

**Sermon:** God's Sent Ones

**Series:** Christ and His Church (7)

**Bible Passage:** 1 Corinthians 4: 1-21

**4** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. **4** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

**6** I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. **7** For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

**8** Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! **9** For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. **10** We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. **11** To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, **12** and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; **13** when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

**14** I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.<sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. **16** I urge you, then, be imitators of me. **17** That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. **18** Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. **19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. **20** For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. **21** What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Would you please pray with me?

*Dear Heavenly Father, we ask you in the name of Lord Jesus to meet us here as we consider your Word. As we spend this time, some of us daily or weekly, considering what this ancient book of good sayings, but truly, as many of us believe, words and truth breathed out from you, God-created. So God, Father, we ask that Your Spirit would use this word to challenge us, to wake us up out of any comfort zones that we need to be moved from, to encourage us, to draw us to you, to show us again the futility of chasing after things that are temporary or fleeting, and to the eternal joy and purpose*

*through You and Your kingdom. That's what we want as we spend time in your Word this morning. We pray in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

This morning, we're taking a look at 1 Corinthians 4 and the title of this message is "God's Sent Ones", literally, "the Apostles are Sent Ones", or sort of like "the Ones God Has Assigned". There's a capital "a" Apostle for people like Paul, and then there are lower-case "a" apostles for anyone who is ever sent by God to do a task. We're going to take a look at why people sent by God sometimes get tripped up because the task they thought they were signing up for was not exactly the same task.

This reminds me when I first moved into my first apartment in Medford. My wife and I, no children, just moved here with a U-Haul truck worth of stuff in 2001. We moved and got here and we had to put all our stuff in a storage container. Two months later, the Lord allowed us to move into an apartment that Pastor Steve generously rented to us (at a great deal I must say). At the church, I was asking people "Hey, can you help us move?" They were probably thinking, "Enoch, Karen, no kids... moving into a 700-800 square foot apartment... how much stuff could they possibly have?" Well, I distinctly remember one brother, who shall remain nameless but recently served as the chairman of the board deacons, came to help me move.

I'm a seminarian. Half of my boxes were filled with books. They look light but they're really heavy. On top of all the stuff we brought from California, we had our Chinchilla habitat. Now, Chinchillas are small, little fur balls; however, the habitat we house them in is not small. I remember we moved everything in, yet there in the truck, was my chinchilla habitat left. The chinchilla habitat makes a refrigerator look small. It's taller than me, wider than me, has these huge glass doors, and is made entirely of fiberglass and steel frame. I remember thinking, "How are we going to get this in?"

That brother, who I mentioned previously, just had this inspiration in his eyes. He used a rope and began measuring the chinchilla cage and thought, "There has got to be a way to get this cage into this New England home!" (We couldn't go through the doorway because it had a 90 degree turn and the cage was too big.) I measured one window of the house and it was too small; this brother, however, said "I think it's going to work!" I told him, "I checked the windows" and he responded, "I checked four windows. This one fourth window is slightly bigger than the other three." I said "Yeah, right", but sure enough, it was big enough and we got all of that into my house.

For the next four years, the Lord allowed it to stay there in that house until we moved again. Wouldn't you know it? I asked people from the church to come help me, and sure enough, that same brother came to help me again. This time Pastor Steve came to help and we tried to get the chinchilla habitat through the same window. We had to lift this cage, which is probably around 500-600 pounds, completely 90 degrees and through a window. As you probably know about New England houses, the

first floor window is several feet above the ground. I'm pretty sure we broke the fiberglass window, but I thought to myself, "Pastor Steve said it was okay to go through the window...It's his window..."

The point is, I don't know if you've ever agreed to help someone move, and you go to their house and realize they haven't even started packing yet. I don't know if you've ever helped someone with a project and you get there and you're working with a condemned building. Or if you've ever offered to help do something, whatever it is, you get there, and you realize this is a ridiculously daunting task. You know that happens with Christians?

