

Discussion of "Clearing Up Confusion"

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Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[0 : 00] Amen. Good to see you all tonight. Welcome. Sharon, was there any other new update from Georgia this morning?

! Okay. Now that Tom said he had spoken to Oscar and that he was hopeful and optimistic. We'd be able to call her and at least talk to her on the phone, I think, tomorrow. But she's not able to talk, but she can hear. So anyhow, yes, continue to please pray for Georgia and for Oscar.

So our text from this morning was John 7, verses 11 through 13.

Jesus waits to go up to the Feast of Booths and while he waits, John records the happenings at the feast while Jesus waits to come and the conversation that's taken place amongst those who are there about who Jesus is.

[1 : 21] So I'll read that again before we dig into these application questions. John 7, verses 11 through 13. The Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, where is he?

And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said he is a good man, others said, no, he is leading the people astray. Yet for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him.

And so this morning's message was centering around how still today that confusion and division continues to be something that we see in our culture and others over who Jesus is.

Some thinking that he's merely a good man, others that he is a deceiver, and still others just have different opinions about him.

And so as followers of Christ who are commanded to go and make disciples, we realize that we are called to go, that people are searching, they want to know, and that often what they know is confused, that it's not based upon biblical truth, and that we are called to go and to speak.

[2 : 38] And so we're to do so fearlessly. We see these people were afraid of the Jews, and so they weren't willing to speak openly about Jesus. But we know that the Lord has called us to go and to share the good news of Jesus Christ, and to do so knowing that we will receive a reaction.

It might be a negative reaction that results in persecution, or it could be that as we share the gospel with the people that we're sharing it with, they will be saved.

And so we're an aroma to some of death to death, of others to life, from life to life, or life to life. So the first application question this morning was, So again, as we answer these questions, it doesn't have to necessarily be that you share your answer here, but we can talk about Christians in general in our country, and what have you or what are we perceiving right now in our nation?

Are Christians tempted to appear good to the world? And so therefore, they are watering down the gospel, softening the edges of the word of God with excuses.

What have you noticed? And what have you seen? Have you seen this happen where someone or a church that you know is more concerned about appearing to be good to the world, and in so doing, they water down the gospel?

[4 : 33] And I have a microphone up here. I don't think I have my helper here with me, though. Oh, yeah. Yeah, Cameron, if you don't mind. I'll even talk first. Green. Wonderful.

Green microphone. Are you going to run around on the deck? Maybe not that fast. Oh, here he comes. He realizes, oh. He's still going to talk first, though, Jack.

So I think for me, it's like, you know, you grow up, you know, even in church, you're taught to be nice to other people and be nice.

And so I think sometimes we're, you know, even as humans, we're social creatures. We don't want to offend anybody. We don't, even if it doesn't have anything to do with religion, we don't like having to be bears of bad news.

You know, we don't like having tough conversations. And I'll, you know, see it even in the workplace. You know, adults don't like having tough conversations, don't like being honest with one another.

[5 : 38] And so I think even for me, as I, you know, think about myself, trying to talk about my beliefs and my faith to other people, it's so tempting to kind of water it down a little bit to not offend the other person.

And then, you know, especially now in the kind of culture we live in and like having, working at a company like I do, I have to be so careful with who I talk to, how I talk.

So it really is easy to kind of have these excuses to kind of either not bring it up or kind of gloss over, kind of water it down so that I don't get myself in trouble, I don't threaten my job, I don't offend somebody at my work that, you know, can make things awkward.

And so I think so many times it's hard to kind of find that fine line of, you know, we've got to share the gospel.

And part of the gospel is there's got to be bad news or the good news. But at the same time, we don't want to come out and say, hey, you're going straight to hell, you know.

[6 : 59] We don't want to beat people up either before we try to give them the good news. So I think it's, for me, it's always been trying to find that balance of how do I come at it lovingly and come off, you know, trying to show care for the person but also being honest about, you know, our faith and what we believe the Bible says about that person's stance in eternity.

Hmm, good. Yeah, because it's not that we are good people because of Christ in us, right?

Now, we need to be careful about becoming legalists as well, but our approach to people, I think, needs to be in order to be effective is show them that we care about them and that we love them.

That's why we're sharing this message. That's why I want to share this message with you because I actually do care about your soul and where you're going to spend your eternity. And so we live in a day and age of tolerance, right?

And to be a good person in our world means to be tolerant of everybody, whatever they believe.

Your truth is your truth, right? We're told everybody has their own truth that we need to respect.

