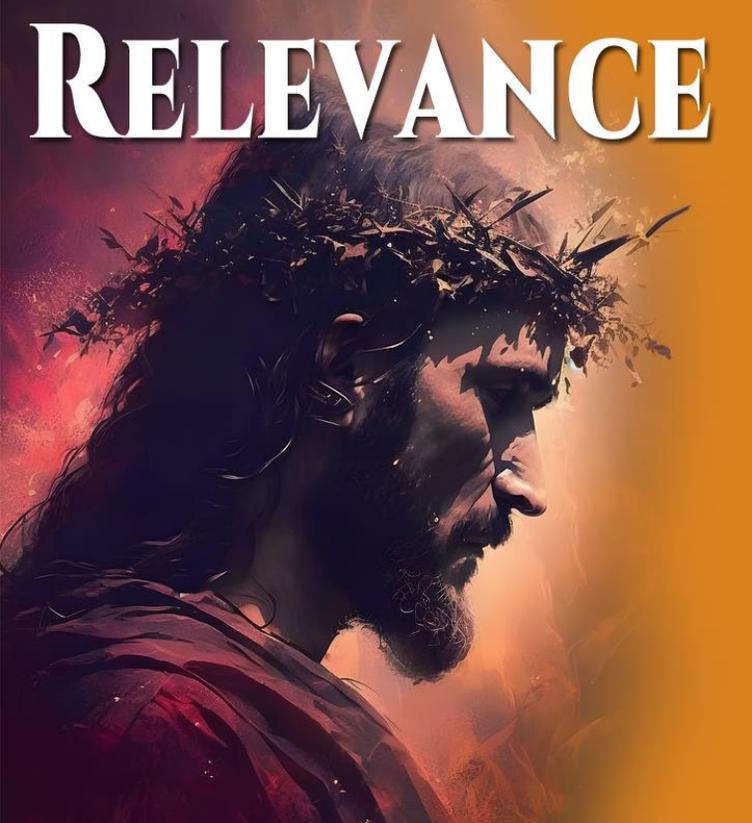


April 14

“Relevant Jesus”



RELEVANCE

“Relevant Jesus”

Mark 2:27 & Matthew 5:43-44

Then he said to them,
“The Sabbath was made
for man, not man for
the Sabbath.

“You have heard that it
was said, ‘Love your
neighbor and hate your
enemy.’

But I tell you, love your
enemies and pray for
those who persecute you.”

Special Music: “Radical Love (The Joy Song)”

Stockholm Worship

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd_I7Uq5m4c

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Matthew 5:43-44

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

Trent looked at his watch. He was going to be late opening the station. The young man hated it when his parts pickup route took him longer than expected. His dad wasn't going to be happy, but hey, it couldn't be helped. He had to drive all the way over to Rusksville to pick up the rebuilt transmission for Mrs. Bernaski's minivan. When he got there, the parts store wasn't even open yet. Seems they were running late as well. By the time he got the transmission loaded onto the tow truck, he was already running a half hour behind schedule. It couldn't be helped. This never would have happened to Junior, his brother.

Trent loved his older brother. The boys were ten years apart (Junior being the eldest), but they had always been close. Junior had been his protector, his confidant, his companion in crime at times. Like when they had set off that firecracker in Mrs. Rumsfield's backyard to scare her cat. And Trent had been allowed to tag along when Junior and his buddies used ropes to put Mr. Simpson's old, no longer used, outhouse onto the high school roof. Junior had never treated Trent like he wasn't welcome wherever he went.

But Junior also had a big secret and only Trent knew about it. Wherever they were, Junior was always looking for ways to help people out. Only God knows how many times he got out the ladder to rescue Mrs. Rumsfield's cat from the oak tree in her front yard without her ever knowing about it. Mrs. Rumsfield couldn't see very well and could hear even less, so it wasn't like she would have realized what Junior was doing.

Every Saturday morning, Junior would put the lawnmower and weed eater into the back of the truck and then proceed to drive around looking for yards that needed mowing. Of course, Trent always went with him. They were seldom separated. When they spotted a lawn in need of some TLC, they would get out of the truck and get to work. They didn't do it for the money. Most of the people that they helped didn't have much to begin with and were elderly or challenged to the point where they just couldn't take care of their yard like they needed to. Seldom did anyone have anything to offer except a cold glass of water or lemonade. They would swap back and forth using the mower and the weed eater. And Trent learned from his brother how to care for other people and take care of their needs without expectation of any return.

