

I. Intro

- A. Welcome to Christ Church. Great to have you here. Greetings to those
1. I was going to say that I loved my time in Ghana. That is not the right word. I was very glad to be there. It was challenging and encouraging and meaningful. The people are delightful. And the work we are partnering with them in – the schools, fresh water, vocational training, medical care, the churches – are very strategic. Thank you for helping make all of that possible.
- B. So, it's getting to be Go Time and I am excited. I hope you are as well.
1. For starters, I'm looking forward to One Church One Night.
 - a) Today at 5:00 at the Crossroads campus – which some of you may have never been to. Go north to 137, turn left (West). It is 3 miles past Milwaukee on north side of the road. It is a white church with a tall white steeple that looks like the Lake Forest campus. Or head North and follow your nose. We are gathering for worship, baptism and dinner – which is being brought to you by the Holy Smokers, who are already there cooking.
 - b) Tonight is chance to feel your soul and your belly. You should be there. Show up.
 2. I am also excited about next week when we kick-off our study of Exodus. It is such an important book. So good and suddenly so trendy.
 - a) It's almost too trendy for me. I am too old to be trendy. No one wants to even see me try. But suddenly, everywhere I look I am hearing about Exodus. Not just that churches are going to doing Exodus series. There is that. But what has my attention is all the others focusing on it.
 - (1) Leon Kass – the prominent political philosopher and Great Books advocate who taught at U of C and Harvard - recently came out with a 700-page commentary on Exodus.
 - (2) Dennis Prager – the conservative Jewish radio host and the founder of Prager University – rolled out a 500-page commentary on Exodus.
 - (3) And Jordan Peterson – the Canadian psychiatrist and author who went viral a few years ago for a handful of reasons – has rolled out a series of lectures on Exodus.
 - b) You'll have to show up this fall to find out all the reasons it has become so hot, but I will give you a hint. As our society crumbles – as more and more people misunderstand what it means to be human and to be free – people are going back to look at what God told the Jews and going, “Oh yeah – that is why, even though most civilizations do not survive more than 200 years, the Jews keep rolling on.”
- C. I am excited about tonight and next week, and I am excited about this morning, and the opportunity I have to implore you to take a next step.
1. Last week we finished James. Next week we start Exodus. This week stands alone. I learned years ago to put a buffer in the schedule because something was likely to come up. This year I am giving this day over to Paul's comments in I Cor. 3.
 2. It is his appeal to the Christians living in Corinth:

- a) to rightly order their lives, their loves and their fears so they can live a life that works.
- b) To decide that they are going to do what needs to be done to develop an inner world that is stronger than their outer world.
- c) To commit to being more shaped by Jesus and the Gospel of grace than they are by whatever crazy trend their culture is peddling at the moment.

3. I almost went in another direction. I almost did a recap on James. It's such a practical, action-oriented letter. There is so much there that having finished it, it seems like it's time to start over.

- a) I listened to it a couple times this week. About a year ago a friend got my attention with a call to read the Bible fast and slow. Most of the time we read it slow – a chapter or a few verses. Which is great. We need to read it slow, but we need to read it fast as well. And one of the easiest ways to do that is to listen to it read – to use an app and have it read.

D. I almost went back to James, but Paul's comments in I Cor. 3 have been unsettling me. He makes it clear that in order to live well we need to grow, but many people do not. I think this is an important moment to hear this because the volume and velocity of our culture is becoming stronger. And that means, we need to be stronger. We need to be more intentionally following Christ, because we are no longer floating in a stream with a five mile current. We are now in white water. The skills – the level of spiritual maturity that was sufficient when you were floating down the lazy river in an innertube doesn't work in the rapids.

E. You can turn to I Corinthians 3. As you do so let me note that:

- 1. Corinth was a large, wealthy, Roman city – a big commercial center located in Greece about 40 miles west of Athens.
- 2. It had been destroyed by Romans 46 BC. But Julius Caesar had it rebuilt it and it had quickly grow to a half million people.
- 3. Paul showed up there on his second missionary journey and spent 18 months planting a church there that had both Jews and Greeks in it.
 - a) It's the place where he met Aquila and Priscilla – who became fellow tentmaking missionaries with him.
 - b) He returned there at least twice. And wrote several letters back to them. At least one, perhaps more that we do not have – so we try to guess what was in it.
- 4. Lots of topics are covered in the two we have, including:
 - a) freedom, spiritual gifts, generosity, love, the resurrection, division in the church, immorality in the church, a fair bit about sex – because there was a large cult to the goddess Aphrodite and that involved a lot of temple prostitutes and caused a lot of confusion. (The city had so many prostitutes that Plato referred to prostitutes as “Corinthians.”)
 - b) It is in Corinth that Paul has to defend his ministry and his calling as an apostle because false teachers were leading the Corinthians astray.

