

“The Church is Responsible for So Much Injustice” *Why I’m not a Christian*, Msg. 4 Luke 10:25–37

Intro Video:

- “In the so-called ages of Christian faith... there was every kind of cruelty practiced upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.” Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian*¹
- “I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”² Mahatma Ghandi

A lot of things going on at the Summit:

Gospel Class/NT
West Club Campus

Wow... well, this is kind of a huge objection... so much to cover... kind of feel like a mosquito at a nudist colony... where to begin?

When you talk about the history of the church, people can point out a lot of dark spots... Crusades; Inquisition; Salem witch trials; Christian leadership in the slave trade. Modern skeptics like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens say that religion has overall been really bad for the world... religion gives groups a sense of superiority, aggravates tribal hatred and leads to violence...

- For many of you when I say “conservative Christian” today you get all kinds of images... bombing of abortion clinics/people with signs that tell you who God hates. Or, you think of right-wing warmongering or people trying to take away rights of women. I’ve shared with you before an experience I had here at **Peace College**...

¹ Bertrand Russell, in his famous book *Why I am not a Christian*, said, “In the so-called ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was the Inquisition, with its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burned as witches, and there was every kind of cruelty practiced upon all sorts of people in the name of religion.”

² Alex McFarland, *The 10 Most Common Objections to Christianity*

For many of you, though, this is more of a personal thing... Maybe you personally have experienced injustice or judgmentalism or greed by someone in the church.

- Maybe something about you has caused you to feel like around religious people you have a big stamp on your head that says “not accepted.” (Divorce... or maybe something like homosexuality).
- Or maybe for you it is simply seeing how much some Christian leaders have seemed to use Christianity for power and money... you’ve gotten up close and seen it... seen that they were egotistical, self-righteous, and power-hungry.
- Maybe you were sexually abused.
- Whatever, you have seen things done by Jesus’ people which you know aren’t right and you don’t want any part of. I’ve heard it said before that the best argument against Christianity is some Christians.

I understand and I’d like to help you work through this... Take a look at a very familiar story... This is an objection that is real and that Jesus really dealt with...

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest (church pastor) was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite (Levite... temple worker... seminary student), when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. See what Jesus is doing? He’s acknowledging the reality of hypocrisy among religious people, even VERY religious people! **Here’s what’s sad about it... these guys are probably on their way to do some “religious” thing...** “got to get to the temple to do my duties...” and in the name of serving their religion they step over someone in pain, hurting. You know, sometimes I look at the behavior of Christians in society and I wonder if we care more about being right than we do about people. Ex. Sometimes it seems like we as Christians are most known by so many things we are against... Anger at homosexuality/abortion... We forget that what Jesus is most known for is that He was for people. If we are against something it should only be because we are for the people that it is hurting and that should come through in how we talk about it! Jesus talked about trying to remove a speck of dust from our brother’s eye when we have a plank in our own... sometimes the speck of homosexuality from our brother’s eye when we have the complete lack of love in our own ³³ **But a Samaritan**, hated race **as he journeyed, came to**

where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. splagma... involuntary, moved down in your gut. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Another thing I really want our church to see is that in this story Jesus uses a Samaritan to correct the Jews. What's important about that is that the Samaritans were known by the Jews as theological deviants. Different religion. And that is true. The Jews were the ones who had correct doctrine... Yet, in this story the Samaritan acted more in line with the ways of God and God used him to correct the Jews. All I want to say about that is this: Church: We have to be humble enough to receive correction from anyone... even if we think they are wrong about a lot of stuff and even if they're not doing it in a loving spirit... Many times throughout my life I have had people who weren't Christians point out inconsistencies in my life... And I never liked it, but I'm grateful. We must receive truth in whatever form it comes to us.

So Jesus acknowledges the reality of hypocrisy and injustice at the hands of the church. You say, **"Doesn't the hypocrisy and injustice of Christians invalidate Christianity's claim to be the truth from God?"** Here's the question you are really asking: **Do injustices practiced by the people of a particular belief system invalidate that belief system?**

- To be fair, you should acknowledge that atrocities have been committed by nearly every worldview. Violence and injustice has not been limited to any one religion or even religion in general.
 - The Communist Russian, Chinese, Cambodian regimes all rejected organized religion but have been responsible for more acts of genocide than any organized religion.
 - A forerunner of these was the French Revolution of the 18th century, which rejected traditional religion and enthroned human reason. Yet it was as violent as any revolution in history. In 1793, when Madame Roland went to the guillotine on trumped up charges, she mockingly bowed to the statue personifying liberty in the Place de la Revolution and said, "Liberty, what crimes are committed in your name."
- Why is that? Tim Keller says, **"We can only conclude that there is some violent impulse so deeply rooted in the human heart that it expresses itself regardless of what the beliefs of a particular society**

might be – whether socialist or capitalist, whether religious or irreligious, whether individualistic or hierarchical."³

