



Following Jesus Part 2

Gospel Wheel Focus: Christ Likeness – How People Change

Text: 2 Corinthians 5.17-21

Introduction

Good Morning. Easter Weekend was incredible here at Mercy Church. It was our highest attended Sunday in the history of our church, we saw dozens of people indicate they were placing their faith in Christ, and we saw 8 people follow Christ in Baptism! Several of you have told me about how your “one” came with you. If you are new, when we say our “one” we mean the one person we are praying for. The person who means a lot to us personally and our hope is that ONE will come to know the love of God that we’ve come to know. So if that’s you and you are newer to church or just returning to church and a friend has invited you, know its because they love and care about you. And you are welcome here.

In fact it’s a great time to be stepping into Mercy because we just began a new series of sermons last week that we are continuing for the next 4 weeks called “following Jesus.” The idea is real simple: we are going to lay out a simple plan for how you can follow Jesus. How many of you have ever had a desire to get physically healthy? To get in shape?

What happens a lot of times...what I’ve done many times...is my DESIRE to get in shape is high. So I go join a gym. And then walk into the gym and the number of things I COULD do is overwhelming right? So I like do 100 bicep curls and run on the treadmill. And I’m exhausted. Good workout. RIGHT? Well, who knows. I don’t know if it was. Cause I don’t know what I’m doing. So I go back in the gym and do some other stuff the next day. And I’m cruising around this fitness machine buffet. I give those big ropes a few whips. And after a month I’m kind of bored. I feel like I’ve tried, and I’ve gotten no where. Why? My DESIRE to get in shape was high, but I HAD NO PLAN. This year, I got a plan. I found a trainer who knew how to help me. Who built a wholistic plan. That monitored my food, my at home exercise. And I started seeing results and felt better. (Then I got injured but that wasn’t his fault but I’m getting there again). But here is my point: A good desire without a good plan will leave you frustrated and eventually burn out your desire. Which is why the gym is always packed in January and emptied out by February. A bunch of people with good desires and no plans

Listen, I see the same thing with so many people in their faith. A Good DESIRE to grow closer to God...but no plan for how to. And so all they end up with is an out of balance to-do-list. Gonna read the whole bible in a year. Leviticus hits and they are done. Most people have never had a plan for following Jesus. So a lot of people settle for kiddie pool faith. Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so. But they never press into how that love affects their marriage. Or learn how to read the bible. Or press into what that love means for advancing

the gospel to the lost. They just hum along. And when life gets tough they usually get mad at God and fall away. That's like blaming the gym because you purchased a membership, did biceps for a month and then left. You need a plan!

If it's not kiddie pool faith, people get really intense in one aspect of faith...like Bible knowledge. People who get intense about Bible Knowledge will KILL it in learning the bible YET will really struggle to OBEY what it says about sacrificially loving neighbors. That's because they are only doing bicep curls. Others will see Jesus caring for the poor and will dive into ministry in the community. Which is good! And yet will waffle in their commitment to the local church which Jesus calls his very bride. Bicep Curls.

My point is, I think we need a plan, And we need a trainer to walk you through it. The bible contains our plan. And the church, led by the pastors, is built to train one another. So here's what we are going to do. I'm going to show you a plan and how you can use it to help you follow Jesus. Now it's just a tool ok. If you use it, we believe it will help you. But if you don't then it wont.

This plan, this tool, Is something we are calling the Gospel Wheel. And it is here to help you follow Jesus in your daily life. Now here's what we did. We took the bible's teaching on what it looks like to follow Jesus...all of the commands and all of the motivations for obeying the commands...and tried to summarize it into a helpful tool. This doesn't replace the bible,

it attempts to summarize it. Ok let me show it to you then talk about how we use it.

[SHOW THE GOSPEL WHEEL]

Now this is a really simple tool but I need you to let me shift into teacher mode a little more than preacher mode for about 5 minutes to explain it ok? You've got a handout in your seat with it as well. And the website our team has put together is phenomenal. It's got training videos, a full guide for walking through this, and a few other resources. As your pastor my job is to equip you to grow as a follower of Christ and that's what we are doing. Ok look at this.

Discipleship is centered on the gospel. The gospel is not just the front door into Christianity; it's the whole house. Progressing in the Christian life means growing in the knowledge of God's love for us and staying grounded in that love.¹ Listen this is the heartbeat of WHO WE ARE AS MERCY CHURCH. 1 Peter 2.10 "once you were not a people, now you are God's people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received Mercy." We named this church mercy church because it's a one word explanation of who we are. This is what we actually talked about on Easter and its why Easter was the first part of our series on following Jesus. Because the only way to move forward in your faith is to stand firm in the gospel. I'm going to come back to this EVERY WEEK. In Christ you have payment for your sin, you have perfection in standing before God, and you have God's power to change your life. The gospel is our motivation for living.