II. Let me walk us through this passage. I Cor 3.

A. **Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.** Getting milk is not a bad thing if you are an infant. There is a time when milk is what is needed. But if you are healthy, you grow – you get teeth and start eating other types of food. Paul is frustrated with the Corinthians because they have stalled. They are behind. They are acting like infants when they are not.

B. V2b: **Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.** You are still being shaped more by the world than by the Spirit. You are still taking your cues from the latest trends being introduced by the sailors, not by the Gospel. Your outer world is shaping your inner world. You are not being shaped by the Holy Spirit. Your life is not described by the fruit that He brings. When people look at you they do not think: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness,

1. Which, by the way, have to all be present. Some of you were born kind or gentle. You're a 2 on the Enneagram. But you lack courage or whatever you lack..

C. **For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?** This is the second time he has used that word *mere*. And when that happens, we need to pay attention to it. It is being emphasized. What does it mean? NT Wright says it's hard to translate, but the emphasis is on being very deliberately "only human." You have failed to go beyond the natural. You are doing things on your own effort.

D. We then hear about the presenting problem. **For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?** The Corinthians are claiming sides over stupid things. Paul and Apollos – and Peter will get added to the list later in the chapter – are not pastors at the same church, but leaders of the movement more generally. And they have itinerant ministries. They are saying the same thing, but people are acting like one is more special than the other and making up teams. And Paul says – no one should think they are on my team because I don't have a team.

E. V5: **What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.** He will further develop the idea that the messenger is not important for about the next ten verses.

F. Dropping down to V16: **Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?** Focus on the Holy Spirit not on me or Apollos. V21: **So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Stone in Aramaic) or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.**

III. So, there are problems in Corinth and Paul is addressing a specific one. If you read through his letters to the Corinthians, you can see that they have all kinds of problems.

A. They are fighting over styles of worship and spiritual gifts. They have sexual sin. Here they are fighting over leaders.

B. The fact that they are having problems is not a surprise. Paul would go somewhere, share the Gospel, call people to faith, spend a little bit of time establishing a church. Appoint leaders – among people who had not been Christians for very long – then leave to go do it somewhere else. And then write letters to clean up the messes he had left behind.

IV. But the real issue here – the issue behind the issue – is that there are a bunch of people who are not growing – not being increasingly shaped by the Holy Spirit.

A. Whose inner world is more shaped by their outer world than the other way around.

B. Who are focused on the wrong things. Who are living today in light of today.

C. The problem is that people are not growing. Let me be clear here.

1. We cannot fix all the problems. Not in a broken world.

2. And indeed, it is not a problem that there are people who are spiritually immature in the church. A healthy church should always have people who are spiritually immature, because there should always be people coming to faith.

D. But Paul is frustrated because there are people who came to faith a long time ago who are still drinking milk when they should be eating solid food. Is that you?

E. Some people have been Christians for twenty years – but instead of being twenty years closer to Christ, they spent the last twenty years doing year one over and over again. Is that you?

F. In this passage Paul makes it clear that we are expected to grow.

1. I often note that we are invited to grow, because spiritual growth is its own reward. Life works better as we grow.

2. But that is a different sermon. I Corinthians 3:3 is a bit of a scold. Does it apply to you?

V. What we are dealing with is Question Five – which I have talked about before – is: what is expected of me?

A. I finally finished the book that was supposed to be done last year.

1. So embarrassing. Getting a book 95% done and then stalling is like moving a football team 95 yards and then failing to put points on the board. It will be out this fall.

2. The book is on how we know what we know – which is Question Seven. Part of my problem is that I kept rewriting the first part because I found myself more animated by Question Five than by Question Seven.

B. There are Seven Questions. Our worldview – the lens through which we see the world – is shaped by our answers to seven questions:

1. Question One: Who or what matters most? Who - or what – is of ultimate importance? What is the highest good? The *Summum Bonum*. Who is God. What am I going to pretend is God.

2. Question Two: Who am I? What is my ultimate identity? How am I to think about myself? Am I a child of God with an eternal soul and profound value, or am I the accidental exhaust of the collision of space, time and chance? Am I neither? Am I both? How am I supposed to understand myself.

3. Question Three: Where did I come from? (As you can see, these questions all tie together. There is a need for some consistency).

4. Question Four: What went wrong? Or, what is going wrong? What problem are we trying to fix? Why is there so much pain, suffering and injustice in the world? Why all the death? Is this just the way it is? It doesn't seem like it. But, if something went wrong, what was it, who is to blame and how do we fix it?

5. Question Five: What is expected of me? What am I supposed to do? What does it look like to live a good life?

6. Question Six: What happens when I die?

7. Question Seven: Where do I look for answers? Am I to look inside myself? Trust tradition? Use reason? Is there some kind of answer key – i.e., has God weighed in? As I already implied, all seven questions are significant. But as soon as we read through the first six, we realize how important question seven is.