I don't mean Christians helping the poor or sharing the Good News of Christ. I mean, the entire Christian life. Jesus said himself in the Bible that if you're going to be a Christian, you need to count the cost. If you're not a Christian, then this is a great message for you because you'll have a great reason to not become a Christian if you hear what Paul has to tell the Corinthian church today. I mean, every logical reason, except for the fact that it's true so you should do it. It's definitely worth considering. I'd be happy to tell you that Paul himself gives you reasons as to why you shouldn't become a Christian. If you are a Christian today, and I'm not referring to having a spiritual funk about forgiving someone or having a spiritual downturn because you're dealing with some struggle of temptation or guilt. I mean the whole thing, the whole Christian life.

In this series, Christ and His Church, one of the major things that trip up people, especially Christians, is the confusion, what I would call a mistake, of what it means to be a servant of Christ in this world. I don't mean a ministry leader in an organized church. I mean following Jesus in general.

This morning, as we consider this sermon series, Christ and His Church, we're going to look at what the apostle Paul says about what it means to be a servant in Christ and how that relates to us today. We know Paul as the church planner, the apostle who wrote most of the New Testament books, and someone who was just a good Christian. But in those days, the very people in the church he planted were questioning him. They wondered, "Are you really sent by God? Are you really Christ's servant?" The mistakes and the choices the Corinthian church made as they accused Paul are the same mistakes I struggle with, and perhaps you too. This morning, our three points from the passage, as we consider what it means to be servants of Christ, are:

### **1. What are two of the most common mistakes people make about serving Christ?**

What are the two mistakes people make when they serve? Not in a church necessarily, but just in general when they're living for Jesus.

### **2. Why is it so natural and common to make those mistakes?**

Why so many of us, myself included more often than I care to share or admit, make those mistakes time and time again.

### **3. How can we overcome those challenges and live as Christ's servants?**

#### **1. What are two of the most common mistakes people make about serving Christ?**

Taking a look at 1 Corinthians 4, we're going to see what these two mistakes are. I'm going to tell you the two mistakes first, and then we're going to read it in the passage. The first mistake is about who we're trying to please and the second mistake is about how we're trying to perform. Let's take a look at the passage, 1 Corinthians 4:1-3

**4** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.

The first mistake is about who we're trying to please. We see this as Paul gives two images of what it means to be a servant and we're going to focus on one of them. He says we're servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. The word "steward" used in that context means the manager of a household. The basic mistake here is about the people we're trying to please. What Paul says here is: if you're a steward of a house, presumably, the person you answer to isn't the other servants or family members of the house. You would answer to the master of the house, and in those days that was the patriarch of the house.

In the context of a Christian's life, there are three groups of people we might be tempted to serve and Paul lists those three groups of people here. The first group of people he warns us about is other people and their opinions. Let's take a look at verse 3:

**3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

The mistake we make, and this is not just limited to Christians, is thinking that the evaluation and judgment of our lives is simply the product of collective polls and opinions of everyone around us. This raises the question: in your life, Christian or otherwise, who are the people that deep down you really want to please? Who are the people we are desperate to impress or draw attention from?

The tricky part is that I don't even remember wanting to impress people as a little kid; either I didn't care or I wasn't even aware of it. Then my insecurities all came crashing down on me in late elementary school and middle school. I cared about what my friends thought. I cared about what teachers thought. I cared about what other people thought in general. I cared about all these other people's opinions.

Here is one version of maturity in life. Some people think that maturity is that you get over the peer pressure and you focus on your job, marriage, and family and you go forward. That's very common. But, let me do it Paul's way.

