



## CHRISTIAN IDENTIFICATION

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We are constantly being told that we need or must reach out, go out and proclaim Jesus to our lost world. Perhaps we would start winning more people to Jesus when we start acting like Jesus.

Luaine and I just returned from a 40th anniversary cruise out of Boston up into Canada. Part of the process was getting our passports. We had to show our original birth certificates to the agent here and then he sent them with our applications.

It wasn't enough to stand before the agent and say, "Here I am. This is me." It wasn't enough to show our driver's licenses and say, "These identify us." Even photo-copies of our birth certificates were not accepted. The only acceptable proof to identify us was our original birth certificates.

The point here is that it isn't enough to tell people that we are Christians. You and I may know what we mean, but to the world the word "Christian" has many different meanings.

Here's how the world sees us: Christians fight, we feud, we take sides politically, we don't get along with one another, we complain and insist on our rights; we're as materialistic and selfish and self-centered as the rest of the world. We preach love and reconciliation, but act just like the world around us.

Non-Christians are confused about who we are. We claim to want to win the world to Christ, but who can blame the world for being reluctant to become one of us. It's not enough to say that we are a Christian. It's not enough to say we have a great church.

The theme of this convention is, "Our God Reigns." We can shout it from the rooftops and say it to everyone we meet, but if the world does not see Him reigning in our lives, He's not reigning.

What the world wants is to actually see God in our lives. Think about those you are closest to, and the people you are around every single day. If they cannot see Jesus Christ in your actions or hear Him in your words, and if you go around with a rotten attitude, or you are a gossip or

constant complainer, how many people do you think will be attracted to Christianity.

At our annual association meeting last week one of the speakers made this statement: you may think you are relevant; you may even be relevant. But if no one else thinks you are relevant, then you are not relevant. This may be where the church is today.

Let me rephrase it somewhat. You may think you are a Christian; you may even be a Christian. But if your friends, neighbors and coworkers don't see Christ in you, how can they know you are a Christian?

Ask any Baptist what the purpose of the church is and they will tell you, "To evangelize the world." We preach evangelism, we teach evangelism, and we tell our folks to do evangelism.

But if people cannot see Jesus in our lives, evangelistically speaking, we are just spinning our wheels. People will not be attracted to Him.

How can we expect the world to believe the Bible is true, that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus' claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of Jesus and oneness in our lives.

How do people know that you are a Christian? The answer was preached by Jesus two thousand years ago in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-10).

It is mind boggling when you realize the entire sermon is about the essence of Christianity. It is about who we are as followers of Christ. It is about our everyday attitudes and conduct.

And the sermon is about how people can know we are Christians. Jesus didn't say, "Try this out for size." He said, "This is who we ought to be."

Many use Christianity as a fire-escape from hell. And it's true that we stand firm that salvation is God's gift, by His grace (Eph. 2:8-9).

But the Apostle Paul in Eph. 2:10 makes it absolutely clear that we are saved for a purpose—to do good works prepared in advance for us to do.

Jesus said we are the salt of the earth. When something is salty, you know it. Or unsalty, you know it. He said we are the light of the world. Light is seen. People should look at us and know we are Christians.

Jesus also said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing." Our whole Christian identity is wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

Apart from Him we can't do anything that has kingdom value—eternal value. Then He says in v. 8, “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Brothers and sisters, it is not our responsibility “to make people ‘Christians’” and get them baptized into a Baptist church. Our responsibility is to attract people to Jesus and help them decide to follow Jesus and his radical message.

Jesus is our spiritual power source. When we are plugged in to Him we glorify God. I am to glorify God; you are to glorify God; every Christian and every church has one over-arching purpose: to glorify God by living in the power and direction of Jesus.

People should know we are a Christian by the fruit we bear. We'll start winning people to Jesus when we start acting like Jesus and reflect Jesus with our lives, our conduct, and our words.

## 1. We have an unusual relationship with the world.

It's almost a love/hate relationship, isn't it? We're in the world but not of it. We need to understand that Christianity will always be counter-culture. We are “holy,” set apart for God's purposes.

We belong to God. No one else in the world is holy. No one else is set apart for God's purpose except for you and me and every other believer.

Jesus begins His Sermon with the Beatitudes (5:3-10). Beatitude simply means “blessed” or “happy.” We ought to read these every day—soak them up—immerse ourselves in them.

These are who Christians are. They describe our characters and attitudes. There are two things that happen when we live the beatitudes: (1) People will be attracted to Christianity or, (2) they will be offended by it.

Jesus warned that when you live this kind of life you may be insulted, persecuted and slandered.

