

**TEXT:**

So I wanna begin with a question/and I'll give you a moment to think about and discuss it with those around you. But the question is this: *What should the primary **FOCUS** of a church be/what should a church be primarily **focused** on?* Take a moment to think about and discuss that with those around you?...**(PAUSE RECORD)**...So obviously alotta possible answers to that question and quite frankly, one it seems to me churches are fairly divided on these days. If I could over-generalize a bit, it seems to me that a portion of churches - maybe, what you'd call your more mainline/liberal churches, believe their primary **focus** should be certain issues and causes. You can usually identify these churches by the various flags they have outside their buildings. While the other portion of churches - maybe what you'd call more fundamental/conservative churches - tend to have as their **focus**, traditions and practices - doing, growing in certain things or just persevering some sort of religious milieu. A lot of you perhaps grew up in churches like this.

Well, if you recall, last week, we saw that, in view of "*Jesus' death and resurrection for all,*" the church is to be **focused** on...living for Jesus! MEANING as Paul defined it; seeing or "*regarding*" both others and Jesus in a certain way; the latter of which Paul highlights today when, you see he says, "*Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.*" - "*regarding*" or seeing Jesus correctly! How do ya know you're viewing Jesus correctly and subsequently **focused**-on and living for Him vs say, one of the many popular, but ultimately erroneous VERSIONS of Him? **2 Things** if you're taking notes:

First, You See Jesus, PRIMARILY, as Your One-And-Only Lord and Savior: Ya notice that word "*once*" there?/"*even though we ONCE regarded Christ according to the flesh*"? What that is, is Paul's admission that there was a time in his life/there's a time in all our lives, in which, before coming to know Christ, we viewed Christ from a wrong, worldly perspective. Paul, you might know, before he met and was converted by the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus - which you can read about in *Acts chapter 9* - was like any other Jewish leader of his time; IN THAT he saw Jesus as a weak/albeit charismatic charlatan and blasphemer, who deserved to be killed. And before we jump down Paul's back for such a perspective, ya gotta understand, the narrative around Jesus at the time was complex to say the least. When Jesus showed up around 4BCE; He did so in a very unassuming way - was born to peasant parents in a pretty obscure part of what is now modern day Palestine - I've actually been to Bethlehem, and gotta tell ya, I've seen used car lots that are nicer. Jesus didn't show up in like Boston, New York, London - ya know, some place of global importance. AND to make matters worse, controversy surrounded Him from birth, given that He was born to a virgin, for whom it was naturally assumed had cheated on her fiancé...PLUS as Jesus grew, He did what a lot of Jewish boys of His time did and apprenticed with his father as a carpenter. So not exactly the upbringing of future global leader, much less the Messiah. And YET we're told in *Luke 2* that even at a young age, He astounded the leaders in the Jewish temple with His understanding of God and the OT. That was basically Jesus' fairly mundane upbringing UNTIL when He was roughly 30 years old, He stepped away from carpentry and started traveling to surrounding Jewish towns, talking about God. Which ya gotta understand, took immense grit/not only because of all the walking, but because Jews saw themselves as the PEOPLE of God/the ones chosen BY God. So for Jesus to

go to THEM and tell em ABOUT God/even more call em to repent and believe in HIM AS God; that was scandalous to say the least. Not to mention, WHILE calling people to repent, He did so by constantly showing and telling people that they were now free to engage with God apart from ritualistically cleaning up their lives or becoming better, which ya gotta understand, for a group of leaders, who'd long maintained a carefully curated religious system that kept people in line by keeping em dependent on those in power; Jesus' message and miracles were therefore a HUGE threat! Not to mention, He added injury to insult, by linking up with 12 guys, who were MOST DEFINITELY sure to be picked last in Jewish kickball.