When you're a child, you only care about what your parents think. Mom can fix anything. Dad can lift anything. That's just how they are. You get a little older and you begin to care about your friends. You care about what your peers think. Then, you get to high school and you realize, "I don't have to care about all my friends. Just the cool ones. Just the socially important ones. Just the ones that influence whether or not I get on this team or into this club or get invited to this event." Then, you get enlightened and you realize, "I don't care what my friends think. I just need to care about what my professors think because they control the future of my career." Then, we get enlightened again and realize half of the stuff we learn in college we end up not using the rest of our lives. We transition to wanting to impress the person who we think might become our life partner. For me, it was about impressing the right girl. Then it's about impressing your boss; who cares about what your co-workers think (unless you think they might become your boss one day). It all comes down to impressing the person that evaluates you. We say, at the end of life, "It doesn't matter doesn't matter what anyone else thinks." We truly enlightened to the second party Paul says we try to impress. Take a look at the end of verse 3:

<sup>3</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.

Here we go. This is the mark of an older, wiser person; they say, "I don't care what anyone thinks. I can dress how I want. I can eat what I want (except when my doctor says "no"). I can get into the hobbies I want." We think that's maturity because we've grown out of peer pressure and we've gotten more intelligent about whom to impress. But Paul is saying that it is the same trap every single time. Is it really maturity if we just shift who we're trying to impress from group to group. Can we really say we're maturing? Can we really say we're moving up as human beings? Can we really say we're making progress in our maturity?

What's the difference between a little kid and a successful business person? One has chosen to try to impress the cute girl next door and one has chosen to try to impress the incredibly powerful executive, but it's the same problem: trying to impress other people as a way to validate ourselves. The ultimate response is, "I don't care what anyone else thinks as long as I am true to myself!" But Paul tells us that he doesn't even judge himself. We make the mistake as people, definitely myself, of impressing people. Not that it relates to many of you since most of you aren't in full time ministry, but you can guess the people who I try to impress are. Growth is not about trying to figure out the smarter, better people to impress. It's not doing the ultimate move and believing that it's all about being true to yourself. Paul is telling is to figure out who really is the judge.

<sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Here's the basic kicker, friends: In the end, it's not other people's opinions that have bearings in my life. It's not even my own opinion. It's the One who judges me. It's the one who actually draws the verdict.

I'm a driver, like many of you. Some of you who have been in my car may think I'm a good driver, a bad driver, or whatever. Many people would say, "I don't care whether or not you think I'm a good driver. I know I'm a safe driver." Well actually, you and I aren't really the matter. It's the judge sitting there deciding on your traffic violation. It's him or her who decides. The real question is: "Who is the ultimate authority?" It's not about impressing others or myself, it's about "who is the real judge of my life?" and the Bible says that it's God. If you've ever grown up in the church and had the notion of heaven and the judgment room, you should know there are two things in the judgment room of God (this is what I envision and it's not necessarily biblical): a giant throne in which God sits on and a massive monitor. What does Paul say?

<sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Every action you and I have done, God has seen. Every word you and I have uttered, God has heard. To go even deeper, every thought you and I have ever had, every motivation, ever secret motivation, he knows. And so because we make the mistake of trying to impress other people or even ourselves instead of God, we make the second mistake about how we evaluate our performance. What is the key of understanding how we're going to be judged. This is what Paul says, beginning in verse 1:

<sup>4</sup> This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

Paul says: because I am a primary steward in the house of God and I'm trying to please God, then I will know what I am going to be evaluated by. In the Corinthian situation, there are two things the Corinthians accused Paul of: his eloquence and his sophistication.

If you read the second epistle of the Corinthians and later in this book in chapter 10, you will see people basically state, "Psh, Paul, you're not as articulate or eloquent as you should be" or "Psh, you're not as sophisticated as our Greek philosophers." In response to these things, Paul says, "You know what? You're right. If my job was to be evaluated by you, then sure, articulateness, eloquence, good looks, being well put together matters. But if I'm going to be evaluated by God in heaven who sees and understands everything in my heart, then what is my performance about? Faithfulness. It's about being faithful to call of God wherever I am, whatever I'm doing."

Friends, you and I struggle with impressing people or focusing on things that deep down we know are so superficial. It's one thing to be healthy and exercise, so you can live a life of energy and service for the Lord. It's another thing to appreciate the beauty of a physically fit human body. It's another thing to deep down know why I'm hitting the gym so much or to know deep down why I want to look a certain way. You know. I know. It's to impress who?

