



Sermon - 1 Peter 2:11ff

Aiden Sibrava - 25th October

We don't have a 'social gospel' ...but...the Gospel we have should make a social difference (not a social distance).

I'm Aiden, I'm one of the pastors here at Kiama Anglican and today we're continuing through the book of 1 Peter, picking up in chapter 2:11. We'll be thinking about how the Gospel of Jesus should make a difference in what we do as we live our lives out in the world.

In Anglican churches there's a prayer we use after Communion, which says (1) what Jesus has done for us, and (2) the 'social difference' that that should make. The prayer says, *'Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that, when we were still far off, you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights give light to the world.'* Amen? Amen.

Through history, God's people have brought light to the world. Jesus said we would; a city on a hill can't be hidden. And I reckon part of discipleship isn't just learning doctrine, but also learning the difference that doctrine has made in history.

You see, there are so many times when Christians have been at the forefront of making a difference because of what we believe.

For example, the early abolitionists—that's the anti-slavery movement in England—that movement was driven by evangelical Christians. It was people like William Wilberforce, or (the Reformed preacher) Charles Spurgeon—who called slavery “the foulest blot”, or John Wesley (the hymn writer) who condemned slavery as “the sum of all villainies”. These were the kind of people who made a difference in their world.

They made a difference, because they were driven by love for God and love for neighbour - the things Jesus called us to.

But it seems like things changed in the 20th Century.

Things which had always gone together - Gospel belief and Gospel-action - it's like they were separated. So that it was almost like you had one group who said, just preach the Gospel; don't focus on the social stuff (it's a distraction); we need to remain faithful to Jesus in what we believe. And another group said, no the works are what matters and belief is (maybe) secondary. So two things which should go together got taken apart and owned by two camps. Now this group who focused on actions are often called 'social gospel' and, to oversimplify, I guess you could say that the worry is, there was way too much 'social' and not enough 'gospel'.

But it hadn't been that way throughout much of the church's history, where action and belief went together. And Peter seems to think that's how things should be. Because this whole part of his letter talks about the difference that Jesus should make in our

social lives and the goodness of that; and the difference that makes—for the glory of God!

11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

Peter says, “Live a good life. Stay away from sin which wars against your soul.” And if you just had that verse in isolation, you might think... Well, “soul” is my psyche, the word kind of means, ‘me at the core of me’, and that sounds very personal. So is Peter thinking of the sins that just affect me personally? He’s not not interested in those, but all of the ‘sin’ that he speaks of in context is social; from the start of chapter 2 it’s malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander - things that undermine our life together. You can’t ‘envy’ without someone else to envy. You can’t ‘slander’ without someone to slander about and to.

And so in context, it seems Peter has social sins in mind. And did you notice that staying away from them has a social impact? It does! Because after Peter says, “stay away from sin” in verse 11, he then says we should behave in such a way so that when they slander you, non-believers might see your good works and glorify God.

It’s like...society behaves one way - they envy, they slander... They slander you! But then when they look at you, you’re not behaving

that way, are you? Are you? No! Because you've been changed by Jesus. And that glorifies God.

And...the exciting thing is, it might even do more than that. Because verse 12 says that when they see your behaviour, they might glorify God. When? On the day he visits. Now some people read that to mean 'the day of judgment' but, despite the translation, Peter doesn't write of the day, he just writes about a day when God visits. And God can visit people for judgment but he can also visit them for salvation. When the Spirit of God stirs the heart, when the Gospel is shared in our actions and speech - sometimes, people respond. They turn and trust in Jesus...and they're saved! And that's glorious. And Peter says that your behaviour could be part of that picture.

So you've got to ask the question, do I behave in a way that glorifies God? Do I behave in a way that's shaped by the Gospel of who Jesus is and what he has done? Or do I behave in a way that actually turns people off?

You know...I think it's a risk.

Because in preparing for this sermon, I looked at some research by the Barna Group, a Christian research company; they did some research amongst Christians where they de-identified attitudes and actions of (1) Jesus and (2) the Pharisees. And they got people to compare themselves with those beliefs and actions. What they found was really sad. They found that only 14% reflected the attitudes and actions of Jesus. 51% were totally Pharisee and another 21% had Jesus' attitudes, but behaved like Pharisees.

Now...how does that happen? Everyone knows the Pharisees are the bad guys. You reckon 72% of Christians don't know that? No way! So what's going on with that research? Well I think it means, we've at least got to ask the question: am I living in a way that honours Jesus in what I say and what I do, or could I be assuming I am, but actually missing it somewhere?

It seems like a possibility. It's possible to think that we're getting it right, when we're getting it wrong.

Because that's what the Pharisees were doing. And apparently that's what a lot of American Christians are doing, too.

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I think you see it again with the next thing Peter says.

2:13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority 14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. 15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

Question: Have you noticed that there are some churches and Christians out there who aren't really good at submitting to the government? They might even use their freedom as a bit of a battering ram to try and get their own way? This year they might be a bit anti-mask, anti-Dan Andrews, or maybe just a bit anti-everything? Well Peter says that that's not who we should be. Not me - Peter. Blame him! He says we should submit and do good. In

fact in 3:9 he goes even further and says don't just submit and do good...he even says bless those who persecute you! Bless them.

Do we?

I know what we should want to be able to say, but what would someone on the street say?...or at work?...if you asked them, do Christians honor everyone? Do Christians respect everyone? Do Christians ever cover up evil (verse 16)? Do they love each other (verse 17)? Do they honor the government? Are they so good that it's hard to criticise them?

I think you and I know that we might not like hearing the answers to all of those questions. And it's worth asking why.

But it might be more helpful to ask what we can do about it. And Peter gives us the answer in verse 15. Peter says: It is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. You see, they knew the abolitionists loved the slaves because they did good for slaves. They'll know we don't hate poor people or foreign people, when we do good for poor people or foreign people.

Our Gospel is not a 'social gospel', but it has a social impact. And it should impact in light of the Gospel, not despite the Gospel.

You see I think a bit of why we get uncomfortable with this sometimes is there's this false dichotomy between gospel convictions and gospel actions, but people like William Wilberforce the abolitionist took action because of their belief; because it had gone so deep it had made a difference; because

that's what real faith does. That's why James wrote that 'faith without works is dead'. John Calvin said that 'faith alone justifies us, but the faith which justifies us is not alone.' Because if you believe the Gospel - that Jesus is Lord - and you love what the Lord loves, and you hate what the Lord hates, then you will love the people that he loves in the way that he loved them.

And what does that look like?

In 1 Peter 2:16, Peter calls us to live as God's slaves. And then he tells us, God's slaves, that Jesus is our example. *Verse 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.' 25 For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

That's not a 'social gospel'. But it makes a difference, for the glory of God, to how we live in this world. Or at least, it should.

So what difference does it make for you?

Well if you're here and you're not yet Christian, two things:

1. You're reminded of how loving Jesus is. He gave himself for you, he died, so that we could have peace and relationship with

God. Number 2, you now know that 'Christians' who are self-righteous, arrogant, judgemental, unloving people aren't living up to what they're called to by Peter. They're not representing Christianity the way that they should. And you have my permission to remind them of that, because we're called to be better.

If you're here and you're Christian - what difference is it making in the way you live your life in this world? Where are the places that knowing Jesus' loves and hates, causes us to make a difference? What difference does it make to the church? Or to those around us? Because an understanding of the Gospel that only affects our beliefs, and never affects what we do with our hands, is a Christianity that's fallen short.



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