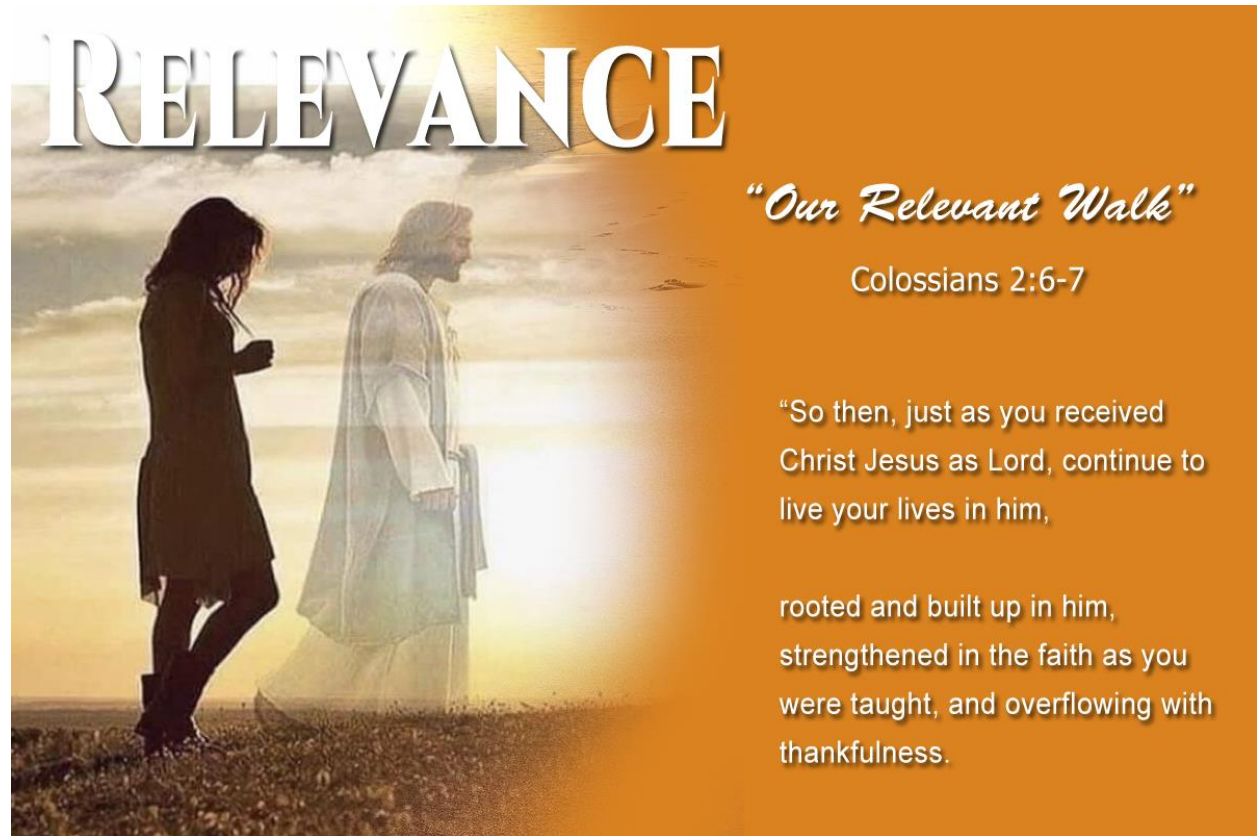


April 28

“Our Relevant Walk”



Special Music: “The Jesus Way”

Phil Wickham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARSGqC9iQb0>

Colossians 2:6-7

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

MORE THAN A REFLECTION

Maria Gonzalez finished up her shift as a hairdresser at the Dreamweaver Beauty Palace. She only worked there part-time while her daughter, Amanda (known to everyone as Mandy), was in school. There was never a dull moment at the Gonzalez house as Maria picked up various jobs around town. Her husband, Dominic, worked for the local cable provider doing installations and troubleshooting.

After her shift at Dreamweaver, Maria would pick up Mandy from elementary school and take her with her as she did the odd jobs that she had signed up for. On Tuesdays, she would clean Audrey Stubblefield's house, which was never a hard task since Audrey kept an immaculate home anyway. On Monday's and Friday's, she did deliveries for Jimmy Drake, the pharmacist. Wednesdays and she filed paperwork over at the offices of Charm & Peckenstock, two of the local attorneys. Theirs was the only law office in Parable and there was never a great deal of papers to be filed. As a matter of fact, there was so little to do at the office at this time, they had told her that she could skip coming in on Thursday. When this happened, they always paid her for the hours anyway, which was often the way people were in Parable.

