

**Why Become Good News Messengers?
Matthew 22:37-40**

Pastor Tom
Sept. 15, 2019

What does a Christ follower's life look like? How can we tell if someone is living the Christian life? How do you know if you're living as a Christian?

Some people might answer like this. "If a person goes to church they are living the Christian life." Maybe. We believe it's important to do that. But, there are lots of people who go to church who aren't Christians. And there are a lot of people who go to church and are total jerks outside of church which calls their Christianity into question. So maybe we should look somewhere else for convincing evidence besides going to church.

Some might say; "You can tell if someone is living the Christian life by what they do and don't do. Well that can provide some clues. My Dad told me about a line that went through church circles when he was younger. It went like this. "We don't' drink, smoke, or chew or go with girls who do." So is that the defining standard of the Christian life? Christians don't drink alcohol, don't smoke and don't chew tobacco; nor do they date people that do those 3 sinful activities But there are problems with this approach. Christians disagree about this. Some Christians drink. Some don't. Jesus drank wine. What about smoking? C.S. Lewis, who many of you have heard about or read, smoked a pipe. So does that mean he wasn't a Christian? We would likely say no – he was. So maybe pipe smoking is okay for British Christians but not for Canadian Christians. And I don't know if there is chewing tobacco in the Bible. Maybe some of the camels did it but I don't know about people. Yet that seems a pretty shaky standard by which we can determine whether or not people are actually living the Christian life.

Thankfully, we are not left on our own to answer this question. Jesus gave a pretty clear and simple summary of how we can know if a person is living the Christian life. So today we are going to look at His simple summary. It will guide and hopefully encourage us that the Christian life is not as complicated as we sometimes make it out to be, and that this will enable us to grow as God's good news messengers.

Last week we introduced our theme for 2019/20 - Becoming Good News Messengers; Living with Mission in Mind. Our focus verse is Isaiah 52:7 – "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him or her who brings good news." It's on the front page of your bulletin. We looked at the different pieces of the good news found in that passage. For the next five messages, we are looking at the different actions that good news messengers need to take with respect to their

unbelieving friends and family. If you did not get one of the cards portraying this, please pick one up at the info center on your way out.

So today we're looking at Jesus' simple summary of the Christian life. Then we'll look at how this applies to the good news messenger calling. We'll address a major objection made by some Christians today against becoming good news messengers. Finally I pray that we will all gain motivation and power from the Spirit during our time at the Lords table to live out this calling as good news messengers.

Please find Matthew 22:34-40 in your Bibles. (Page 697). This incident occurs during the final week of Jesus' life after the triumphal entry. Some major debates are happening between Him and the various religious and political leaders. First, the Pharisees tried to entangle him in his words. They fail. Then another Jewish group called the Sadducees tried to entrap Him concerning the resurrection. They also fail. So the Pharisees take another shot at Jesus in this passage.

Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV) ³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

The Pharisees get one of their own, a lawyer, to ask Jesus another question. Notice the motive for the question is found in verse 35. He asks to "test" Jesus. He asks a legitimate question. In fact a debate raged within Judaism about which was the greatest commandment from God. But the motive for this question is not really to further this debate. It is a test with the hope that Jesus will in some way incriminate Himself with His own words. But the Pharisees will fail again in their goal because Jesus provides a deep, profound and authoritative answer. It contains two simple parts that answer the question **How do you live the Christian life?**

Part 1 - Love God with all you are. Verse 37 – "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." Jesus quotes a verse very familiar to all Jews of that time. It came from Deuteronomy 6:5. It was part of a small group of verses they recited daily called the Shema. "Hear O Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might." Here Jesus says heart, soul and mind. He's not saying that there are 3 very distinct parts to every person. The pieces simply add up to the whole of the person. So I've framed it "Love God with all you are."

But what does it look like to love God with all that you are? It requires total devotion to God with all of our lives in every area of life. It includes the call to obey the rest of God's commandments. Loving God needs to be our north star, our guiding light, our first priority, our main goal. The first question we ask when facing decisions; "How do I love God in this?" The rest of life flows from this love for God with all that we are.

Now notice to Love God does not simply mean, "form an emotional attachment to Him." Or "stir up warm feelings towards God." It's a command. You can't command emotion; at least honest emotions. Hopefully, emotion will come in following this command. But the command focuses on action to live in a way that loves God.

