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Sermon Summary

Speaker: Keith Harrington



Core Beliefs Pt 3.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about Christianity and so this series we are doing is called Core Beliefs. What are the core essentials of the Christian faith? There are 7 Core beliefs and if you remove any of these 7 you do not have Christianity. This means there are lots of non core beliefs. These are things that Christians disagree on. There are Quite a lot of these and it is not that these are not important but they are areas of disagreement and where we need to show grace towards one another.

I lead the ministers group in town which has recently been renamed Churches together Invercargill. Currently there are 15 churches that have said we want to be on board - about half the churches in town. There are another 3 or 4 on the edges. The group has Anglican, Brethren, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Apostolic, Baptist, C3, AOG, independent. As churches we would have a whole variety of views on many of these issues. But we don't choose to focus on these. There is total agreement around the 7 core beliefs, as there has been for centuries. We gather around our core beliefs and 3 values of prayer, unity and service to the city. It is hard to argue with those. It was great to see 650 at the combined service recently. I meet with 6 senior pastors twice a month for lunch, prayer, fellowship. Once a month, a wider group of leaders gets together for lunch. Last time we had 20. Earlier in the year, 5 of us did a 24 hr retreat of prayer, worship and building relationship. It grieves the heart of God when we fight over the non core issues. We can hold strong views. But we can have the grace to accept others hold different views. Our faith is in a person, not a set of creeds. When the world sees us arguing over this stuff, they right us off. But Jesus says when the world sees how they love each other, (not just those same beliefs) and are united, then it will bring glory to his name. I sensed God say to me soon after I came here. Your role is to build the church. I said sure. That's right. He said. No I mean the church in Invercargill. I am not glorified if ICBC has 500 people in it, and half of them have come from the church down the road. That has not built my church. I want you to leave my church in the city in a better place when you leave it than when you came. Now that is a bit more challenging. But with the support of the elders, that is what I am giving input into.

One of our core priorities is to serve the city. Part of that as a larger inner city church is that we serve the church of the city. Not because we are better, but to serve. What can we do to build the church in the city? Never speak negatively about another leader or congregation. Sure there is a whole heap wrong with them, just like there is with us. But I don't need to speak that out. I can sow negativity about the bride of Christ in the city or I can build an atmosphere of unity and faith. So I will choose to speak positively about my fellow leaders and fellow congregations. One of the pastors I met with telling me the other day about a young guy in his church who used to come here and was telling him how bad I was. The pastor just looked at him and said. Keith is a good man. The conversation came to an abrupt end. He was not going to let him run me down.

Another way we can build the church in the city is to learn how to respectfully disagree with each other. We don't need to try to change people to our view. You don't need to agree with everything another Christians believes in. It is OK to hold different views. The fact is the each denomination brings with it something of the image of God. Just as people reflect the image of God, so each church reflects part of the image of God. The Anglicans reflect well God's holiness, sense of mystery, transcendence. The brethren reflect well the priesthood of all believers. The Pentecostal reflect well the power of God, Baptists reflect well a passion for god's word, and for mission.

Today we look at Core Doctrine 3. Central to Christianity. As I said last week our faith is in a person. Jesus Christ. The church is a group gathered around the risen Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15-22 This single passage sums up much of our beliefs around Jesus Christ. It's a great passage to memorize. (tried twice and failed twice!)

3. We believe Jesus is fully man and fully God yet one.

Fully Man Read the biographies of Jesus we see Jesus normal birth, grew and developed normally. Physical limitations hungry, thirsty, weary, pain, emotions, sorrow, love, compassion, astonishment, anger. religious life, subject to temptation Paul clearly states. Jesus is human. Rom 8:3, Phil 2:8, Col 1:22

Fully God. Read of Jesus doing the things that only God can do. He was Present at creation, he saves people, forgives people and judges people. He Is Worshipped. For a Jew to offer worship to anyone other than God was offensive Rom 9:5 2 Tim 4:18, 2 Peter 3:18 Rev 1:5f His Name tells us he is God. The sacred name for God YHWH was in Greek translated Lord. Title was given to Jesus directly. Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3, Phil 2:11 The Confession Jesus is Lord is probably the earliest confession of faith. In saying Jesus is Lord, the early Christians were saying Jesus is God. Jesus did miracles like walking on water, turning water into wine, healing the sick, and raising the dead. And then there is the Resurrection when he himself came back to life from the dead. If God is not fully man, then he can't identify with us, and our humanity. But if Jesus is not fully God, then the work of the cross is not sufficient.