C. The book is about Question Seven. This sermon is about Question Five: what is expected of me?

1. This is Solomon's big question in Ecclesiastes. He frames it a bit differently. He opens by asking "What's the point? What are we here for?" And he cycles through all kinds of concerns. He goes to some dark places, "Vanity of vanities." Everything under the sun is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

2. He is trying to process what he is supposed to do. And we find him saying:

a) I tried the "be good" for others. That doesn't really work.

b) I tried the "eat, drink and be merry," but that gets old.

c) I decided to create my own values and meaning, and that is a house of cards.

3. Eventually he comes around. At the end of Ecclesiastes – the very, very end – he gives his answer. The last two verses of the last chapter read: **Now all has been heard here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.**

VI. Solomon and Paul are singing different verses of the same song.

A. Solomon is telling us to live a life in which we have rightly ordered our loves and our fears. Paul is saying, "get after it already. Grow up already. Be shaped by Jesus and the Gospel already. Do the hard work already. Cultivate an inner world that is stronger than your outer world."

B. How are you doing? Please understand:

1. The path of least resistance will not get you where you want to go.

2. The easiest thing to do is do last year over again. Or to go where the culture takes you. A lot of really smart people who want to live your life for you – shape what you think and do and buy – wake up every morning thinking about how to get you to buy what they want you to buy. Do what they want you to do. Think what they want you to think. And at this moment they have a lot of ways to get inside your head.

3. Please understand, I think following Jesus is going to get harder.

VII. My thinking right now – my decision to focus on I Cor. 3 - is shaped by two conversations.

A. The first I had with a friend – I do not know him that well, but we’ve been interacting a bit lately. He has just retired from leading a church of 40,000 – which makes it one of the ten biggest in the country.

1. Among other things, we’ve been talking about our dismay over how many people are stuck repeating the “first year” of the Christian life. Rather than growing more like Christ over time, they keep splashing around in the shallow end of the pool. Consequently, after 20 years of being a Christ-follower, they’re not 20 years closer to Jesus, they’ve just repeated year one 20 times.

2. But that’s not all that we talked about. We also expressed surprise over how little *we* had grown. In fact, we spent a lot of time talking about a book he’d just written exploring his ongoing struggles with anger.

3. I share this to say that although spiritual growth is expected, it’s not common. At least, it’s not as common as many people think. The Apostle Paul implies as much in our text, where he laments being unable to explain “the deeper truths” to them because they were still, “infants in Christ,” babes who “could not handle solid food.”

B. The second conversation was last week. I had a four-hour dinner a couple friends two weeks ago. They are also pastors. We talk for an hour every week. Once a year we get together. This year, a good part of our evening was spent wondering what the next year would bring, and how to help people move through it with hope and joy.

1. As you know, it’s a little crazy out there. A little fragile. We’ve got China and Russia and AI and debt and cyber security issues and plummeting trust and political polarization. And an election coming up. You know all of this. You don’t need to hear it from me.

C. Now, there is no need to panic. For starters, many things are going right. And in many ways things are better now than ever before. But the volume and velocity of culture keeps picking up. And it is becoming increasingly important to be shaped by Jesus not Hollywood, not Madison Avenue, not Twitter (or X, or whatever I am supposed to call it).

1. In order to live well – to be the non-anxious person we want to be and others need us to be – our inner world needs to be more dynamic than our outer world. And right now, the outer world is becoming very strong.

D. And so, I want to challenge you to step up. To take a next step.

E. As I said, “this is Go Time.”

F. Your spiritual development is your responsibility. It’s time to make the necessary investments – which we have framed under Know God, Grow in Faith and Live it Out

G. We are trying to help you know God. In Jeremiah 9, the prophet writes: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they understand and know me.

H. This isn’t just knowing about. The Hebrew term used here is much bigger than that. It means to be in a relationship with.

1. God matters most. He does not exist for our benefit; we exist for his. Our obedience to Him matters more than our happiness.

2. And obedience to him is the path to joy and to eternal happiness.

3. If we seek our agenda more than yielding to His, our life may work for a bit, but it will not work over time.

4. God is not an add on. He does not do second. And our agenda is never ultimately big enough to give meaning to our life.
5. For some of you, the next step in knowing God is to accept Christ. You need to land the plane.
6. For some of you, the next step in knowing God is to be baptized – tonight.
7. For some of you it's as simple as prioritizing showing up at church.
 - a) I was in a conversation with a guy last week who is working through travel sports.
 - b) You are going to need to figure out what is going to define you.
 - c) Life is about trade offs. As the economist Thomas Sowell has noted.

VIII. The second headline we are trying to organize under is Grow in Faith – it requires that you to head down that path.

A. Daily Bible reading. Small group participation. Some Lakelight classes.

IX. Live it out is next. For some of you, it is serving.

A. We spent almost two months this summer in the book of James—which is all about living out our faith. I am not going to beat you up more. But, find ways to serve. That was a big theme for last week. Lots of you signed up to Find Your Fit. Thanks.

X. As I said, it's game time. Let's jump in. Know God. Grow in Faith. Live it out. Take a next step down one of those paths today.