Friends, think about the things we spend our extracurricular time on. When we're at work are we trying to be faithful employees or are we trying to go above and beyond certain jobs so we can the notice and attention of other people? Human beings miss stuff. Human beings give credit to the wrong people. You felt that way. You did something good yet someone else got the credit. Has that ever happened to you, whether at school, work, or even at home? Or have you ever gotten credit when it really wasn't supposed to be for you? Human beings make those mistakes because they don't know all things. When we try to focus on the pleasing of other human beings, we have to get noticed because if we don't get noticed, we will miss it.

Jesus gloriously and frighteningly looks into all of our hearts. We don't have to try to get noticed because God knows, if he's evaluating us based on our faithfulness, there is little someone can tell from the outside. Someone might look like they're not doing much, but they're so faithful in prayer and so generous in their giving. Someone might be very busy, very active, but in their hearts, their motives are not necessarily pure.

Friends, this is the great mistake that I make and I'm sure many of you can relate to. Our mistake in serving Christ is about who we are really trying to please: people, ourselves, or the One who will judge us. If we know who we're trying to please, we will know how to perform. Is it about eloquence, sophistication, or external things? Those aren't bad things, but not that important. We have to know who are boss is.

My kids, in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade, now take a different school bus. Last year was glorious. They all took the same bus, got home the same time, and left at the same time. Now, one kid goes earlier and, for the two younger kids, we have to go up our street to the bus stop. It's quite busy. The last two years has been great because the bus would stop at my street, right there. This year, because they're changing the bus system and trying to save money, we have to walk up the street again. It's kind of a busy street. One third of the time I go to that bus stop, I see a car run a stop sign. The bus stop supervisor there has a lot of strong thoughts about these things and when I brought up the old busy stop down on my street, she said, "Well they're not supposed to have that anyway. They're only supposed to stop at major intersections."

One day, the bus driver arrives at the bus stop and the bus stop supervisor, whose number one concern is safety for our children, gives him an earful. The bus driver starts to get a little scared and says, "I just

do what I'm told. You gotta call the supervisor." The next week they're still trying to figure out the bus stops and where to drop off kids. The bus driver arrives again and the bus stop supervisor tells him her opinions again. However, this time the bus driver is there with his own supervisor and he says, "Hey, we just do what the district tells us to do." My wife, God bless her, decides to call the district and say, "I'm a parent. I'd love it if you would consider stopping at our street. The street is very narrow. The street is high speed. Not everyone stops at the stop sign. It's especially unsafe when winter comes around." The district responds with "We will put a bus stop at your street." She emailed me all this and added "but so-and-so [the bus stop supervisor] won't like it." I said, "That's okay, because I won't be walking up there anymore."

I would listen to the bus stop supervisor voice her concerns, but then I had to stop and think about it. Who is it we are really trying to please? A well meaning traffic supervisor who has been at that stop for a decade or the district and their supervisors who are trying to figure out the best route for their buses. I think the same goes for us. There are a lot of well meaning people: who we may be married to, children of, parents of, working with, disciples and mentored by. It's helpful to understand the wisdom and value we can get from other people. But literally, on the day of judgment, there is only one person who has the right to judge us about our lives.

Here's the key thing: who are we really trying to please each and every day? It's very liberating. Once we know that I'm trying to please God and He sees it all, I don't have to fight for attention anymore. In fact, God says if you get looked over for something you've done praiseworthy, that's good because in heaven you'll have more. Jesus himself says that. Wouldn't that be great if Christians held lightly the praise of other people? Who are you trying to please?

