

## They Like Jesus...but not the church

### Introduction

- John 10:10—The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
- Jesus said that when we know him we will have life to the full. Following Jesus changes our lives. And many people ages 18-35 who don't identify themselves as Christian would actually agree
- Matthew: 9:36-38 “When He saw the crowds He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” “...Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field.’”
- Jesus had **deep compassion** for the hurting world and taught that **we are not to keep this abundant or full life to ourselves**, but we are to live **missional lives** (Acts 1:7–9). When the Holy Spirit was sent to us, it wasn't just for us to **sit around with each other**, but to provide us with the **power** we need to be **salt and light** to those around us. Kermit just finished going over this.
- University students are asked the questions “**What do you think of Jesus?**” and “**What do you think of Christians?**” (Share results)
- People are **respectful** and **admire** what they know of Jesus – but **they don't like the church.**
- The simple fact is, we live in a **new world**. Many people **don't see the church as good**, anymore.
- In fact, this may come as a surprise to some of us, but most young people today **have no idea** what it means to be Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, etc. Those words have **almost no meaning in their vocabulary.**
- Listen to what **Reggie McNeal** says in his book, The present Future:

- **“We are witnessing the emergence of a new world...**The phenomenon has been noted by many who tag the emerging culture as post-Christian, pre-Christian and post-modern. The point is the world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century, and everyone knows it. But knowing it and acting on it are two different things. **So far the North America church largely has responded with heavy infusions of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and come back around to the church.** The rate of disconnection **indicates a dilemma far more serious than mere youthful rebellion...** The further you go down the generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation report going to church...”
- How did we get here? To a place where people are saying **these things?** (Bono and Ghandi quotes). Those **aren’t hate-filled, Satan worshippers.** Both of them lived their lives as **peaceful men** active in the world **bringing about peace and helping the oppressed.**
- John 17:15—Jesus prayed that we be protected from evil as we remain in the world. But we’ve by and large withdrawn form the world, and we soon discover both good news and bad news: **many people like Jesus, but not Christians.**

## **1. Unintentionally Moving from Citizens of the Kingdom to Citizens of the Bubble**

- Could Christians **unintentionally** have slipped into a **busy Christian life,** hanging out socially **only with other Christians** and created a **“bubble”** in which to exist?
- Walk through PowerPoint slides of the creation of the bubble.
  - Slide 2
  - Slide 3
- Here’s how many become a citizen of the bubble:
  1. **We become a Christian.**  
Excitement! Joy! We are learning new things from the Bible, **being “fed”** as a new Christian. We are **excited about Jesus** and eager to tell our non-Christians friends about our faith.

## 2. We become part of church life.

We meet **Christian friends**; get involved in **church activities** with Christian friends. But we also **can slowly lose touch** with **non-Christian friends** as we become **immersed** in Christian activity.

**Then something happens:  
Instead of being part of a community on a mission,  
we begin to become inwardly focused.**

## 3. We become a citizen of the bubble.

- Evangelism shifts from being **our responsibility** to the church leaders responsibility **primarily through events and concerts**.
- We get more excited about going to the mission field **overseas** than we do in our **own mission field all around us**.
- We stop praying daily for those who don't know Jesus.
- We slip into the **"invite them to church" mode**, instead of **being Jesus to them** and hanging out with them in **relationships**.
- We **stop socializing with non-Christians friends**... our circle of peers is eventually **comprised only of Christians**—if we're real adventurous we have friends from other churches.
- We have little stickers and t-shirts...we hang out with only or mostly Christian friends; we go to the **amusement park** on Christian day; we **listen to mostly Christian bands**; we begin using **special Christian phrases** like **backsliding, prayer warrior, fellowship, quiet time, traveling mercies** (none of which are even in the Bible!)
- We have become citizens of the Bubble.

## 4. We become like Jonah

- We begin to **complain** and **finger-point** about the terrible things happening in our culture.
- We go into a subtle **retreat mentality** where our church becomes more of our **social-protection-from-the-world-club** (although we don't call it that).

