

SERMON NOTES
Luke 22:24-30
“Influencing By Serving”

Intro:

- As reported in the book *unChristian*, a research project looking into the way 16-29 year-old non-Christians view Christians found that their three most common perceptions of Christians today are that Christians are (1) *anti-gay*; (2) *judgmental*; and (3) *hypocritical*
- **Christians are the new Pharisees in the perceptions of today’s youth culture**
- *That perception will greatly reduce the influence of the Gospel on this generation*
- **The very people in our society who know the truth, and stand for the truth, and are able to proclaim the truth – are basically repulsive to most youth and young adults who absolutely reject what we stand for**
- Of course, we would want to deny the accuracy of those perceptions
- *If non-Christian youth and young adults really got to know us – they would understand that we are not anti-gay and we are not judgmental, right?*
- I mostly listen to WDLM and K-Love, but sometimes I listen to the other Christian radio station in our area
- *Rarely do I hear Christian music or Gospel preaching or anything presenting Jesus Christ in a positive way*
- What I do hear on that Christian station is virtually indistinguishable from what a person could hear on a secular conservative talk radio show – *namely, some interesting news information that needs to be heard, and some valid arguments for traditional moral values and conservative policies* – but also a whole lot of Obama-bashing, and Congress–bashing, and liberal-bashing, and public-school-bashing, and gay-activist-bashing
- *Though I share some of the underlying beliefs and values of those programs, the tone is often so negative and critical and judgmental and self-righteous and angry and nasty that I can’t listen for more than a few minutes without changing stations*
- The vast majority of youth or young adults listening to those programs would conclude that Christianity is virtually identical to secular conservative ideology and is in fact predominantly anti-gay, intolerant and judgmental
- *And they would want nothing to do with the Gospel conservative Christians proclaim – not because they are hostile to Jesus – but because they are turned off by groups that are perceived to be anti-gay and judgmental*

- Evangelical Christians – and the Gospel we preach and the values we espouse – are becoming more and more irrelevant and distasteful to the present-day generation of youth and young adults
- *Some Christians seem to be more passionate about capitalism and traditional family values than they are about Jesus and His Gospel*
- **In our zeal to convert our culture to conservative moral and economic and political values – we are losing a generation to the Gospel**
- *How can Christians regain their lost influence in our increasingly secularized culture?*
- Our text today presents us with two alternative strategies for gaining influence over people:

I. **WORLDLY POWER**

- *Power is the ability to control one's environment and the behavior of others.*
- **All humans have some measure of a will to power in the sense of desire to control one's own life and environment as well as to control others**
- Sometimes power is exercised by someone in a position of authority within a social structure
- *But power can also be used in the sense of influence over others apart from any formal or legitimate authority*
- Sources of power include: the authority of a leadership position in an organization // wealth or belonging to a wealthy social class // charisma // expertise // knowledge // *persuasive abilities* // coercive force // social influence // moral persuasion // control of resources needed by others
- *Power is obtained or held or exercised in two basic ways: by force or by persuasion – that is, people follow the one holding power either involuntarily (by force) or voluntarily (by persuasion)*
- *When people share a common belief system & values and common goals, then people will voluntarily follow a leader exercising authority*
- But without a sense of common beliefs and values, some degree of force or coercion must be used in order for one group to gain power over others
- When an individual or a group uses wealth or violence or punishment or political force or military might or other forms of coercion in order to control the behavior of others – *the response of those being coerced or controlled will be resentment and anger and resistance and sometimes even violence*

- Whereas when people can be persuaded to adopt the same beliefs or values or goals as those in power or leadership – *they will voluntarily support the leadership’s objectives because of a sense of shared common interests and ideals and goals*

Luke 22:25 (NIV) ²⁵Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.”