The point is: before Jesus was crucified, PAUL felt quite justified in not only seeing Him as a weak, charlatan and blasphemer, BUT as one who needed to be killed along with His followers. That's why he became such a vehement persecutor of the church. And AFTER Jesus had been crucified, Paul assumed He'd been right IN his beliefs, since *Deuteronomy 21:23* had long pronounced that *"anyone hanged on a tree was cursed by God."* THAT was the worldly or *"according to the flesh"* view of Jesus that Paul and others like him *"ONCE"* had - that He couldn't possibly be the Messiah, because the Messiah couldn't possibly be so weak in both upbringing and ultimately death, as Jesus appeared to be...And yet, of course, we know, Paul's view of Jesus got completely turned on it's head, when He met the resurrected Jesus and came to see that, not only, was He really the Messiah. But He was; therefore, the ONLY Lord and Savior! So when Paul says here that *"he once regarded Christ a certain way, but now does no longer,"* that's the shift He's referring to - going from seeing Jesus, as basically...a loser...to Lord - as Jesus said of Himself in *John 8:58*: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*

Now admittedly, most people don't *"regard"* Jesus quite as negatively as Paul did. After 15+ years of ministry, I've found that most people aren't really opposed to Jesus. BUT by the same token, most people ALSO don't *"regard"* Jesus as Lord and Savior. Maybe a good man, who died a tragic death, or a revolutionary seeking to bring about social liberation for the oppressed, or just a kind ancient guru with Instagramable sayings that help us live our best life, but not Lord and Savior...But you understand...if your primary view of Jesus is anything BUT Lord and Savior - literally, the One you SERVE/"Lord," because He's the One you NEED/"Savior" - then you're not seeing Him for who He actually is!...***When you consider who Jesus is/even yourself in relation TO Jesus, what comes to mind?***...Cuz as Tim Keller says, *"the basic principle"*¹ behind Jesus being Lord and Savior, is that out of gratitude, we now live NOT to please ourselves, but to please and resemble Him. That's what it means to have Jesus as Lord and Savior. It means, for example, you don't determine for yourself what's right and wrong, but instead rely wholly on God's word. You give up the daily operating principle of putting yourself first and instead put what pleases Jesus and loves others in Jesus' name, first. You ensure that no part of your life is immune to self-giving, BECAUSE He gave Himself fully to you. THAT'S what it means to have Jesus as Lord and Savior! ***Is that how you see Him?***

¹ The New City Catechism Devotional: THE GOSPEL (The Gospel Coalition) (p. 20). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Second and Finally, you know you're viewing Jesus correctly and subsequently living for Him when **You See Weakness As An Opportunity Rather Than An Obstacle**: When you read through Gospels/certainly as you unpack the transition Paul made in coming to see Jesus as Lord and Savior, the main thing that stands out as to the reason he initially/and people TODAY reject Jesus, is because Jesus appears weaker than they expect. A lot of times, the reason we won't trust Jesus either with our lives or just in some area OF our lives, is because He doesn't immediately fix all our problems the way we think He should. And I'll admit, sometimes in profoundly disappointing ways. You think about someone like Elie Wiesel, who was born into a Jewish family in Romania. He was a teenager when he and his family were rounded up by the Nazis and taken to Auschwitz, and then Buchenwald. In his book, *Night*, he gives this terrifying account of the horrors he endured in those camps. And in the foreword to his book, François Mauriac writes of his encounter with Wiesel, he says, "*On that most horrible day, even among all those other bad days, when as a child, Elie witnessed the hanging of another child, he tells us...he heard someone behind him groan: "For God's sake, where is...God?"*"²...A lot of times, the reason we struggle-to or flat-out WON'T trust Jesus is because He appears to us, in some way, weak, incapable, even unwilling to fix our problems...The same was true for Paul and guys like him. Cuz the expectation was when the Messiah showed up, it was gonna be "game-on!" God would immediately rescue and restore Israel to prominence, and cause the world to straighten up and fly. YET when Jesus came onto the scene, none of that seemed to happen. Rather, He appeared content to just restore some sight to the blind, heal those born lame, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and preach good news to the poor, but basically practice NON-intervention. UNTIL making matters worse, at the end of his traveling, teaching and miracles, He simply died and disappeared - was literally crucified, witnessed to have resurrected, but then ascended into heaven, seemingly leaving no kingdom that could provide rescue or reform for the world. So for those like Paul/US, bent towards the winner's circle and who want a swift cleansing of things, Jesus' apparent weakness can be an **obstacle!**