[8 : 26] And so yet we know that that's not true according to God's Word. And so to go up to somebody and be like, let me tell you something. You're an idiot.

You know, your truth is wrong. There is one truth. And let me tell you about the fact that, you know, as you said, you're going to hell. And so, you know, that approach is probably not going to be very effective.

Yet we've got to also be careful too because, and I think those of you, especially who work more in, you know, like Phillips, some of these major corporations, you might feel more of that tension as well where you have a job to do, but you're a Christian as well.

You want to share the gospel. You want to do so in a way that will be effective. Yet with some people, I mean, we're eventually going to, the gospel is an offensive message and it's going to offend.

And so I think that this is a really good question for us to consider because I think that this is something for Christians that we are struggling in these days because who doesn't, it's uncomfortable, isn't it, to be seen as the bad guy or whatever.

[9 : 51] In your families, when you gather for Thanksgiving, I know, or other settings, I know, you know, sometimes the temptation is, well, we want to, let's just have a good Thanksgiving.

Let's just have a good Christmas. And so the thought is, maybe don't bring up some of these things that will create tension or rifts.

However, yet we're to share the good news. So when and why and how we do that is important. Anybody else want to chime in on this one? To appear good to the world, do you water down the gospel?

We'll go Kayla and then Elsa. Oh, and Michael. Well, with the example that Cameron brought up and working for Phillips, I think one thing that we can do to help prepare ourselves for those conversations is the attitude and the actions that you portray leading up to those conversations.

So if you are in a difficult meeting and get frustrated instead of like, and I'm guilty of this, rolling your eyes or like that long exhale that you know the person next to you can hear, like instead of reverting to those kinds of reactions, just take your notes and calmly take it in and process it.

[11 : 15] And as people see those behaviors and see that consistency, they'll reach out to you and ask you, why, how do you have such a good attitude? And then that opens the door up because they came to you and because you made yourself approachable.

Because you were probably nice, but they could see that there was something different. So that's when you can take that opportunity to share Christ. Good. Being a person who is sincere about your faith and your convictions as a Christian and modeling that before them go a long way.

Elsa? Yes. I think about when people say God loves you and he has a plan for your life, it makes like oversimplify the gospel and makes it look like it's about the person.

And I think it's taken from Jeremiah 9-11, but it skips the fact that you have to search him with all your heart about what he was saying and you were saying.

I've seen great comfort using a strategy like asking the person, have you ever stolen? Have you ever lied?

[12 : 30] And the person acknowledges. And so it's the person who acknowledges that they're sinners. That's it. Yeah.

Good. Thank you, Elsa. Yeah. In order for the gospel to be perceived as the good news that it is, it has to invade bad spaces. People got to understand why they, why Jesus is important.

That they are a sinner. Right? And so using some of those things, talking about the fact, well, what is sin? You've committed sin. That sin that you've committed against God.

And this is why Christ has come to die for our sins, to take the wrath of God away from us on the cross, that we can have eternal life. So they've got it. I mean, yeah, because I think sometimes we just kind of like, let me throw this out here real fast.

God loves you. You've got a plan for your life. Do you love God? Yes. Okay, you're saved.

Something like that, right? Doesn't cover it. That's not communicating the gospel. Michael? I mean, as we look at this mega church in particular, Joel Steen and his prosperity gospel that he has, I mean, he has watered down the gospel to the point of saying that the whole point is that you're going to prosper.

[13 : 42] And once you become a Christian, everything's going to be sunshine and daisies. And he's softened the edge of God's word. And he doesn't get to the point of, well, you're going to have trials and tribulations in this life.

You are going to have times where it's going to be tough to be a Christian. All for the sake of appearing nice to the world. And that's what it's come down to is he wants to make it seem like this message is so easy and instead of the true gospel, which is so much harder.

Yeah. Yeah, classic example of Mr. Nice Guy Christian, Joel Osteen. You know, he's got that big smile and looks like such a nice guy.

And I don't know, I've never met him before. I'm sure that he's polite and everything. But that's one I've gotten. And I know other believers who have rebuked me for criticizing his ministry because he's such a nice guy.

Let's say he's such a good man. You know, he helps so many people. But for all the reasons, like you said, Michael, but he's not preaching the gospel. And he's claiming to be a man of God.

[14 : 59] He's, in truth, a deceiver of many. Was there another hand over here? Okay. Are you more concerned with the unbelieving world identifying you as nice or identifying you with Christ?