¹ Colossians 1:21-23; Ephesians 3:16-19

If your life is a WHEEL, the gospel is the hub. It holds everything in place and everything in your life takes its cues from the hub, from the gospel. Now from there we've summarized all of the commands of scripture into 3 basic buckets. Think of these as the spokes of the wheel.

We call those Devotion, Community, and Mission.

- **Devotion** – When Jesus made the call to the disciples to “follow me” he was calling them to follow a person. Not a philosophy, but a man. The Great Commandment of Matthew 22.37 is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. The first Christians, when they gathered together as the church, Acts 2 tells us they DEVOTED themselves to the apostles teaching & to prayer. So we are going to do in this section is train you on what it looks like to build a life of personal devotion to God. How to read the bible in a meaningful way. How to pray. And how to cultivate a life of joyful obedience to Jesus.
- **Community** – Jesus didn't start a movement, he created a new community. This community is what he called the church. And the gospel not only brings us into a restored relationship with God the father, it brings us into community with other followers. The short way I'll say it is the Christian life is not an isolated life. There are 47 different “one another” commands in the new testament. And here's the cool thing: God wires us up differently so that when we all are resting in the gospel and then seeking to serve one another,

we all experience the character of God more fully as we see his love come out differently in each one of us. We are to be a reflection of heaven here on earth.

- **Mission**: When Jesus saves us from our sin, he saves us to a community, and also calls us into his rescue mission to see others come to know his great love for us. This “people of mercy” are a people who obey Jesus' command in Matthew 28 to make disciples of all nations. But sometimes that can be a command that is a little abstract for us to put into practice so we are going to talk about that. And we are going to talk about why its intimidating to think of ourselves as people God can use in others lives. And how we can take a step forward.
- **Christlikeness**: When we reside in the gospel, and follow Jesus' commands in these areas, what will happen over time is that we will start to grow into the image of Christ. And that's the destination. That's our aim. Over time as we devote ourselves to God, we are transformed into someone completely different than the old me. And in fact that's what we are going to talk about more today.

[Take the Wheel Down]

Devotion, Community, and Mission. A follower of Jesus will be fueled by the gospel to follow Jesus into a life marked by these three “spokes.” NOW let me give you 2 promises about this tool.

You cannot make God love you any more or less today than he already does in Christ. A lot of what is going to happen in these four weeks is personal assessment. Like...if all you've been doing is bicep curls and you find out you need to do some squats...you find out uh oh, my leg muscles are scrawny. Maybe you look at YOUR wheel and you'll be tempted to think...my wheel is pretty misshaped. It ain't rolling anywhere. That will be every single one of us in some way or another ok. NONE OF US ARE PERFECT. Jesus is the only one. SO, here's the warning: Don't let this tool become a checklist. If you do, you'll start to become the older brother from the prodigal son story last week. Where he demanded things from the father because he had followed all the rules. We aren't trying to create religious elites...we are trying to lay out a plan for following Jesus. You know every time the new testament lays out a command...somewhere right before or after it is a reminder of the gospel. Because we are so prone to separate the what from the why. The spokes from the hub. GOD's love for you...that MUST be what fuels this. It's why we preach the gospel every week around here. And you know what, if you leave these four weeks ONLY knowing the gospel...That's WAY better than only leaving with a checklist ok.

God's commands are access points to experiencing his love. Can I change the idea for a second? I've been talking about them as spokes. But think of God's commands for a second like power lines. The purpose of the lines is to carry power out from the source. And here's what I promise you: Obeying Christ's commands is like grabbing onto the powerlines of God's love for you. Which is why Christians will tell you that

things like sharing the gospel with a non-christian who has never heard it...it might be a little scary but then you actually end up experiencing joy because it reminds you of God's love for you. Same with giving or bible reading or whatever else. So they aren't just a response to God's love, they are access points into his love. Which means sometimes they feel like disciplines I'm doing that I don't feel like doing...and God actually uses those to re-awaken my heart to his love for me.