Maria had gotten a call from Henry Strawberry over at First National Bank explaining that someone had spilled some kind of drink on the front doors. Stephanie, one of the tellers, had done her best to wipe them off, but her efforts had not had the desired outcome. Henry asked Maria to drop by and see what

she could do. Since the law office had let her have the day, she took Mandy with her to clean the doors. When Mandy accompanied her on these odd jobs, Maria would find a place for Mandy to sit and work on her homework while Maria did whatever she needed to do. Mandy didn't mind. She enjoyed spending time with her mother and learned a lot by watching how hard she worked.

As Maria and Mandy walked through the door, Stephanie was there to greet them. The problem was obvious. Whatever someone had spilled on the door was extremely sticky and it didn't seem to want to come off with just soap and water. It was obvious that Stephanie's attempt to clean it up had actually made things worse, and now the door wasn't just sticky, there was sand, dust, and pieces of paper towel clinging stubbornly to the glass. It didn't help that the doors hadn't been cleaned in a long while.

"I'll get right on this and make it spotless, Stephanie. Do you have a place that Mandy can do her homework?"

"Of course," Stephanie replied. "She can work right over here at the conference table. Can I get her a snack? I think we have some cheese and crackers in the break room."

"That would be wonderful. You'd like that, wouldn't you Mandy?" Maria said graciously.

Stephanie was only gone for a couple of minutes before returning with the cheese and crackers and a bottle of water for Mandy. Meanwhile, Maria had gone to her car to grab her case of cleaning solutions and rags. Once back inside, she

went right to work, scrubbing the insides of the doors first. The spill had been on the outside, but as long as she was there, she intended to make the doors spotless, inside and out.

It took a while, but Maria managed to get all the grime off the inside of the doors before turning her attention to the neglected sticky exterior of the doors. She started scrubbing, using circular motions to not only remove the dirt and grime, but to polish the glass to a super shine. The glass was tinted, so she wasn't really able to see what was going on inside the bank while she worked. There seemed to be a reflection in the glass of her hand and the cloth that she was using. But suddenly, the reflection seemed to cease to be a reflection, just for a second. She stopped her cleaning, cupped her hands to block the sun, and looked through the glass. Standing on the other side of the door was Mandy, rag in hand. She smiled. Maria smiled back.

Maria picked up her rag and started to clean again, only to realize that Mandy was matching her every motion. It wasn't a reflection she had been seeing after all. It was Mandy trying to match her mother's every move. And she was doing a pretty good job of it. Maria was impressed that Mandy was matching her movements, stroke for stroke.

She opened the door and pulled Mandy into her arms. It might not have seemed like much to many people, but Maria didn't want to let go of this moment where Mandy had sought a way to match her mother's actions, even though Maria had been unable to notice at first. Mandy didn't really understand why her mother was so impressed, but she threw her arms around her and hugged her

tight. I mean, that's what mothers are for, right? Maria could see Stephanie smiling in the background. Such a simple moment with such a great lesson. Such is the stuff that beautiful memories are made from.

Why is our walk relevant? I mean, who really cares about our walk?

Walking with Jesus, what does that even look like? Doesn't the Bible tell us that we are supposed to tell others about Christ? Where does it say that we need to show people what that looks like? This is what Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So, if we believe what Paul has to say, then we really don't have much of a choice but to reflect the image of Christ. It will happen naturally as we grow closer and closer to our Savior. Being a Christ follower, a Christian, means that we want to reflect his love, mercy, joy, grace, and forgiveness to this world that seeks only to tear us down, just as Christ exemplified an image of love, mercy, joy, grace, and forgiveness that was a reflection of HIS Father in a world seeking to tear Jesus down and destroy him. Jesus never expects us to do anything that he wasn't willing to do himself. As he mirrors his Father, we mirror him.

But that bothers us. We tell ourselves that we aren't Jesus, that we can never be Jesus, that it is impossible to live up to his expectations and his example. And that would be correct. Under our own authority, we can never be like Jesus. It just isn't possible. However, if we allow Jesus to live through us, we automatically start reflecting his nature and purpose to the world. People stop looking at us and start to see him instead. Our Creator doesn't allow us to

use the excuse that we are not perfect to explain away why we don't reflect his nature to the world around us.

That becomes a prickly point for many Christians as we hear the words that we need to die to self, that we need to remove ourselves from the equation. The less we show of ourselves, the more people can see him in us. This message is repeated in so many different ways in the New Testament, but we still struggle to embrace it.

1 What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?

2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—

7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 6:1-7

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10:38

23 Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?

Luke 9:23-25

23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

25 Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

John 12:23-26

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

John 3:30

That last verse was spoken by John the Baptist just as he explains to his followers that Jesus is the reason, the author of our salvation and that John's personal service needs to diminish in order for Christ's ministry to flourish. Meaning, "At some point you have to stop looking at me and start looking at him." Anytime people see us in the reflection rather than Christ, means that we are not reflecting the image of Jesus Christ to the world. We put on the Jesus costume but don't example the spirit that goes with it. No wonder the world gets confused by who we are and just what Christianity is all about.