- *The Romans didn’t worry about the consent of the governed*
- **They used political force and military force and judicial force and economic force and any other kind of coercive power required to gain and sustain control over their subjects**
- *They would manipulate the behavior of their subjects toward desired ends by means of material rewards and various kinds of punishments – and then call themselves Benefactors as they gave their subjects various kinds of benefits to keep them under their control*
- **Much of worldly power is coercive in nature**
- How do you like it when a group gains political power in our country and then uses that power to pass legislation and advance an agenda that is founded upon certain beliefs and values that you strongly disagree with?
- *Does that make their beliefs and values and goals more attractive to you?*
- When you are forced to obey laws you don’t agree with or give your tax money to causes you don’t support – *does that make you more or less likely to support the values and agenda of the group exercising political power?*
- **Coercive power produces resentment and resistance, doesn’t it?**
- **That is precisely the problem with Christians trying to advance Kingdom values and agendas by means of power politics apart from persuading people to adopt Christian beliefs and values**
- *Even if we were successful in gaining enough political power to turn our values into public policy and the law of the land – how would people who don’t share our beliefs and values respond?*
- *Does the exercise of political power make people more or less likely to adopt our beliefs and values? More or less likely to embrace the Gospel we proclaim?*
- Many laws and policies are based on values of some kind or another

- *When those laws and policies are consistent with your values and beliefs – then you don't complain about one group imposing their values or agenda on you against your will*
- *But when those laws and policies violate your own beliefs and values – then you will resent and resist one group using political power or judicial power to impose their values on you*
- *We don't like being on the receiving end of that use of power, do we?*
- *No one does*

- *The problem is not with Christians being politically active nor with speaking out on the moral issues of the day*
- *The problem is depending on coercive power more than on persuasive power – trying to control others by political power when we have failed to persuade them of the truth and benefits of our beliefs and values*

- *We have failed to make disciples of our nation // failed to make disciples of this generation // failed to persuade the last two generations of the truth of the Gospel and the benefits of following biblical moral values*
- *Consequently, the majority of 16-29-year-olds today do not look at the world and issues such as sexuality and marriage and sanctity of human life from a Christian perspective*
- *They do not share our Christian beliefs and values – and thus they accuse us of trying to impose our religious beliefs and values on them when we try to uphold traditional marriage and family values*

- *Unlike when I grew up in the 1950s and 60s – children and youth today are growing up in a culture that is unfriendly toward biblical values and worldview*
- *There have always been hypocrites who did not put into practice their beliefs and values – but when I was growing up our culture generally was supportive of biblical values*
- *That day is over – and the church needs to adjust to reality*

- *And our culture will not be transformed by conservative talk radio nor by the Republican Party nor by constitutional amendments nor by longing for the good old days when our nation's religious heritage was respected*
- *Nothing wrong with those things – but they are just ineffective when it comes to transforming the beliefs and values of a majority of people in our society*
- *The church needs to change its strategy and tactics or Christians will continue to lose influence in our culture*

- **Instead of trying to control the behavior of non-Christians by means of exercising worldly political power – we need to follow the way of Jesus and of the early church**
- **Jesus and his apostles and the church of the first two or three hundred years of Christianity had NO worldly power – *no wealth // no political power // no social status // no cultural support or political support for their beliefs and values***
- **They were more often persecuted for the sake of the Gospel and righteousness than applauded for their beliefs and values**
- ***Yet in 300 years the Roman Empire had become largely Christianized***
- **Politically powerless – they transformed the culture, beliefs and values of the Roman Empire**
- ***How did they do it?***

II. CHRIST-LIKE SERVANTHOOD

- ***1st and 2nd century Christians lived in a culture that was just as wicked and immoral and ungodly and hostile to Christianity as ours – or more so – but what were the 1st and 2nd century Christians known for?***
- ***Were they known for their criticisms of the Roman Emperor and Senate? Were they known for their negative opinions of the Emperor's and Senate's economic policies or foreign policy or health care policy? Were they known for their condemnation of the sexually immoral lifestyles of the non-Christians of that day? Were they known for trying to change the tolerant attitudes of Greeks and Romans toward widespread and flagrant homosexuality in that culture?***
- ***The early Christians were known for their uncompromising allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord // they were known for their constant chattering about Jesus and his death and resurrection***
- ***They were known for their humility / kindness / authenticity / compassion / generosity / hospitality / self-sacrifice / good deeds / active caring & sharing***
- **Listen to this description of the early church written in 125 AD:**
- ***“They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them. They love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. Whoever has distributes liberally to whoever has not.***

- *“If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him as if he were their own brother: for they call themselves brothers, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit of God.*
- *“When one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs.*
- *“And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.”*
- Those are the kinds of qualities and deeds that make the beliefs and values of a group attractive to those outside the group
- **No wonder the Gospel they proclaimed had such a transforming impact on their surrounding culture**
- *The early church understood the power of serving others to persuade people of the truth of the Gospel and to influence the beliefs and values of an entire society*
- Where did they learn the influencing power of serving?