- We may even **secretly rejoice** that those non-Christians will get their due, **instead of mourning the fact** that some will and being motivated to change it.
- We **choose our churches** based on how well the church leaders **perform** in music and energetic preaching and how well they **“feed us”** (instead of being adults and learning to read the Bible and pray and know God for ourselves).
- We are content living in our Christian bubble, but **we don’t even know it** because all our **Christian peers** are doing the **same** thing. And since we now have only Christian peers, we **have nothing to compare** our lives with...except the **evil world** we’re so busy complaining about.

**How ironic that Jesus has made us a salt and light unto the world...and we spend all our time seasoning the rest of the salt and shedding light on lamps**

- So what to do? **Is all hope lost?** Not quite.
- First, we need to **see this world as a missionary**. Because that’s the world we live in, now.

## **2. The Good News—People Are Interested in Jesus**

- There is an **immense amount of respect** in our culture for Jesus. People see him as someone who fought for the poor and oppressed...and **they respect that**.
- Even if they sometimes don’t show him **reverence**, they show a **definite interest**.
- *“Jesus saw the good in people, he believed in people”* --Duggan, 30, coffee shop manager does not identify himself as Christian
- "Jesus gave so many people hope--not just in the afterlife but in this life. That things could be better. he was sort of like a pirate, --a modern

thinker who led a rebellion against a religion that was corrupt." --Maya, 27, Hairstylist, does not identify herself as Christian

- Then there's quotes from people like Pamela Anderson: "**If I refuse one of them I'd be like, 'Oh my God. What if that was Jesus?'"** -Pamela Anderson explaining why she gives money to homeless people
  - Yet I hear Christians talk about **refusing to give money** to the homeless for any number of **bad excuses**.
  - *It is my plea to the audience to encourage mankind to help one another." And then: "I believe in my heart that if Jesus were alive he would be doing the same thing."* - Madonna
  - The idea that people hate Jesus right now is just false. And often it's **just an excuse** we use for why we **duck out of being part of the world** and **investing our lives** into helping people see him.
3. **The bad news: there is a largely negative opinion about the church**
- There is a growing amount of **negativity** and **misunderstanding** of what the Christian faith is about
  - There were 5 main ideas that came from these questions to unbelievers.

### **1) The Church is a judgmental and negative organized religion**

- *"I did grow up in a church, but now I am Buddhist. When I became a mother, I wanted my daughter to have a spiritual upbringing. However, I didn't want her to become like the Christians I know. They were always so **negative and complaining** about everything, and I wanted my daughter to be in a **positive environment**."* –Jennie, beauty salon owner.
- Many see us as judgmental and negative

### **2) The Church is male-dominated and oppresses females**

- *“I feel the church is very sexist, yet I don’t believe that Jesus was sexist. From what I have observed, women in the church **basically sit on the sidelines and are only able to work with children, answer the phones, be secretaries and serve men.** They seem to be given no voice. The church seems pretty much like a boys’ club for adults.”* -Alicia, does not identify herself as Christian (or a woman’s rights advocate)
- I won’t say much on this now, except this: when was the last time you saw a woman standing **where I am right now, doing what I’m doing, in this church?** (and no, I don’t mean **all-women services** or **gatherings** like the UMW’s...I mean in a mixed gender gathering)...moving on

### 3) The Church is homophobic

- *“Why don’t Christians try to make me feel included? Why do you **treat me like an outcast and not care about my feelings** or want to **relate to me** in any way? You don’t need to understand why I’m homosexual—but to **understand me as a person or as a fellow human being.** Isn’t that what Jesus would do?”* -Penny
- Penny makes a good point, and an even better one here:
- *“It was very, very clear that the church was against homosexuality. How could you no know that? It seems that homosexuality is one of the main things churches publicly and consistently condemn. So picture being gay and wanting to seek counsel or spiritual advice. **Why would I go to a church? They’ve already condemned me before I’ve even walked in the door.**”* -Penny
- Now perhaps you think **she’s making excuses** or **blowing it out of proportion.** But think of this: if you **voted against legalizing gay marriage,** but aren’t putting pressure on politicians to outlaw **pornography, lying, alcoholism** and a host of other **sins**...then yes, **you’re behaving biased** towards this issue.
- I can say this because **I voted against gay marriage,** and when discussing the issue later with gay friends, I realized **I was being very biased.** It’s not that I’m trying to say I don’t think it’s a sin...

