

Irresistible

The Good Book
Matthew 5: 38-48
September 29, 2019

We've been talking over the last few weeks about the irresistible qualities of our faith and why we believe that if we are going to change the world we need to revive the irresistible nature of our faith. Why, because we believe that Jesus was and is irresistible but that the Church and those of us called Christians – the followers of Jesus Christ – are easily resistible. It's easy for people to say that you can believe what you want and I'll believe what I want and if it works for you it's great for you but, don't try to "force" your religion on me. Look, we shouldn't be forcing a religion on anyone. We should be presenting a dynamic and exciting relationship with the Savior of the world in such a way that the people who know us and the people who hear about us want to believe what we believe about Jesus.

The problem is, we – the Church – have not been all that good at being a positive and convincing reflection of the Jesus we say we believe in. There are plenty of places in history where believers did things that seemed very un-Jesus. So, instead what we do is we tell people to read the Bible to find out what Christians are supposed to look like. And when people do read the Bible they come back and say things like...why are you doing such-and-such, the Bible says we're not supposed to do that. Or better yet, they come back and ask why Christians are not doing the things Jesus taught or acting the way Jesus acted towards people or criticizing each other or siding with political parties or all of the other things believers do that are contrary to what we read in the Bible...probably because most Christians don't read the Bible. And some of those people who have read the Bible have come to us and ask questions about the parts that don't make sense or the parts that we've been told to "just believe" in and we haven't had the answers...because that's not what faith is all about. **The Christian faith is not about defending the Bible it's about living like Jesus.** We are not going to win people by spending all our time defending the Bible. Why, because the Bible is really hard to defend sometimes.

There are some things in the Bible that are tough and that make Christians blush or make us scratch our heads and wonder what that's about. There are places in the Bible where the Bible seems to contradict itself. Is there one angel at the tomb when Jesus rose or were there two, were they inside the tomb or outside the tomb? Does God really say "wipe them all out" or was that just what they wanted to hear? Do angels and demons really exist? And we end up talking with people who have access to more information at their fingertips than any other time in the history of the world and who openly struggle with the Bible. The number one given reason that people under 35 leave the church and the faith is because they don't believe anymore. Something happened at one point that challenged them, and, in that challenge, they read something or heard something or saw something that caused them to question their faith and "The Faith" and they chose to no longer believe.

And if all our faith hinges on believing that the whole Bible is true and accurate and perfect...then all it takes is one thing to be questioned, one thing to fall apart, one card to come out of place and the whole thing comes tumbling down. And in defending the faith we've told people that the entire Bible is reliable and true. And in doing so, we've set up a situation where if one part of the Bible isn't true then the whole Bible isn't true and if that's the case, it's easy to not believe anymore or to never believe in the first place. That is fragile. If Jonah and the whale seems impossible then the resurrection must be impossible too. But, **what makes our faith so powerful**, so profound, so amazing **is that** for hundreds of years before there was a thing called the Bible **people** spread the message, gave their lives, and helped others to **believe** – not in something they read but – **in something they saw**. Jesus came back from the dead and they saw it with their own eyes and would not change course from that message even in the face of death. The thing that is going to make Christianity irresistible is that Jesus came to earth, lived like us even though he was God, died in our place for our sins, and rose from the dead so that we could have an eternal relationship with the Father in heaven. That's what changed the world back then and that's what will change the world today. That's why we have to anchor the faith to the event – the resurrection - that started a movement that gave us the Bible – the Good Book. If we do not anchor our faith in a deep and lasting relationship with Jesus, the skeptics will rule the day and we cannot let the skeptics dictate the faith for the next generation.

It's time for Christians to step up because there is a generation who is analyzing and fact checking and questioning constantly. Google makes it easy to read a thousand differing opinions on any given topic. The best way for this generation to have a relationship with Jesus is for them to see it in action. Christians are called to act in ways that reflect what they believe. That means we need to get straight what we believe. Part of the problem is, we've got the Old Testament telling us one thing and the New Testament telling us another. We've got old covenant with Israel saying one

thing and **Jesus** saying things like: "You've heard it said...but I tell you" and he goes on to **proclaim the New Covenant**. We are religiously schizophrenic. We go on Daniel fasts and then we lay the Old Testament beside Paul or Jesus who ate whatever they wanted with people who were outside of the accepted circles. We look at Sampson and see a man who could not make wise decisions being seen as a hero when the New Testament calls us to be wise and to be spiritually strong over physical strength.