But here's the thing: Martin Luther noted that there's two kinds of strength or power in the world. One is what he called right-handed strength. And this is the kind of strength everyone ASSUMED the Messiah would exercise. Cuz right handed strength is dominant! Statistics say that the majority of us - something like 90% of all people - are right-handed. So for most of us our right hand is our dominant one.³ So "right-handed power," Luther said, is that dominant, straight-lined, efficient kind of power you get when, for example, you remove dust with a cloth, or an enemy with a weapon. THAT'S what everyone assumed the Messiah would show. The problem is: "right-handed power" isn't great at preserving relationship. For THAT, you need what Luther called, "left-handed power," which is a kind of strength that almost doesn't look like strength because it's NON-dominant/can even look weak, and like losing...But THAT'S the kind of strength Jesus evidenced on the Cross! Cuz see, even though His death on the Cross didn't instantly set things right/even though His rule and reign right now doesn't instantly set your life and mine right - cuz of course that would mean wiping out all sin, and with it, you and me as

² Alpha BiOY 11/23/16

³ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handedness>

sinners - His death on the Cross DID preserve relationship with us, and subsequently began a process of cosmic healing. As the Apostle Peter says in **1 Peter 3:18**, “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, THAT he might bring us to God.*” **So you see?** More important to Jesus than cleaning up the world/cleaning up your circumstances or mine, is cleaning up your heart and your future! Instead of wiping you and me out, Jesus sought to win you back, by HIMSELF getting wiped out on the Cross!...Greg Beale calls it a “redemptive reversal”⁴ - this surprising theme throughout the Bible in which God moves in counterintuitive ways - ya know, like saving the world through His “failure,” while our grandiosity flops...Or outsmarting the experts with His “foolishness,” while our “wisdom” flunks...Or just breaking through with apparent “weakness,” when our “strength” hits a wall...ALL of it showing you that/ **listen:** God’s heart for people like you and me, who are FULL of weakness and sin, is not that we STRIVE to overcome those things in some kind of “right handed,” way, but that we “surrender” those things to the One who’s already overcome em - That you SEE that Jesus as Lord and His Kingdom of Salvation; it doesn’t have ladders to climb, levels to attain or even obstacles to overcome. Rather it’s simply received! **Friend**, that’s what every ounce of weakness, struggle and brokenness in your life is about - reminding you of how much you need Jesus - that freedom is not found in INdependence, but IN...dependence...on Him...It’s all about giving you repeated **OPPORTUNITY/not obstacle/opportunity** to trust a Lord and Savior, who in being strong, was made weak, so that YOU, who are weak, can be made strong, as you cling to Him! **Where are you struggling today? Where are you hurting, feeling hopeless or just at the end of your virtuous rope? Can you see that in the economy of God’s kingdom, those things aren’t obstacles God is looking for you to overcome, but opportunities for you to depend on your Lord and Savior afresh?** If so you’re seeing Jesus correctly!

CONCLUSION:

Let me close with this - a picture! - And maybe it’s cuz I still haven’t seen Top Gun Maverick yet and I can’t wait, but THIS is obviously a picture of an airplane cockpit. And I’m showing it to you because I heard someone say recently⁵ that sometimes becoming a follower of Jesus or just trying to SEE Jesus correctly AS a follower, feels like being dropped into an airplane cockpit like this...for the first time...while airborne!...You see all these buttons, levers, gauges, joysticks, and lights, and you begin to have anything but assurance and confidence...It seems to me though, that when you get down to it, seeing and following the Jesus is, really, simply about seeing Him as Lord and Savior BECAUSE you see yourself as lacking and weak...It’s why/I often have to fill out these different profile forms for partner churches, network events, what-have-you - ya know “tell us about yourself,” and I never know what to say. So a couple months ago, I was doing one, and I decided, from now on, I’m just gonna say something like, “*My name’s Charlie Dunn. I’m husband to Abby; Dad to Brooklyn, Ezri, Charley Grace; Pastor to Hub Church...AND I’ve often made a mess of my marriage. Sadly, I can be insensitive with my daughters. I don’t always have the right answers for my church, but I like to think I do. And I’m pretty sure I like candy and sports too much. BUT I know Jesus even loves me and I stake my*

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-longest-years-of-ministry>

⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ce1MUGxLag8/>

hope and confidence in the fact that He and He ALONE is Lord and Savior.” Something like that!...I wonder if you could say something similar today? I wonder if WE as a church could, in some senses, delight in being/and I hope you take this the right way, but: a “fellowship of losers,” BECAUSE we’re so ***focused*** on seeing and serving a exceedingly great Savior and Lord...***That'd be good wouldn't it?*** AND I think it's be something God would love to bless...***So how bout we go to Him in Prayer now and ask Him to do exactly that...Let's Pray!***