And so this is one I really encourage us all to think about in our relationships, in the people who the Lord has brought you close to, who you know are unbelievers.

Are you more concerned that they see you as a nice person or that they're able to identify you with Christ? Cameron? So this one I thought was almost kind of a funny question because when I think back, you know, growing up, it was kind of like, well, if I'm a Christian, then obviously people are going to see me as a nice guy.

You know, it was that went hand in hand. But now with the shift in our culture and everything else about, you know, tolerance and everything like that, I've found it that it's hard to be a nice guy and a Christian in our culture at this point.

I never thought I'd say, you know, get in a discussion with somebody about a topic and say, well, yeah, I'm a Christian. And they just say, well, you're a bigot. There's no other excuse.

[16 : 40] Like, it's just, wait, what? Yeah. Like, those shouldn't, you know, mix together. Those should be complete opposites. You know, Christian, we're called to love everybody first.

A bigot is somebody who hates somebody just because of. And it's like, so me as a Christian, I should never be labeled a bigot because I don't hate anybody.

At least I try not to, right? And so I found it kind of weird that all of a sudden now to be a Christian in our culture probably means you're not going to be labeled a nice guy in our culture like I, you know, kind of once thought.

And so it has gotten harder for me to go, okay, if I'm going to stand up for my faith, I'm probably going to offend people.

And there's probably going to be people that are not going to like me. And I'm going to have to learn how to handle that. Yeah.

[17 : 44] I think we've noticed, I have, that especially when it comes to politics or celebrities or professional athletes, the world's okay with you being a Christian as long as you don't talk like one and live like one, as long as you'll be tolerant.

Of everyone else. Then there's an issue. Then you're a bigot or you're a fanatic of some kind. And so they're okay with us being Christians as long as we fit into that, you know, but be nice.

Yeah. Be nice though. And not saying again that we're not, I don't want to be misunderstood. We aren't going out there and like, well, you know, Pastor Mike said that Christians shouldn't try to appear to be good to the world.

They're nice guys. So I'm going to go out there and ruffle some feathers this week. You know, you just got to understand and how's the, yeah, don't be Westboro for sure.

But it shouldn't be a question for us as believers. We shouldn't be undercover in our world.

[18 : 58] People should be able to tell that there is a difference in us, that we are sincere about what we believe as followers of Christ, that we truly believe what the word of God says and we live our lives by it.

And so I think the challenge again is that we, that you think more about this. You know, do people know that you're a follower of Christ? Or because you want to fit in with them or the crowd or whatever, you want that promotion at your job or whatever the case may be, you're more tempted to suppress that so that you appear like a nice guy in their eyes.

Or nice woman so that you can, you know, advance in society, advance in your career or whatever the case may be. Willard. I think truly it comes down to the matter of what degree of Christ likeness have we reflected in our lives.

Work of the spirit of God is to mold us into the image of Christ. And that is to be our aim is to be so sensitive to the spirit of God that we give him liberty to work that work in us.

You know, if we're being conformed to the image of Christ and we're reflecting that from our lives, it should make a difference. It shouldn't matter whether we're nice to the world or think we're nice to the world or not.

[20 : 32] We're just reflecting Christ. And Jesus said, the world hates me, so it's going to hate you. And we realize that's the truth and the reality. And so I think our aim has to be focused on letting the spirit of God mold us into the image of Christ and reflect that from us.

And you think about Jesus and you think about the way in which he lived, the way in which he calls us to live, that his primary concern certainly was not that people viewed him as a nice man.

And in fact, he challenged the Pharisees, the Sadducees on many occasions. He called sin for what it was. He told people the truth about the fact that sin is committed against God, all sin is committed against God, and you will die in your sins.

You will go to hell. He preached a lot about hell. And he told people the truth. And so as followers of Christ, we do the same. So we need to be careful that we make sure that we explain the gospel.

And that goes into the next question where we're not trying to add to numbers by getting decisions, making sure that we are clear as we present the gospel, talking about sin.

[22 : 01] Talking about its consequences. Talking about Christ and the cross and his resurrection and why it's essential that he came, why it was essential that he lived and died and rose again for our salvation and not leaving any of that out.

So the second question was, do you or we as a church use deceptive means and methods to attract people to Christ and our congregation? And thinking of our church or thinking of other churches, how have you seen them use deceptive means and methods to attract people to Christ? You know, so I kind of want to reflect real quick back to the first one and then go to this one. But just as I grew up, I feel like, and I'm early 40s.

