

The Jesus of Suburbia

Chapter 1 "Revolution"

Jesus' birth dramatically changed how we should interact with the world. The author makes the case that the Gospel accounts of Matthew & Luke are calling people to live in opposition to the government leaders (Caesar & Herod) of the time.

What are some of the leaders/accepted ways of living/thoughts we are called to fight?

What messages of the world does Christ call us to live in opposition to?

Are you a revolutionary?

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Chapter 2 "The Narrow Road"

“But for those of us who see the darkness in our souls and the wickedness in our hearts, who feel the desperation and pain of this broken world, biblical principles aren't enough. I don't need enhancement; I need a new heart and a new mind. I need Jesus to invade my life and take it over. I don't want principles or religion or piety; I want him. I'm, desperate, I'm empty, and I am not content simply to be my same old self "new and improved;" I want to be something else entirely. I want to lay hold of the movement of Jesus and be turned inside out and upside down. But what I want is costly. Jesus never promises safety and comfort. He promises life with him and a renewed soul, heart, mind.” P 23

Neither biblical principles nor the Jesus of Suburbia will lead to this dangerous life which is possibly why both are so popular even though neither will ultimately satisfy.

Jesus calls us to live a dangerous life—a life that will call me into uncomfortable conversations and situations.

How does the call of the Gospel impact your life?

How is this call dangerous? What are your fears?

What are the costs in following the call of Jesus?

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Chapter 3 - "The Failure of Religion"

“The Old Testament is the story of a redeemed people and how they could live as a redeemed people” (P 46). The way I understand the use of the law for redeemed people is that the law (Sermon on the Mount, greatest commandment, etc) is to show us how to live in this world. The law was never given so we could earn points with God; all of our points have been already earned for us in Christ.

Jesus did not come to change our behavior, but our hearts. When our heart is changed, then our behavior will eventually change. The fact is that even as our heart is changed at conversion, it still needs guidance, which God provides through the Word, the Holy Spirit, counsel of believers—His Church.

I often struggle with making obedience to the law my goal rather than using it as a guideline for living and letting it lead me to Christ and trust in His obedience for my righteousness. As an example, when the Book of Church Order calls for the elders to visit those under their care, the committee that holds the elders accountable, can use the law to browbeat the elder, or they can use it to help the elder if he is struggling with his office. After an elder has been on sabbatical for one year, the committee meets with him not to force men to serve, but help the church better know the life of the elder so they can walk with them and provide any encouragement or relief with their role as elder.

How does Mike Erre define “religion” and “Christianity”?

Why should I change my behavior? What is my motivation for change? (Read: Romans 12:1-2)

How is falling in love with Jesus different from being a Christian?

How is empty religion more dangerous than outright immorality?

Has your desire to be right, caused you to miss out on Jesus?

“We are not lost despite our obedience to the Father, but because of it.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

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Chapter 4 "The Scandal of Grace"

According to the author, Grace equals forgiveness for actions that once brought condemnation.

Is that a true statement? If it is true, how are we called to love others in this manor?

The author talks about how the nation of Israel took direction from God and turned it into ways of judging and demeaning others.

What are some of the laws/rules/biblical stereotypes, we use today?

He also states the leaders of the day established rules that would keep them from interacting with unclean/sinners (gentiles, mental or physically disabled, poor).

Who are the people we judge as unworthy to sit at our tables?

Jesus gave us the example of dining with Zacchaeus, whom the Jews hated for collecting Romans tax plus a little extra for himself.

Who are the tax collectors in your life (the spouse of an ex-wife, the parent of the neighborhood bully, the boss who takes credit for your work)?

So much of this chapter is about how we (religious people) look at a person and their circumstance and judge them. The truth is that we all do it, whether we admit it or not.

If God loves us before we sin, and he knows we are going to commit sin and still forgives us then why do we still judge others?

What does it say about our own understanding of God's forgiveness and grace in our lives when we judge others?

The author once again challenged us:

Do we use the Gospel to narrow who we are to interact with?

The gospel frees me to be friends with everyone to reach into any class or community.

Do I take hold of that opportunity?

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Chapter 5 “The Danger of Theology”

It is possible to learn a lot about Jesus and still not *believe* in him. We may even intellectually agree with the information we have been taught, but that still falls short of what the Bible means by “belief.” This chapter answers the question, “What does it mean to *believe* in Jesus?” P 78-79

The author makes the point that most of us define “belief” as intellectually agreeing with true statements about Jesus, but he insists that “belief” is much more.

How have you defined “belief?” Do you agree with the above statement?

According to the author, how does the Bible define or describe “belief?”

What is “belief,” if it is more than just understanding and agreeing with statements of truth? (Read: James 2:14-26)

Biblical faith isn't for those who are content with their own religious performance. It's for those who are disgusted with who they are and what they have done. Faith in Jesus is for those at the end of their rope—those who have tried everything and realize nothing else can satisfy the deep needs of their soul. P89

Why do we have to realize that we are at the end of our ropes to have biblical faith?

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Chapter 6 “All Things Are Spiritual”

The point of the chapter is simple: all issues are spiritual issues. All disciplines are spiritual disciplines. We can't separate the spiritual from the physical, and much of our teaching on the spiritual life of following Jesus attempts to do just that. P101

Have you seen Christians divide issues into “secular” and “sacred?” What are some examples of this (music, film, books, clothes, video games, etc.)?

What impact does this kind of thinking have on your daily living?