We love God in similar ways to how we love other people. So, we make time for God; we learn about His character. We hear from Him and listen to Him. We obey His commands and live in dependence on Him. This love for Him should not only show up in Christian activities like Bible reading, prayer, going to church and memorizing Scripture.

We must love God with all we are when we shop, drive, sit in class, when we're alone, ride the bus, interact with coworkers. We love God with all we are when love for Him governs our choices on what we read, watch, listen or do with our time.

Sometimes as Christians we talk about having our time *with* God meaning the time we set aside to read our Bibles and pray. That's very important. But we need to guard against thinking that once we're done our time *with* God, we can live the rest of our lives *without* God. We need to view all our time as with God. Then we begin to see how we can love God with all we are wherever we are. Jesus says in verse 38 "This is the first and great commandment."

But then He goes on to give another commandment as part of the answer. Verse 39 – "And a second is like it." This does not diminish this command as less important. It means the second is similar in importance. So there is the first and great commandment. There is a second and great commandment. **Love your neighbor as yourself.** Jesus assumes we will naturally look after ourselves. We look out for our needs for surviving and thriving. Jesus says "take that same concern that you have for yourself and apply it to your neighbor."

But what does this look like? It involves being useful and beneficial to one's neighbors. It can mean to give to someone what they need or to help someone in need. It can mean to love like in the Sermon on the Mount. Not to "feel" love for neighbours; though hopefully we do – but show love **to** neighbours. So again, it is not primarily an emotional feeling. It involves a helping action. Jesus wants to ensure that our care and concern for others – both believers and

unbelievers – runs deep. He calls us to a costly love in the gospel of Luke account of this incident; the questioner immediately asks “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus responds with the Good Samaritan parable. So this command calls us to practically help and meet the needs of people around us – who live beside us, sit beside us on the bus or in the office or in class; people who work with us or share a common interest or are part of our extended family. Anyone we know or come across who is in need is our neighbor.

So in the same way that we make time for God and space for Him in our lives, we need to make time for neighbors and make space for them. When we hear about their needs, we can respond by keeping in mind our love for God and our love for them. Then Jesus summarizes His answer with the statement in verse 40 – “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Depend or “hang” was a technical term that meant all the other laws derive come from these two great commandments. So here’s Jesus’ simple summary of how to live the Christian life. Love God with all you are. Love your neighbor as yourself.

What does this have to do with becoming good news messengers? When it comes to sharing the good news, **our primary motivation must be love.** It must not be to make converts. If my main motive in befriending someone is for them to become a Christian, what will likely happen to our relationship if I find out they don’t want to become a Christian? I might just drop them in search of another convert that would damage Christ in that person’s eyes. They might think “the only reason they talked to me was so I would buy what they were selling or teaching. “They didn’t really care about me. I want nothing to do with their Jesus.” But if our primary motivation starts with love, then whether or not they receive Christ, we can still love them. Who knows what God might do in them because of our love? A really famous pastor said something about this that I have not forgotten. His name is Pastor Serge. During one of our staff devotionals or pastoral meetings, he said “The great commission flows out of the great commandment.” The great commission is when Jesus said “Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name...” But it flows out of Loving God and loving others. God and His good news are everyone’s greatest need. One way we love others is by providing for their needs. Giving others the good news provides for their greatest need and shows them love.

Think about the people in your life who don’t know Christ. Some might be close friends; family members; work colleagues; class mates; team mates; boyfriends; girlfriends; siblings; children; parents. It hopefully bothers us that they live without the hope of God and are on their way to Hell. It hopefully grieves us. Do we have a heart for the lost in this

city? Or are we convinced they are a lost cause? I believe it's not a lost cause. God has many in our city who need to hear the good news and are ready to receive it.

So love your neighbor. Love like in the sermon on the Mount. Practically help them and care for their needs. Then maybe we'll earn the respect to announce the news that will meet their greatest need.

Yet there are a growing number of Christians who dispute the need to proclaim God's good news. They may not believe that people's greatest need is our God and His Good News. They may think it's wrong to even talk about this. This objection may show up with a statement like this.

