

February 26, 2017

Authentic Christianity
How Passionate are You?
Mark 10:17-22

Opening words: Webster defines “authentic” as: genuine or real; not false or copied. The issue of being authentic is important. Our world will tolerate many things, but our world will not tolerate a hypocrite. It is true in the secular world and it is true in the life of the church. In the life of the church, there is no room for hypocrites. It is not enough to know the words of the creeds; we must live a life worthy of Jesus. We must be authentic Christians.

This is the final sermon in my eight-part sermon series, *Authentic Christianity*. True Christianity is designed to be life-altering. It should affect your actions and opinions. We are looking at characteristics that should be within you. To date, we have looked at compassion, hope, faith, perseverance and love. Last week, we looked at forgiveness. Today, I want you to examine your priorities. Let me ask you this question: *How passionate are you?*

Today, we are instructed from the Gospel of Mark. Some believe this Gospel was written as early as the year A.D. 50. Others believe it was written as late as the year A.D. 70. Regardless, it is obvious that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source in their writings. John does his own thing. Remember, Mark was not a disciple, but he was a friend or associate of Peter, the Rock. Through the centuries, this Gospel has been referred to as Peter’s Gospel. Mark wrote this Gospel to the Gentile Christians in Rome. Our scripture reading for today is Mark 10:17-22.

Mark 10:17-22 ¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” ²⁰ “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

In 381 A.D. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote:

He began His ministry by being hungry, yet He is the Bread of Life.
Jesus ended His earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet He is the Living Water.
Jesus was weary, yet He is our rest. Jesus paid tribute, yet He is the King.
Jesus was accused of having a demon, yet He cast out demons.

Jesus wept, yet He wipes away our tears.
Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet He redeemed the world.
Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet He is the Good Shepherd.
Jesus died, yet by His death He destroyed the power of death.

Do I have to say it? Do I really have to say it? The only thing that really matters in the life of the church is Jesus. Everything else in the life of the church is secondary. If you can agree with that statement, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the tenth chapter of Mark. Jesus is in Judea, which means he is being received with mixed reviews. He is on his way to Jerusalem for his appointment with the cross. As he travels, a man approaches him and falls on his knees. We know the man as the "rich young ruler". From our perspective, he has it all. He is rich, so he doesn't spend sleepless nights worrying about money. He is young, so he doesn't spend his sleepless nights worrying about his health. He is a ruler, so he has influence. The only thing he lacks is spiritual peace. He asked Jesus the question we have all asked, *"what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* Jesus responds to his question by reminding him of six of the Ten Commandments: Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony. Honor your father and mother. The man freely admits, he had followed those commandments since he was a boy. He hoped his salvation was at hand. The problem is, the story doesn't end there. The story continues by saying, "Jesus looked at him and loved him". Then comes the most painful line in the story. Verse 21 quotes Jesus. That verse says, *"One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."* The story ends by saying, the rich young ruler left Jesus in a depressed state because he had great wealth. Can I be honest with you?

I have preached this passage many times. I have heard many more sermons on the story of the rich young ruler. Most of the time the topic that is addressed is money. It is hard to look at this story and not look at the money. After all, money is important. It is not just true in our generation. It has been true in every generation. If you do not believe me, then try to live without money. Your lifestyle and standard of living will change. However, this time I want to look at this story from another angle. It is not just a story about money.

It is a story about priorities. The rich young ruler had done some good things. He hadn't murdered a single person. He had been sexually faithful to his wife. He had never shoplifted a single item. He had never lied in court. He respected his parents and cared for their basic needs. There is nothing negative about him in this story. He was a good man, but doing good wasn't good enough. The only thing he didn't do was follow Jesus, because he wasn't passionate about Jesus. It isn't just his story. It is our story as well. Good is not good enough. In the life of the church, we must be passionate about Jesus. Billy Graham once said, *"Make sure of your commitment to Jesus Christ, and seek to follow Him every day. Don't be swayed by the false values and goals of this*

world, but put Christ and His will first in everything you do.” So, let me ask you this question: Is your life just full of good things? Or, are you passionate about Jesus? This is our question for you today: How passionate are you? If that question makes you think, say **“Amen!”**

