

“Doubt and Imperfect People”

April 24, 2016

This is the 4th sermon in a series on “Doubt.” We’ve talked about people who doubt, like “Doubting Thomas,” and about some of the struggles we have with the Bible. We spoke about the importance of the Resurrection and how that’s the cornerstone of the Christian faith, but again, some have doubts. Last week we spoke about the relationship between a good God and the problem of evil, sin and suffering. Today we talk about another problem which causes doubt: but this one’s not about GOD, it’s about Christians. One reason why people aren’t Christians is because of Christians. It’s common to hear some people say like Gandhi who (supposedly) said: **“I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.”**

I know Christians ARE imperfect, but I’d also argue, “Most, are really trying.” If we fail it doesn’t mean that the Gospel is wrong. Furthermore, we don’t know all that’s going on within a person. Someone who appears to be a failure might, considering their background and where they’ve come from, actually have made a lot more progress than many others who “were born on 3rd base and think they hit a triple.” Every healthy church will have a wide range of Christians. Redwoods vs. newbies. When walking with a child you don’t walk so fast that their little legs can’t keep up with it. Jesus chose disciples all along the continuum – Peter would deny, Thomas would doubt, and Judas would betray.

In today’s text, Paul is giving advice to Titus who’s pastoring a troubled congregation. Jesus entrusted His message to His odd and quirky family, who are all sinners. Titus’ church in Crete has some real challenges. You might want to read what Paul has told him in the previous 31 (there are only 46) verses. This is a letter describing a pastor’s duties.

Paul’s intro to Titus was: **LIVE LIKE THIS Titus 2:15-3:2** *These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage & rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. Remind the people to be subject to **rulers & authorities**, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,² to slander no one, to be peaceable & considerate, & to show true humility toward all men.*

Paul tells Titus to live in a certain way so you’ll have an opportunity share the Good News with people.

1.) We are **JUSTIFIED BY GRACE 3:2-8a**³ *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived & enslaved by all kinds of passions & pleasures. We lived in malice & envy, being hated & hating one another.*⁴ *But when the kindness & love of God our Savior appeared,*⁵ *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had*

*done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth & renewal by the Holy Spirit,⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,⁷ so that, having been **justified by his grace**, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.⁸ This is a trustworthy saying.*

Paul recognizes our tendency to sin but quickly redeems it by describing what GOD has done.

Paul describes human nature in this verse. It's not at all positive! "We too" doesn't just mean a handful of us or half of us, but all of us were caught up in foolishness, disobedience, deception and slavery to sin.

This is not about our righteousness, but about God's mercy.

"I'm not what I want to be, I'm not what I ought to be, I'm not what I'm gonna be – but thank God, I'm not what I used to be."

2.) We are to **DO GOOD 8:b** *And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to **doing what is good**. These things are excellent & profitable for everyone.*

Once we've given our lives to Christ, we are to learn to do good. We don't save ourselves by doing good, but our good deeds are a reflection that we have been saved.

3.) We are to **AVOID HARM 8:9-11** *But **avoid** foolish controversies & genealogies & arguments & quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable & useless.¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, & then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him¹¹ You may be sure that such a man is warped & sinful; he is self-condemned.*

How do we respond to our critics?

1.) **Acknowledge our DIFFERENCES in belief or behavior.** Some of our doctrines are unpopular. Some behaviors which the Bible speaks about aren't what people want to do.

2.) **Acknowledge OUR SIN.** The church IS full of imperfect people. We must acknowledge this reality. The 7 Deadly Sins show up here every Sunday: Pride, Envy, Anger, Lust, Greed, Gluttony and Sloth. Just because we walk in the door doesn't mean that there's some supernatural vacuum cleaner which removes all of our stain. But, those 7 Deadly Sins also show up in every school, business and family. Any time you have people, you are going to have sinners. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The thing is, that people expect church

people, who are forgiven sinners, to act differently from all the rest of humanity. But we come up short, too.

On the one hand, this seems unfair; that we are judged according to a higher standard. For instance, a person who doesn't profess to believe in God doesn't have any specific moral code they are governed by – it's whatever they want. But Christians are to live by the New Testament teachings. It's not only hard, it's impossible to live up to its standards. We're all hypocrites because we are all sinners. We profess more than we can practice. Loving your enemies tops the chart. But it's also hard to love some other Christians, too. Have you noticed they are pretty messed up? It's because I'm pretty much in favor of ME (and you are in favor of you). Christians can be mean. Sometimes we speak the truth, but don't do it in love. Sometimes we won't speak the truth because it might hurt someone's feelings.

