



JESUS *the*
STRANGER

SERMON OUTLINES

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Sermon One

The Gospel of Christ, a Hidden Treasure

Scriptures: Matthew 13:44–46; Luke 2:25–35

I. Introduction

In 2023, a New York auction house sold a painting by Pablo Picasso for \$139 million. Other paintings garnered between \$10.9 million and \$42 million.¹ What makes these paintings valuable is the name of the artist and rarity of their work.

In Game 6 of the 1998 NBA Finals “The Last Dance,” Michael Jordan made one of the most famous shots in NBA history to win the NBA Championship. The jersey he wore raked in a whopping \$10,091,000 at a sale in 2022.² What makes these jerseys so valuable is the talent of the athlete and the amazing athletic feats in significant games.

What makes Christianity a special hidden treasure?

II. Body

- A. Jesus is the light of God (John 3:19–21).
 - 1. Jesus is the true light revealing God and salvation to all people.
 - 2. While light shows us God, it also exposes darkness in our world.
 - 3. Simeon’s eyes beheld the light of the world (Luke 2:25–35).
- B. Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:1–18).
 - 1. Some welcomed the light and were transformed by it.
 - 2. Some hated the light and sought to extinguish it.
 - 3. Still others remained indifferent to him, like most of the crowds.
- C. Jesus invites us to know him intimately (John 15:9).
 - 1. Knowing Jesus is about abiding in his love.
 - 2. The Holy Spirit transforms Jesus from stranger to friend.
 - 3. We come to enjoy the same love Jesus enjoys with the Father.

1. See <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/new-york-sales-november-2023-results>.

2. See <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/top-10-most-valuable-nba-jerseys-ever-sold-at-sothebys>.

III. Conclusion

A fine piece of art speaks to us. That is why people pay good money to own such art. [Or substitute a sports theme.] In Christ we find a treasure, and Jesus Christ is unlike any other religious leader. Jesus is not just a great religious teacher, giving us fine principles to live a better life and then qualify for heaven. Jesus is God in human form.

When we see him—welcome him. He transforms us through the forgiveness of our sin and (re)birth into the family of God. Our response is to love and worship God and to live by the Holy Spirit he has poured out on us. When we find him, as one might find a treasure hidden in the field, we abandon everything else to belong to him.

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer's Praise*

#603: I Have Decided to Follow Jesus

#604: Let Me See Jesus Only

#607: All to Jesus I Surrender

#608: All That I Am

Sermon Two

Seeing as Jesus Sees

Scriptures: Luke 7:36–50; Matthew 22:34–40; John 10:1–21

I. Introduction

A farmer looks at a forest and sees either worthless land or land that needs to be cleared for planting. A lumberman looks at the same forest and sees trees to be harvested. From the same land and plants, there are two vastly different views of value.

Einstein saw time and space differently than previous scientists. He developed the theory of relativity and opened the whole field of nuclear science. Where others saw nothing, he saw something that opened our minds to understand God's universe.

In school when we divided up into teams for playing sports or a game, did you get picked among the first, the last, or somewhere in the middle? Did others see value or little value in your playing ability?

When we see people, are we blinded by our first impressions or do we see the dignity of God's image in them? We can use the encounter Jesus had with the sinful woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee to examine our own lives. How much are we actually like Simon? Like Jesus?

How can we become more like Jesus?

II. Body

- A. Jesus knew alienation; therefore, he saw whom Simon could not (Luke 7:36–50).
 - 1. Simon rejected the woman; he saw her sinful life.
 - 2. Jesus received the woman; he saw her acts of repentance and faith.
 - 3. What are adult versions of high school cliques?
- B. Jesus reveals generous, rightly ordered love (Matt. 22:34–40).
 - 1. Love God above everything else; love your neighbor as yourself.
 - 2. Be willing to step on social taboos.
- C. Be a presence in your neighborhood whose absence people would miss.

- D. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees' shallow interest in him (John 10:1–21).
1. Following Jesus requires acknowledging his totalizing claims.
 2. We must develop a discernment to hear and obey his voice.
 3. Loving God may require suffering and rejection.

