

Conversations that Connect series
Jesus talked with people, with an ear open to the Spirit
One mouth to speak with Luke 14:25-35

This is the final message in our four-part series, during which we've been looking at the way Jesus conversed with the people around Him every day. Today we are going to finish by coming back to the gospel. God has given us a message to speak with our mouth. It's the most important message in the world to share and get out there with!

In this series we have discussed the idea of 'sour notes' – things that might seem contradictory to us in people's thinking and worldview, which for us can become gateways for meaningful conversations about spiritual things. For example:

- "All religions are essentially the same" This makes little sense if you know what the religions actually teach is very different; also
- Many people believe 'morals are relative'- but this is a terrifying view, because there is no fixed definition to STOP us determining what is right and wrong for ourselves. We'll choose differently – and without belief in a Creator God there is nothing to say human life is sacred. Consider Nazism and Communism, both being forms of atheistic secularism, which resulted in more deaths in the past 100 years than all the religions combined in the last 2000! With no moral compass there is nothing left to stop evil. Human nature is not good in the sense that our human standards will invariably slide.
- A number of people deny that a God even exists - the radical and inflated claims of evolution are mind-blowing. In the world around us we do NOT see complex things 'creating themselves'. Given our biodiversity, this should be commonplace (why are species becoming extinct while we're not seeing new species being 'created' to similarly replace them?). To suppose that our biology did this all by itself, when even much simpler things do not, does not make sense.
- If there was a 'big bang' it needed a first cause. Consider the fine-tuning of the universe. Consider the *existence* of morality, or our ability to love and comprehend beauty.

Let's take a brief look through this passage, highlighting a few points beginning v25.

At this moment in Jesus' ministry it was a popular thing to follow him as the large crowds demonstrate to us.

Today when we gather together in community and life, especially with Christian friends and family it can seem like being on our own happy Jesus bandwagon. Which has the potential to lead us to misunderstand all this and think that the purpose of our Christian faith is all about helping us feel fulfilled in life through all our own personal needs being met - when in reality it is about something much bigger and beyond our own lives and needs because in becoming Christ's disciple, it is all about laying our lives down for the purpose of Christ in this broken and temporary world.

In v26 Jesus went straight for the jugular of those who had jumped on the happy-happy, joy-joy bandwagon when he reminded this crowd of what it would cost to truly follow Him using vivid hyperbole, an exaggeration, to make a very important point. So when Jesus states that you must hate your own family members, even your own life in order to be his disciple. What he is saying is that God wants us to be head-over-heels in love with Him more than any other person or thing in the universe. So, if you commit your life to follow Christ, nothing less than wholeheartedness is expected with the Lord God-Jesus Christ sitting on the throne of your life – the One whom you truly worship and obey above all else! And prove it by taking up and carrying your own cross after Christ's own example v27. The person carrying their cross represents the self-denial, complete dedication and willing obedience required of anyone considering becoming a disciple of Christ and wholeheartedly following him.

Jesus then illustrates what he is saying with two stories. The first one vv28-30 is about a man considering making a building investment who calculates beforehand whether he can complete it. The second vv31-32 is a king who is about to go to war and calculates beforehand whether he can win or not. These two illustrations tell us that Jesus wasn't after a blind naïve commitment that expected only joyful blessings. As a builder making an investment estimates costs or a king evaluates military strength so people must consider what Jesus expects of his followers '**before**' they commit their lives to him.

And we haven't even got to the punch line yet – Here it is!

V33 *"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."*

The cost, Jesus informed the crowds travelling with him, was no less than complete surrender to him. The question is: Who could say they have given up *everything* they have?

Up till now we have discussed 'sour notes' in the context of our conversations with non-Christians, but how about 'sour notes' in Christianity and the church. For instance:

- A Christian or church who doesn't witness- lovingly sharing the good news of the gospel through word and deed in the way God has wired you up and specifically made you to. [Acts 1:8]
- A Christian or church hoarding wealth for their own benefit bringing meaning to the scripture, Matt 6:19-21 "Don't store up for yourselves treasure on earth...but store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where it won't be lost, destroyed or stolen. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
- Finally, for a Christian who continues to hate, lie, steal, cheat, lust, envy - Jesus' teaching is clear - Are we really following Jesus if we continue to be and do these things?

And then there are our personally adopted belief systems that can make for 'sour notes' in our Christian faith and the church: i.e. For a Christian who thinks all beliefs are the same, that all roads lead to God, everyone is saved/going to heaven – this is universalism. A Christian who thinks morals can be relative, and thus that things like sex outside of marriage is OK – that's liberalism.

