

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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James Madsen
Jesus Outside the Lines: Jesus as Lord | John 20:30-31**

Good morning everyone! I thought a good way for us to begin today would be a pop quiz. I bet you weren't thinking that'd be a good way to begin today, were you? You're thinking you wish you had studied for the quiz. Okay, it's just one question. It's the most important question, though. What is the one thing you can do today to please God? What is the one thing you can do today to please God? Do you have the answer in your mind? John tells us the story in John 6.

²⁸ Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"
[John 6:28]

So, what answer do you think they were expecting? Maybe it's something similar to what you're thinking. Maybe to love your neighbor. To love God. To be Christ like. The answer that Jesus gives is shocking, though. So shocking that I'm not sure you're going to even believe it is true.

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

"To believe in the one he has sent." There is just one work that will please God: To put your faith in Jesus and to trust Jesus with your whole life. Hebrews also tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Do we believe this? I mean sure we believe Jesus died on the cross for our sins, that He is the Son of God, that He rose again, but other than keeping us out of hell, we so often live as if Jesus is not much more than an example of how we should live, and I think even the example and the teachings of Jesus makes us feel uncomfortable sometimes, right? And I think in our discomfort, we create a Jesus that is more palatable. We prefer a Jesus who doesn't talk about hell or meddle with our money. We minimize who Jesus is. We think of Jesus as more of a life coach who gives us recommendations. We want a tame Jesus, a Jesus that we can control, and I think we do this without really realizing it, don't we? What we believe about Jesus shapes how we read the Bible and how we process books like *Jesus Outside the Lines*. I really loved Scott Saul's book, but I have to admit that there were places in the book that made me feel very uncomfortable.

Last month at the ECO Presbyterian conference, Kyle Strobel was telling a story of how when Jesus says things that make us feel uncomfortable, we have this imaginary folder called "crazy things Jesus says that we don't really believe is true." Right? And we take those things and file them into that folder and then forget about them.

Last week Petey did such a great job of talking about why Jesus matters. I love his illustration about mobsters—not lobsters, someone in the last service thought I said lobsters—about mobsters who live untransformed lives. My heart feels very much like a mobster’s heart. Petey said that we live Christ-less Christianity. That was kind of harsh, wasn’t it? Don’t you think, Petey? That was a little harsh. I think it’s more accurate to say that our Jesus is very small, right? That we have a pocket Jesus (takes out a small plastic Jesus). We bring Jesus out at Christmas and Easter. We take him out whenever we need to feel good about ourselves. We cover His eyes when we don’t want Him to see what we are doing, right? We like a Jesus that is more manageable. He’s going to sit right here and watch all of you and make sure you stay awake, okay?

Matt Johnson, in his excellent book *Getting Jesus Wrong*, says “Everyone has an image of Jesus that they prefer, a Jesus who values what they value. Our personal images of Jesus reveal that we think the Christian faith is about furthering our hopes and dreams.” We would prefer a Jesus whose primary job was to grant our wishes and to make us happy. When we create Jesus in our own image, we miss out on the Jesus we really need. A pocket-sized Jesus really doesn’t matter that much in our day-to-day life does He? Do you know that in Christian bookstores in America, books about Jesus don’t sell very well? Does that explain why we have a hard time giving away Scott Saul’s book? I don’t know. Do you know what kind of books do sell well? Self-help books. We focus on self-help and self-improvement, but the Bible calls us to put off self and to put on Christ. Why is this? Why do we reduce the most compelling rescue story of all time to a self-improvement program? I think part of the issue is that we have fuzzy thinking about belief in Jesus and about faith. We don’t think it has much relevance outside of our life in church. Did you know that everything we do in life flows out of what we believe? Everything we do in life flows out of what we believe. Jesus matters because what you believe about Jesus affects everything you do every moment of every day.

Let’s think about synonyms for this word faith. Words like believe, trust, depend, rely. The thing we are trusting in, leaning on, relying on to give us a meaningful life, is the true Lord of our life. That’s the thing we are really worshipping. Everyone in the world has faith in something, right? In America, we primarily put our faith in self-reliance and self-improvement. Most of the sermons across the country are three steps to a better you, couched in a “What would Jesus do” theology. We give lip service to the idea that Jesus is Lord, but I think everyone struggles with making Jesus Lord of their life.

