

A Questionable Life
Part 1: Living a Questionable Life
November 1st & 2nd, 2014

This week, 15 years ago, a small group of people who loved Jesus and wanted to see the city of Lowell turned upside down by the gospel, prepared for Harbor's very first worship gathering! And then, on November 7th, in the ballroom of the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Lowell, Harbor celebrated its Grand Opening! (VIDEO CLIP) As a result of their faith and commitment, many of our lives have been transformed and shaped in unspeakable ways, so together can we take a moment to thank God for what He's done!

Today...we probably look very different than we did on that first Sunday, but our heartbeat has never changed! We remain committed, by the grace of God, with all of our energy and resources, to continue *Helping People Find Their Way Back to God!*

Now...we're spending the entire fall looking at what it means *To Help People Find Their Way Back to God!* For the last several weeks, we walked through the book of Galatians, which describes the Good News of what God has done to bring us back into His arms. Not because of what we do or don't do...or how we've lived or haven't lived...or because we're good or not too bad! We're invited back into our Father's arms because of what Jesus Christ has done for us!

That's where we've been thus far. Now, for the remainder of the year, we want to look at one question...

*"Now that the gospel is going to work in us,
how does the gospel work its way out through us?"*

Do you know that for the 300 years following Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, the gospel swept the Roman Empire like a firestorm and transformed it, and ultimately changed the landscape of history itself?

In fact, we have literature in which Roman leaders and historians write about the bewildered response of the Empire to the early Christians and the way they lived with such reckless, selfless abandon for God and neighbor!

Julian the Apostate: In the 4th century, the Roman emperor Julian feared that Christians were going to subvert the empire, not with the sword, but with love, kindness, and generosity, and so he wrote a directive to his officials...in which He said...

"We pay special attention to this point, and by this means affect a cure (for the "sickness" of Christianity). For when it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the (pagan) priests, then I think the impious Galileans (Christians) observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. And they have gained ascendancy in the worst of the deeds through the credit they

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win for such practices...the Galileans begin with their so-called love feast, or hospitality, or service of tables – for they have many ways of carrying it out and hence call it by many names – and the result is that they have led very many into atheism (i.e. Christianity).” Julian the Apostate

He goes on to write that Romans were going toward Christianity in droves because the Christians opened their tables to all regardless of race, ethnicity or social status; they cared for the poor and orphan; they shared their food with those in need; they offered medicine to the sick and dying; they gave proper funerals to people while the Roman empire left the poor, sick, and dying lying in the streets...

Not to be outdone, Julian came up with what seemed like a brilliant plan! He ordered his Roman governors to out-love the Christians by developing food-distribution programs and building hostels to care for the homeless! All in hopes that the Romans could slow the transforming effect of the gospel...

The problem...was that it didn't work! See, you can order a man to build a home or to hand out a meal, but you can't manipulate someone's heart to love their neighbor, to care for the poor, or to serve a stranger! You can't!

**Julian didn't understand that Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit of love and motivated by the grace of God!
What he demanded...the Christians gave freely in terms of their money...time...and health for the good of others!**

Historically speaking, Christianity has never changed the world by building beautiful buildings and inviting people to come in off the streets to encounter God! Christianity has changed the world when ordinary followers of Jesus have gone out into the streets, into their homes and neighborhoods to live with such radical love and generosity that the gospel literally becomes alive...and recognizable...and desirable to those who have yet to encounter Jesus.

The question becomes...is it possible for us to live as these early believers did? Is it possible for us to see our homes, neighborhoods, and world transformed by the same gospel they believed and loved and lived out in remarkable ways!

I believe that, by the grace and power of God at work in us, it is possible! So...in between now and Christmas, we're going to look through the lens of Scripture at the life that the Holy Spirit longs to shape in us, so that we too might become world-changers for His glory!

Exponential: Last April, our staff had an opportunity to go to a church leadership conference in Orlando. Two things you need to know about our time in Florida: First, we're a fairly competitive bunch, so we have a favorite mini-golf course near

Disney, and on the day of our arrival, we have a tournament, which can get pretty cut-throat because a lot of pride hangs on the outcome! And this year I lost...which simply means that we'll have to return to Florida! **Even more important** is that our hearts as leaders and pastors are filled there...it is some of our best dollars spent on staff development because we're challenged and encouraged in ways that ultimately benefit you!

