

Christ Presbyterian Church
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Jesus Sounds Good, But. . . I Don't Need Religion
Matthew 28:16-20

Good morning—it's a good morning. My name is Jake. I'm one of the guys on staff here; I'm the Connectors pastor. Hey, it's summertime; well at least it feels like summer to me. Memorial Day has always marked summer for me. What's your favorite thing to do in the summer? For me, summertime is marked by Memorial Day Weekend and here's why. The pool opened on Memorial Day weekend—the public pool that we got passes to opened on Memorial Day weekend—and I would always go no matter what. If it was 62 degrees outside and windy, we're going to the pool! I loved going to the pool and one of the reasons I loved going to the pool, my brothers and I, is that personally, I loved the high dive. The high dive is the 3-meter, not the really tall one. We had a tall one and a small one and I loved going and watching because during the adult swim there was always this guy at the pool who was amazing at cannon balls. The kids would line up on the one side just to get the splash from the cannon ball and it was my goal to be as good as him someday. So I studied and watched and paid attention, and when I was 16 they finally let me go during adult swim. I don't know why they let me do that, but I learned and I thought okay, he has a certain technique and the arch and all these different things, and so one day I did it. All the kids were lined up because this guy was there and he was doing his thing so I take my turn and I do a can opener, not a cannon ball—those are more dangerous I feel like—but I got it great. I did it perfectly; you know you did it perfectly when you just hear the water, right? In my mind it was perfect. I went under water and it hurt my head because the water came splashing back, and when I came up, all the kids were soaking wet and the moms sitting behind the kids were soaking wet, and the waves from this can opener went off into the shallow end and we're lapping over the pool. Like, that's amazing! I didn't try anymore after that because I thought *that's the best I'm going to do*. But my question for us today is this: just like the ripples went out from that spot where I entered the water, what if this summer the impact that you and I have ripples out far beyond the boundaries of our lives?

As we talk about summer and this transition into summer, we're kind of in-between things right now. We kind of stand between this series we're in and where we stand as a church, and the realities of transitions—the change of pace and change of rhythm for the summer. The change of rhythm marks for me something that happens quite often when I get out and about because after hiding all winter, I found out I have neighbors. We meet in this park behind my house and inevitably this question comes up; it comes up in all of our conversations when we meet new people, right? The question is: what do you do? I use to hate that question because it would kill conversation, but now it doesn't anymore as much. *Well, I'm a pastor*. I kind of like to see people's responses because depending on what they were talking about, it kind of changes. "Sorry for my language!" "Don't say sorry to me, I have a 2-year-old here. You should say sorry to

them.” I’ll get this once-in-a-while, “Oh, that’s really good, that’s great. I’m not really that religious.” I say, “Great. Me either.” That really throws them off! “Isn’t that your job to be? Don’t you go to church all the time?” “Yeah, I do.” “You believe in God?” “Yeah.” “You’re a good person.” “Really? I’ve fooled you, haven’t I?” Yeah, yeah, all those things. I wonder sometimes what they’re getting at. Maybe they see rituals and traditions and rules and moral standards, or whatever it might be, and there’s a little bit of pushback. Maybe because over time they’ve seen it institutionalized, or they’ve seen it manipulate them or those around them, or maybe they feel like it’s oppressive. So, here we stand this holiday weekend where the rhythms of our lives are about to change, and some of you have been coming to this series “Jesus Sounds Good, But . . .”

We’ve talked about all sorts of doubts or things we want to push back on and say, “It sounds good, but . . .” and today we want to talk a little bit about “Jesus sounds good, but . . . I’m not really that religious.” Because if you’re that person that says *Jesus sounds good, but...* if you’re that person, you’ll hear this change of pace in our conversation and maybe you hear things that we’re not trying to say, but you’re hearing them in a certain way. You hear, “Well, you should come to church. We want you here and if you can’t make it here, check out the Livestream online and make sure you get back to that, but worship is really important.” Or maybe you’ll hear something about how important prayer is, or reading your Bible, or getting into a small group—make sure you get plugged into that, or study your Bible with a group, or give. And maybe you hear those things and they don’t sound like what you want them to sound like. They may sound more like religion to you, and so we have this tension—as a community we find some meaningful expressions of our faith and we try to talk about those things, but some of us may feel like we aren’t really that into religion, not really that into church, not really that into following the rules. *Jesus sounds good, but I’m more of a spiritual person, not so much of a religious person.* I wonder if sometimes spirituality is really just our rebuttal against what seems or feels like superficial requirements.

There’s a quote from a guy named Bruxy Cavy, a pastor from Canada. I heard him talk about religion once and some of the things he said really resonated with me. He said, “I’ve met many people who call themselves spiritual as a way of saying that they just don’t care about church, or synagogue, or mosque, or temple anymore. But being spiritual is not about what you don’t do. Yes, walking in the woods can be a spiritual experience, but it can also just be a walk in the woods. Likewise, going to church can be a spiritual experience or it can just be a religious tradition. The heart of the matter is the human heart.”