I told you today was about the destination. And here it is. The main idea for today as we focus on what you will become when you follow Christ with your whole life:

ICON of the CROWN FROM THE WHEEL with the following highlight underneath it:

you become like Christ by abiding in Christ. The way we will say it throughout this series: **Because Jesus is full of grace, he will meet you where you are. Because Jesus is full of power, he will not leave you there.**

Now let me offer a big word of caution. This isn't a 30 day get ripped for Jesus plan. Like the before and after commercials where the guy is a depressed blob and then 30 days later he's on the cover of men's fitness magazine. Remember PRIDE isn't the goal here. And spoiler alert: you will never be perfect like Jesus ok. In fact God uses your weaknesses and sin to remind you of how much you need his grace. So if you get to mid may 4 weeks from now and you are like...man, I'm still getting angry at people. What's wrong? Well, nothing. Except you. You are still a sinner. So this is all about progress not perfection ok?

I told you this series is summarizing A LOT of bible into a few ideas. Let me show you why we say Christ-likeness is the destination we are heading. And how diving into the gospel is what takes us there.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17

This is major ok. If you are in Christ...the bible teaches you are being recreated into something new. The old you, its not there anymore. Which full of hope isn't it? Because of his grace he meets you where you are, but because of his power he won't leave you there. He will transform you into a new creation. Look at how the gospel is the motivation for this new creation life...

21 He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -- 2 Corinthians 5:21

He made Jesus...who was sinless...to be sin for us. What that means is not that Jesus became a sinner. But that he became a substitute payment for our sin. SO THAT we might be set free from our sin. You gotta understand, that's the great exchange we talk about and if you are new to Christiianity let me explain it real briefly. The bible says everybody sins. Sin is the great "I" problem. I do what I want to do because I want to do it and ultimately I am in charge, not God. Sin is often seen as an action. But sin is not primarily an action, it is an attitude of rejection.

And that sin, that rejection, comes with a curse. We are separated from God and under penalty of death. The gospel says Jesus takes that penalty from us when he goes up on the cross. And therefore he removes the separation between us and God. BUT NOT ONLY THAT...he transforms us into what paul calls here a new creation that is the righteousness of God.

Well there is only one thing that is the righteousness of God. That's Jesus. We are to become like Jesus. And the rest of the New Testament shows this. Has always been God's desire for us. One of my favorite spots is

29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. -- Romans 8:29

Don't get hung up on the word foreknew and predestined words ok. That's for another time, another sermon. To follow Jesus isn't just to watch Jesus, it is to become more like him. The new creation he is making us into is one that is becoming more and more like Jesus. Let me show you the key to all of this. The key to being transformed into the image of the son. The thing that will actually change you.

God's love is the power that changes us into the image of Christ

Listen there are two primary ways to approach God. One is to say "I obey, and therefore I am accepted." That's what every religious system has always been built on. If you follow the rules you will be rewarded. The other is to say "I'm accepted,

and therefore I obey.” That’s the gospel. And it is entirely unique and entirely against our natural way of thinking about faith.

These two approaches produce two entirely different types of change. Religion produces a kind of mechanical, outward change. Say for example you are standing on a pile of sand...how do you make it grow? Add more sand. That’s religion. Add more good behaviors. That’s fundamentally different from how a tree grows. A tree grows from within, organically. The gospel produces that inward change & grows you into Christ-likeness from within.²

Religion will give you LOTS to do (go to bible studies, give you prayers to pray & rules to follow). But it alone is mechanical change. The gospel motivates you in an entirely different way. It’s an internal change of the heart and of your motivations.

True Christlikeness is always rooted in the gospel. You can only become like Jesus in your character when you have first seen how Jesus became like you on the cross. Because Jesus took on your sin on the cross and gave you his perfect righteousness as a gift, you are empowered by the Spirit to take on his character. This change is a change that flows FROM security in God’s love, not trying to attain security in his love. 1 John 4.10 says “We love him because he first loved us.” **Love from him produces love for him & then for others.**

² The highlighted sections from this gospel v religion section come from Session 5 of “The Gospel Class” called “Gospel-Centered Living” which I

Think of it this way. Any of you ever seen those WWJD bracelets or billboards? I get what they are doing but I just wish they’d go away forever because they are starting in the wrong place. Especially the billboards. Because When I’m in traffic I don’t need a Jesus scorecard on top of everything else I got going on. That’s religious peer pressure.

The Christian life doesn’t start with what would Jesus do. It DOES go there. Follow Jesus. YES, certainly. BUT It always starts with **WDJD**. WHAT DID Jesus DO. And in seeing how he became sin for us...we respond seeking to live our lives in worship-filled response to him. We must rehearse the gospel in every step we take towards becoming like Jesus in our character.