Let us be reminded there is a straight and narrow path that we are called to walk on. Listen to Jesus' words from Matthew 7

¹³ 'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

So as Christians in the church we need to know the truth so that we might walk the narrow path and for that to happen: **We need our Bibles** – to open them, to read, study and meditate - to know God and His Word better in order to gauge how our daily lives reflect God's goodness and grace to us, or not. It should bring us to the awareness that we definitely need help and guidance to live our lives according to Christ's uncompromisingly high standards, ethics and morality that we so often fall short of. There is help on the narrow path - **We need the Holy Spirit**, the very real presence of God in our lives to make up for our weaknesses, to overcome our failures so that we might not be ashamed of the gospel or the commitment in our hearts to carry our cross and follow Jesus.

And we need this commitment in our hearts because there is a personal cost involved in carrying the cross. For with it there is a call – to make Christ known - This is our PRIMARY mission! It is the MISSION of the Church made up of every church group and every church person. The Bible says that Jesus Christ will not return until every ethnic or people group has been reached with the Gospel. It is therefore the primary purpose for our existence at this time, as followers of Christ – to make Christ known!

Could it be that we've allowed the things of this world to cloud our minds, and to ensnare our hearts?

Whereby we are more concerned about our financial wellbeing and assets, about our many hobbies and pleasures, even about our own families so much so, that we give little diligence to our mission – while, all the while, our neighbours and colleagues and friends are going to an eternity apart from Christ. They are all around us every day, yet sadly we say near to nothing about it.

Jesus finished this teaching as recorded in vv34-35 with some incredibly fearsome and sobering words raising real questions:

- What if a faith without works really is dead?
- What if our so-called Christian lives are declared 'void' if we aren't willing to live out the faith we claim to follow?
- What if we are saved by faith alone, but the sincerity of the commitment in our heart really is a condition that follows when you decide in your heart that Jesus Christ is your Lord/Saviour?
- What if you actually have to follow Jesus on that narrow path to get to heaven, and a simple prayer or half-effort is not actually enough? Do not these questions point directly to the fact that...

Absolutely then we need the grace of God because we'll never be perfect. But still, God wants sincerity. God wants our devotion – including our devotion to His mission because God loves all the people who are around us probably much more than we can ever imagine- Christ died for their benefit as much as He died for ours.

The point of the passage then: There is a cost to embrace- It is not an option! It is what we committed to when we first gave our lives to Christ *and this includes a resolute commitment to our mission.* Not everyone is an evangelist but Witnessing is not an optional extra in Christianity. It is core to our business. Therefore, a right response to this today is to consider seriously how we might apply what we have discussed in this series.

Application

If we are going to be witnesses for Christ, the most basic thing we need to know is, what the Gospel is, and how to share it clearly.

What is the Gospel? In terms of what the *whole* Gospel it is:

1. Creation - It begins with a self-existing, eternal, knowable Creator God who is good and created everything in the universe;
2. Fall – Humanity has, beginning with Adam and Eve, used the freewill God gave us to go our own way/sin, instead of His way;
3. Redemption – What God has done for us in sending his Son Jesus Christ to live, minister, die and be resurrected so that we can be forgiven for our sins and restored to relationship with Him; and
4. Restoration – God’s greater vision, includes us using our lives, skills, resources and opportunities to bring about God’s ways of love on earth, which will be completed at the return of Christ.

CONCLUSION: In 1 Peter 3:15 it says *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”*

I believe any of us could ‘always be prepared’ if we would make being prepared a commitment of our lives - and it is not difficult to do when we have the example to follow of Jesus who talked with people, with an ear open to the Spirit. As we recommit our lives to Christ today may we be encouraged to engage in conversations with others that connect including, when we hear ‘sour notes’, asking questions that help people to evaluate their beliefs and consider other ways of seeing things.

The 3 key questions we learnt throughout this series are:

1: What do you mean by...?

(Which seeks to clarify **WHAT** they believe)

2: What led you to that conclusion?

(This seeks to clarify **WHY** they believe that)

3: Have you considered that...? (This seeks to redirect to or to illuminate a different way of thinking)

Questions for conversations that are undergirded by the fact that God has given us: Two ears to hear with; One Spirit to listen with; One heart to love with and as we have learnt today; One mouth to speak with sharing the truth of the Gospel – God’s love for us.

Challenge: Are you willing to make a fresh commitment to Jesus’ mission? If so, what is it that you are going to do?

The Material contained in this sermon was made available from Hope Project Media NZ who note that Credits for the overall direction of tis series go to Dr Norm Geisler & Dr David Geisler, from their book 'Conversational Evangelism' (see meeknessandtruth.org). We have partnered with Dr David in a couple of things, & have summarised (with permission) a number of points from his Conversational Evangelism material among the content of the three chapters in Dave Mann's book, 'Because we care' that address this topic area. This book can be purchased at bigbookpublishing.co.nz.