III. Conclusion

A pastor in an upper-middle-class community befriended a very strong-willed, but backward, individual. He was very friendly, and most people liked him, but his poor money management left him with unpaid tax debts that others covered for him. It also left him with the other effects associated with poverty brought on by poor money management.

Few people wanted a close association with him. However, the pastor began sharing Christ with him and one day asked him if he was ready to receive Christ as his Savior and Lord. He was. The pastor baptized him and took him into membership. He stood proudly in front of the church dressed in a clean black T-shirt and clean tan jeans held up by bright-red suspenders as he confessed his faith in Jesus. Most people were extremely glad, despite some people never really accepting him. He began to be disciplined by the pastor and a team from the church. He grew in his faith and love for Jesus. But he also felt the continued rejection of some.

The man died unexpectedly about eighteen months later. His family members did not even think of having a minister or a church funeral as they were very unchurched. They simply held a memorial at his property. Upon learning of his conversion, however, several pastors from the community were invited to attend and able to share about the man's love for Christ. Where some people saw Fred as a person to be avoided, others saw a man Jesus died to redeem.

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer's Praise*

#311: Open My Eyes, That I May See

#217: Shine, Jesus, Shine

Sermon Three

Recognizing God's Savior and King

Scriptures: John 11:35–53; Matthew 21:33–46; 10:34–39

I. Introduction

Once there was a great flood. A very religious man was trapped by the flood. He climbed onto the roof of his house and waited for the Lord to send the rescue he firmly believed would come. As the water touched the eaves of the house, a rescue boat came by and he was encouraged to get into it. He refused, saying, “No, the Lord Jesus has promised to rescue me.” As the flood waters rose, he had to climb to the peak of the roof. Again another rescue boat came and the people encouraged him to get in. Again, he refused, saying, “No, the Lord Jesus promised to rescue me.”

The waters continued to rise and he climbed to the top of the chimney and waited for his rescue. A helicopter approached and dropped a ladder down to him. The rescue crew of the helicopter said, “Get on the ladder and we will save you.”

For the third time the man refused, saying, “No, the Lord Jesus will rescue me.” The helicopter left, the floods continued to rise, and the man was swept away and drowned. As he stood before Jesus, he asked, “Lord, why didn’t you rescue me?”

The Lord responded, “I sent you two boats and a helicopter. What more did you want?”

The religious leaders of the Jews heard his teachings, saw his miracles, and saw others delivered from their sins, yet they refused to accept God’s rescue plan for all of us.

Are people really any different today when confronted with the person of Jesus Christ?

II. Body

- A. Jesus knows people have complex desires and attachments (John 11:35–53).
 - 1. Great miracles do not always lead to faith.
 - 2. The rising of Lazarus was a miracle no one could deny.
 - 3. We are each responsible for how we respond to Jesus and his totalizing message.

- B. Jesus can make people feel welcomed or threatened (Matt. 21:33–46).
 - 1. Do we assume we are owners of God’s vineyard?
 - 2. Do we believe we are stewards of God’s vineyard?
 - 3. How does Jesus challenge our assumptions today?
- C. Jesus knows that following Him can lead to conflict (Matt. 10:34–39).
 - 1. Following Jesus creates division and persecution.
 - 2. We must rank our loves and put Jesus at the center.
 - 3. The transformed life brings guilt to some and joy to others.

III. Conclusion

Often in Muslim families, when a family member becomes a true Christian, they are persecuted and rejected by their own family. Depending on what country they live in, sometimes they are even killed.

A man was delivered by Jesus from the practice of homosexuality. The man was dying of AIDS but testified, “I was a homosexual, but Jesus Christ delivered me. I am not going back.” When he visited his family to say his final goodbyes, he shared with them about what Jesus had done. He came from a family that belonged to a very strict Jewish group. Rather than embracing his new lifestyle in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, they disowned him. He went back home to die, knowing he would soon meet his Lord and Savior.

What about us? How does Jesus challenge our assumptions about the kingdom of God? Do we see ourselves as owners of God’s kingdom or stewards of God’s kingdom? When saying the Lord’s Prayer, do we quietly think, “my kingdom come,” or do we honestly mean “Thy kingdom come”? Are we honestly open to the grand interruption this entails?