Then there was the time that Doc Adams got stuck in a ditch on the way back from delivering Sarah McAlister's baby. Doc was returning to town in the middle of the night and the roads were slick from the evening rain. He missed the curve just north of Dancer Williams' place. Doc had called the station hoping to catch someone and Junior had thought to forward the station phone to his own cell phone. Junior and Trent had gotten dressed, went to the station to get the tow truck, and had gone out to pull Doc's car from the ditch. Unfortunately, the front right ball joint had taken a hit, leaving the car undriveable. So, they hooked up the car and took Doc home before taking the car back to the station. Junior never charged Doc a dime for that, not even for fixing the ball joint. Nobody ever said a word except for Doc telling him how grateful he was.

That was Junior. He didn't go to college, so he helped his dad (Wild Bill) run the QuickStop. But when he turned 21, he informed his family that he was joining the Marines to serve his country. And just like that, Junior was off on a new adventure, this time without his little brother Trent.

Although still too young to run the station for his dad, Trent knew he could and should help in any way he could. After all, his dad was starting to get a little long in the tooth and had difficulty handling everything by himself. So, Trent learned all he could from his dad about the cars he was servicing and got to be a pretty good mechanic. When he graduated from high school, he stuck with the shop helping his dad, taking care of the business day in and day out.

Trent was so proud of his Junior, and they talked all the time, even when Junior was stationed in Iraq. Trent kept his brother informed about how his mom and dad were doing and how the business was going. He would tell Junior about the cars he was working on, and his brother would give him a tip here and there on how to deal with something Trent was finding tricky. But Junior never talked about his experiences in the Marines.

At one point, Junior let Trent know that when he finished up his current tour, he was going to come home. He had done three tours, and it was time to let go of the military and move back home. This thrilled Trent to no end, thinking of all the things he and his brother would do together once he got home. Trent looked up to his brother. Junior was his role model. He wanted to become the same kind of giving, loving, sharing person that Junior was.

So, here he was, on his way back to Parable from Ruskville with the rebuilt transmission for Mrs. Bernaski's minivan. He thought about all he needed to accomplish. The monthly inventory needed to be done, and the CO2 canisters for the drink machine needed to be swapped out. The food aisle needed to be restocked and there were a few supplies he was running short of that needed to be ordered. Only then could he get to work on replacing that transmission for Mrs. Bernaski.

When he arrived at the station, Chester Thompson was there wanting an inspection for his Jeep and Mabel Gallagher needed gas. She just couldn't pump it herself. She had just had her nails done and didn't want to mess them up. Trent's dad wasn't around which was a little strange for a Thursday morning. He had probably gone to meet the guys at Daisy's to grab some coffee and gab a bit. That coffee klatch was the closest thing to getting current news in Parable. Trent filled up Mabel's Cadillac, then turned his attention to the inspection. That shouldn't take too long. After he had finally finished with Mr. Thompson and sent him on his way, he stepped behind the counter to grab his clipboard for the inventory. He decided that he would check for messages before he got started.

There was only one. It was from his dad telling him that he needed Trent to come home, that it was okay to close the station for the day. Well, something was definitely going on. Other than Sundays and Christmas, the station was always open. Trent closed the garage doors and locked the front access on his way out. Driving home, he wondered what could have gotten into his dad. Maybe he

wasn't feeling well. Maybe something had happened to his mom. No need to worry, he would find out when he got home.

As he entered the front door, he heard low voices in the living room. His dad had his arms around his mom as she sobbed into his shoulder. Two marines stood by in their dress uniforms. He actually recognized them. He knew the guys were from Junior's outfit. Junior had shared pictures of his comrades with Trent. One stepped over to him and stood squarely in front of him.

"Trent?" he asked. "You must be Trent. Junior was always talking about you and how proud he was of you."

"What are you doing here? Where's Junior?" Trent asked even though he already knew.

"There was an accident, son," said the Marine. "The helicopter that your brother was on went down. Your brother managed to pull most of the men and women out before his own injuries overtook him. He passed away in the medical chopper on the way back to base."

"No, that can't be! Junior promised he was coming home!" cried Trent.