And so as I grew up and was a young child, I can remember what people called the hellfire and brimstone preachers. Uh-huh. And I really, because I was born and raised in the church, and I really feel like that I saw it go from that and that type of preaching and that type of deliverance of the message and of the gospel into, yes, we watered it down because we were tired of being received or portrayed as just hellfire brimstone, throw it out there.

And so I do feel like that we tend, that as a church, as a whole, we did tend to water it down. I feel like as I've grown up and continue to mature spiritually, what I have seen is that it's a lot easier in my own day-to-day and answering to God and Christ himself if I will align myself with Christ instead of trying to water things down.

[23 : 56] It doesn't matter what it is, preaching the gospel or just talking to my kids. If I will not water it down but I will stay aligned with what Christ called us to do, it just makes it a lot easier.

Is it harder as far as the way people view me? Yeah, it is. But then again, like Willard said, you've got to remind yourself, Christ said, they hate me, they're going to hate you too.

And I'm okay with that. What I have seen though, again, as a church, I sometimes see us trying to reach out to people and especially the needy.

And we say, here, let us help you, let us help you. And it's kind of like, if we help you, you come to church with us. If we help you, you come to church with us. And I agree with the fact that, again, we were called to take care of the widows and the orphans.

We were not called to extend our hand to every single person in need. We were called to love them, but we were not called to extend everything to try to get them into our churches.

[25 : 02] And so I feel like sometimes we do that. The church that I was born and raised in, they sometimes have a really good ministry of feeding the youth on Wednesday nights.

They sometimes have an excess of 75 youth that they feed. And then other times, they don't, and it dwindles. And the sign of times may become, you know, things going on back and forth, whatever. But I also feel like there are times where, again, you're offering food, and it's kind of the wrong attraction. The wrong attraction.

Good. Linda up here, I think, so you make some good points. Sometimes we look at being deceiving as watering down the gospel and trying to get decisions by being light and fluffy.

God loves you just as you are. Just come to God, and life will be great. But then there's the opposite where we are being deceptive and trying to scare people to come to Jesus.

[26 : 18] And I think, I don't know if they're as popular as they used to be, but the old judgment houses that they would have, you guys know what I'm talking about, where they'd be a play. You'd often take teens, and they would go through, you know, whatever.

Yeah, different stages. And a lot of kids were scared. I remember going to one and was really scared by that, too. So we've got to be careful as well that we're not all wrath, wrath without explaining the grace of God found through Jesus Christ as well.

And then also, we can be tempted to believe that we can meet physical needs and that if we're doing that, then in some way we've met the spiritual. And I agree that there are churches and ministries who, now we are, called to help those in need and those who come to us, be generous towards them.

But that's not sharing the gospel with them. And so we've got to make sure, too, that we don't see that, well, we fed 150 people, and that was great, and we feel like our mission is complete because we're called to go and make disciples.

And so, yeah, we use those as avenues, I think, to share the gospel. But we can't stop at just saying, well, we met this need, so we've done good for the Lord today and all that we could do.

[27 : 48] Linda, had your hand up? Right up here, Josiah. Right here in the middle. Well, I was raised in one of those Helen Brimstone churches, and we were so, the congregation was a small congregation, because we certainly didn't encourage anybody to come in, because, you know, it was to scare you into heaven.

So there's got to be a delicate balance. There's got to be a balance between, we're not going to be a church that's trying to attract you in for the wrong reason.

We're bringing you in here because you're going to hell. So we didn't, you know, it was a horrible atmosphere. I don't know what the answer is. You know, you can't pamper people into church, but you can't scare them away either.

Yeah, so again, making sure it's not just judgment, your horrible, filthy, rotten sinner, without talking about the grace of God and the love of God and sending Christ to save us.

My classic example of deceptive means and methods to attract people that I've shared before was down at Falls Creek with Rewired, the men's conference, which is good.

[29 : 10] And if they would have had it this year, we were planning on going. But I think for the organizers of that event, I don't know if they feel pressure.

I don't know that it's from outside or from within, but we do this, that, you know, we want to see decisions. And so we want to be able to report that to, you know, through the Baptist messenger or to the churches and say, you know, to say that this event was successful.

And so one of the last nights, I don't know if it was the last night, where, you know, the gentleman came up and preached and then kind of the emcee of the event got up and was just imploring people to come forward if they'd been saved, right?

You've heard this and you're saved. You know, come forward. And, you know, there was not too many down at the altar that came forward, you know, for if you've been to Falls Creek and you've been in that tabernacle, it's huge.