I have to tell you that I really struggled with writing this sermon. In part, because I know you struggle with making Jesus the Lord of your life. And in true Minnesota fashion, the way we usually deal with that is by not talking about it. But I also struggled with this because I came face-to-face continually with the areas of my life where I wanted to be the Lord of my life and I didn’t want to give control to Jesus, right? I believe in Jesus, I believe that everything I have in my life that is good comes from Him. I believe that Jesus is Lord, but on some level I still want to be the boss of my life. Anyone here who wants to be the boss of their life? We have more honest people in this service than in

the last service. That's good. I struggle with believing. I fall for the same lies that Satan used in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve—the lie that I can be my own god, the lie that God cannot be trusted, the lie that God will not give me what I really need, so I turn to self-reliance.

Martin Luther says that every sin that we commit is really the sin of unbelief, the sin of not trusting Jesus as our Lord. When I turn to self-reliance, I am turning away from God. Let me tell you what I know is true . . . Jesus loves you, Jesus is for you, and Jesus is with you. Putting our trust in Jesus, believing in Him, is really the application to the reality that Jesus matters. When we trust in Jesus we find life and life abundant.

Let's look at what the apostle John has to say about Jesus. At the end of his gospel, John gives us his purpose statement for writing his gospel.

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name. [John 20:30-31]

By believing in Jesus you will find life. John isn't just talking about eternal life. He isn't just talking about fire insurance so you don't go to hell. No, he is talking about the abundant life here and now. The abundant life isn't found in a big house and a fancy car and a picket fence. No, the abundant life is living a life confident in Christ's love for you, confident in what Jesus accomplished for you through His death and resurrection.

In Colossians 1, Paul tells us that Jesus created everything on heaven and on earth, and that everything was created by Him and for Him. Who do we usually assume that we were created for? For me, right? In fact, who do I usually think my wife was created for? For me, right? But that's not true at all. The reality is that I was created to give glory to Jesus. Do you know what that means? It means that when I live in my flesh, when I live in my selfish desires, I am working against the very purpose for which I was created and that causes friction in my life. Friction is really a nice way to say that it causes conflict and destruction in my relationships. It creates anxiety in my soul. It actually robs me of the abundant life that Jesus came to give!

A simple example of this is when I believe I am the center of the universe, I see interruptions and disruptions as an attack on my kingdom. I mean, why doesn't everyone around me just accept and know that I am the center of the universe? Come on people. Get with the program, right? So, when Jack, my two-year-old, comes home from daycare exhausted and he's having a meltdown, I make it about me. Right? I react to him. I let him know who's the boss. Is that very helpful? No, but in those moments when I live for Christ, remembering Jesus is my life, I get a glimpse that I am not the center of the world and I can actually be for Jack what he really needs. I can comfort him. It's not about me.

When I was thinking about John's promise—that when we believe in Jesus we will experience life—I was reminded of the seven I AM statements Jesus makes in the Gospel of John.

I am the Bread of Life

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

I am the Resurrection and the Life

I am the Good Shepherd

I am the Gate

I am the Light of the World

I am the Vine

As you see all those statements together, what does it say to you? How does it speak to your heart? I think one of the things I see here is just the reality that Jesus came to bring light into a dark world. He came to bring us life. He came to restore our relationship with Him, because the abundant life is found in our relationship with Jesus and in flourishing relationships with one another. When I look at this list, I see clearly that Jesus is not only the source of life, but He is also better suited to run my life than I am.

These are all metaphors to show us how to find life in Christ. For example, John 15 says, "I am the Vine and you are branches. Remain in me and I in you, and then you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing." Jesus is saying *trust in Me, stay close to Me, cling to Me and your life will be fruitful*. Again, we naturally think fruitful means we have a lot of stuff or that we can be in control of our world, but fruitful means that we are living for the purpose for which we were created. Paul says that the fruit of our faith in Jesus will be our love for God and our love for other people. You see, grace is not a gift that you keep for yourself, it's a gift that you pass on to other people. If Jesus is not good news to us, if our Jesus is only this big, we're not going to feel like telling other people about Jesus, right? But if we have a giant Christ who has saved our life, who has given us a hope and a future, who fills us with joy, that is a Jesus we'll want to tell people about, right?

I think the reality is that our believing in Jesus is a moment-by-moment struggle. Our very own human nature continually wants to rely on self. Our culture tells us that your identity is based on what you do, and even Satan himself says that you are more reliable than Jesus. This is why Jesus says that the work of the believer is to believe. It really is hard work to continually cast ourselves onto Jesus, to trust in Him, to surrender to Him, to trust that His work on our behalf really is enough, and that we don't have to prove anything.

