**BELIEVE 32 – Becoming a New Person in Christ**

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**OUR GOAL = BECOME LIKE JESUS.** To become like Jesus, we must ACT like Jesus, from the heart. To ACT like Jesus, we must THINK like Jesus. You CANNOT separate them from each other.

**CHRISTIANITY IS NOT SOMETHING WE DO, IT IS A LIFE WE LIVE.**

**OUR FAITH IS NOT AN EXTERNAL CODE OF CONDUCT, IT IS WHO WE ARE!!!!**

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So…what now? For two years we have been on a journey together to grow in our understanding of the core foundational truths of our faith.

What does it all mean? What was the purpose of this journey? What drives our desire to become more like Jesus? What makes us Christian?

Turn, if you would, and look at the wall. It is hard to believe we have been through all of this in the last year. And, if you turn to look at the other wall…the year before that. But what do we do with it now? How does it all connect? And where do we go from here?

Do we end with the virtues? Does becoming Christ-like simply mean that we strive to become good people?

No, this journey does not end as just a moral code of conduct. If we end here then we are no different than any other religion in the world.

Do you know what distinguishes Christianity from other world religions? Every other religion requires the believer to live by and uphold an impossible external code of conduct as the way to restore a relationship with God. Every one! Only Christianity points to a loving God who seeks to restore a relationship with his creation and has provided the means to do so.

Folks, all of this, everything we have talked about for the last two years drives us to one ultimate purpose…to embrace and proclaim the Gospel Jesus Christ!

What We Believe, What We Do and Who WE ARE Becoming are all a part of the journey that is intended to prepare us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. If that is not the final destination then we are no different than any other religion.

Did you know that for the first time in our history a plurality in our country claim no religious affiliation? Last year the “none’s”, at 23+%, surpassed the Catholic Church. They are not atheists. They are not even agnostic. They’re just indifferent. They’re good people. What do they need the church for?

Could it be that our culture doesn’t hear anything unique or compelling coming from the church? Is the message they hear simply about becoming a good person and living a virtuous life?

If that is our only message…then I would say we’re in real trouble. Because then we become just like every other voice in the chorus. And, when we fail to uphold our own moral code (and we will fail) they will label us as hypocrites.

How many have heard of the Jefferson Bible? Thomas Jefferson took a copy of the scriptures and cut out everything he didn’t like or agree with. Do you know what he cut out? He cut out all reference to the divine and the miraculous. Jefferson took the Bible and created a moral code of conduct devoid of the Gospel message.

We *have* to be about more than just an external moral code.

On the other side of the equation…it is thought by some that our nation is moving towards a Universalist mentality. We increasingly embrace the idea that many paths lead to God. As a result, Christians have bought into the idea that we don’t need to or shouldn’t witness to the name of Jesus Christ. It is not appropriate. It’s too intrusive. People need to be allowed to find their own path to God

And…as a result…we don’t matter. If there are many ways to God then what value does the Christian message have?

How do we answer that question? How do you answer that question?

Humanity is looking for God. There is a yearning in every soul be in relationship with God. It is a desire that resides in the deepest part of us. The world wants to know the one true God.

**And we know how to find him.**

I have told this story before, so I apologize for repeating it again, but it is a powerful image for me that speaks to what Believe is all about.

Several years ago several of us went to NJ after Super-storm Sandy to assist with relief efforts. The church did not yet have substantial feet on the street so we hooked up with AmeriCorps.

One of the days we were working in a home and it came to lunch time. Our team went in different direction but Tom Trimbur and I saw no reason to move our bodies any more than we had to, so we just sat down on a pile of debris with the young lady from AmeriCorps who was our escort for the week.

During the course of our conversation the young women asked us about the church. Essentially she was asking…why are you here? So we took a few brief minutes to share the Gospel with her. It was our desire to live out a Christ-like life that called us to the work in NJ…that calls each of us to mission. But we weren’t there just to repair homes.

What if we would have not been willing or prepared to share the Gospel message to that young women? Well, we would have been just another group of good people in a long line of good people that she worked with over the course of the summer.

**What we believe is important. What we do is important. But what we say changes lives.**

The virtues that we have been talking about for the last several weeks lead full-circle back to what The Story and Believe are all about.

It is about a relationship with God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is about proclaiming Christ to a lost world. Ultimately, every part of what you see on that wall comes back to a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The Christ-like life is a doorway. It is an invitation for someone to say to you, “you’re different.” Why?

You’re different. Why? Have you thought about that question? What is your response going to be when that happens? Would you say, “I am trying to become more like Jesus.”?

Well that’s nice. But who is this Jesus and why should I care what he says?” Are you prepared to answer that question?

You see, the end of Believe starts at the beginning of Believe. Chapter 1 is the first chapter…and the final chapter.

Believe starts and ends with…**God**.

Turn to page 13 (key idea). I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you proclaim that truth then you also know that God desires a personal relationship with you (chapter 2) and that you can come into a right relationship with God by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ (chapter 3). And how do we know this? Because the Bible is the inspired Word of God (chapter 4)…**and the journey begins all over again!**

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**So how do we do all of this? How do we Think, Act and Believe like Jesus?**

**There are TWO ESSENTIALS:**

1. **THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

His divine power has given everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature. **2 Peter 1:3-4**

God is at work in our lives. The presence of God is with us everywhere and at all times. We cannot escape Him. We can ignore Him but we cannot get away from Him.