And it wasn't, it was, you know, probably more than halfway full, I think, when we went. And so it wasn't a whole lot of people. And I sensed that the emcee was not happy with the few in numbers that he saw.

[30 : 41] And so he came at it hard again, just a real guilt trip, you know, to get more people to come down. And so he laid it on again.

And, you know, another song was played. And while the song is playing, come on, come down here. You know you need to. Now's the time. Now's your chance.

Get down here. Just come on down here, you know. And just saying that kind of thing over and over again and a few more would trickle out, trickle out. Then at the end of that song or whatever, I think he was still not happy with the amount that he saw.

So the next thing he said was, maybe you've got a friend here with you. And you know that the Lord has been working on their heart.

But they're just scared to come down. Grab them by the hand and bring them down here. And so then the other song played.

[31 : 43] And you see these guys, you know, grabbing another guy by the hand and bringing them down to the front. And more numbers are now down at the altar.

And they led them through a sinner's prayer, I believe. I remember a sinner's prayer being prayed. And then we're told that, you know, now you're saved.

And that bothered me a lot. And I think it bothered other guys in our church because I thought, how confusing. How deceptive. You know, here I am, maybe. Maybe I've been invited by my neighbor or a guy that I work with to come to this men's event.

And I've heard, you know, the gospel was preached. And there's different speakers. And some have been really good in the past. And some were very good at that event. But how confusing. I came to this thing. I've heard it. And I'm hearing this guy just give a never-ending guilt trip. And all of a sudden, I get grabbed by the hand. And I get pulled down to the altar.

[32 : 49] And I'm told to pray this prayer. And I do it or pretend to do it. And then I'm declared to be a Christian now. And I'm saved. And that's the kind of deception that I think that as a church, we need to get rid of.

There is not a sinner's prayer recorded in Scripture. There is no magic words. If you're saved, right? The Holy Spirit draws you to Christ. You are saved.

And so we can't get into the mode where we look again. This goes back to a few weeks ago and what we talked about, where we're so numbers-driven that we will use deceptive means and methods and think that we're being successful because we somehow managed to have a large amount of people up here at the front after church so that we can feel like we've done well today. You know, that more souls were one for the Lord. Now, I will say, I know and I've talked to people who they have come forward.

During an altar call, they were instructed to say a prayer, but they were saved in the pew as they heard the gospel. And then they just followed whatever they thought was necessary afterwards.

[34 : 15] It was God who saved them through the hearing of the gospel, through the spirits drawing them to salvation, and they were saved. They came forward. Maybe they were instructed to offer

that prayer, but they were saved.

And it wasn't those actions that saved them. It was the gospel that saved them. Cameron, do you have a microphone? Okay, I still got it. I think, again, it's still kind of that fine line we walk as a church.

You know, do I think it's wrong if we have events trying to bring people into our church? No. You know, like the back-to-school event, you know, pre-2020. But, you know, the back-to-school event, the fall festivals, the, you know, whatever, cookouts and all that, you know, do I think that's wrong? No. No, but it's, I think there's that line of, what are we doing to keep people here? Are you up there doing magic tricks, and Dan's got smoke show during the worship service, and, you know, is that what we're doing to keep people in the pews, or is it, you know, sound worship followed by sound teaching that is keeping people here?

So, again, I think it's, you know, some churches have blown way over that line, and it's a rock show before, and then, you know, the preacher's coming out in shorts and a t-shirt and his coffee table, and, you know, oh, it's, God loves you.

[35 : 48] See you next Sunday. You know, and it's, you know, real water, like the question before, it's real watered down. Yeah. Because, well, we've got to make sure our 5,000 people are still coming here, and so I think, again, it's that line, you know, we want to attract people somehow, and so I don't, you know, I don't see anything wrong with having those events to get people in our doors and to be able to get, you know, you know, a little bug in their ear, get a pamphlet into their hand, you know, something, but what are we doing on a consistent basis of keeping people in the pews, and I think that's why I love my church.

It's a worship leader that is, he's not focused on himself. He's focused on bringing us in front of Christ and praising him. It's not a preacher that's up there tooting his own horn, trying to get as much money out of our pockets as he can.

He's in the word and not afraid to preach what the Bible says, and that's what's keeping people here, not the show. Yeah, I think we've got to clearly define if it's these engaged type events that we're doing, why are we doing this?