How do we move toward letting Jesus be Lord of our life and experience abundant life in Him? I think a good starting point is just simply to begin with a prayer asking that the

Holy Spirit would reveal to us how much Jesus really loves us. This is the most important prayer that you can pray for yourself, for your spouse, for your kids, and especially for your pastors. Paul prays this in Ephesians 3:

¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches God may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in Christ's love, ¹⁸may have the power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for you, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. [Ephesians 3:16-19]

No one loves you as much as Jesus does. In fact, no one loves you better than Jesus does. Do you believe that? The truth is whatever you give your heart to, that's what you will give your life to as well. Tim Keller says, "What the heart trusts, the mind justifies, the emotions desire, and the will carries out. Everything follows the heart." You can only get life from Jesus if He has your heart. And if He has your heart, you will freely give Him your whole life.

When I met my wife ten years ago she was a missionary in Spain, and even the first time I met her, I could tell that she was captivated by Christ's love for her. The more she talked about Jesus the more I wanted to know this Jesus. I had to marry her so I could keep hearing about this Jesus, right? My wife is so captured by Christ's love that she said, "Of course I want to be a missionary! Doesn't everyone want to sell everything they own, go to a faraway land, and tell people about Jesus? Doesn't everyone want to do that?" You see, when you are loved so well, you will gladly give everything for that person. The more you know that Jesus loves you, the more you know that really everything you need is found in Him. I pray the love of Christ for us would be so embedded in our hearts that His love would fill us with joy, that His love would change us, that His love would compel us to tell the world about Him. I think another key to finding life in Christ is by believing our true identity is in Him.

In Colossians 1, after Paul has told us that Jesus is God, that He created everything in the world, that He has authority over all things, and that this very same Jesus came down to earth to restore our relationship with Him, Paul tells us that Jesus made peace through His blood, shed on the cross for our sins.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you as holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. [Colossians 1:21-22]

So, what makes you right with God? Is it loving your neighbor? Is it being a good person? No sir! No sir-eee bob, that's not it. Right?

The Heidelberg catechism asks the question again: What makes you right with God? You're probably not going to be surprised by the answer at this point.

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. It goes on to say, Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil (this is back to my mobster heart, again), nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept the gift of God with a believing heart.

We are back to that question of believing. Do you believe Jesus makes us right before God? Do you believe that Jesus makes you acceptable to yourself? Do we trust what the Bible says is true . . . that you stand before God as holy and blameless because Jesus shed blood on the cross for you? Do we believe it? Or do we believe what our culture says? Is that what our faith is in? That our identity is in our successes and failures? That our identity is in how many social media followers we have? That our worth is only as good as yesterday's performance? Jesus loves you, He died for you, He credits you His perfect record so that you stand before God holy and blameless just as if you had never sinned! You are loved, accepted, secure! Nothing can ever separate you from the love of God and Christ Jesus. What does that do to your heart? Doesn't that fill your heart with JOY?!

So, you can begin to see how believing in Jesus can impact your day-to-day identity. Dave McCarty, who works at the same mission as my wife, writes a blog and says this:

"When Jesus is ENOUGH, a believer has no fear of failure. No fear of losing everything. When Jesus is ENOUGH, a believer lives and loves with reckless abandon. Uninhibited. FREE. Bold. Fearless. Humble. Optimal performance. When Jesus is NOT enough, a believer is self-absorbed, internally selfish, failure-avoidant, suffering-avoidant, stressed, intense, hurried, feels under the gun, unlimited obligation, miserable but living in denial of the misery, and performance suffers. The stressed, pride-filled believer wants MORE than Jesus and His imputed worthiness."

Which life do you want to live? Are you starting to see how what you believe shapes every moment of every day? When I rest in Jesus, I live in peace and joy, confident of God's grace and power at work in my life, and when I don't believe in Jesus, everyone around me suffers. Every moment of the day provides you an opportunity to lean into Jesus, and what I have learned is this: In the places of my life where I actually trust Jesus, I experience abundant life, and in the areas of my life where I want to maintain control, I experience darkness, slavery, and anxiety. I think one of the telltale signs that we are struggling to trust Jesus is when we worry. Did you know that worry is a sin? Right now, you're worrying that I mentioned worry is a sin, aren't you? Worry might be the most common sin after pride, but worry is the sin of unbelief. It's the most common

command in the Bible. Do not be afraid. Do not worry. Three hundred sixty-five times. One command for every day. When we worry, our true beliefs about God are revealed. Our worry reveals that we don't think God is going to take care of us or that God doesn't know what He's doing or that God is going to abandon us. As Jesus has gotten bigger in my life, I worry less, but I still have moments when I revert to worry and usually the worry revolves around money, but in truth it's truly the belief that God isn't going to take care of us.