In his 2003 book, Blue Like Jazz, Donald Miller tells about auditing some classes at a very secular university in Portland, Oregon. He said there were very few Christians in the school and the ones who were there were somewhat harassed because of their faith. There was a bumper stick on a car in the student lot which read: "Too bad we can't feed Christians to the lions anymore." On one particular weekend, the school shuts down so the students can have a Ren Fayre ("Renaissance Fair") festival. "Friday night is mostly about getting drunk and Saturday night is mostly about getting high." About 100 of them stripped and painted their bodies blue and paraded naked around campus.

A handful of Christians decided that this would be a good time to "come out of the closet" as Christians. Don proposed setting up a confessional booth in the middle of campus and putting a sign up that said: "Confess Your Sins." Being a Christian does mean you have to confess your sins, and there was abundant evidence of that on campus, but he proposed it as a joke. Another student, Tony, thought it was a great idea. Tony gave it a twist, however. He said instead of inviting the agnostic/atheistic students to confess THEIR sins, that they'd use the confessional booth to confess their sins for Christianity. (Miller doesn't like the term, "Christianity," because if you ask 10 people what it means you get 10 different answers. People link the term to The Crusades, TV evangelists with million dollar jet airplanes, sex abuse of children, mean and self-righteous, judgmental people who go around telling everyone else they are going to hell.) Christianity sounds like a religious system, not a relationship with Jesus.

They did this. They built a rather large booth which looked like a shed. Don Miller wrote this about an encounter he had in the tent, dressed as a monk, with a guy named Jake:

"So, what is this? I'm supposed to tell you all of the juicy gossip I did at Ren Fayre?" "No." "Okay, then what? What's the game?" "Not really a game. More of a confession thing." "You want me to confess my sins, right?" "No, that's not what we're doing, really." "What's the deal, man? What's with the monk outfit?" "Well, we're a group of Christians on campus who've been thinking about the way Christians have wronged people over time. You know, the Crusades, all that stuff..." "Well, I doubt you personally were involved in any of that." "No I wasn't. But the thing is, we are followers of Jesus. We believe that He is God and He represented certain ideas that we've not done a good job at representing. He's asked us to represent Him well, but it can be very hard. There's a group of us on campus who wanted to confess to you." "You are confessing to me?" "Yeah. I'm confessing to you." "You're serious." His laugh turned to a straight face. He looked at me and told me I didn't have to. I told him I did and I felt very strongly in that moment that I was supposed to tell Jake that I was sorry. "What are you confessing?" "Everything! Jesus told us to feed the poor and heal the sick. I've never done very much about that. Jesus aid to love those who persecute me. I tend to lash out, especially if I feel threatened. Jesus did not mix His spirituality with politics. I grew up doing that. It got in the way of the central message of Christ. I know a lot of people will not listen to the words of Jesus because people like me, who know Him, carry our own agendas into the conversation rather than just relaying Jesus' message. There's a lot more, too." "It's all right, man," Jake said very tenderly. His eyes were starting to water. "Well. I'm sorry for all of that." "I forgive you," Jake said. And he meant it. Then he said, "It's really cool what you guys are doing. A lot of people need to hear this....You really believe in Jesus, don't you?" "Yes I think I do. Most often I do. I have doubts at times, but mostly I believe in Him." "You said that there was a central message of Christ. I don't really want to become a Christian, you know, but what is that message?" "It's that a man sinned against God and God gave the world over to man and that if somebody wanted to be rescued out of that that Christ will rescue them if they want; that if they ask forgiveness for being part of their rebellion then God will forgive them." "What's the deal with the cross?" "God says the wages of sin is death. Jesus died so that none of us would have to. If we have faith in that then we are Christians. Jake it you want to know God, you can. I'm just saying if you ever want to call on Jesus, He will be there." "Thanks man. I believe you meant that." His eyes were watering again. "This is cool what you guys are doing" he repeated. "I'm going to tell my friends about this." He shook my hand and when he left the booth there was somebody else ready to get in. It went like that for a couple of hours. I talked to about 30 people. Many people wanted to hug when we were done. All of the people who visited the booth were grateful and gracious. I was being changed

thru the process. I went in with doubts and came out believing so strongly in Jesus I was ready to die and be with Him. I think that night was the beginning of change for a lot of us.”

The beginning of change = when we open our hearts to a relationship of grace with Jesus Christ.