

This Sunday, Ed Strong wrapped up our 700BC series with the message “What makes you different?”

Isaiah 53 covers Christ, the person, (53:1-3) and His sufferings (53:4-9). The humiliation, and exaltation of Christ, are minutely described; with the blessings to mankind from His death. (53:10-12).

Isaiah beheld Christ, the Servant. John the Baptist saw Christ the Lamb, Pilot beheld Christ, the Man, the King. John the apostle saw Christ the Lion. The most important question we should be asking ourselves as Christ-followers is; Who do we see Jesus as? We live in a nation that is 80% Christian but yet we have shocking stats on HIV infection rates, rape, adultery etc... What Jesus do we behold? As our relationship with God grows, our revelation of Whom He is should grow deeper so that it alters our soul.

In John 5, Jesus attends a feast in Jerusalem at a time when religious fervour was at an absolute high. Here He encounters a group of very educated people. This group of people had memorised the first five books of the Bible. Jesus says to them: “*And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.*” John 5:37-38.

In Exodus 33 we have an account of God wanting to destroy the Israelites for their sin. He says that His presence will no longer dwell among them and that He will send an angel to be with them as they journey to the promised land. But Moses intercedes in their behalf for the breach that sin had made between them. Moses is earnest with God in prayer, and prevails, for a promise of His presence with the people. Then Moses said to him, “*If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?*” Exodus 33:15-16. God agrees and shows His presence by descending in a cloudy pillar.

What distinguishes US as Christ-followers? We are not distinguished by our passion and devotion, our sense of community, our knowledge of the Bible... The thing that distinguishes us is His presence and His love in our hearts.

When you consider the ‘thief on the cross’ and the high priest who condemned Jesus, who would you think would be most likely to lead you to Christ? The ‘thief’ never said a prayer, got baptised, or attended a life group, but beheld something in Jesus and it changed him radically!

So how do we reflect God’s presence in us?

### 1. We are called to declare not defend

In Acts 17, Paul arrives in Athens and is grieved in his heart by the idolatry he sees: *Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god.* Acts 17:22-23. He doesn’t then try to defend God but

goes on to tell them about God (declare): *The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’* Acts 17:24-28.

In Colossians 1:24 Paul says: *Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.* Is it possible that the afflictions of Jesus were incomplete? No, Jesus paid the price for salvation in full on the cross; however the Church is responsible for the delivery of salvation - unless the church rises to this, salvation will never be complete.

### 2. We are called to demonstrate not debate

We can’t influence people on Christ’s presence by debating, because when it comes to debating, the better speaker will always win. Jesus did not debate. When Jesus and Barabbas are before Pilot, Pilot was influenced because Jesus said nothing! *When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.* Matthew 27:12-14.

In John 19 when Jesus comes out wearing a crown of thorns Pilot says: “*Here is the man!*” (v5). But eventually Pilot’s soul is disturbed: *From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting... (v12) and he says to those that want to crucify Jesus: “Here is your king” (v14).* He saw something in Jesus which altered his view of Him.

The Church is not meant to be silent, but we shouldn’t get involved in debates. We need to demonstrate who Jesus is. And the way we do that is through the authenticity of our relationship with Him. Through love that crosses borders through the Holy Spirit: *And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* Romans 5:5. As we behold Jesus, there is a stirring in our hearts of love that wants to cross borders - economic borders, age borders, cultural borders...

Ezekiel 47 speaks of a river that flows from the temple, and as it flows towards the East it becomes deeper and deeper. Due east from Jerusalem is a desert. This desert is representative of spiritual barrenness. The further into the ‘wilderness’ you venture, the deeper the river. This is the river of love, life, light, salvation... If it’s shallow at the source (the Church), it’s deepest around the people who are furthest from God!

What makes YOU different? How do you declare and demonstrate Christ?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from this Sunday's message?
2. Is there someone who has had a significant impact in your life through the way that they declare/demonstrate the presence and love of God?
3. Consider the price Jesus paid for our sin, that wasn't his debt to pay. If someone else took the responsibility and consequences for a major mistake that you made? Would you be willing to let it happen? Why or why not?
4. Read Isaiah 53:9-12. What is the first word that comes to mind when you consider what Jesus did that Isaiah describes: He gave his life for us?
5. When have you treated your sin lightly? When have you minimised or excused wilful departure from God's ways?