Thus, **the fact of violence in a society does not necessarily invalidate the beliefs.** (You know this... you've probably seen some of the injustice in the medical system... many doctors are greedy—they overcharge; some of them are lazy and their laziness leads to misdiagnosis and unnecessary death. But you would never say that those things invalidate the whole science of medicine). "I don't go to the doctor, it's full of hypocrites." May not be the best strategy.

The best thing to do is to look at each worldview itself and ask which one leads to the good for the poor. That's why I bring you to this parable. This parable shows you why the Gospel is the best hope for the injustice in our society. (this is the DEEP part) **In this parable, Jesus absolutely goes to war against the mentality that leads to the oppression of the poor. Two things cause the oppression of the poor... pride and selfishness.** Pride looks at itself and says, "See what I've accomplished, I got this by working hard; I have nicer things than you because I deserve better things than you. If you would work harder, or be as good as I am, you'd have this too." Turns a deaf ear to those it deems inferior. Selfishness says, "I'm only going to look out for me." No one else is looking out for me so I must look out for me. I can't afford to look out for you because I've got to look out for me since no one else is.

This story turns both of those on their head. Let me show you:

This whole parable is told in answer to a question, ^{10:25} **And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"** ²⁶ That is an odd question, isn't it? Which laws do we have to keep to guarantee we'll go to heaven. It's a trap. He wants Jesus to say something like "the Law doesn't matter, just accept Me and you'll go to heaven" so then they would have a reason to say Jesus was blaspheming the law and get rid of Him. So Jesus avoids their trap and sets one his own (of course his is a loving one): **He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"** Two ways to respond... to give all 600 or so laws in the OT one by one, or the other way is to summarize them as Moses did by saying... ²⁷ **And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your**

³ Tim Keller, *A Reason for God*, 56.

mind, and your neighbor as yourself." So, Jesus, having successfully set and snapped the trap, says...²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

- At this point the lawyer should have been honest (not always easy for that profession) and acknowledged, "That's not the condition of my heart." If Jesus had simply pointed out different behavior patterns of the Law, then the Lawyer could say, "I've done that... check." But when you see fulfillment of the law as a matter of the heart, which of us can say "I have loved God always as I should, and I have always loved others fully as well?" No one that is honest would say that. The lawyer should have said, "I must give up my expectation that I can be good enough to earn heaven." **Really cool thing in the Great Awakening:** guy named Nathan Cole, a barely literate farmer who came to hear George Whitfield preach. He left a journal... really hard to read: no punctuation, sentences run together, words are written out phonetically, he talks about hearing the Gospel preached by Whitfield: "My hearing him preach gave me a warm heart wound; by God's blessing my old foundation was broken up and I saw that my righteousness would not save me."⁴ "My old foundations are broken up: I cast myself on the mercy of God." That's what the lawyer should have done.

But look...²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He feels the pressure. So he tries to avoid it by asking "who is my neighbor so I can go be nice to them and check it off my list"... and in response Jesus tells this story. And Jesus' point is: a truly loving heart is shown when it naturally responds in love (splagma) to the needs of our enemy.

And that's when this parable's real meaning comes out. You see, Jesus taught us that none of us have really lived like we should, we all have sinned greatly... we have rejected God, refused to love Him; we are selfish, greedy, proud, apathetic to others... and our sinful choices have left us like the guy on the side of the road (beaten, bruised, without hope) and that's when Jesus, the real Samaritan, the outsider, came and had compassion on us, even though we hated Him. He rescued us, bandaged us up, and poured Himself out into us... the **oil and wine** of His Spirit.