This year, a church leader and author by the name of Michael Frost, taught a message called *A Questionable Life* in which he challenged many of the deeply ingrained ideas I've held regarding the ways in which we, the body of Christ, will effectively live out and proclaim the gospel for the good of our world and the glory of God. So we owe a big thanks to him for inspiring this entire series...

Frost shared from Colossians 4...and it was so good that I've done my best to personalize it in order to share it with you today as a way to frame our entire series.

So...let's go to Colossians, chapter 4!

"Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about this mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should. Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."
Colossians 4:2-6

How will we see our neighborhoods and cities transformed by the gospel in the same way that the early followers of Jesus experienced?

Paul gives us two specific ways that it will happen!

First, Paul says, *"Pray that God will give us many opportunities to speak about the gospel (mysterious plan concerning Christ)."*

Here, and throughout his letters, Paul taught that some people within the church (including himself) are gifted evangelists, uniquely called by God to proclaim the gospel within the local church, or as they travel from place to place (missionaries).

Our responsibility as believers (to the gifted evangelist) is to pray that they have opportunities to boldly and clearly proclaim the gospel wherever they go! But please hear me...this does not apply to everyone in the church...

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See...Paul doesn't say, "Pray for me to boldly and clearly proclaim the gospel, and I'll be praying for you the same!"

We're to pray for those whom God has uniquely gifted to announce the gospel! But for the rest of us who belong to Jesus, Paul describes our calling...Look again at verse 5!

"Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone." Colossians 4:5-6

The primary way that most of us will speak about the gospel will be in response to people's questions about Jesus!

Peter described the same thing:

"You must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks you about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it." 1 Peter 3:15

Both Paul and Peter say that we're to live in such unusual, unexpected, inexplicable ways that the people around us can't help but question, 'why?'

And the way to know if this is happening in your life is to ask, "Are my friends and neighbors actually questioning why I live the way I do!"

Naked Cowboy: This summer, we took our kids to New Jersey to visit my brother's family...and we spent a day in Manhattan. Our second stop was Times Square! Now, I've been to Times Square several times, but never with my children. So when we came upon the Naked Cowboy and several of his savory friends, I had to do some quick thinking, because my children aren't used to seeing a guy playing the guitar in underwear and a cowboy hat...so naturally, they wanted to know 'why?'

That's a different kind of questionable! But here's my point! If you live a Questionable Life...people will take notice, which will open the door for you to speak of your hope in Christ!

Middle-class Suburbia: On the other hand, no one will ask you about the hope that is within you if who you are, and how you live, and what you're doing is just like every other suburban, middle-class person in this country!

If we spend the same amount of money on our houses as everyone else does, and take the same vacations they take, and have the same kinds of toys they have. If we have the same habits and hectic schedules...if our lives look exactly the same as theirs, what would they possibly ask us about?

There must be something more curious about our lives than that we attend a worship gathering on the weekend!

What does this life look like?

We need to look at the Scriptures...but we also need to look at how the early church lived out the Scriptures.

They transformed the Roman Empire as evangelists like Paul and Peter traveled around proclaiming the gospel and planting churches! And at the same time, hundreds of thousands of ordinary Christ-followers like you and me infiltrated every aspect of society and lived the kind of lives that evoked curiosity to those looking on!

Remember Julian's critique of the early believers! They loved their enemies and forgave their persecutors. They cared for the poor and fed the hungry. In a society where men had three women – one for having sons, a concubine for sex, and a mistress to make him look good in public, Christian men instead treated women as equals, they treated their wives as sisters, and they were sexually faithful to one woman!

This is how the Christian community subverted and conquered the Roman Empire...by living extraordinarily different lifestyles that aroused questions, and opened doors for the gospel to be shared! When this happened, people bowed their knee to Jesus as King and history was literally transformed!

In the same way, we must discover how to live so counter-culturally that people looking on will want to know, "Who are you?"