So, here we stand in a little bit of tension trying to figure out how to go through the rhythms of our lives and get connected to this person named Jesus, how to live in ways that we can learn from Him and not feel like we want to push back against or push out things that have meaning or could have meaning for other people. Here’s a question I’d like to ask today: what if the changes of pace for us aren’t obstacles this summer? What if they’re opportunities? What if they are our greatest opportunity?

Let’s jump into some Scripture here. We’re going to be looking at the biography of

Jesus in the book of Matthew. There are four biographies about Jesus—we'll be in the one written by Matthew. We're going to be reading from the end of Matthew's book, so he's kind of concluding the story he's trying to tell. It's important to remember that Matthew is writing to a specific audience. He's writing to a pretty religious, mostly Jewish audience, and the Jews of the time have an engrained religious way of life. I mean not just like *hey you should pray, you should read your Bible*. Everything kind of revolved around their religious practices Things like how far you can walk on a Sunday, or rules and restrictions on how you interact with people that might be sick. For example, if somebody sick was across the street or coming down the side, you should cross to the other side so you don't touch them. Religion was really in their blood, it was part of their identity. They actually believed that their religious practices were what kept them connected to God. This is the context that Matthew writes into. Matthew 28—I'll read it and maybe say a few things as I read, and we can go along.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee,

Eleven disciples. Judas was the twelfth. He betrayed Jesus and hung himself. So now there are eleven, and Jesus tells them to meet Him in Galilee. Let's pause to remember the disciples—these are Jesus' closest followers and in this group of close followers are some really interesting characters. There are political religious zealots on one side, others that are just hot headed, some get easily angered, some have temper issues, and some are just really impulsive. There are a couple others that are just blue-collar, trying to make life work and get by with what they have, and they've been following Jesus for three years.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him.

They worshipped Him. Why would they worship Jesus? If we look at the interactions of the disciples before, there's not so much of this way of talking about Jesus. But they worship Him because of what's been taking place. Jesus has said for three years, *Hey, I'm the one who's come to set you free, to do something about the thing that you can't do anything about. You're engulfed by sin and death and it has a control over you. You have brokenness between you and God, and brokenness between you and each other, brokenness between you and creation, you have brokenness in yourself, and Jesus says I'm coming to do something about that. I'm going to set all of that right*. He talks about it and He gives signs about it. Gives evidence that it's going to take place. He tells them how it's going to happen. He tells them *hey to make this happen I'm going to die*. The disciples don't really catch it until this moment when Jesus is unfairly arrested, tortured, executed, hung on a cross, died, was buried, and then comes back to life. He's resurrected, and in that time where the disciples start to see this and they start to put it together, they worship Him. I mean, if there's any reason to worship somebody it's because they have power over the thing that we have no power over. They have power over the biggest obstacle we could face—sin and death and everything that comes with it. So they worship, but some doubted. Well, that's interesting isn't it? That the closest followers of Jesus—some worshipped and some doubted.

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Jesus can say, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” because of what we just talked about, because of what I just said. He has overcome everything—I mean sin and death, if somebody can overcome that and do something about that, reverse that and change that, well that person can probably do just about everything else. I mean, if we were to summarize this, Jesus is kind of saying, *okay, I’m in charge. I’m in charge.* So what Jesus says next, not saying it’s more important than anything else Jesus has ever said, but what He says next is pretty important. If He has overcome sin and death, and He has done all the things He promised to do, and He followed through on what He was going to do, then it means what He said it means and now He’s letting us know He is in charge. The next thing Jesus says, we should listen to and figure out, because this is probably the thing, or at least one of the big ones for Him.

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, (making disciples is making learners—they’re learning and they’re leaders. Disciples are people who make other disciples) baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” [Matthew 28:16-20]

There are a lot of things we could say about this passage, and a lot has been said. More will be said, and there are a lot of books out there and lots of messages preached by other people. What I’m feeling convicted with today and would like to submit we think about a little bit more today is this: following Jesus is not about religious transactions, but relational investments. Following Jesus is not about religious transactions, but relational investments. Go back to verse 17. “Some worshipped, some doubted.” In the group of the closest followers of Jesus, some worshipped and some doubted. Some worshipped and some wavered. Doubts, your doubts, don’t disqualify you from following Jesus. If you’re somebody who has some wavering going on, some doubts, that doesn’t disqualify you from following Jesus. It doesn’t disqualify you from participating in the thing that Jesus calls us into. If you’re somebody who says, “I have doubts, I feel like I’m wavering”, that doesn’t disqualify you from following Jesus, from hearing Jesus, from being near Jesus. You’re not disqualified from being called a follower of Jesus. You’re not disqualified from being around other people who follow Jesus. You’re not disqualified from learning about Jesus and you’re not disqualified from leading others in the ways of Jesus.

Some worshipped and some waned. See, doubts don’t disqualify, doubts are what validate our need to follow; they’re opportunities to participate. Your opportunity to participate isn’t defined by whether or not you have your act together. You don’t have to dismiss your questions; you don’t have to hide your uncertainties. If you’re wavering or if you’re worshipping, the opportunity that Jesus offers is the same. It’s an opportunity not of religious transactions, but relational investments.