⁴ George Whitfield: *Laboring in the Great Awakening*, 91.
http://www.biblerock.org/miscpages/cthistory/george_whitfield.htm

When we understand that, it kills two things in us:

- **First, it kills our pride by showing us that we were hopeless when God rescued us:** We Americans have this "middle class" ethic—we believe we each have what we have because we've worked for it and earned it, we pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps, and so naturally we look at people who don't have and say, "Well, if you don't have, it's because you didn't work hard enough..." I realize there may be level of truth of that in some dimensions of economics... but we translate that into a "middle class spirituality"... which says, spiritually, if you work hard enough, good things come to you. This parable says "no." There is no middle class. None of us, truly speaking, has pulled himself up by his bootstraps (**that's impossible, by the way, ever try that?**). No, God rescues us because of His **mercy**. And when you realize that, it kills your pride, and rather than looking down on people, you tend to feel more compassion for them because you don't see yourself as that much different from them.
- **Secondly, it kills our selfishness by showing us that we have hope only because God poured Himself out for us to rescue us.** Where would we be without God's mercy? The person who understands the Gospel says, "Totally without hope!" **Illus.** Most moving scene in film... **Les Miserables...** Jean Val Jean... **When the Gospel is understood properly, it produces self-emptying sacrificial love.**
- **So much so that the New Testament says that THE mark of whether or not you're really a Christian is how you treat the poor.** **James 2** says that if we can see the suffering of others and not be moved to pour ourselves out for them than our faith is dead. We can talk about Jesus all day long but if we don't show compassion on others, it is because we must not really have tasted the compassion of God for us, and deep down, no matter what we say, we still feel like we are the ones who can take credit for our salvation. That's why we don't show compassion on others, because we've never really perceived ourselves as having been the recipient of great compassion.
- James says this: "For judgment will be without mercy to one who has shown no mercy." (**James 2:13**) The two are linked. **If you have experienced mercy, you show it**, and one of the signs on judgment day that your faith was real is you have a life of acts of service poured out on the poor.

So, let me go back to the objection that Christians have been responsible for injustice... You're right... when Christians has forgotten the Gospel, they have acted unjustly. But look at what happens when they remember it!

- Roman Emperor Julian, who was one of the last rulers who tried to stamp out Christianity. He built all these temples and spruced them up... people kept going to church.⁵ "The impious Galileans [Christians] support both their own poor and ours as well."
- There's a group called *Freedom House* (non-partisan and non-religious) that each year rates countries on a scale determined by criteria of overall freedom. Nearly 90 percent of the nations that earn the rating 'free' are Christian countries. "Freedom, democracy, medical care, education, and charity tend to flourish in countries with a heritage of Christianity and its profound respect for the individual."⁶
- "But wait: Didn't so-called Christian countries sell millions into slavery?" Best work on slavery is by an African-American scholar named Thomas Sowell. He points out that almost every society was engaged in the slave trade: every slave sold to Christians were enslaved and sold to them by other Africans. In addition to that, the Arabs sold twice as many slaves as did either the Africans or Christian countries. His conclusion: all societies engaged in slavery. Yet, he says, when you examine what brought an end to slavery: that came exclusively out of Christians reflecting on the Gospel. Slavery was stopped by 3 the converts of 3 evangelists: **Wilberforce, Wesley and Whitefield.**⁷ Even now, you have an enormous guilt literature coming out of the West, but none out of Arabia or animistic Africa. Not to exonerate heinous acts of injustice committed by people of Jesus... but to show you that the Gospel didn't create the problem, it is the only thing that *fixed* the problem! What turned the slave trader John Newton into one who fought for freedom for the slaves was his experience of "Amazing Grace"
- Or take contemporary examples like this one: October 2007, the Amish community in Lancaster, Pa. Horrific story. A gunman who

was "mad at God" took over an Amish school... sent out all the kids except for 10 girls and lined them up next to the chalkboard.

- 2 of the girls offered to have themselves shot for the others.
- The gunman at that point shot all 10, one by one, in the head. He then killed himself. 5 of the girls survived which is how we know the story.
- In the aftermath of this tragedy, the parents of one of the little girls who died got into their buggy and drove to the house of the shooter and went up to the door. They said to the wife... we're not here for revenge; we have lost our daughter; we're here to grieve together. You have lost a husband and your children have lost a father."
- Even the cynical journalists said something supernatural, divine was happening.⁸
- **The Amish are fundamentalist by any standard, right? Did their fundamentalism lead to hatred? Why? At the center of Christianity is a man on the cross loving people who don't love Him, pouring His life out for people who aren't even interested in Him.** Where did these girls get the idea to die for their friends? Where did the parents get the idea to forgive their killer and his family?

((I'd also add that Christianity has been the best thing for the poor themselves to believe...

- Karl Marx said that Christianity was the problem in poverty. The opiate of the people and it would keep the poor trapped in poverty and also become a way for rich people to justify their wealth.
- A generation ago in S. America was one of the poorest parts of the world. All these sociologists were telling them to throw off the chains of religion and embrace Marxism. Exactly the opposite happened. S. America has experienced a Christian awakening like no other place in Christian history with the exception of China... (The whole population grew from like 2% evangelical to 40%.) And as it grew their economies progressed. Marx turned out to be precisely wrong. They'd go into these countries that were prospering and instead of finding them abandoning Christianity, you'd find entire villages who had embraced it.