The key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 6:8, “Do not be like them . . .” Don't be like whom? Like those who reject Jesus Christ.

Most people today are looking for the right things—meaning to life, peace, love, and reality—but too many are looking in the wrong places—drugs, alcohol, relationships based on sex, etc.

We have the answer. Jesus came to give a wonderful, full, and rich life to believers (John 10:10). We can have that life by giving ourselves to Jesus and following Him.

A minister filling in for a teacher of a young boys' class asked, "What do you think Jesus was like?" He expected to hear: He was a good man; He was a carpenter; He was like God. But no. One little fellow raised his hand and replied, "I think Jesus was like my Sunday School teacher."

Has anyone ever compared you to Jesus? The church should be filled with people who are like Jesus.

You would think that because the church is filled with Jesus followers, the one place people should feel welcome, where they would say, "There's something different and good there," and be attracted to it, is the church.

But when our neighbors only see Christians as a political arm of one party or the other; when we are more known for what we are against than for the Jesus we represent; when we are constantly engaged in so-called music wars; when we have an unwillingness to change to do whatever it takes to reach people for Jesus;

When the world thinks that all Baptists do is fight; when they see us going into the casinos and buying lottery tickets, then they have every right to question us and even call us hypocrites.

Probably the worst of all is that maybe we have become so irrelevant in our neighborhoods that many don't think of the church at all. If your church up and closed its doors tomorrow, would your neighborhood notice or even care?

Our relationship to the world should not be political, and it should not be entertainment. And it should not be just another expression of the same values the world holds dear.

Our relationship with the world should be unique. We are not another organization—we are the living Body of Christ in the world. And more specifically, in our state and in our towns we need to embrace our communities with the love of Christ.

Let's begin viewing the world through the eyes of Christ's love, not the eyes of a movie or rock star, or through the viewfinder of a politician, but with the love and compassion of Christ.

We can do this, we really can, because...

## 2. We are the only people in the entire world who live in the presence and power of God.

Christians are the only people who have the indwelling presence of God in their lives. In this one powerful, comprehensive sermon, our Lord lays out the foundational truths of the Gospel He came to proclaim.

The Beatitudes are from God and belong only to Christians. They are not dependent upon our own self-righteousness or good works, but on the new nature that God gives to us when we accepted Christ.

This new nature sets us apart and different from the world. One of the most obvious things about being a Christian—we always live in the presence and power of God.

When someone says, “Hey, I didn’t know you were a Christian,” you should be cut to the quick. Everything we do and every decision should be in light of our intimate relationship with God.

Look at chapter six. Verse one says, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

Now look at the next to last verse of the chapter, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (6:33).

Everything we do is tied up with who we are in Christ. Between those verses Jesus gives a lesson on prayer. He shows us how foolish it is for a Christian to worry about the needs of life provided by God. He reminds us that our true treasure is in heaven.

And in this world our primary concern is not about food and drink and housing and clothing. We don’t live for these things. We live for a greater cause—to bring glory to God by reflecting Jesus to our world.

Our greatest desire should be to please Him. When we have this close and dependent relationship with Jesus, we care more about pleasing God than being like the world.

Our relationship with Him is more important than anything else. So, every day we should wake up and say, “Father, I give myself to you this day. I submit myself to Your leadership and direction.”

Here’s what all this is leading to: we do have a mandate to win our world to Jesus Christ. I believe we can win our world to Jesus when our lives, our attitudes, our conduct toward other Christians as well as our unsaved friends and neighbors reflect Jesus.

### 3. Our mandate.

Some of the first words we hear from the lips of Jesus are in this Sermon. Some of His final words are found in Matthew 28:19-20.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, 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.”

The “therefore” is there for a reason. It refers to everything Jesus taught, lived, and demonstrated with His life. These are the things Jesus wants us to learn and to teach to one another.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a set of new rules. It is not the Ten Commandments for the New Testament.

It is a description of a person who lives under the Lordship of Christ. Our character is the result of who we are in Jesus Christ. I truly believe that the way we are going to reach our world for Christ is to live Christ-like live—live the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus didn’t say it would be easy. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the hard teachings of Jesus. He taught these things to show us who we are.

## Application:

1. The Sermon on the Mount is about believers. It shows the absolute necessity of the new birth. It cannot be lived without the guidance, strength and encouragement of the Savior.
2. The Sermon on the Mount emphasizes the Lordship of Christ. It shows us that the only hope we have of meeting God’s standards is through obedience to Christ.
3. The Sermon on the Mount describes God’s pattern for true Christian fulfillment.
4. The Sermon on the Mount is the key for winning our world to Jesus.
5. The life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount is the life pleasing to God.