- **His generosity makes us more generous**

In 2 Cor Paul is trying to motivate the Corinthians to be more generous. How does he motivate them? He doesn’t yell at them “You stingy thieves. How could you sit here like this when we are all starving!” He doesn’t manipulate them “If you give, then Jesus will make you rich.” That’s prosperity theology. NO. He reminds them of the grace of Christ. And says dwell on that and then give generously but only with a cheerful heart.

- **His relational love makes us more relationally loving**

In Ephesians chapter 5 Paul wants men to be better husbands. He doesn’t say “Shape up your deadbeats.” “Stop hiding behind your work, your not too tired, stop whining and love your wife.” No, some wives may wish

first taught at The Summit Church in 2007. Though I helped write the material, I feel certain J.D. Greear originally wrote this particular content.

he said that but he doesn't. he says look at how Christ has treated you. Stare into the wonder of how Christ loves his bride...the church...which you are a part of. Receive that love from him and then love HER from that love. To think you can have a healthy, thriving marriage without self-sacrificing love is crazy. This is where it comes from.

- **His security forms our self-image**

John 8 – Jesus tells the woman caught in adultery to go and change. But he says “neither do I condemn you, now go and sin no more.” The assurance of forgiveness comes first, the call to change comes second. Religion says go and change, then you won't be condemned. If you meet the standard, God will love you. That's not the gospel though. The gospel says you are forgiven, now go live as one forgiven.

- **His forgiveness makes us more forgiving**

This one is personal to a lot of us right. Somebody hurts us...maybe a spouse, maybe a friend, maybe a co-worker. I mean ya'll that happens ok. In that moment if I only look to Jesus as my MODEL...WWJD...I will have to grit my teeth and try to forgive because well Jesus would do that if he were here. See what I'm trying to do there is Reach Christ-likeness through my own strength. That is behavior modification. But the gospel says those who have seen grace will naturally show that king of grace.

Jesus had to teach this to Peter. Because Peter was complaining. HOW MANY TIMES do I have to forgive my

brother or sister who sins against me? As many as 7 times? And Jesus says no, 70 x 7.

PARABLE of King & unforgiving servant. Jesus tells Peter, with everyone listening, the story of a king who wanted to settle his debts and so he calls in a servant that owed him 10,000 talents which is a billion days worth of wages. Jesus' point is he will never be able to repay it. It's more money than circulating in all of Palestine at the time. The guy begs for the king not to imprison him forever & the king, it says, had compassion & forgives him the debt & releases him. Well, upon leaving the building the servant encounters a guy who owes him a few bucks for lunch. And the servant gets angry with the guy & has him thrown in prison. The king hears about it and is shocked. He says “I forgave all that because you asked. Shouldn't you have mercy on your friend just like I had mercy on you?” And then the king throws the guy in jail. And of course Jesus' listeners would be shocked and say NO ONE WOULD EVER DO THAT. And Jesus is saying EXACTLY. So if you can't forgive...it means you must have forgotten my forgiveness.

Jesus isn't only our model, he's also our power. The gospel is not just the front door to the Christian house, it's the whole house! And the more we make our home in it, the more we will grow into the image of Christ.

When that starts to happen, it will be visible. The Spirit of God will begin to produce in us what the bible calls FRUIT. Just like a healthy plant produces good fruit...the sign that you are spiritually healthy is the fruit being produced in your life.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5.22-23

Your community group study is going to focus in on this fruit to help you assess if you are growing into the image of Christ. Listen that might be painful, but honest self assessment is the starting point. In fact, throughout this series where we are training you how to follow Jesus, I hope you go through a three questions to help drive you towards gospel-motivated change.

1. **Where am I right now?** That's the honest question in each of these. Is the fruit of the spirit visible in my life? Do I spend time getting to know the Lord?

2. **What do I need to stop believing & start believing?** Bad fruit comes from bad belief. Good fruit from good belief. So to go after good fruit means to assess where you need to recenter your heart and mind on the gospel. In fact let me tell you something really powerful in all of this. When you think about the WHEEL that is your life...when you assess it, you might be prone to think man, I'm a mess. And this could feel like a burden. But IF YOU ARE IN CHRIST...IF YOU've repented of your sin and believed Christ died for you...when God looks at you, he sees CHRIST's PERFECTION. So that means you need to pick your head up and start walking in the freedom from Sin Christ paid for.

3. **What's my next step?** There should be a next step God is calling all of us to take. In fact, over the course of these weeks

I HOPE that the combination of these sermons, the study guide, community group discussions...all of us should identify a next step we can take. And we can do it in community with others!