We believe Jesus Came to earth, born of the Virgin Mary, died, rose and ascended to heaven

There is an Historical reality to Jesus. He is Not a mythical figure. There was a Moment in history when God became flesh. Our belief is ground in cold hard historical reality. There is Overwhelming evidence for each of these. You might think well, the Virgin Birth can't be core belief can it? But it strikes at a number of key things. (Not least the Scripture clearly states it.) But crucially, it points to the uniqueness of Jesus. If Jesus had two human parents - then he is just a man. If no human involvement at all, then he is fully God say just God, with no humanity. This is important because it earths our faith in something tangible - in the real physical world. People say I would believe in God if I could see him. Well, when we see Jesus, we have seen God.

Work on the cross deals with sin and it's consequences and we access this work by faith

The cross makes no sense without the second core belief around our fallen world, and personal rebellion. If we don't believe the world needs a saviour and that everything is OK, then you don't need the cross. If we don't believe that we personally have rebelled against God and try to find satisfaction in all kinds of wrong place, then the cross is no use. But if we instinctively know something is wrong then the cross is good news. As the Colossians passage point out, through the cross we are reconciled to God, ourselves and creation. Here is the very heart of the Christian message. We can be in relationship with God. The barrier of guilt is dealt with. We can come into the very presence of God as we are. We can be in relationship with each other. We don't need to control or judge but can accept others for who they are and truly love them because we are secure in who we are. We are loved children of God.

We can be in relationship with creation anew and find purpose in life. And there is Nothing we can do to earn this. The work of Christ is done and we accept it by faith. Many say they believe this, but....

Why do so many Christians feel guilty all the time? Guilt comes from the law. The law has been fulfilled by Christ. So why do so many Christians feel guilty? Work of the cross is once and for all time. When we sin, we don't suddenly become separated from God. We have been accepted by God. That includes sins, weaknesses. Sin grieves the Spirit of God. We are to ask forgiveness from sin. We are to feel sorrow for sin, because we have hurt someone we love. But guilt comes from law. Sometimes our own internal law. I.e. I ought to do this.

Why do so many Christians feel unloved by God? They have not grasped that they are accepted by God as they are. The work of Jesus on the cross means we are fully accepted by God. No condemnation for those in Jesus Christ. So many Christians not living in reality of grace and acceptance and freedom that comes in Jesus Christ and the work of the cross.

Why do so many Christian try to earn God's favour? They are forever striving for God's approval, hoping by serving and having quiet times God will approve of them. But they are already loved by God and nothing they can do could make God love them more.

For years I tried to earn God's approval. I would think if I missed a quiet time, that God was out to get me. I lived with a sense of condemnation. You are not good enough. How dare you worship. God has had to set me free. Some of this came from my childhood. I felt I had to earn my parents approval and that I was never quite good enough. I took this same feeling into my relationship with God. It has been a slow process of bringing these truths from my head to my heart.

We have not done a good job of communicating this core Christian message. The most common comment I hear from those not Christians, or when I am at the tennis club, is "The Roof would fall in if I came to church." or "I reckon I have lived a good life so will be OK when I die" Somehow we have communicated a message that says that you can only come to church if you are good. There is the exact opposite of Christianity. We need to come to church if we are not good. If you have it all together please leave now because the rest of us don't have it all together. Church is not for those who are good but for those who know they need God. I once put a sign out at Eastside years ago. It said something like. "this church is for bad people" This created lots of discussion from the shop keepers. But the people who got upset were those in the church, despite this being very sound theology. You are not here because you are good. You are here because you know you desperately need God. That means how much money you have, your education,, your achievements, your race is totally and utterly irrelevant. Christianity is not about what we do for God. It is about what God has done for us.

Communion time of both celebration and reflection.

We believe Jesus is fully God and fully human

We believe Jesus came to earth, born of the Virgin Mary, died, rose and ascended to heaven

We believe Jesus work on the cross deals with sin and it's consequences and we access this work by faith

Some declarations to make.

There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. I am in Jesus. Therefore the condemnation I feel is not from God. So go in Jesus name.

God is faithful and just. As we confess our sins, he is faithful and forgives us. I am forgiven in Jesus name. I am washed clean by the blood of Jesus.

I am a child of Gods ,part of the family of God. I am loved and approved by the Father.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- ◆ What can you do to build up the church of the city? Have you been guilty of speaking negatively about the church? How do you think God feels when we run down his body? What can you do to create a positive atmosphere at ICBC?
- ◆ In what ways can we live and act as if Jesus is not fully God?
- ◆ What part of your humanity do you need Jesus to identify with at the moment? I.e weariness, temptation, sickness....? What would help you know Jesus understands your struggle?
- ◆ How or when do you experience condemnation? How can you counter this?
- ◆ Do you sometime feel as if you have to earn God's approval? How could you experience freedom to know you are loved as a child of his? Can your experience with your own children help you?
- ◆ Practise in role play what you would say to the person who says the roof will fall in if they came to church. Or how to respond to the person that says they have lived a good life so should go to heaven.