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer’s Praise*

#55: Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun

#125: Knowing You

#134: There’s Something About That Name

Sermon Four

True Christian Discipleship

Scripture: John 6:25–57

I. Introduction

The Jewish leaders of the first century had perverted the teachings of Moses to satisfy their own ends and maintain their own power and positions in society. They hated Jesus because he challenged their assumed self-righteousness. Yet the church can also pervert the message of the gospel and create a Jesus that protects and supports our own interests or beliefs. We need to guard against perversions of the gospel.

Jesus warned us many false prophets would come in his name and told us to guard against them (Matt. 7:15–20). True Christian faith is to know Jesus and become like him as we are taught in the Word of God. True Christianity brings “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17b) and the assurance of eternal life (Rom. 8:13–16). False Christianity may appear righteous, but it always misses the mark and leads to eternal death.

Kool-Aid and antifreeze can look and taste exactly the same. They are both colored clear liquids. They both have a sweet taste. Kool-Aid may quench your thirst, but drinking antifreeze can kill you.

Many people enjoy foraging for mushrooms. There is a big difference between edible mushrooms, psychedelic mushrooms, and poisonous mushrooms. But they are all called mushrooms, and you need to know the difference. The impact is worlds apart!

The same is true for us as followers of Christ. We need to know that we are following the Christ of the Bible and not a Christ who has been twisted into something he is not. The consequences are eternal.

II. Body

- A. True Christian faith has universal love for all people (Luke 6:20–23).
 - 1. It does not create in-groups and outsiders—all are welcome.

2. Jesus dined with both Pharisees and notorious rejects, but Jesus confronted sins of all stripes.
 3. Faithfulness to the gospel means we will be either misunderstood or despised and rarely appreciated.
- B. True Christian faith demands holiness and righteousness (Matt. 3:2).
1. “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”³
 2. God’s love is holy, not merely sentimental. His precious Son’s life was the cost of atonement.
 3. A gospel that ends with forgiveness of sins or going to heaven when we die is impoverished.
- C. True Christian faith requires Jesus’s sacrifice as revealed in Holy Communion (Luke 22:14–23).
1. The body and blood show us Jesus took on the consequences of sin from Genesis 3 (John 6:52–69).
 2. We take up our cross to follow Jesus. (The one given to us by Jesus, not people.)
 3. Jesus trades his death for ours and we give up our sinful life for his holy love (Phil. 1:29).

III. Conclusion

Suppose you board a plane in New York City bound for San Francisco. Everything appears fine, but the plane is slightly off course. Though it is still heading generally in the same direction, unless the pilot makes the needed course corrections, he may end up at a completely different destination. Our destination is Christ himself and eternal life with God—we do not want to be misdirected to anywhere else.

There are many false prophets in the world. Jesus warned us about this (Matt. 7:15–20). People who twist Christianity to fit false narratives and personal battles—often their own interests—are some of the most dangerous people in the world. May we be people who know the difference, and live faithfully authentic Christian lives.

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer’s Praise*

#136: My Hope Is in the Lord

#137: More about Jesus

3. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 15.

Sermon Five

Overcoming Evil with Good

Scripture: Romans 12:17–21

I. Introduction

Jesus is the ultimate example of overcoming evil with love. He turned the world's value systems upside down.

Jesus shows us what it means to overcome evil with good when faced with betrayal, denial, indifference, mockery, hatred, suffering, and, ultimately, execution. Jesus knew he had the power to call upon the Father to deliver him (Matt. 26:52–54). Yet, out of pure love, he chose to bear the cross. The Scriptures were fulfilled and new creation came bursting out of the grave.

In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were deprived of their rights as Roman citizens, accused, flogged, and thrown into jail without trial. Yet they praised God and led the jailer and his household to faith in Jesus. They also testified before the city leaders. In Acts 7, Stephen the deacon prayed for those who were stoning him (vv. 59–60)—a radical martyrdom whose love covered even the perpetrators.