⁵ D. James Kennedy, *What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?* Pp. 30–31.

⁶ Philip Yancey, *Rumors*, Ch14 - "Stereoscopic Vision" p 240.

⁷ See D. A. Carson, lecture on the emerging church at Cedarville; session 2, track 9.

⁸ <http://ncrcafe.org/node/1560>

- Why? The Marxist worldview, based on evolution, said, “All you are is a highly developed animal, an accident of history. Simply a product of your environment. If you’re poor, which worldview empowers you? Christian worldview: Christ died for you, He found you on the side of the road and didn’t just leave you there, He healed you, got your back on your feet. Pours the wine and oil of his Spirit into you and gives you the power to prosper and being healing others. Which vision of humanity inspires you upward? Calls you out of poverty into prosperity?
- Anyone who says Christianity is bad for the poor is usually not looking at it from the poor’s perspective. They are an outsider looking in. From the poor’s perspective, Christianity is a great source of good news.⁹)

Take a look at one more example right here in our own country... **MLK**: when facing the injustice of racism, he did not call for the nation to shed Christianity, the opiate of the people. Read his *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*. He called the nation back to a better, truer Christianity. The solution to injustice is not to get rid of Christianity, but to come back to it! Yes, there has been hypocrisy. But the atrocities that have been done in Jesus’ name are not done because of what the Gospel is but despite what the Gospel is. When the Gospel is understood, it leads to the most sacrificial, love-saturated culture ever known.

I know for many of you hypocrisy troubles you. Let me just summarize and make sure I’ve made my point clear:

- **“I hate hypocrisy. I can’t stand to be around it.” So does Jesus.** Just read the Bible! Over 2000 verses that rebuke God’s people for not having compassion on the poor... *Whenever you complain about injustice in any context, you are on the side of Jesus!* One day Jesus will deal with hypocrites.
 - And to the church let me say something very serious here... Jesus said that on the last day the one thing that would prove your faith to be genuine is not how much you went to church or how many Bible verses you knew or how much Bible doctrine you’d crammed in your head (I get around my seminary friends and sometimes that’s what I think... they expect to get to heaven and have God say “Wow, you just

understood so much!) No, on the last day... the one thing that will prove that you understand the Gospel and that your faith was real your compassion and your generosity for the poor.

- **You might say, “Well, I’m not going to abandon Jesus, I’m going to abandon the church.”** Here’s my question: To *what*? To yourself? As if you alone are so holy and righteous that you can only be in a little community by yourself?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that one of the signs that we were growing in Christ was that we begin to gain a sense of dissatisfaction with God’s community—we begin to see that God’s people aren’t living out the Gospel. But that’s only 1/3 of maturity... real maturity is when we begin to have a great sense of dissatisfaction with *ourselves*, at how we each personally fail to live out the Gospel. Only then, when you are more disgusted at your own hypocrisy than that of others, can you enter the church as Christ intended us to enter it, not as a self-righteous Pharisee, but as someone who is aware he is a recipient of great grace and now going to work redemptively within the church to help make it more like Christ.¹⁰

When you say, “The church is a bunch of self-righteous hypocrites. I am too holy to be around them...” Do you catch the **irony** in that? Jesus didn’t die to create little individual self-righteous communities. He died to create grace communities. People who are aware they are recipients of great grace who then give it to others. To not join up with a group of people because they are imperfect is to suggest that you alone are perfect, and that’s just rude.

To abandon the church is to abandon Jesus’ prize possession, what He gave His life to. The church, says Paul, is the bride of Christ and Jesus loved her so much He gave Himself to purchase and purify her. **Imagine if you came up to me and said, “J.D., you are such a**

¹⁰ “Just as surely as God desires to lead us to a knowledge of genuine Christian fellowship, so surely we must be overwhelmed by a great disillusionment with others, with Christians in general, and if we are fortunate, with ourselves. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all of its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God’s sight, and begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

⁹ Tim Keller, “Injustice: James 2” MP3.

great preacher. I really respect you. But your wife and your family... I just can't stand your wife. I think she's ugly, loud, obnoxious, dresses skanky..." You and me would have problems! **You can't love Jesus and hate his wife.** Jesus gave His life for the church...