But can we confess that by simply paying our taxes, waving to our neighbors from the safety of our yard, shuttling our kids to every activity under the sun, or enduring our work Monday through Friday so we can sit inside and watch TV on the weekend, it's not questionable!

How do we get there?

Close

In these last few moments...I want to encourage you with some practical application...and then we'll spend the rest of this series looking at several characteristics given to us in Scripture, which describe a questionable life when compared to the cultural norms of our day!

Before we get there...let me leave you with a text, and two steps to take in the week ahead!

Titus 2 – In Titus, chapter two...Paul writes to encourage the new believers to apply the gospel in their relationships! To the older women, *“Don’t slander others or drink too much...love and train younger women to love their husbands and children!”* To the young men... *“Live wisely (self-controlled lives)”* when every other young man in Roman society was living a sexually promiscuous life. Paul tells slaves not to steal from their masters, but to obey them and do their best to please them; this during a time when masters treated slaves brutally!

Paul was basically saying...as Roman and Greek citizens...your lives once mirrored the Roman and Greek culture...but now you belong to the Kingdom of God...therefore, live according to the norms and values of this Kingdom!

Then Paul writes...

“(In living this way), you will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way.” Titus 2:10

See...the way you live will beautify the gospel in people’s eyes!

Then...Paul offers them a new motivation for living this way!

“For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people...(14) He (Jesus) gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.” Titus 2:11,14

See... “Jesus Christ came to reveal the grace of God, bring salvation, free us from sin, and to cleanse us! (Galatians)

Not so that we would become fine upstanding, rule following, church-going Christians, but why? Jesus gave his life to make us His people!

Totally committed to doing good deeds!

Jesus came to reveal the grace of God...so that we might become a people who reflect the grace of God to our neighbors, strangers, even to our enemies!

Jesus gave His life to free us when we were enslaved to sin...so now, we’re learning how to give of ourselves to those caught in spiritual, physical, or social bondage...

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Jesus rescued us from sin...and now, we seek to help those who are hurting, oppressed, discouraged, overwhelmed, sick...

We desire to love the unloved. To serve the under served. To feed the hungry. To befriend the friendless.

This is what Jesus has done for us!

**As the gospel works its way into our lives...
It will always work its way out of our lives...**

If you're not living a questionable life (and none of us are doing it perfectly, are we?), don't say, *"I'm finally going to change!"* Go to Jesus, confess sin of complacency or selfishness, and ask Him to make the truth of His grace real to your heart!

Action

Finally, this week, can I encourage you to do two things!

#1 – Pray for one person each day this week... We've been encouraging you to ask God, every day, to work out His grace in another person's life!

See...we can love our friends and neighbors, but only God can melt a person's heart with His love!

#2 – Bless three people this week... Now, next week, we'll look in detail at what it means to bless others, but for now...

Bless: *"To confer prosperity or happiness upon another."* Or, *"To add strength to another's arm."*

Basically, to bless someone means to do anything that relieves a burden in their life by supporting, by alleviating distress and helping them breathe more easily...

Word of Encouragement – It might mean to write a word of encouragement to specifically let them know you care!

Notes: Some of you have done this for me and our other pastors by writing notes of encouragement every day this month! You have no idea how life giving those were to us! Thank you!

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Acts of Kindness – You can bless someone through a random act of kindness! Help a neighbor clean up their leaves! Take a colleague out to lunch and listen! Babysit someone’s kids! Purchase someone groceries! Take your wife on a date, arrange childcare, and surprise her! Invite someone into your home for dinner!

Bless someone by generously giving your resources to meet a need...or simply to encourage!

To bless others, you’re going to have to think creatively, and then create margin in your life to carry it out! But as you do this, you will become a blessing to others!

Mission: Harbor, our mission is to *Help People Find Their Way Back to God*. If you call Harbor your home, we want you to own this! ***A mission statement only becomes a movement when it gets off of the wall and into our hearts!***

Imagine what would happen if we allowed God to shape our lives so fully, that when people spent time around us, they said, “Why is that person...why is that group of people so radically loving and generous and life-giving?” Imagine what would happen?

It could change the world!

My prayer is that we will LIVE QUESTIONABLE Lives!

Pray!