There's another word in the text that I think is really important. It comes toward the end of Matthew. Jesus says, "baptizing and teaching", but He doesn't mean just teaching information. It says teaching them everything, "teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Everything. That's an interesting word—everything. Literally translated means everything. I don't know about you, but when I hear that word everything . . . if I wasn't having doubts before, if I wasn't wavering a little bit before, I start to waver a little bit there because I think, *everything that Jesus commanded?* I mean Jesus was with these guys for three years and He said some things and He did some things. He taught them how to heal people. He taught them stories and then told them what the stories were about and tried to give some application to those stories, and the disciples had been struggling along as is, and maybe He doesn't mean everything. But He does mean everything, and not just teaching the information about everything, but teaching to obey everything, to be obedient to what Jesus is leading us to. But it's not about religious transactions; it's about relational investment. I don't know about you, but when I read about "everything" I think, there are a couple of things—that's going to take some time. If I'm trying to teach others to do that or somebody's trying to teach me, that's going to take some time and I'm going to probably need some help...and I actually haven't even learned it all, yet. See, that's why I believe that we're not disqualified, because if we're waiting for somebody who has it all together, somebody who's learned it all and can show us, we're going to be waiting a long time, and if that person shows up, they're going to be really busy. It's about investments.

Let me end with this story about a guy named Tommy. Tommy came to me a few years ago. I was working at a church, and he had been part of another church that I was a part of, a young guy when I first met him. I saw him come into our student ministry, start to play guitar, and then play in the band. He was really talented. He could play just about any instrument that he picked up. He said, "Hey, I'd like to come and worship at your church and be a part of that team that leads", and we said, "Great!" A couple of weeks in he came to me again and said, "Can we start meeting a little bit? I need to talk to you about some things." "Sure Tommy, let's meet." And the first time that we met, Tommy and I are across from each other at a table at Starbucks, Tommy almost can't get through a conversation with me before tears well up in his eyes—before he's visibly agitated with some things. He said, "I don't know about this. I'm kind of mad at God. I'm kind of mad at everybody who calls themselves a Christ-follower. I'm kind of mad at some of the things you taught me, Jake. I don't get it. I'm mad at the way people are responding to one of my closest friends whose choices right now don't look and align with the way that they see the world and see their faith." We talked about hypocrisy last week, but John (Crosby) was saying more than, *Hey, there are hypocrites out there.* This was rattling Tommy's faith. He was going from somebody who worshipped to somebody who was wavering. Tommy and I started to meet and he was asking questions I didn't have answers for—not good answers anyway. His questions were making me ask more questions, and both of us started to ask all sorts of questions. In

the course of the next couple of months, Tommy and I met several times and I would say that the time meeting with Tommy has done more in my adult life to transform my faith than almost any other relationship I've had, because it caused me to go deeper with who I really believe God is and who I really believe Jesus calls me to be, and what it really means to obey everything He teaches. There were moments where Tommy was leading me, and moments where I was leading Tommy, and there were moments when we were both learning together.

I want to reflect on what's going to happen this summer. Around this time of the year, a book starts circulating around for graduates. It's called *Oh, The Places You'll Go*. Dr. Seuss is a great post-modern philosopher, so I thought we should talk about him. This is probably a little strange for me to say, but what would it sound like if Jesus was Dr. Seuss? Because Jesus already wrote *Oh, The Places You'll Go*. It's Matthew 28. If you know the story of *Oh, The Places You'll Go*, it's an inspiring, encouraging book about being in a new place in life and how you're going to change the world. You're going to have struggles and difficulties, but you can make it and you're going to do it. There's a line in *Oh, The Places You'll Go* that says, "You're all alone now, you're on your own", and that's where the story differs. Because when Jesus writes *Oh, The Places You'll Go*, he says, *No you're never alone. You don't go at this alone.* You have people who are maybe a few steps ahead of you and you're leading people along with you and if you're following just even one step toward Jesus, you're now qualified to lead someone else. So, if Jesus sounds good to you I want you to reflect on *Oh, The Places You'll Go* this summer. Where are you going this summer, and who is it that you're going to invest in as you go? Is it a person that you can help lead along the way or maybe it's somebody that you need to go to and say, "I need to learn something this summer"?

I want to challenge us to think of a name, or a group of names, or a couple of names. Who are you going to invest in relationally this summer as you go?

I didn't finish the story about Tommy. Tommy is part of a church plant now. He started a new church with a group of friends. He leads worship and also mentors three kids younger than him: a high schooler and two junior high students. He probably still has questions and doubts, but he's taking steps toward learning and leading kind of interchangeably.

The name I wrote down is Naomi. She's someone I met at the park and she has three kids, I can't remember their names, and I don't know where they're at in their faith or what faith they even have, but it feels like that's a place I'm supposed to be this summer. I'm going to be there. I feel like I should make some relational investments. I wrote down a couple other names as well. I want to encourage you so that we don't forget these places that God's taking us, places you'll go. Let's do the benediction.

May the God who meets us in our doubts, the Son who invites us into participation, and the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live these lives of love, be with us all. Go in peace.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.