



WHO WE ARE

A couple of years ago Luaine and I celebrated our 40th anniversary by taking a cruise up into Canada.

For the trip we needed passports. To get them we had to prove we were who we said we were by showing our original birth certificates or a certified certificate to the agent here.

It wasn't enough to stand before the agent and say, "This is me." Our driver's licenses were not acceptable. (We've learned that in NM driver's licenses don't prove a thing.)

Photo-copies of our birth certificates would not do. 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. We must be Christ to our world. That is who we are. Maybe more people would become Christians if more Christians started acting like Jesus.

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. Christianity will always be counter-culture. We are "holy," set apart for God's purposes.

But to the world the word "Christian" has many different meanings. Many in the world see us as preaching love and reconciliation, but acting just like the world around us. They see Christians fighting and feuding among themselves.

Politically we are acerbic; we complain and insist on our rights; we're as materialistic and selfish and self-centered as the rest of the world.

Is it any wonder that 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. We can shout it from the rooftops and say it to everyone we meet, but if our neighbors cannot see any difference in us, why should they be interested!

Our world wants to see that being a Christian really does make a difference. When our friends and neighbors see us acting just like them, why would they want to become a Christian?

If you always have a rotten attitude and sour disposition; if you are a gossip or constant complainer, how many people do you think will be attracted to Christianity?

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 share Jesus with our world."

But if people cannot see Jesus in our lives, 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 in our lives?

How can 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 in the outline).

This is who we are. We are blessed. The entire Sermon is a description of followers of Christ. It is about our everyday attitudes and conduct. Jesus didn't say, "Try this out for size." He said, "This is how my followers act, think and talk."

When every day we live in caring, loving and forgiving relationships, people can know we are Christians.

Jesus said we are the salt of the earth.

When something is salty or unsalty, you know it. We are the light of the world. Light is seen. People should look at us and know we are Christians.

Jesus 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 Christian identity is wrapped up in Jesus Christ.

Apart from Him we can't do anything that has kingdom value. It is not our responsibility "to make people 'Christians'" and get them baptized into a Baptist church. Our responsibility is to be faithful Jesus followers.

He is our spiritual source of power. 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 way we live our lives—not just because we say we are. 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.

Two things happen when we live for Jesus (1) People will be attracted to Christianity or, (2) they will be offended by it. Jesus warned that when Jesus is reflected in your life, you may be insulted, persecuted and slandered.

Jesus begins His Sermon with the Beatitudes. Beatitude simply means "blessed" or "happy." Christians are blessed. They describe our characters and attitudes.

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.

2. We live in the presence and power of God.

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.

When our neighbors 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 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. Would our neighbors notice if we up and closed our doors? Would they 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.

We should see 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.

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.

These truths are not dependent upon on 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. The most obvious thing about being a Christian is that 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.

Matt. 6:33, says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In this sixth chapter 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. Everything we do is tied up with who we are in Christ.

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 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.”

3. We have a mandate from Jesus himself.

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—beginning with His Sermon on the Mount, how He lived his life, and how He gave 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 Christians who lives under the Lordship of Christ. Our character is the result of who we are in Jesus Christ.

Our lives, our attitudes, our conduct toward other Christians and unsaved friends and neighbors should reflect Jesus.

Application:

- 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.
- 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.
- The Sermon on the Mount describes God’s pattern for true Christian fulfillment.
- The Sermon on the Mount is the key for winning our world to Jesus.
- The life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount is the life pleasing to God.