Knowing that God cares about every detail of our lives, how does that change the way you view your everyday activities (i.e. driving, mowing the lawn, cleaning the house (men...yeah right), and your job)?

Jesus never called us to be believers—he calls us to be followers who believe. Jesus Christ is interested in you and your whole life—your problems, friends, family, job, and weakness. He's interested in your real personality. It's you he wants to save, and it's your whole life he wants to redeem. He wants it all surrendered to him—your work, your play, your relationships, your speech, your body, your dress, the way you buy things, what you do with your money—he wants it all. P105-106

Does knowing this change your view of redemption? If so, how?

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Chapter 7 “Mystery and Paradox”

This has *always* been the temptation of the people of God—to tame him. He increases mystery; we desire to remove it. He introduces paradox; we seek to solve it. We, like the Israelites before us, want a God who is understandable and predictable and safe. We want a God who makes sense and operates according to generally accepted accounting principles. But instead, we meet YHWH and his son, Ye’shua, who don’t play by our rules. P123

Using Job as an example, the author gives us a paradigm for the way Job understood God. He says, “If you do good things, God will reward and protect you. If you do bad things, you will suffer and be punished.” P 125

Do you see any similarities between Job and yourself?

In what areas of your life do you think this way (i.e. if I do “this” God will bless me and if I don’t do “that” God will bless me)?

How does this thinking actually prevent trust/faith in God?

God often uses mystery, paradox, and pain to peel us away from our systems that prevent true faith in Jesus. The author writes, “Sickness invades our bodies. Our finances go south. Our loved ones walk away from what is good and right. All of this forces us to move into trusting God. Often God has to bring us to the point of desperation so we will learn how to trust.” P129

Faith in God comes when we see God in the midst of mystery and pain, when God strips us of our props and religious manipulations and reveals himself to us in the midst of our emptiness. Job grew in his faith and learned that whatever needed to be taken care of would be taken care of. P131

How have you seen God do this in your life?

What makes this faith so hard to have?

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Chapter 8 “The Church As Subversive Community”

Consumerism is the god of this age. I spend my days choosing between countless goods and services, all designed to cater to my preferences and whims....I spend all day, every day, deciding what I want and what will be most pleasing to me....My life is based on my right to choose. P136

Do you agree with these statements?

Does this attitude find its way into your thinking about your role in the church? If so, how?

So it is no surprise that this mentality creeps into the church. Many of us come to God with our wants, desires, and preferences in primary view. But God intended the church to be guided and powered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the mission of Christ on the earth, which is to make disciples of all nations and to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

A central theme of the book of Revelation is that unbelievers were won over for the kingdom by the sacrificial death of the witnesses and by God's validation of them. Evil is conquered not by force but through sacrificial love from the lions who are lambs. P 150

Opportunities of martyrdom are those daily moments we die for our faith (i.e. in our marriages, how we treat people, the attitudes we have towards our bosses). One of the things that must die is the idea that God exists to give me what I want. I must die to the notion that my life is still my own. My preferences, my dreams, and my ambitions, must all be put to death if I truly follow Jesus. P152

What are some ways you can be a “martyr” at home, at work, or at play?

What impact would living a life as a martyr have on the church, the family, and your non-Christian friends?

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Chapter 9 “The Redemption of Culture”

Residing in our inspired Bibles are words of people who did not know God or Jesus and yet said things that were true. The moral: engage the culture around us means that we claim truth where ever we find it.” P 164

Why is it important to “contextualize” the Gospel? What is the danger?

The author writes, “All truth is God’s truth,” do you agree? Explain.

With this in mind [to say that Jesus is everywhere] we may argue that anytime someone comes into contact with truth, goodness, and beauty, they are coming into contact with Jesus Christ. They may not know it is him, but it is Jesus nevertheless. Can we not suggest that when we study cosmology, geography, biology, and history—any countless areas of study—that we, as the community of faith, are learning and/or worshiping Jesus Christ? Can we not appreciate him as designer, architect, creator, engineer, and mathematician?

How should knowing this effect the way we view movies, non-Christian music, and non-Christian books as well the given areas of study?

What is an example of truth being revealed in a non-Christian context (i.e. movie, book, song, etc.)? Explain.

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Chapter 10 “Show and Tell”

If it is true that most objections to Christianity are becoming moral in nature, then perhaps it is time to reexamine the “demonstration” part of the ministry of Jesus. Much good has been done on how to proclaim the message (the tools of evangelism), what message to proclaim (theology and doctrine), and the defense of the message (the study of apologetics). But less has been done on what it looks like to embody the message of Jesus as we share it. This, the demonstration is the Gospel, is now as critical as proclamation. P 180

Why is “demonstration” as important as “proclamation?” Explain.

What happens when “demonstration” and “proclamation” contradict? What damage does it cause? (Read: Romans 2:17-24)

The author correctly points out that all Christians are missionaries, not just those who are “sent off.” Then he writes, “Who, then, are the best missionaries, the best demonstrators of the Gospel? The pastors? No way. We’re “paid” to be religious. I think it is the mortgage brokers, moms, students, janitors, baristas, and executives who fill our churches. How does God reach lawyers? By dressing up some of his children as lawyers and putting them to work. How does God reach college students? By dressing up his children as college students and sending them off to school. Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, as you are going through life, “make disciples of all nations.” P 181

Knowing this, how should this effect the way you view your work and what you do?

Do those you work or play with know about your faith? Why or why not?

How are your co-worker and friends different because of your relationship with Jesus?