There are many more verses talk about dying to self so that Jesus can become the subject of our conversation, rather than us. About the seed needing to die in order for the plant to produce fruit. About being made into new creatures. About leaving our old sins and desires behind as we allow Christ to shape us into something new. But all too often, we stop short of giving all that we are to Jesus in order for him to remake us. It's like we part ourselves out to our Savior. "You know, Jesus, this particular thing I do, well it looks good on me, so let's leave it alone. Instead, why don't you work on this part over here. You know, the one that needs a couple of dents pulled and then polished out."

"Jesus, please save me from this addiction. But I kind of enjoy this other bad habit that I have, so don't touch it, please." "Jesus, I really like being the driver. I like to be in control. Why don't you just help keep the car clean and be the navigator while I continue on as pilot of my soul." There is nothing in the Bible that tells us that this kind of thinking and partial submission is acceptable in any way. Why do we insist on saying, "Please God, forgive me of my sins. Thank you

so much for cleaning up my soul. You did a great job. I will take over from here. After all, it is my body and my soul, after all.”?

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul says it this way:

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;

23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds;

24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Every day, I see so many messages where Christians say one thing and then turn around say something that totally contradicts what they have just said. “I am totally sold out to Jesus, but I like where I live and I won’t move.” “Jesus is completely in charge of my life, but he would never ask me to change jobs.” “I am listening to the voice of Jesus and I will do whatever he tells me, unless, of course, he tells me to go to Africa, because, well, I know he would never tell me to do that.” “I know that Jesus tells us to visit the sick, but I’m not going to the hospital because there are sick people there and I might catch something.” “I will follow Jesus anywhere, unless it proves too dangerous or too filthy.”

I would love to be able to tell people that this kind of attitude is okay because it allows us to nestle into our comfort zones and puts a boundary on we will do and won’t do as Christians. But the truth is that we would need to gut the New Testament for any of that to make any sense. I would love to tell people that because they are too old, too sick, too frail, too young, too smart, too

uneducated, too sinful, too rich, too poor, too hungry, too fat, too skinny, too beautiful, too ugly, or too anything, so that God gives us special dispensation to ignore all these verses. But that just isn't so. We are not called to fall back into our comfort zone when God asks us to do something. We cannot call ourselves Christians if we choose to only be Christians part-time or when it suits our purposes. We're not talking about a verse or two, but the entire message what Christ wants from us.

It has been said that the best soldiers are those who train themselves to believe that they are already dead, so they have nothing to lose. I think there is some truth to that. As Christians, when we fully embrace that this world is not our home, that our purpose is not to live out our best lives but the lives that Jesus has prepared for us, when we accept the fact that spreading the message of Jesus Christ is our sole purpose on this planet, it is only then that we can come to the table as the passionate followers he needs us to be. When we realize that death no longer holds sway over us and that Jesus Christ has conquered death and given us new life, only then can we become the reflection that he needs for us to be in this chaotic world.

And I want to remind all of us of something else. The world will hate us for it. When the people decided that Jesus was not the Messiah that they thought he would be, they killed him. What do you think will happen when they see the reflection of Jesus in us? The world is a selfish place and people struggle with this message:

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The world doesn't want to hear that God isn't selfish. They don't want to hear a message that God was willing to sacrifice his own son to save a world that did not appreciate the sacrifice. The world teaches people that this is God manipulating us by saying things that don't match with the experience we have in the world. The world doesn't want to see the reflection of Jesus Christ in our lives. They think that it is just smoke and mirrow and the world may hurt us for it, or even kill us, just as they did Jesus.

I know that's a heavy message. It is such a long way from a cute little girl named Mandy trying her best to imitate her mother. But it truly isn't as big of a stretch as one might think. As hard as she tried, Mandy was never going to have the ability to completely match her mother's movements, just as we can never fully match the nature of Christ. But we aren't meant to. What we are called to do is let go and realize that only Jesus Christ can be the Messiah to the world and our lives are simply reflections guided and molded by his hands.

This week, I want us all to look in the mirror to see if we are being a reflection of Christ. Are we allowing ourselves to be used in such a way that when people look at us, they know that they are looking at a reflection of our Lord and Savior? If not, perhaps we need to re-examine our purpose. We are not

living to have people see us as some kind of Jesus facsimile. Our goal is for people to see Jesus living through us. We can never be the reflection of Christ that Jesus needs us to be. We aren't Jesus. However, we can allow Jesus to live through us, letting him drive the boat, pilot the plane, drive the car which allows people to see a true representation of Jesus Christ that may just cause them to rethink their lives and find relevance with our walk.

God bless you all!

AMEN

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