For some of you, the next step is belief. This whole time I've been talking about how people change and I keep talking about the gospel. And you need that hope right now but you don't know for sure that you have it. Because your life hasn't really ever changed and you are thinking well, no fruit...maybe all I had was an emotional experience once but I never actually decided to FOLLOW Jesus. I'm still a fan.

Matthew 7 says many will come to him and say Jesus didn't we do all these things in your name and he will say depart from me because I never knew you. He will say they were fans, not followers. Ya'll there is NO SUCH THING as half-way christianity. There is following Jesus – that's called Christianity. It is total and complete. And my job is to help you orient your life around it. But it is NOT a segment of your life. There is another religion, the good people religion, that encourages goodness & occasional religious behavior modification.

You need to follow him today. And the first step, like we said last week, is to be baptized. And I want you to know you can take that step today. We just decided we would bring it back out here a second week because maybe you made that decision to follow Jesus on Easter but you weren't sure about getting baptized. And you've been kicking yourself all week. Well, the invitation to you is to take that step of faith. We

have the tank outside.... CLOSE – Guided Prayer – I have all I need in Christ...so father make me more like him today.

THE BENCH

Alternate Intro

How many of you have ever played any kind of organized sports? Anybody who has played organized sports knows there is a big difference between pick-up ball & organized ball. You see it especially in football. We can get a group together and go play around, but if you want to win games you need a strategy, you need to all know what play you are running, and you need to practice those plays so well you can do them in your sleep.

I think the reason a lot of people never really grow in their faith is because they are playing pick-up ball. They don't have a plan for how to grow, just a

And the idea is real simple: We are going to take these 4 weeks to build a road map for how to follow Jesus. Cause I think a lot of people have a desire to get closer to God. But they just aren't sure what to do. Maybe attend church, read some books, give some money. We might do any number of things hoping that at some point through some combination of these things you'll feel closer to God. Which isn't so much a plan as just a list of do's and don'ts.

And It's kind of like trying to drive from here to the Beach WITHOUT GPS. Remember those days? Where you had to ask people & you got like 8 different ways to get there and the directions were like...AT the medium large oak tree...go ¾ mile and turn L onto the road...then you'll see that building...you know the one...turn R there. Bout 600 yards

you will do a U-turn...if you get to the Wendy's you've gone too far. Anybody got people in your life who still do that? I do.

We don't do that anymore because we all use turn-by-turn navigation apps. That tell us step by step how to get where we are going. And we arrive. Imagine if, right now, GPS went down. I'm guessing half of you could not get home. You'd have to move in here. Now imagine I you are halfway to the beach and GPS turns off. Most of you, not all, but MOST of us are forever lost in eastern north Carolina. Take 74 until it ends and then that's where you live now.

A lot of people approach the Christian life wishing there was some kind of a step-by-step guide. Some kind of a GPS

Following is more about becoming than watching.

road map, a clearly marked path

Outline

GOSPEL – Payment, Perfection, Power.

“The gospel isn't just the front door to Christianity; it's also the house. Believing in the gospel is how you begin and grow in discipleship. Paul tells the Colossians that they will grow more like Jesus if they “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (Colossians 1:22-23). The only way to *move forward* in Christ is to *stand firm* in the gospel.

This is why **the gospel is the center of the wheel**. You can only love God in devotion because he has loved you first in Christ Jesus. You can only love each other in community because he has made you his sons and daughters by grace. You can only love the world through mission because he left heaven on a mission to save you. And the only way to become like Jesus in Christlikeness is to remember that Jesus became like you on the cross. “

Jesus in my place always leads to Jesus in my character. Becoming more like him.

Christ likeness – Love, Joy, Holiness -
2 Cor 5.17 – Eph 4.21-24 (New Creation...created after the likeness of God).

A disciple becomes more like Jesus through Devotion,
Community, & Mission.

5 But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete. This is how we know we are in him: 6 The one who says he remains in him should walk just as he walked. -- 1 John 2:5-6 (CSB)

Now a much different approach is to say ok this person hurt me. And if my immediate response is not forgiveness...which often times ya'll it just isn't...then what do I do? Do I grit my teeth and just try harder? Religion would say yes. But the gospel says no. We need to go back to our power source.

Which means I need to go sit down and rehearse what happened FOR ME on the cross. Jesus took my sin and God forgave me of sin when I was actively rebelling against him. I need to get back to a place where I am sinner first, sinned against second. I need the hub of the wheel. And only then, when I am freshly aware of how great a debt I've been forgiven of...can I truly go and forgive another.