Luke 22:26-27 ²⁶But among you, the one who serves you best will be your leader. ²⁷Out in the world the master sits at the table and is served by his servants. But not here! For I am your servant.”

- *The one who serves best will be the leader – the influencer – the one who persuades others to follow*
- **Do you want to be a person of influence // a leader // a world-changer // a difference-maker ? – then devote your life to serving others in love**
- *That’s how Jesus lived his life – not by trying to control others – but rather by serving others*
- Of course, the disciples were as slow as we are to learn the power of serving
- *What was the context for this teaching of Jesus?*
- The Last Supper
- *The night that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples*
- That Passover Seder night that Jesus taught his disciples the meaning of sacrificing his body and shedding his blood in order to set them free from the bondage of sin, death and Satan

- *And it was while Jesus was instituting the ordinance of Communion during the last night of his life that the disciples were arguing among themselves which one of them deserved to be placed in the seat of greatest power in Jesus' coming kingdom*
- *It was the first of hundreds and thousands of power struggles that have taken place in the church of Jesus Christ over the centuries and continuing to this day*
- *Both by words and by example Jesus taught his disciples that true power // true leadership influence – is not gained by lording it over people in an attempt to control them or coerce them into following our agenda – rather true power and influence and leadership in the Kingdom of God are gained and exercised by serving others*

Mark 10:45 (NIV) ⁴⁵ “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- *Jesus was not a Master who occasionally served others – rather Jesus was – and is – a servant by nature*

Luke 12:37 (Jesus – speaking of his return) ³⁷ There will be special favor for those who are ready and waiting for his return. I tell you, he himself will seat them, put on an apron, and serve them as they sit and eat!

- *When Jesus returns as King of kings – he will still be the Servant who serves his servants!*
- *Growing in Christ-likeness cannot be separated from growing in servanthood*
- *A Christ-like church will be a Servant church devoted to serving one another in the body of Christ and devoted to serving the hurting and needy and lost outside the body of Christ*
- *The more we serve – the more we reflect the likeness of Christ*
- *The more we serve – the more attractive we make the Gospel to unbelievers*
- *The more we serve – the more we grow in our ability to persuade others to embrace our beliefs and values*
- *The more we serve – the greater will be our influence on our surrounding culture*
- *If we want to be great in the Kingdom of God – then we will serve*

- If we want our church to be a moral and spiritual leader in our community – then we will serve
- *If we want to make the Gospel attractive and credible to unbelievers – then we will serve*
- If we want to be culture-shapers rather than worldly conformists – then we will serve
- *If we want to earn the right to speak out and be heard on the moral and social issues of our day – then we will serve*
- If we want to show skeptics what Christ-followers are really like – then we will serve
- *If we want God to enlarge the territory of Cornerstone for the sake of His Kingdom – then we will serve*

- **That is why we do Serve Fest: to reflect the likeness of Christ // to make the Gospel attractive to unbelievers // to increase our influence for Christ in the surrounding culture // to extend Christ's love to the hurting and needy**
- This is why we go to the AIDS Project Quad Cities and ask: *How may we serve you?*
- This is why we go to our community leaders and ask: *How may we serve you?*
- This is why we partner with Habitat for Humanity and World Relief and Salvation Army and Hospice organizations and ask: *How may we help?*
- This is why we deliver laundry detergent in Jesus' name to apartments in Park View and Eldridge
- *This why we paint fire hydrants and clean up trash in city parks*
- This is why we show God's love to nursing home residents
- *This is why we partner with Jan and SonShine Community Ministries at Mt. Joy*

- **This is what Christ-followers do // this is who Christ-followers are – we are servants extending Christ's love to others**

- ***Let's go out into the community and be the body of Christ!***