We tell people that there is an Old Covenant and a New Covenant and most of the modern Protestant world puts the two in a blender and tries to live according to both...at the same time. That doesn't work. We hold onto Old Covenant laws and rules that were brilliant when they were given to the Jews. But, when Jesus came along and said that those rules no longer work under the New Covenant we somehow feel bad if we make the adjustment with him. We are people of the New Covenant that Jesus ushered into existence when he walked out of the tomb on Easter morning. Careless mixing and matching of the old and the new covenants and the rules and values make the faith we have resistible. Twenty years after the resurrection the early church leaders decided that the Gentile converts were not obligated to follow the law of Moses. Jesus finalized the that covenant. It no longer had a relevancy for those who would believe. Jesus was doing something new, brand new.

The Christian faith began at Easter and it's time that Christians live in such a way that shows the world that the resurrection event is what changes lives. It is people living what they believe that will make a difference in this world. The book we put so much stock into is written hundreds of years after the event of Easter - as a resource. It is not the other way around. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution did not found our nation. The company handbook did not start the company. The Bible did not launch Christianity. I'm not saying that the Bible isn't the most important book ever...I believe it is and will always be. What I am saying is that **we need to start living the faith the way Jesus taught us**, the way the Apostle Paul taught, the way Peter taught. Each of them reminded us of what the old covenant said and how the new covenant brought life out of the law of death.

Look at what Jesus says in the passage for this message. Listen to it again: ³⁸ "You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. ³⁹ But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. ⁴⁰ If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. ⁴¹ If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. ⁴² Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow. ⁴³ "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

If we are hoping people get eternity because of a book, we are no better off than the generation that was alive when Jesus walked the earth. The hope then was that people will follow the Law and make it into heaven by checking off the list. Multiple New Covenant writers state that this thought process just doesn't work. We need to proclaim the words of Jesus by living them out in a way that people around us cannot dispute and in a way that transforms the world we live in. Your story is more valuable than thousands of words and it's time for us to get back to living the story in us instead of just pointing to the Stories people find hard to believe. In this skeptical generation we are back to the day when people will not believe what they read but, they will believe what they see being lived out.

Look at some of the things **the New Covenant calls us to do**: return evil for good, be kind in the face of brutality, be generous beyond what is expected, love those who are considered enemies and those who persecute believers. Love even the worst and love beyond the norm. We are to go the extra mile, give more than what was asked for, and love in spite of our prejudices, our preconceived notions, and our biases.

It is this kind of living that will help people know the life altering, world changing love of God that shook the world on Easter morning. We are New Covenant people. We have been saved, forgiven, redeemed, set free and cut loose. Why would we reach back beyond the cross to an Old Covenant that was temporary and inferior to the New Covenant that Jesus brought with him when he walked out of that grave? Look at what the Bible says in Hebrews 8:6-7 about the Old and New Covenant: *But now Jesus, our High Priest, has been given a ministry that is far superior to the old priesthood, for he is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises. If the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second covenant to replace it.*

As New Covenant people we are called to live out the message of Jesus and Him above all other things...including all the other things in the Bible. The apostle Paul said it best as he wrote to the early assembly of believers in Corinth. *For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* Paul knew a lot about the law and the Old Covenant. He had been a scholar and a leader among the Jews. His decision was that he would leave behind the Old Covenant and grasp ahold of the New Covenant and live his life in such a way that everyone would find what he has experienced in his life and he could not turn back from, ever.

One of the questions we need to ask is this...**will I live out my life according to the new life Jesus gave to me on Easter morning** in such a way that others might come to know him as their savior and lord? Who here today will start living differently now because of this new understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us? Is it you? It's time for us...those who say they believe, to be a part of making Jesus and the faith irresistible again.