II. Body

- A. Jesus experienced betrayal at the hand of Judas.
 - 1. A betrayer begins good but goes wrong (John 6:70).
 - 2. Evil enters the heart of every betrayer (Luke 22:3).
 - 3. Betrayers hide their true intentions (John 12:4–6).
- B. Jesus experienced denial at the hand of Peter.
 - 1. He denied the Lord three times (Matt. 26:69–75).
 - 2. He was immediately filled with remorse and repentance (Matt. 26:75).
 - 3. Peter was given a three-fold restoration (John 21:15–17).
- C. Jesus experienced indifference at the hand of Pilate (Matt. 27:11–31; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 22:66–23:24; John 18:28–19:22).

1. Pilate, a non-Jew, was only interested in keeping peace—the status quo.
 2. Pilate believed Jesus was innocent and wanted to release him (Matt. 27:17–23; Luke 23:20; John 18:38–39).
 3. He handed Jesus over to be crucified to prevent a riot (Luke 23:24).
- D. Jesus experienced mockery at the hands of Herod (Luke 23:8–12).
1. Herod wanted to see Jesus do a miracle (Luke 23:8).
 2. Jesus was silent. Herod was a mocker (Prov. 9:7–8).
 3. Herod, his soldiers, and later Pilate’s soldiers mocked Jesus.

III. Conclusion

In the face of all these manifestations of evil, in which Satan thought he was overcoming God’s purposes, Jesus had a heart filled with love and mercy. It was for the love of God his Father, and love for us, that Jesus remained engaged.

Corrie ten Boom suffered in a Nazi concentration camp. After the war she watched one of the trials. She saw one of the men who had been a tormenter come before the tribunal. He stood and pled guilty and then testified that he had repented and received Christ. It was difficult, but she knew she must love and forgive him. He would still be executed for his crimes, but his eternal destination was changed from hell to heaven by the mercy of Christ.

Corrie ten Boom testified:

Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.

And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world’s healing hinges, but on His.⁴

When we are faced with overwhelming evil and persecution which we are powerless to stop, we must hold firmly to Christ and let his Spirit fill our hearts with love and forgiveness toward those who cause our suffering.

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer’s Praise*

#231: Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?

#119: Victory in Jesus

133: Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

4. <https://renovare.org/articles/give-me-your-forgiveness>.

Sermon Six

God in Our Darkest Times

Scriptures: Philippians 2:5–11; Romans 8:28–39

I. Introduction

A Roman crucifixion was one of the cruelest forms of execution ever invented. Every aspect of it was designed to totally humiliate and maximize the pain of its victims—and demonstrate the totalizing power of the Roman Empire. Jesus knows what it is like to go through the most humiliating and painful circumstances of life. God never left him during those circumstances and Jesus trusted totally in the Father’s will. In our painful and humiliating circumstances, we can totally trust Jesus to bring us through them.

Many Christian martyrs went through their executions with singing, testimonies filled with joy, or praying for their enemies. See illustrations from the book *Jesus Freaks: Martyrs* by DC Talk and The Voice of the Martyrs. Consider the example of Joni Eareckson Tada and her faithfulness to Christ though trapped in a paralyzed body.⁵

II. Body

- A. The shape of the Christ’s life (Phil. 2:5–11)
 - 1. He stepped down from his eternal glory.
 - 2. He reaches out to all people—from the lowest to the highest.
 - 3. He is driven by holy love for his people and his entire creation.
- B. The irony of Christ’s life.
 - 1. Unexpected: “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23).
 - 2. Jewish leaders sought to destroy him completely.
 - 3. Ironic: his public execution was where his divine love was revealed.
- C. The victory of the Messiah’s life (Col. 2:11–15)
 - 1. The Father was with Jesus on the cross.

⁵. See <https://joniandfriends.org/>.

2. Christ rose victorious over death.
3. Jesus gives us victory, even over death.

III. Conclusion

The humility and sacrifice Jesus went through shows us God is able to meet us and sustain us in the most humbling and painful of circumstances. We may express genuine lament and sorrow, but God stays with us. As he walked with Jesus through his deepest darkness, so he will walk with us through deepest darkness (Rom. 8:28–39). It is through darkness and suffering that Jesus cast judgment on sin and undid its power. Jesus allowed himself to be a stranger to some in order that he might return as our Savior.

IV. Suggested Closing Hymns from *Our Great Redeemer's Praise*

#231: Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed?

#233: What Wondrous Love Is This

#236: The Old Rugged Cross

#239: In the Cross of Christ I Glory