## **2. Why is it so natural and common to make those mistakes?**

We've seen that we've mistaken who we're trying to please and therefore we've also mistaken how we're trying to perform. Why do we make that choice? I want to assure you that it is very reasonable, but nonetheless inaccurate according to the Bible. I want us to see why we have the mistake and then we can see it in the Bible. This is why I think a lot of us make this mistake: we think suffering is an indication of not being in God's will. We think hardship and criticism is that we're not doing it God's way. However, suffering is, more often than not, evidence that we are doing it God's way. Suffering is, more often than not, that we're actually getting it right. Let's look at Paul and his life and see how this applies. You have to understand that the criticism that the Corinthians accuse Paul of is that he didn't look like an apostle. He didn't look like an impressive emissary of God. Paul uses sarcasm. The Bible has sarcasm. Let's look at verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one

against another. <sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

<sup>8</sup> Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

The Corinthians were using a very reasonable measure to decide whether or not Paul was a good servant of Christ. The measure went like this: is he sound, intelligent, and wise like a good teacher should be? Is he impressive looking and powerful like our kings, the ancient kings of Israel? Is he well put together, wealthy, and clean? Paul was kind of like a homeless guy who barely scraped together money as he made tents to support himself in churches that were basically ungrateful for him. History tells us Paul was short with knobby knees, and probably bald.

The point is: he didn't look impressive. Paul says, "Wow, you're so rich. You're like kings. We're like the end of the procession." In the ancient world, when a general returned to the city victorious, they would have a parade. At the end of the parade, as the victorious marched through their treasure and plunder, would be the prisoners slated for execution. Literally, at the end of the parade, the losers, the conquered, are going to be executed for public spectacle. Paul says, "You know, you're right. You are like kings, fine and polished. Sometimes I feel like we who are God's servants are made a spectacle for all. For the world, for angels, and for all people. We're like the people at the end of the parade, being mocked. That is what a life of the messenger of God looks like. That's what he says here in verse 11.

<sup>11</sup> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup> and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

The word "scum" referred to here is something you clean by peeling it off. The word "refuse" referred to here is something you clean by wiping it off. He's saying: the apostles of God are like the things you have to chip off and wipe off to be clean.

The reason why the Corinthians assumed Paul couldn't be this great messenger of God is because it did not fit their perception of what it means to serve Christ. I think the same goes for us. Maybe the reason why we focus on pleasing other people or validating ourselves in our own minds is because we think that a servant of Christ should look better. Yes, we're supposed to follow Jesus, but is it really supposed to be this hard?

On my recent trip to California, a lot of my peers in California would be open to say, are not doing spiritually well. One of the common questions I hear is, "I know being a Christian isn't supposed to be

easy, but is it really supposed to be this hard?" I think in the back of our minds, we really believe it's not supposed to be this hard. There is a very tightly held American doctrine that basically says that Jesus is supposed to make your life better. Paul is saying: no, it doesn't work that way. Most of the time it's going to look like you lose. Most of the time you're going to be called the fool for Christ's sake. Most of the time you won't look intelligent in your academic setting. Most of the time you won't look with it or cool. You won't be up to date on the societal norms and morals. You won't be on the cutting edge of all these ideas. You'll be antiquated, outdated, intolerant, prejudice.

One of the things my family and I like to do is go to the Museum of Science and do this engineering design challenge. You make a little helicopter and it has to float down or you make a boat and it has to race down a track. When I was growing up and went to these events, I'd think, "Wow, people are so smart. How did they do that?" Now I know, how we do it. I don't know it's how smart people do it.

We can do it because we're members at the Museum of Science we build that thing five or six times a year. When I do it with my sons, we don't even talk about it anymore. They say, "Baba, we'll get that piece and you get this piece and we're attach it together and we'll get first place." And so, we're just doing it like that and I know what other kids on tour groups are thinking. They see our boat racing across the water and they think, "Man, that's awesome. I want to be smart like them."

This came to head because recently I took my son to a boy scout event that happens every five years. We had to do something called the "Marshmallow Challenge". You got 20 pieces of dried spaghetti, one meter of string, and one meter of masking tape and you had to elevate a marshmallow off the ground. I asked her, "Okay, what's a good range?" And she responded, "Well if you can get it 14-16 inches off the table, that's probably pretty good. Most people will be there." I then asked her, "Okay, so what's the winning height?" And she said, "About a yard, so 38-39 inches. They had a totally different strategy." Me being the good father I am, I took out my smart phone and looked it up. Unfortunately my internet was slow and I couldn't really find anything relevant.