- In the same way, **"I don't want to be a hypocrite. I'm not going to be a part of the church because I have so many problems."** Newsflash... (dirty little secret): We're all dysfunctional. Everybody's normal until you get to know them. We're a bunch of screw-ups who are rejoicing in the lavish grace of God poured out upon us. I hear a visitor who says... "your people are so good and kind." Just stick around. We'd love to be a part of the healing process together with you.

To the church: we must be in the city demonstrating the Gospel. Peter said, "Live in such a way that your lives demonstrate the Gospel."

- Sometimes I think about what we must communicate... People think going to church as going on Sunday to hear a talk about how to be a better person... But we know that's what the Gospel is not about at all. The Gospel is the announcement that God in His radical love has done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves by pouring Himself out for us! We have to show that by how we live!
- Get involved:
 - You heard this morning... Hurricane relief
 - Best way... SLG
 - Beyond that... Website
 - There are over 4 billion who aren't Christians, with somewhere near 1.5 billion people in the world have never heard the name of Jesus.
 - **Splagma? I can only be a pastor in the US...**
 - 15,000 children who will die of hunger this year? How could we possibly say we understand the love of Jesus and do nothing about that?
 - We all want to be a part of a church ahead of the curve. We're trying to be. Get involved.

Finally, **"I've been hurt by someone who represented Jesus."** That was not Jesus.

- Imagine if someone stole your clothes and impersonated you (job interview). "That wasn't me." that's what he wants to tell you.
- Church: We have people all around our society.... We must go to them and tell them that's not how Jesus is...
- Waffle House: I'm part of the problem...

Invitation: Come and learn the Gospel...

Bullpen:

To do:

- Keller, *Reason for God*
- Christians are all hypocrites, McFarland
- Doesn't hypocrisy invalidate Christianity? Samples
- Doesn't Christianity promote intolerance? Samples

They will get their due. Be in the church with a few of them or in hell with all of them.

Other passages:

7 woes of Matthew 23:1–36:

- The twofold child of hell:
 - V. 5: you love being recognized. Do all their deeds to be seen by others... love long robes, titles, places of honor
 - Luke 20:47: you devour widows houses (i.e. you use people in religion for your own ends, be it materialism or your need for prideful self-righteousness)
 - V. 13–15: Very zealous in spreading their culture and worldview, characterized by triumphalism and hate. Missions is not the proof of Gospel love. how you know that is you see a disturbing lack of love in your life... you have something you are seeking to gain, such as why you're smart and people who disagree are stupid....see my [blog](#) about converting people to rituals but not Christ
 - vv. 16–22: zealous for traditions (temple) and not so much for glory of God. Why you get so angry...
 - vv. 23–24: you tithe but don't love—Luke 13:14–15
 - vv. 25–28. you are pretty on the outside but don't love God on the inside
 - vv. 29–36: you fancy yourself the friend of the prophets but if Jesus were here today you'd crucify Him again! Religious people crucified him then, they will crucify him now (cf Romans 2; Matt 15; Luke 13:14-15; Matt 6:1–7; Isaiah 1:11–15, 58:3–5 I don't want feasts, I want repentance and love
- Difference in Gospel change and religious change...

Matthew 15:1–31

- Pharisees are hung up on a loophole (vv. 1–2)
- They used the law as a way to cover up the message (v. 5–6)
- Diagnosis (v. 8–9): Honor with the lips, heart is far
- They have elevated a system of laws that they have added to the Gospel (v. 9)
- The real Gospel is about inclusion, healing... (21–28; 29–31)

I'll refer to this as **middle class spirituality**: middle class spirituality says that if you work and do your best then good things will come to you. And, when you get them, you deserve them.

(v. 17) "Faith without works is dead." If you have received mercy, you will show mercy. If you don't think you've been shown mercy, you'll have a hard time showing it to others. If you think that you've earned your way to God, then you'll despise others who haven't earned their way to God.

Led people like Bertrand Russell in his famous book *Why I'm not a Christian* to say that religion has been one of the worst things for society. Guys like

You say, "No, the problem is only when one religion claims to be the only truth from God." Alister McGrath says, when the idea of God is gone, we will simply transcendentalize something else: For the Marxists it was a system of government; for the Nazis it was a race; for the French it was the ideals of liberty and equality.

- ((Probably the philosopher who said the most about this was Karl Marx, who said Christianity was one of the worst religions for the poor. He called religion "the opiate of the people" because it kept the poor satisfied in their condition and also gave the powerful a rationale for staying in power.))

He certainly did say the way to equality was to embrace the relativity of truth. If truth were relative, why would white people ever give up their power? It was by calling us back to the Gospel.