And to understand, again, in the understanding of our people who participate, this is not your evangelism event for the year, you know, again, evangelism way of life, but we've noticed that there is a need in our community that we are going to use this event to meet, and we hope this will be an avenue through which we can share the gospel with them, but also build those relationships so we continue to share the gospel with them.

And it is hard because, you know, I know sometimes we've had fall festival in there and we've had upwards of a thousand people and it's exciting, it's dangerous, I think.

[37 : 39] If the fire marshal came in, he'd probably shut it down and we won't be able to do that this year because of COVID, but, you know, that's a way for us to show our congregation that we love them and provide a safe place at least for this evening.

And so, yeah, we've got to, balancing that line between, you know, we are called to do good, let's do good, but why are we doing this good thing? And making sure that our encouragement and our instruction to our members is that, you know, you are commanded by the Lord to be a disciple maker and equipping them to be able to do that.

Okay. Nick. You know, I was just thinking about these questions and something that came to mind, I think we don't talk about repentance much anymore.

We mostly talk about belief and the scripture talks about both. People need to repent and believe in Jesus. And I think a lot of times we just, we feel really uncomfortable with the idea of talking about repentance so it gets dropped out of our gospel presentations.

And I think part of that in my own experience is that at times maybe I wasn't, I didn't help people count the cost of what following Jesus might look like for them in their life.

[39 : 12] Is that something that the Lord talked about? I mean, he implored people, count the cost. It's better not to begin than to start and walk away. And I think we've all heard so many presentations at conferences and camps and stuff like that where basically they just say, come forward, believe.

But they don't talk about repentance. And they also don't talk about how this message must change your life. And in many ways, it'll make your life more difficult. But in every way, it will be worth it.

A lot of times I don't feel like we say that. And I think that's one of the reasons why we all know we've been to those crowds. We've been to conferences. So many people got converted. It was amazing.

And yet none of them stayed in the church. Yeah. And so I think that's something that for me I have felt as when I know people and I get the opportunity to evangelize them over time is helping them see what following Jesus would look like in their life.

All the benefits of it, but then also the things that they would have to lay aside. And I think it's helped people make an informed decision because they know this is going to cost something.

[40 : 25] And I feel like in conferences and things like that, a lot of times we don't want to do that. It's easier to get bigger crowds, bigger numbers just by keeping it simple and just like, hey, just believe this.

It's going to be great. We want you to come back for the conference next year. For sure. Well, and I kind of was thinking and asking the Caraways and the Grassers who have come recently off the mission field, for your fresher perspective of what you've seen in the American church, have you seen these deceptive means and methods used to attract people?

I'm just interested in your perspective and I kind of, just to put you on the spot a little bit. So sorry. This is Sabin and his wife Kendra.

And so working at VOM now, we're 10 years in the mission field with IMB in China. So, you know. Yeah, nothing like being put on the spot.

Yeah, I think for us, I mean, as we were doing work overseas, we were in some ways really trying to fly under the radar because we were working in a hostile nation where the cost was pretty high if we were going to be caught, you know, sharing the gospel.

[41 : 49] And so having that tension of we want to be obedient to Christ, but also at the same time going, okay, how do we do this in an appropriate way where we can be faithful witnesses and not get kicked out of the country.

And so our work was primarily working out in villages with rural farmers. And so very quickly, I think we felt burdened that we needed to identify with Christ first and say, you know, first and foremost, this is who we are.

And then, you know, that was a big part of our identity for everyone that met us. But at the same time, we showed love and concern and care for our community and wanted to serve them.

And so that gave us opportunity then to speak into their lives and to be able to share the gospel in a very natural kind of way. So as we've come back to the church, I think, or come back to the church in America, I think that there has been just this tension of feeling like, you know, the smoke in the mirrors is that really, I don't know, the right way to present the gospel.

Really, I feel like living out what the church is supposed to be as being a community of love and care for one another. I mean, Jesus said, they will know you by your love.

[43 : 15] And so that, I think, is primarily what the outside world needs to see when they come into the church is this is a different kind of organization.

It is not an organization. It's an organism. It's a place of life. And it's a place where people care for each other. And when they see that, then it's distinct from what they see elsewhere.

So, I don't know if that makes any sense. I don't know what the question was. Yeah. What was the question again? Oh, just, and I appreciate all that Ben had to say, but just talking about as you come back, have you perceived some of these deceptive means or methods that the church is using to try to attract people to the church?

