



Turn your eyes upon Jesus

There once was a man named George Thomas, a pastor in a small New England town. One Easter Sunday morning he came to the Church carrying a rusty, bent, old bird cage, and set it by the pulpit. Several eyebrows were raised and, as if in response, Pastor Thomas began to speak:

"I was walking through town yesterday when I saw a young boy coming toward me swinging this bird cage. On the bottom of the cage were three little wild birds, shivering with cold and fright. I stopped the lad and asked, "What you got there son?"

"Just some old birds," came the reply.

"What are you going do with them?" I asked.

"Take them home and have fun with them," he answered.

"I'm going to tease them and pull out their feathers to make them fight. I'm going to have a real good time."

"But you'll get tired of those birds sooner or later. What will you do then?"

"Oh, I have some cats," said the little boy. "They like birds. I'll take them to them."

The pastor was silent for a moment. "How much do you want for those birds, son?"

"Huh??!!! Why, you don't want them birds, mister. They're just plain old field birds. They don't sing they are not even pretty!"

"How much?" the pastor asked again.

The boy sized up the pastor as if he were crazy and said, "\$10?"

The pastor reached in his pocket and took out a ten dollar bill. He placed it in the boy's hand. In a flash, the boy was gone. The pastor picked up the cage and gently carried it to the end of the alley where there was a tree and a grassy spot. Setting the cage down, he opened the door, and by softly tapping the bars persuaded the birds out, setting them free.

Well, that explained the empty bird cage on the pulpit, and then the pastor began to tell this story.

One day Satan and Jesus were having a conversation. Satan had just come from the Garden of Eden, and he was gloating and boasting.

"Yes, sir, I just caught the world full of people down there. Set me a trap, used bait I knew they couldn't resist. Got them all!"



"What are you going to do with them?" Jesus asked.

Satan replied, "Oh, I'm going to have some fun! I'm going to teach them how to marry and divorce each other, how to hate and abuse each other, how to drink and smoke and curse. I'm going to teach them how to invent guns and bombs and kill each other. I'm really going to have fun!"

"And what will you do when you get done with them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, I will kill them", Satan glared proudly.

"How much do you want for them?" Jesus asked.

"Oh, you don't want those people. They are no good at all. Why, you'll take them and they'll just hate you. They'll spit on you, curse you and kill you!! You don't want those people!!"

"How much?" He asked again.

Satan looked at Jesus and sneered, "All your tears, and all your blood."

Jesus said, "DONE!" Then He paid the price.

The pastor picked up the cage, opened the door and he walked from the pulpit.

This morning I want to spend a brief time looking at Jesus. In order to do this, I am going to use the letters in his name, J, E, S, U, & S as the starting point for five brief points. We will look at the first one, fairly briefly and then we will sing a song, that may help us to focus on Jesus, and the theme of this talk.

So the first letter J stands for Jesus himself. For that is his wonderful name. There are many good things that we as Christians can look at and think about. There is the Bible, the church, the Holy Spirit and hundreds of other important subjects. However, the danger is that we may take our eyes of Jesus.

I like watching cricket and one of the expressions, used in many ball games is, 'don't take your eye of the ball'. Particularly in cricket when the ball is coming towards you at maybe up to 90 mph, if you don't keep your eyes on the ball, you may have a very painful experience.

In fact the writer to the Hebrew Christians, says just this when he writes to them:

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)



So it is very sad that so many Christians, take their eyes off of Jesus. Some of them get really involved in looking at things, that are often good in themselves, but deflect their focus from Jesus himself. There are a few Christians, who take their eyes of Jesus, because they don't really believe in him. They even share all their doubts within the church.

But our focus this morning is Jesus himself, is the author of our faith. He really is wonderful and the best thing in the world is to keep focussed on him, and following him closely.

I would like us to sing what is a fairly old chorus that when I was younger, we were always singing in our church. It is not in the books, so I have written it out for you on the sheets. It says:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full, in his wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of his glory and grace.¹

<Sing song a couple of times>

So we are looking at the name Jesus and using that to see what Jesus stands for and can do. As we have seen J reminds us of his wonderful name Jesus.

The second letter E reminds me that Jesus is exciting. That might surprise you. But consider this. Jesus walked on water; he turned water into gallons of wine; he stilled a raging storm; he caused blind people to see, and even raised some people from death back to life. And that is just a few of things we read of in the Gospel accounts. John at the end of his account of Jesus life, which we call the Gospel according to John writes this:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

John 21:25 (NIV)

I know that most of you here know Mike Shelbourne. Well I have heard him preach a sermon about how we manage to make Jesus boring as a counterpoint to the exciting person Jesus really is. And regrettably we do make Jesus boring, in many of our churches. Where is the excitement of knowing Jesus. In some churches only ever sing old hymns, and sing them so slowly that they are like a funeral dirge. Some preachers make it all sound pretty dull when Jesus was around, that is, if with some of them you an understand what they are saying.