The point is this: I forgot what it was like to not win. I have forgotten what it is like to just look at it and be completely puzzled and fight with each other to do this task. As Christians in a very prosperous nation like America, have we forgotten what it's like to not win? To not have an incredibly large, successful music industry that finally rivals the best music out there in multiple genres. Do we feel like we won because we were able to capable leaders in public office who were strong, publically testified Christians? Did we win because in general, we have so much religious freedom? Have we forgotten that most of the time, Christians are going to look like they lose? We're not going to look like we're winning. We're not going to look popular or cool. We're not going to look smart? If you're not a Christian, join the club. This is what it means. Have we forgotten what it's like to be a follower of Christ?

The C.S. Lewis' out there, the respected Christian, I don't even know if we should strive to be that. The athlete out there who's a good athlete and also Christian, not to say there aren't blessings from that and I'm not criticizing those celebrities, but I'm not sure if that's a good measure of success. "I want to be a Christian in the medical field who's awesome and Christian" or "I want to be a Christian in the genetics sciences field and stand up for my faith". Those are great things to strive for, but at the end of the day, Jesus still says this: if you're an athlete and Christian, but never make it to the NBA, who cares? Because God doesn't. I do. My friends do. It is so easy to forget who we're trying to please because we're used to being in positions of power and influence. Nothing wrong with that. If anything, all the more to use for the sake of the kingdom.

What Paul is saying is this: this is what it's like. We don't look like we win. We don't look good. We aren't going to look cool. By definition, I don't even think you can be a cool Christian because cool is so trendy and based on what everyone likes, and everyone definitely does not like Jesus. He will never be cool except in heaven and until then, I think we should just be Christians. Not Christian athletes or Christian scientists or cool Christians. Just Christians.

As you do your vocation, whether it's in athletics, science, business or art, sure, strive for excellence and glorify God. If you find yourself in a position in your field where you're a very prominent celebrity status, may God help you because it's really hard to be there and keep your faith. That is what impresses me most about these celebrity Christians. It's not that they're pretty good at football and they're Christian, which is pretty hard, but it's the fact that they battle with temptation every day that I may never experience or know because I'll never be famous.

What are the mistakes people tend to make: we mistake who we're trying to please and therefore how we're trying to perform. We're not trying to please just other people or even ourselves, but really the One whose opinion actually counts because He's ultimately the One who matters in our lives.

Which then tells us it's not about how we look, our eloquence, our sophistication or how well put together we are. God evaluates based on our faithfulness and we don't have to work so hard to be noticed because he already sees everything. If you and I are working hard to get noticed, maybe it's because it's not God we're trying to please but other people or ourselves.

The reason why we do this is because deep down we've forgotten that suffering is evidence that we are walking with Jesus. You can suffer and not be with Jesus, I'm not arguing against that. More often than not, the hardship and persecution should be confirming our faithfulness. We should be like the apostles in the book of Acts, rejoicing that we get to suffer for the Name.

### **3. How can we overcome those challenges and live as Christ's servants?**

Let's take a look here at verse 14-17:

<sup>14</sup> I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.<sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Here is what he wants us to do: remember who we're imitating. We are imitating Paul, and so far any other Christian leader we look up to, to the degree that they imitate Christ.

A number of years ago when I was an impressionable college student, I went to a church in Southern California where the pastor was getting a lot of money. The pastor told the church board, "Stop giving me raises. I don't need any more raises. I'm totally fine." And the board told him, "No, we want to appreciate you", but the pastor resisted saying, "No, I really don't need more money." One elder said something to the pastor that made him take the raises even to this day. The elder said, "We want to give you raises, even if you say you don't need it, because we are desperate to see what a Christian family does with more money. We need to see that." When the pastor and his wife heard that, they accepted the raises.

