rightly and understand what God has already said about our salvation.

God's love loved us before the foundations of the world (Ephesians 1:4), God loved us when we were his enemy (Romans 5:8), Jesus' sacrifice enables us to be sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:15-17), it ransoms us from evil ways (1 Peter 1:18), it makes us new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), it gives us power over sin (2 Timothy 4:18), and it endures us to the end (Philippians 1:6)! Same gospel, new pleasure in the cross of Christ.

This is what Paul is fighting for in his Corinthians church. This is what it means to bend down without sacrificing

the truth of the gospel. He wants them to push past Jesus language and a recitation of a creed, and he wants them to see the depth of the gospel in greater clarity. This is what it means to have the mind of Christ, to look at God's redemption the same way Jesus did. To understand the depths of our need and the storehouses of God's mercy. This simple gospel is powerful enough to critique all of the issues the Corinthian church was facing.

Only when we have seen what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:23 that we are Christ's and Christ is God's can we begin with right language and proper emotion engaging our culture in a substantive and real way. We must not repeat the error of the detective, flattening our scope and limiting our understanding. But we must look up and see the whole work of God in Jesus Christ.

I have two things I want us as believers to do with this message today. First, I want you to pray that you have a greater understanding of the gospel, that you would be able to have that tasting experience in a way which makes the work and the person of Jesus more wonderful.

I do have great fear that we are in danger of loving Jesus to death. But I am not worried, because the true gospel will engage people in true emotion and gospel knowledge. Though our task may be hard, our gospel makes it easy because when rightly understood there is nothing more attractive and nothing more compelling than the things which God has prepared for us in the gospel.

And second, I want you to invite people to join us this Easter, because this church is dedicated to presenting the whole gospel of God in order to meet the whole crisis of humanity.

When we love Jesus with gospel informed love we have a message which will endure past fanaticism and into eternity. Not on the structure of straw and social acceptance, but on the shoulders of God's mind revealed through the infinite value of Jesus' work on the cross.