Just before I left work, I young contractor sat opposite me at work. Knowing that I preach in churches from time to time etc... he asked me how long I had been religious. Well I really don't like being called religious. I think I said something like, I really am not very religious. I believe that Jesus was one of the most exciting people to ever live in this world.

Let us ask God, through his Spirit to wake us up, to just how exciting Jesus was and is.

¹ Helen H. Lemmel, 1922



The third letter in his name, S, reminds us that he is a saviour. For indeed he is the saviour of the world. But what do we understand by this word. Sometimes it sounds as if this is the gospel or good news of Jesus, as set out by some Christians.

Believe in, or on, the Lord Jesus; You will then be forgiven for your sins; You will receive eternal life; You will go to heaven.

Now this is not untrue. But it seems so limited and thin on the ground. And after all if you read the 4 gospels in the New Testament, Jesus didn't actually mention eternal life very much at all. What he did talk about all the time was the exciting concept called the Kingdom of God or sometimes it is called the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now as you know the New Testament was written in Greek, about 2000 years ago. A very different time, place and culture to us. The root of the word salvation in Greek is sozo. Now when it says in the New Testament that Jesus heals someone, the Greek comes from exactly the same root. So salvation and healing in New Testament Greek are virtually interchangeable. This parallels another wonderful word in the Old Testament and that is shalom. We tend to translate this as peace, thinking about peace between God and us or peace between people. But shalom in Hebrew as root can mean in practice, salvation, healing, wholeness, completeness, perfection, richness, along with many more meanings. You see when Jesus came he said, repent the Kingdom is at hand. And even more significant the Kingdom is within you. If I had time to develop this we could show that he is saying because I have come shalom is here.

So from both the Hebrew and the Greek, salvation is not just about being forgiven for our sins. It is so much more. It is about entering into healing and wholeness. It is about entering into the riches that come from God. (That doesn't necessarily mean lots of money, such as taught in the prosperity Gospel type teaching).

Why do so many Christians in churches go around with low opinions of themselves? Why do so many carry a load of guilt and shame in their lives?

Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Philippians 2:12b & 13 (NIV)

So we are not just saved when we believe and that is it. Paul says we are to work out our salvation, remembering that God is at work in us.

So we need to let his wholeness & healing grow in our lives. For Jesus is truly the Saviour in all that this word means in its riches.



The fourth letter U, reminds us that Jesus is un-changeable.

The writer to the Hebrew or Jewish Christians writes:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)

So if Jesus was exciting when he was on earth, he is still exciting today. He hasn't changed one little bit. In fact in some ways he is more glorious now. For he is seated in heaven and has poured out His Spirit on the church. That is all of us as Christians can be filled with his Spirit. We can do what he did when he was on earth. When he was on earth, he could only be in one place at one time. But now the millions of Christians here on earth can all act for Jesus in the power of his Spirit. Remember Jesus himself said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

John 14:12 (NIV)

So if Jesus was exciting then and doing great things in the power of the Holy Spirit, by his very word we can be doing even greater things.

Jesus hasn't changed, but maybe we or at least some teachers in the church have changed things about him. He is still God's son. He always was and always will be. He was the saviour who came to save all people, and he is still the saviour who reaches out to save us and heal us all the time. God is love, he always was and always will be.

We need to let God excite us again. We need God to revive our love for him and to allow through the Spirit his life to flow through us.

The final S in his name, reminds us that he satisfies us.

Here are a couple of verses from the Psalms:

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Psalms 145:16 (NIV)

"With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalms 91:16 (NIV)

And here is what Isaiah says to those of us, like me, who are getting older:

Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Isaiah 46:4 (NIV)

So whether we are 6 or 86 Jesus will satisfy us.



So what I have been saying today is that we need to keep our eyes focussed very clearly on Jesus. He not only was the most exciting person around but he still is today. He is truly the saviour, we need. And salvation, is not only from sin, but being saved into wholes and healing in all that this means. Jesus is unchanging because he is the same yesterday, today and for ever. Finally Jesus does truly satisfy us, no matter how old or young we are. He will satisfy us today, if only we will let him. And in the future he will also go on satisfying us, till one day we stand face to face with him, in heaven.

AMEN²

² 2359 words – 18.5 – 20 minutes