

Who do people say Jesus is?

Bill Phipps, in 1997, said that he did not believe in Jesus; did not believe that He was God; he doubted the reality of heaven and hell; he did not believe that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

But, if Bill Phipps was just a man on the street, those kinds of statements should not really affect the Church as many people have said such things. Problem is Bill Phipps was the elected Moderator of the United Church of Canada, which is the largest Protestant denomination in that country.

When he was asked to defend his lack of position on matters of Faith, he said: *"I believe that nothing I said is outside the broad mainstream of United Church belief. I believe my faith is well rooted in scripture and Christian tradition, although it is not frozen in the language of early creeds..."*

This is very much of a problem for me and I hope for most of us this morning. This blatant lack of Biblical understanding should not be found in a person with such a position of spokesperson for the Church. But it represents the feeling and belief systems of millions around the world. Phipps wanted to retain respect for Jesus as an inspirational figure while denying Jesus' identity as God's Son. Many Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is and Jehovah's Witnesses hold the same view. It is the only way these groups can integrate Jesus into their worldview belief systems. Some within the Faith want to reach out to those in such groups to find a common ground to build on, find such a system attractive. (Not wanting to be abrasive or non-accepting,) they move from the core of the Christian faith and fall away into the gook of universalism non-faith. To hold Jesus up as a moral teacher and not as Christ, the Lord, bears little or

no resemblance to Jesus, the Lord and Savior of historical **2** Christianity.

This is the very topic Paul addresses as he walks his way around the known world of his time. His proclamation was both strange to the general person he would speak to and it was foolishness (**1 COR. 1:18** "*For the Message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*") to the rest. Nonetheless, it was Truth. And it was THE most important thing to live out in front of the world. That was the Gospel.

The word GOSPEL comes up in over 90 verses in the NT. It is THE #ONE item on Paul's list of topics. As you will remember, his life was all wrapped up in himself before the Damascus Road incident. He took pride in his parentage, his nationality, his religious zeal, but after that wild encounter with Jesus, his confidence was no longer in his performance but in the Gospel of Jesus, Christ.

ROM. 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the GOSPEL of God-- ² the GOSPEL He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures..."

ROM. 1:9 "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the GOSPEL of His Son, is my witness ..."

ROM. 1:15 "That is why I am so eager to preach the GOSPEL also to you who are at Rome. ¹⁶ I am not ashamed of the GOSPEL, because it is the Power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the GOSPEL a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by Faith from first to last, just as it is written: *'The righteous will live by faith.'*"

What is the main thing in your life? I wonder that about myself. I asked myself this week as I was preparing this

message: *What is Number One in your life? The ministry? The concept of being a missionary to Japan? The role of a husband?*

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The role of being a father to four children? Of being a pastor? Of having a relationship with people around the world? What is important to me? All these things are important but are they the number one important thing in my life?

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| #1 | #3 |
| #2 | #4 |

Which is the most important to you? What can you live without?

When it comes to the eternal end of all things, Paul's choice was easy to make. It was the Gospel!

In 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1.3, Paul writes: ¹ Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the **GOSPEL** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ... :³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

First importance. There are so many different callings and goals in a life and many possible areas of service in the Kingdom of God, but there is only one transcendent truth should define our lives. One bit of simple truth that should move us and motivate us in all our waking moments: Christ died for our sins.

After the 12 went out to do ministry in the countryside in LUKE 10, and returned rejoicing that people were touched with the miracles of healing and that some were released from the bondage of Satanic control, Jesus' surprising answer shocks even us today. LUKE 10:20 "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

That is the Gospel of Jesus. He died for you and He paid the price for your sin. He went to the Cross to die to take your

place and to take your punishment, so that when His father looks down on you, He sees the Blood of His Only Son covering you and in seeing that, calls you righteous in His sight. **4**

His robe of Righteousness covers us. (Put it on.)

If there is anything that should drive us to be passionate about, that is the one thing that should. I don't mean passionate only about sharing the Gospel with others but passionate in thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, and allowing that passion to color the way we look at all of life.

Only one thing needs to be central in our walk of Faith, and that should be it! *"what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."*

And in light of that, on the night He was betrayed, **LUKE 22:17** After taking the cup, He gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you."

Taken from: C.J. Mahaney's *The Cross Centered Life: Keeping the Gospel the Main Thing*; LifeChange Books; Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, Oregon.

Christianity Today; *Who Do People Say Jesus Is?*; Web page Bible study on the Da Vinci Code.

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