but why did **THIS sin** get **special attention** from me...and what **sort of message was I sending?**

4) **The Church arrogantly believes they are right and all other religions are wrong**

- *“All I hear from Christians is that all other religions are wrong and going to hell. I try to have **intelligent conversations** with them about the beauty of other expressions of spirituality, but they go into this **religious rhetoric** and avoid the hard questions. It seems they have **programmed, dogmatic answers** that someone has told them, and they can’t even hold **any type of normal back and forth conversation** about any other spiritual beliefs but their own.” - Duggan*

5) **The Church is comprised of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally**

- *“Christian fundamentalists seem to use the Bible like a weapon, quoting verses **out of context** like bullets to shoot anyone or anything they don’t like.” -Penny*
- Don’t agree? I took this picture right here in Bismarck:
- It says, “...you do err, not knowing the scriptures.” Implying that it’s wrong to not know the Bible—**which is true**—but is it **what Jesus meant** when he said this? Let’s see...turn in your bibles to Matthew 22:28-30 and read it in context: The Sadducees go on with a long story about a **woman having 7 husbands and then she dies**, trying to prove there is no life after death, and they ask:

Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, **Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.** For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

- Awkward. Jesus is pointing out that their **error in the theology of the afterlife was because they didn’t know the scriptures well enough.** Yet this sign clearly tries to make it sound like **something else.**

- I don't know that Jesus would be all that excited about that particular use of scripture. Something about the **darkest parts of hell** being reserved for those who twist God's word.
- If we **can't trust our churches** to use the Bible responsibly, who can we trust?
- **So what does it all mean?** Why am I babbling on and on...and on about this? Because if we want to have **any hope of showing people the love of God** in this century, we have to **do something** about these **misconceptions of the church**.
- The classic Bridge illustration represents when human beings represent their separation from God.
- It also shows how Jesus is the bridge over that gap.
- But now we have **another gap** to overcome: **our cultural separation** from people. If you **saw yourself in these things today**, that means you have to first find a way to **relate to people where THEY are, not make them relate to you where you are**.
- I'll repeat that.
- It's **OUR job** to **accept people as they are** and let the **Holy Spirit change them from within as he sees fit**, not make them **conform to our vision of a good Christian**.
- And to do that, as crazy as it may sound to some, **we need to re-engage the secular world**.
- John 17:5 "My prayer is not that You take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one."
- Get out there...get to know what's going on. **Don't be so afraid of being corrupted by people that you avoid them at all costs—like a spiritual germophobe**.
- That's exactly why Jesus chastised the Pharisees. The **confused** the idea of **purity with intolerance and isolation**. And their mission to **show the gentiles that God loved them** was a failure, because they were **afraid** to even touch most gentiles.

- They were so **committed to staying pure**—a good thing—that they demanded that people **only associate with Jews, frequent Jewish merchants and respect a Jewish government.**
- They said things like, “surround yourself with only Christians” and “stay away from non-Christian businesses, boycott those who disagree with us” and “vote for the Christian candidate—even though his political qualifications are shaky” ...oh wait...**that was us.**
- Suddenly our Christian **sub-culture** doesn’t look all that glamorous when **compared to the Pharisees**, does it? Imagine how it looks to those **outside the church.**
- Over the next few weeks we’ll be discussing some of these major points and what we can do about them, but for now I’ll leave you with this challenge: **GET OUT OF CHURCH.**
- If you’re going to have a meal with friends, **don’t let them be Christians**
- Ask a non-Christian friend **what he or she thinks of God...then just listen...**and **don’t offer your opinion unless they specifically ask for it.** Instead, try to listen to what they’re saying—**not to consider conversion**—but to see **who they are** as a person and **what shapes their life.** Because they’re your friend.
- Let your desire to see them know God come from your love... sometimes I think we do the opposite and **act like we’re forced to love** people so they’ll get saved. **What a horrible way to see people.**
- **Be a Christian. Love God. Be pure. But be in the world.** Because that’s where the people who need God are. And our calling is to go those people.
- Close