Less than a week ago, I was talking to my sister. She had her annual lunch with a group of college friends. They like to get caught up on one another’s lives. Some things are good and some things are bad. One of her old friends is named Elizabeth. I don’t know why, but they have always called her Beefer. She lives in a rural area in northeast Ohio. My sister reported, Beefer was upset about her church. It was down to just a little handful of people. They struggle to meet their tiny budget. The problem is not just biological death. The problem is, the healthy members are leaving. My sister asked, “Why are they leaving?” She expected to hear that the sermons were boring, there was conflict between members, or the minister is too handsome ☺ . According to Beefer, the reason people were leaving the church was: autism. My sister asked for more information and she got it. The pastor has a son who has autism. The pastor loves his son, so he developed a service for autistic people. It worked, and several families in the area started to attend. The problem began when the autistic children intimidated the rest of the congregation. The people complained, and the pastor dug in. He said, the autistic need a place to worship. Helping the autistic is a good thing. He wasn’t wrong. The autistic do need a place to worship, but it is a complex situation. That story illustrates one point.

Like the rich young ruler, good things are not good enough. It is not just that church’s story; it is every church’s story. It is our story. The church is not in the good deeds business. The church is in the disciple making business. Our passion for Jesus unites us into a single church, maximizing our efforts. A church that lacks passion for Jesus will divide and become territorial. Churches who lack passion for Jesus become a collection of little kingdoms where only good works are done. If that makes you think, say, **“Amen!”**

Have you ever considered how many good things happen within this church? It is hard to find this church building empty. Five days a week, the daycare, The Children’s Academy of Ohio, is open. It provides a service to the community and generates some income for us. The kids are great. Every Tuesday when the fish sticks are served, I eat lunch with the children. Daycare is a good thing! Five days a week, the Mahoning Valley District Office is opened. They are our local connection to our denomination; they keep track of all our forms and provide some income for us. The District Office is a good thing. On Mondays and Wednesdays, Boy Scouts meet in our building, rent free. I can say nothing against our Boy Scouts. They are a good thing. We are also the home of two Girl Scout troops. I love that group because they never ask me for a thing. You know it is true. Girl Scouts are a good thing! On Tuesday nights, an AA group meets here. I like those people because they are trying to be better people and they are trying to help others be better people. AA is a good thing! I am proud that on election day our

church is open to the community to vote. I am all for voting because it is fundamental to our democracy. Voting is a good thing! On Tuesday mornings, the Helping Hand is open. People come to buy second hand clothing and save money. The money raised goes to help the struggling in our community. Helping Hand is a good thing! Also, on Tuesday mornings, the sewing ladies show up and create all kinds of things. I will never forget taking their sundresses to Haiti to give to little girls who had nothing. Those little girls squealed with excitement. The sewing group is a good thing! Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on? The choir, the TOGGLE Team, youth group, Sunday school, mission trips, food collections, chicken dinners, retired nurses, Daughters of God, Circle of Friends, United Methodist Women, Men's Breakfast, Woodland Haven, the pavilion, church maintenance and cleaning and everything else are all good things. This is the problem: Good things are not good enough. If you don't believe me, then ask the rich young ruler. He walked away sad. Through the eyes of God, good things are just that, good things. The only thing that really matters is Jesus. I want you to listen to this next line. It is easy to become passionate about your good things and ignore Jesus. How passionate are you about Jesus? If that question makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

Several years ago, I officiated at a wedding. The couple had no connection to this church. They found my name on a list and called me. The rehearsal was on Friday night and the couple invited me to the rehearsal dinner. Kathryn was out of town, so I accepted the invitation. At the dinner, I learned about the wedding party. They had all been friends from childhood. As a matter of fact, all the groomsmen had grown up on the same street. They were an impressive group. Each one had gone on to excel in their field of expertise. When the bride and groom began to pass out their gifts to the wedding party, I expected the groom to give his ushers a bottle of expensive liquor or an overpriced cigar. He didn't. He gave them something different. He gave them a picture. For each usher, the groom went back to the old neighborhood and took a picture of their simple childhood homes. He placed each picture into a picture frame that read: NEVER FORGET WHERE YOU CAME FROM. It was a humbling experience for those young men. One of the ushers opened his gift and was too choked up to voice his appreciation. Maybe that is what we all need to do?

We all need to remember where we came from. We all need to remember our spiritual journey began on the day we met Jesus. Ask the rich young ruler. Good works aren't good enough. They aren't going to earn you your salvation. What you have to do is follow Jesus. Do you remember the words of Billy Graham? *"Make sure of your commitment to Jesus Christ, and seek to follow Him every day. Don't be swayed by the false values and goals of this world, but put Christ and His will first in everything you do."* Let me ask you our question of the day one more time. How passionate are you?