Last March, my son Luke who is six, had some dental surgery at Children's Hospital. The insurance said that they were going to cover it. Surprise surprise, they denied the coverage, so we still owe \$2,700 on top of the \$2,000 that we already paid. The short version is that Children's Hospital isn't sending our insurance company the right codes. There is a longer version, but the bottom line is that we owe this money. It was last July when I found out that we owed the money and I can tell you that I was angry, I was worried, and I was complaining to a lot of people about it. We can just say that the fruit of my spirit was not love, joy, and peace. And after a few months I went to Jesus with this and He smiled and said, "What took you so long?" I remembered that Jesus loves me, and that He is for me, and that He holds the world in His hands. He could bring resolution to the confusion or He could provide the money, but it didn't really matter how it comes out because I know that He is going to use it in my life. When I remembered who Jesus is and who I am to Him, it changed my demeanor. I no longer went immediately to despair! Worry and anxiety makes every problem bigger than it is. Leaning into Jesus, doesn't mean that we go to passivity. No, you know what happens? For me it gives me more and courage and more energy. It gave me the courage and the energy to call Children's Hospital and to call my insurance company over and over and over again, but the way I talked to them changed. There was so much more love, joy, peace, and kindness in my interactions with them.

Hear this. Whatever you do, do not condemn yourself for worrying. Do not condemn yourself for doubting or for your lack of belief. Do you know what? Jesus died for those sins as well. But instead use it as a wakeup call of trying to find life apart from Christ. It's an opportunity to run to Jesus and to remind ourselves what is true, to **BOAST** in the Lord of the universe, whose promises are many, and whose promises are for you! When I am faced with something worrisome, I can remember that God is going to use this to His glory, whether it's to shape my character or to reveal to the world that when I am weak, Christ is strong.

One of the gifts of worry is that it's an opportunity to remember how much I still need Jesus. It bursts the illusion that I've outgrown my need for a Savior. I love the story in Scott Saul's book about when Joni Erickson Tada asks the Christians in Ghana, West Africa, "Why are you so joyful?" The response is simply, "We have joy because we need Jesus more." We only turn to Jesus when we know that we need Him. My mantra the last few years has been, **MORE Jesus, Less Me**. The more we turn to Jesus, the more

love, joy, and peace we experience in our lives. Jesus offers us an invitation to find life and life in Him. How will you respond?

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. [Romans 10:9-10]

If you have never received the gift of life from Jesus, He offers it to you today. It’s through putting our trust in Jesus that we are made right with God; you are saved by grace through faith. It’s by our daily trusting in Jesus that we grow in maturity. The more dependent we are on Jesus, the more we become like Him. A pocket-sized Jesus doesn’t do that much for us, but a giant Christ will lead to giant Christians.

What’s the one thing you can do today to please God? Believe in Jesus. Trust in Him. Rest in Him. Receive His grace and His love for you, and that will lead you on a path to greater obedience, and the fruit of that trust in Jesus will be love, joy, and peace. Let’s pray together.

If you have never accepted the gift that Jesus offers to us, the gift of grace, and haven’t declared Him as Lord of your life, now is an opportunity to do that. You can pray along with me.

Jesus, we come before You and I believe that you are the Son of God, that You died on the cross to rescue me from my sin and to rescue me from death and to restore my relationship with You. I acknowledge my sin and my self-centeredness. I receive Your forgiveness and I ask You to take Your rightful place in my life as my Savior and my Lord. Come and reign in my heart, fill me with Your love, and Your life, and Your power. Restore me, Jesus. Live in me and love through me. And for all of us Jesus, I pray that You would reveal Yourself to us today, that You would give us a sign of Your love. So often we feel like the man in the Bible who said, “I believe. Help me with my unbelief.” We pray, Jesus, that we would see what the cross has really done for us. That it would get down deep into our heart, that it would fill us with joy, that it would change us, that it would make us alive, and that the fruit of that faith in You would be our love for one another. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

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.