We need to be reminded of who we're imitating. For you and I, it's so tempting to imitate the other people out there, all the great authors and speakers. Praise God for them, but they are not the basic foot soldiers of God's army. The basic foot soldiers are the forgotten, no-name, never recognized, faithful, brother or sister in Christ who is loving the people God has placed around him or her. Who are we trying to imitate? We are servants of Christ and who is Christ? The Bible says that Christ didn't look impressive. He didn't have the beauty that we should we should recognize him.

The Old Testament also says that Christ was a suffering servant and people would revile Him, curse Him, and criticize Him. Yes, for certain seasons of His life, He was incredibly popular, but to the same extreme, incredibly reviled, hated, mocked, and criticized by His own best friends and His own family. Christ had a Judas who He poured His life into, but who ended up betraying Him. His brothers and sisters said, "He is out of his mind! He's crazy! We're going to collect Him, so He doesn't go cause any more trouble." Christ was publically humiliated, convicted of a terrible crime, mocked, and eventually killed. We're servants of Christ. This is Christ and His church.

And so, if we're to follow and serve Christ in this city of Boston, if you're considering Christ, these are the claims we are to follow. Yes, we celebrate Christmas when Christ is born in a soft manger with soft hay. Maybe that's how He enters the world, but that is not how He exists the world in His first advent. He ends humiliated and crucified, but he also leaves vindified. It is Jesus who says: you can believe me on the basis of my miracles, but when I rise from the dead, we'll see. That's it. Much of the Old Testament and the New Testament says that when Christ rises from the dead, everyone will know.

This is what it means to be a servant of Christ. To not fall into the mistake of thinking who am I trying to please? Who am I working hard to get noticed by? Because God can advance you like that. The preparation you need isn't experience or good stuff on your resume. It's learning to be faithful. What does God say about that? Those who are awesome with little things will get bigger things? No, He says: those who are faithful with little things will receive greater things. God entrusts more. God can elevate someone so fast, it'll make us dizzy. Some of the greatest world leaders, innovators in industries and businesses, educators, etc. are here. Even some are in this room. When God gives you a tremendous platform, regionally or nationally, are we ready to remember? Did we learn in our trenches before we become well-known and before the public criticism arrives that we need to be faithful? We know who our boss is, who our master is.

Friends, if you're struggling to get noticed or to impress, I can assure you two things: firstly, you're not trying to focus on God, because God sees. Secondly, whatever I'm striving to be noticed for, it's not worth it because that person isn't the final judge. The final judge is God and God says: If you're in Christ, then I see Christ in you and I welcome you into my home.

Let's pray.

*Our Father in Heaven, I confess a daily struggle to want to be noticed by the people I somehow think opinion matters. Yes, we should be receptive to feedback and be teachable and eager to learn from anyone. But I confess that that is not what motivates me. I don't know, I just want to be impressive or look good to people. I work hard and it's wasting energy in light of eternity.*

*And so Father, perhaps some of my friends and my brothers and sisters in Christ can relate to that. We've focused on pleasing other individuals instead of you because deep down we think that the good life is what Jesus wants us for. Yes there's heaven and there's a taste of heaven now. But Lord, more often than not, Christians look like the losers here. Why would anyone do this? Because you're God. You made us. You sent your Son to redeem us from our fallenness, brokenness, and sins and to restore our relationships with You, with each other, and with creation.*

*You're calling us to align our lives with Your kingdom's purposes. Challenge us. Show us that whoever we're trying to get noticed by, as important and as worthwhile as they are, they are not the ultimate person we are trying to please. We're trying to please You, our Heavenly Father, and the good news is that in Christ, we have already pleased You because You clothed us with the righteous life of Jesus. We don't have to do that because Jesus did that for us, and that's why we come to You and give our whole lives for You as a response in worship and gratitude. Move in our hearts. Let us be a congregation and a church that knows who we're trying to please. Christ and His Church.*