Once we come into a restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ He promises that He will never let us go. You cannot do or say anything that will separate you from the love of God once you belong to him. Nothing!

It doesn’t matter who you are. God worked through a giant like Abraham who He called to be the father of nations. And he also touched the life of a young girl, in a backwater town, who gave birth to the savior of the world.

God is present in the heart of every believer. Our response…

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. **2 Peter 1:5-8**

The objective of this entire process of The Story, and Believe, is to live a life in Christ in such a way that others will be drawn to a faith in God. It can’t happen if all we are prepared to show them is an external moral code.

Qualities such as goodness, gentleness, and faithfulness are essential to us as we show the love of God to those around us. As we become more and more like Jesus we are empowered to boldly proclaim the Gospel message. Then…the church will matter!

Church family…I have some news that will probably not come as much of a surprise. The world is not going to walk through those doors anymore. The days of Cultural Christianity, when people came to church because that just what you did on Sunday morning are gone. And I say Good!

Cultural Christianity produces a weak, stagnant and self-centered faith. Genuine Christianity is powerful, enticing and life-changing. People will come when they see a reason to come. We have to show them and we have to go tell them why “*here*” is different.

Yes, God wants us to become more like Jesus for our own sake, but he also wants it for those around you. He wants it for your spouse, your children, your classmates, your neighbors, and your coworkers.

The presence of God, residing in each of us, goes to work as we yield our will and our hearts to God’s will and God’s heart. We allow God to take control. And when an entire community of believers, like us, is unified around God’s purposes and God’s heart, the community and the world are impacted and changed.

1. **THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

We do not have the power within us to accomplish any of this on our own. Period! The good news is that God never intended for us to do it alone.

When we recognize that the presence of God resides within us, then we have, within us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection power of God is OURS.

Are you uncomfortable sharing your faith? All you have to do is to be willing and available. The Holy Spirit will give you the right words at exactly the right time.

Without the spirit working in us – we don’t have a prayer. But with the presence of God in our hearts, and the wind of the Holy Spirit at our backs, we can consistently grow to become more like Jesus.

**Acts 4:11-12, 20, 31**

Conclusion:

I would like to conclude with an illustration that I think speaks volumes to the connected nature of everything we have discussed with Believe. I am going to use a story about Ken Steinbreugge as an example.

During his career, Ken kept a Bible on his bookshelf at work. He didn’t place it in any special location or prominent position. It was just on his shelf. As would happen from time to time a co-worker would ask him about that Bible. Here is what I think is so cool about this story. Two things…

First, when Ken was asked about the Bible he would not take the time then and there to talk to the person about Jesus. Why? Because that is not what he was paid to do. It would be a dishonor to his employer if he were to spend valuable working time to talk about his faith. Instead, he would offer to meet the person for lunch or after work to share the meaning and purpose of that Bible on his bookshelf.

So Ken created an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. But was it simply because he kept a Bible on his bookshelf? No!

Here’s the second point…Ken created the opportunity to share the Gospel by demonstrating virtues of a Christ-like life in his work environment. He demonstrated kindness, humility, gentleness, a calm spirit, passion for his work and respect for his employer.

Now, what if during his working day Ken was rude and inconsiderate, anxious and stressful, talked down about others or about the company? Then that Bible on his shelf would have meant nothing!

So…was it the Bible on the shelf that caused some to notice Ken’s behavior and actions? Or was it Ken’s actions that led people to notice the Bible on his shelf?

Yes!

Ken’s example also provides us with a glimpse into what is coming next. Ken opened doors for Discipleship. For two years we have worked to build the foundation for **Discipleship**.

So now the real work begins. Are you ready?

We’re going to close our journey with a time of prayer and commitment. We have heard the Story. We have been instructed through Believe on ways to live a Christ-like life. Now it is time to decide what you are going to do with all of this. Now is the time to ask, “so what?”

I would invite you, as we enter a time of prayer, to consider everything that you have heard, read and learned over the last two years. And then I want you to ask yourself, “so what?”

What does it mean to me and…what am I going to do about it? What change am I going to make, what action am I going to take as a result of what we have learned?

I urge you…don’t let The Story and Believe just be an academic exercise. Think about the road ahead. Think about the road of Discipleship.

In your worship folder you will find a small blank insert. On that insert I invite you to write down one thing that you will commit to in your own life as a result of what we have just completed. Don’t put your name on the card. In a few minutes I will ask the ushers to collect the cards and bring them to the altar where we will pray over them and dedicate them to the journey ahead.

Maybe you still have questions. You are simply not sure where you stand right now. If you are not quite sure what you believe, I would invite you to write your questions on the card and, if you wish, sign your name and either Pastor Chris or myself will contact you directly for further discussions. God never intended His Word to be hidden or obscure. The Holy Spirit wants to reveal the Word of God to each of us and to the whole world.

I invite you, as the music plays, to spend time in prayer. Consider what you have learned from The Story and from Believe. If you would like to come forward and pray at the altar I would invite you to do so.

If you are a visitor today I would ask you to pray for **us**. And perhaps…consider joining us for the road ahead.

We’re going to move forward in this journey together. No one can be left behind. Discipleship is both the hard work and the ultimate joy of faith. In the coming months and years we will continue to build on what we have started here. I believe it will be a time of renewal and growth like nothing we have seen before.

Let us come before God in prayer.