Isn't it more loving to not try to convert another person? Well what Christian would agree with such a statement? According to the Barna Research Group, 47% of practicing Christian millennials agree. A millennial is someone born between the years 1981-1996. So they are approximately 22-37 today. This study was published last February and can be found under the title "Millennials oppose evangelism." It found that nearly half at least somewhat agreed that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith." These are practicing Christians. It's not just millennial Christians. Christians from all different age groups are adopting this thinking. Maybe some here today agree that it's wrong to share your personal beliefs and try to convert someone else.

How did this happen? What are some reasons a Christian might believe this? I want to give you three reasons and I'm sure there are more. **Reason 1 – Scientism puts Christian Claims Outside of the Credibility Structure.** Notice very carefully that I said "Scientism" not "Science." What is scientism? Christian Philosopher J.P. Moreland, in his book entitled "Scientism" quotes this definition: "Scientism is the belief that science, especially the natural sciences is the most valuable part of human learning because it is the most authoritative, or serious or beneficial." Moreland then gives his own definition which might be more understandable. "Scientism implies that something is true, rationally justified, or known if and only if it is a scientific claim that has been successfully tested and is being used according to appropriate scientific methodology." It's a belief that you can only trust what science can prove. You probably know people who believe this or live according to this. They might say I only believe or trust what can be proven by science.

So what does that have to do with religious claims and the good news message? It completely removes religious claims from having any credibility in public discussion. So, if anyone tries to raise a religious claim, they are immediately

shut down maybe with a statement like “that’s just your personal opinion.” and yet, since scientism has gained a significant following today, Christians can also adopt it without thinking much about it. Then they would conclude that bringing good news for the purpose of conversion is wrong.

But do you see the critical flaw in the scientism claim? “Something is true only if it has been successfully tested in a lab or follows appropriate scientific methods.” How can anyone prove that statement is true in a lab? It’s not a scientific claim. It’s a philosophical claim. Science can’t test the claim. It must be tested by philosophy which has also been excluded with the scientism claim. Further, Christianity has always been an evidence based religion. Our faith was never founded on airy statements like “I believe because I feel God in the air.” It is based on eyewitness testimony and other facts. The tomb of Jesus Christ must be empty. If it’s not our faith is futile. So a discussion about Christianity and its truth claims can stand up in the credibility test.

Why else might Christians conclude evangelism is wrong? **Reason 2 – Personal Preference has become one of our cultures highest values.** It has even been elevated above truth. Abdu Murray talks about this in his book “Saving Truth.” He notes that in 2016 the Oxford Dictionaries selected “Post truth” as the word that best captures the culture’s current mood. One form of post truth thinking. This view acknowledges that truth exists or that certain things are true. But people don’t care about the truth if it gets in the way of their personal preferences. So truth may exist but our feelings and opinions matter more.

So how could that impact whether or not a Christian become a good news messenger? Say I’m a Christian and I value my personal preferences above everything including truth. Say, I value other people also having their own personal preferences. Then even if I think the gospel is true, I would likely not share it with someone who is not a Christian because it might violate their personal preferences.

This leads to **Reason 3 – The understanding of tolerance has changed.** Moreland talks about this in his book “Scientism.” He states that “showing tolerance used to mean that you could have a moral view and believe it to be right and that your friend’s views were false. But, you still respected your friend. You tolerate the person but you did not in a sense tolerate their views. Some views were actually right and others were wrong.

Today, tolerance means you must not judge another person’s views in any way. In fact, that act of disagreeing with someone else’s view is considered intolerant. Remember that Barna group study which found 47% of practicing Christian

Millennials think evangelism is wrong? The survey also asked them to agree or disagree with the following statement – “If someone disagrees with you, it means they are judging you.” 40% agreed with that statement. So if a Christian believes that even disagreeing with their friend judges them, why would they even bring up the good news to someone who doesn’t believe it? That would be intolerant.

Yet if we are so tolerant of another person’s views that we dare not even share the gospel with them, it’s like we’re just affirming them on their way to Hell. This is the culture which we live in and must be aware of today.

But it’s not hopeless to be a good news messenger. Following Jesus’ simple summary shows the way. Love God. Love your neighbor in practical ways. Then earn the right to discuss respectfully with the one you have shown love to.

It is not easy and it is costly. But it is infinitely more loving to take a risk and proclaim the good news. After all God made an infinitely costly sacrifice to show His love to us. 1 John 4:9-11 describes it. “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” This includes being good news messengers. Let’s celebrate and remember God’s love now as we come to the Lord’s Table.