I think the majority of what I've noticed as we've been looking for a home church, really as we went back to Ada for a while in Oklahoma to our home church, noticing a lot of watered down gospel, a lot of, a lot of the congregation expecting the ministers to do the work of the church rather than the ministers equipping the church to do the work of reconciliation and to be able to go out and each one of us as members of the body going out and opening our mouths to the gospel, fearlessly making known that what we've been called to do and a lot of churches, the congregation sitting back and wanting to be entertained and I just keep thinking as we've gone through some of these questions and as Nick, sorry,

I keep thinking of his other name, had mentioned, you know, whenever we would talk to believers in China and as locals would lead others to Christ and the questions that we ask them are, you know, do you believe this?

[45 : 25] Like you said, there has to be some transformation. It's going to, we've got to count the cost and so we would say, okay, great. But when they say we want to be baptized, we would ask them, are you willing to die for this?

And that's a question right at baptism they have to answer because it's possible. And I think that's not the kind of hunger that I've seen in our churches, in a lot of churches, is, am I taking responsibility for the gospel as an ambassador of Christ?

Is that, do I really take it on as my job no matter what the cost is? What if I get fired from my job? Is that okay with me? You know, that's a cost and I think every one of us as believers have to carry that cost and count it and be willing to answer for it.

Good. Thank you both. Good insights and observation because I think in what we see a lot is what's popular for churches these days or what some people are looking for is a place where they can show up anonymously, be entertained and leave anonymously just like if you're going to a movie or something.

You know, how many times do you interact with the people in the movie theater as you walk in? You know, not very often. Maybe you do. But you know, it's like we're here to be entertained, to watch the show and then once it's over we'll leave and so it's very much about entertainment.

[47 : 04] It's very much about not knowing the people that you go to church with and not living life with them and then, yeah, the ministry is all up to whoever is on the staff instead of it being the church acting like a family who is encouraging and equipping and loving one another coming alongside one another through difficult times and just enjoying life together and working in unison to advance the kingdom of God together.

You had another comment? Kendra? I just wanted to encourage this church. I'm a very emotional person so I'm going to try not to cry right now. But this is the first church that we've been to that the moment we got here I felt the spirit was here.

And so, not that anyone here should say, look, we are awesome. but to be excited to be part of what God is doing I really believe that the spirit is in this church.

So. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. That means a lot. Isn't that encouraging to hear from people who have been visiting Highland Park and have been coming that they sense that?

That's really encouraging to hear. Thank you for sharing that. About the Caraways, do you want to add to in your time they've been in three years in Russia and now are back working with VOM.

[48 : 43] Have you noticed anything in the same ways with the church in America being more of deceptive in their means and methods to try to attract people and make disciples?

So, since we got back we've been really at two churches. This church and our home church in Fort Worth. And both are Reformed Southern Baptist churches. So, praise the Lord, we do not feel that we've seen anything deceptive or underhanded.

But I will say this, this is something that stood out to me on our return that I hadn't expected. I didn't come back and visit, so I was on the field straight for a thousand days and got back and back in my home church.

And the thing that surprised me is that the congregation was almost exactly the same. In three years really nobody had been added to the congregation.

A few people had moved in but of course they had moved from other churches. But my question, it just hit me, it was like, oh no, we're about a hundred people, we've had three years, we haven't seen unbelievers brought in and made into disciples.

[49 : 58] And that just really stood out to me because when you're on the field you're with unbelievers all the time and so we would have maybe a small group and there might be three or four believers in there and then ten or fifteen unbelievers that we were bringing in and we were doing this every week.

It was just very normal constantly bringing in unbelievers. But the thing that I really saw differently was the same hundred brothers and sisters that we had left three years before and there weren't other people being brought in.

And so it wasn't a condemnation, there was no deception but it was something that I saw differently when we returned. And it was something that concerned me just about the future of the church because if we're not making more disciples we're going to run into problems and the church isn't going to continue to expand.

I think something that stood out for me for three years of working with the international church was it was such a blessing to come back to the American church and to get to be in what felt familiar. But it was also really interesting because while we were overseas we had to just make do with a lot of things that we didn't have. We didn't have a worship team or we didn't have a church building or we didn't have just all the things that I associated with normal church.

[51 : 18] and I think the Lord used that in my life to help me be more open to experience or to change and as I came back and enjoyed church I also just felt this flexibility of like man everything that I thought was normal or that I defined as like this is the biblical way that we do church.

I was like this is a lot of this is the cultural way that we do church and I feel like that's a blessing to think about it that way and to have a little bit more flexibility to know like this is what feels normal to me but it would feel really weird to other people and it's okay for me to look at what feels normal and say like well how biblical is it and you know where can I try to make remove barriers so that my friends who are unbelievers can get to be involved in something that feels different but also like approachable to them.

Yeah. Good. Thank you guys. Sorry to put you on the spot but I'm glad that I did both of y'all. That's encouraging and convicting to hear that what they had to share too wasn't it?

we just have to be careful and as far as I know we're not using these deceptive means and methods but we should continually be on guard that we're not and just making sure that we're not morphing into one of those churches.

Amy you shared a video with me of a pastor riding around on the roller coaster on his stage. Okay. Oh Elsa? But gosh I mean so this pastor they've got this little roller coaster like you'd see at a little kiddie carnival yeah and he's riding around on it I don't even know what why or what the message was or anything yeah smoking lights and it's funny but it's not and it's really heartbreaking so you know we're not going to be using any money from the general fund to go buy a roller coaster or anything like that but it is heartbreaking it really is and it's easy for us to sit and to condemn which we should but also pray for those churches and those pastors who feel like that's important [54 : 06] I'm just going to look at the last question real quick I know it's almost 730 why are Christians often afraid to talk about Jesus outside of the church to unbelievers how oh yes my grammatical mistake Lee and whoever else Doyleen they usually do so good to catch my errors but you know I'm full of them so you know it's hard to keep up with all my errors how can our church most effectively share the gospel in Bartlesville okay yeah yeah it takes somebody real special to get it wrong like that so anyhow I think a lot of us know the answer for why we're afraid and so that's something that I just encourage you to really spend time in prayer about and consider as has been mentioned as Nick has mentioned too and what

Christ has said about what it means to follow him and the cost that comes with that you know he said you're not worthy of following him unless you're willing to pick up the cross daily the cross is an instrument of death and so every day dying to self that we may live for Christ let's not sugarcoat that as if it's an easy thing to do but it's something that we've been called to do and by the spirits empowering and enabling he can help us to do it thank you Lee all right all right all right our church is our church okay oh man I need the help I can get I appreciate the help that I have all right I'm going to close in prayer let's pray Heavenly Father thank you for this time that we have together to come on Sunday nights and for the conversations that we have and how you use them to help us sharpen one another

Lord it may break our hearts and it does to see so many churches abandoning the gospel to the point where we can't even say that they're truly the church or part of the church because the gospel they preach and they believe in is a different gospel is a false gospel and to see them lead so many astray and then to see churches that that are churches that do preach the gospel yet they are tempted to use deceptive means and methods in order to bolster their numbers or feel like the event that they had was a success or whatever the case may be and God it's easy for us to sit here and and to laugh and to joke primarily Lord I pray that it would break our hearts because we know that it breaks yours and so Lord we pray that we would be more in prayer for them we know that there's confusion in this world as to who

Jesus is but we know also that there are many churches that claim to preach the gospel and claim to be making disciples but the people who enter their buildings are just as confused and so Lord we pray that we would take to heart what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and our prayer would be that we would be the the types of followers the types of disciples who make disciples not

by watering down the gospel or or being afraid of not being perceived as a nice person by unbelievers but that Lord we would seek as Ben as Ben had mentioned to that we would seek to first be closely identified with Christ that in our lives in our speech in the way that we conduct ourselves that our primary concern would be that we are mirroring Christ that people would identify us with Christ that those opportunities would come for us to share the gospel and again that we would do so fearlessly that we do so also lovingly and that we would be clear in expressing and declaring the truth of what the gospel is what it means about sin about hell about God's wrath about grace though and the love that comes through Christ who is willing to die to take our place to endure that wrath to take our sins upon himself and give us eternal life in its place and so Lord we pray that we would be a church of disciples who make disciples not trying to attract and use deceptive methods this would be a place we pray Lord that when people come in they hear the gospel clearly communicated clearly preached clearly shared through our children's ministries through our youth ministries through our adult ministries Sunday school classes Bible studies book clubs certainly on Sunday morning wherever and whatever we're doing Lord that that would be a clear message that they clearly hear and that the results Lord then we trust are yours and so Lord be with us this week as we go back to our mission fields our neighborhoods our places of work and father help us to truly consider these questions in this scripture that we've read today that we would make sure that our greatest desire would be to be to be identified with [60 : 04] Christ and all that we do and we ask these things in Jesus name amen I bless you all I hope that you have a great week moment of Thank you.