"Trent, he did come home. We are honored to be allowed to bring him home. Even in the med chopper, all he could talk about was coming back home and all the things you two were going to do together."

The weight of it all hit home. A part of Trent shriveled up and died inside his chest as the tears started to flow, even as he mustered all of his energy to

hold them back. Trent joined his dad in holding tight to his mom. In the middle of this mess, they held onto each other for dear life. His dad pulled away and shook the hands of both marines. Trent, still numb, realized that it was the proper thing to do. It was obvious that these men had cared deeply for his brother as well. One of the Marines said that there would be more information coming soon, protocols, steps to take, who to contact, what to do, blah, blah blah. And then they were gone, like they had never been there. Like this had all been a bad dream. No, a nightmare.

Trent hugged his mom and dad again, then went upstairs to his room. Staring at the ceiling and trying to make sense of it all, he prayed, hoping to find answers. After what seemed like an eternity, a certain peace came over him. And then he felt like he needed to do something. He went to the garage and grabbed the ladder and went next door. Yes, he didn't know how he knew it, but Mrs. Rumsfield's cat was stuck in the tree again. So, he set up the ladder and brought the cat safely back to earth. On Saturday morning, he would mow a few yards.

That's how it is supposed to be when you look up to someone so much that you want to be like them. You want to carry on with the path that they had forged. That is the way that their voice can still be heard in the world.

One of my favorite verses is Micah 6:8 -

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy

and to walk humbly with your God.

“To walk humbly with your God.” Have you ever noticed when people walk together, they have a tendency to walk in sync? Even when they try to walk with their own strides, they unconsciously begin to walk in sync. And the closer the relationship between the people, the more likely they are to walk in sync with each other. It’s a natural phenomenon. It feels awkward being out of step with someone you are walking with. Something seems akilter. Out of whack. Awkward.

When people dance together well, they move in unison. Even their counter-steps are synchronized. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth, Patrick Swayze and Jennifer Grey, and John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John come to mind. When watching them dance, it becomes difficult to imagine them dancing separately. Moves and countermoves blend into a singular performance. If you could hear them talking, they would probably be completing each other's sentences.

Flash mobs continue to fascinate me. Especially when a large group of people meet up for only a few hours practice, and then come together in a

performance at a public place, whether it's dancing or playing music. The people involved are often not trying to outdo each other, but instead, allow themselves to become part of a bigger whole in order to create a spontaneous moment in time. At least, it appears that way.

In large, choreographed numbers, where there is no lead dancer, every person strives to not stand out, but be an integral part of a total performance. Musicals like *A Chorus Line*, *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, *West Side Story*, *Anything Goes*, and so many more. At one point it seemed like Hollywood was trying to get as many people dancing together inside a single frame as possible, all moving together as one company.

I want to talk about our dance with God. What is that like for us? What are you talking about preacher, dancing with God? It's just what it sounds like. Each and every one of us has the ability, and even the calling, to dance with God, to synchronize our walk with his walk, to stay in step with our Creator. But it is also sad that so many of us choose to walk akimbo to his stride, rather than with his stride.

Here's a thought for you. When you see people walking together, dancing together, singing together, even doing sports together, it generally isn't just a thing of chance. Someone, even if we can't tell who, someone is the leader. It might be someone doing the walking, or someone backstage, or someone conducting, or someone on the sidelines. Someone is doing the leading. And someone else is doing the following. That leader may be invisible to the audience. Or that person can be in plain sight, right up there on a podium, or

even inside performing with a dance troop, or orchestra. But everyone involved is taking their cue from a leader because the followers always know who the leader is. The passengers on a cruise ship may never see the captain, but they know that someone is in charge and directing the crew. There can be only one main coach, one general, one director, one choreographer, or one true leader, one person who is ultimately responsible for everything that is occurring.

“I can see what you are trying to say, preacher, but what, if anything, does this have to do with the relevance of Jesus in our lives?” Do you remember me telling you that “it is also sad that so many of us choose to walk akimbo to his stride, rather than with his stride?” What happens when a player doesn’t listen to their coach? What happens when a soldier chooses not to obey their commanding officer? What happens when a cast member doesn’t listen to their director? Or a musician? Or a singer? It really doesn’t matter how skilled they are or how much they have practiced, if they don’t listen to their leader, it all begins to fall apart, quickly.

I was on a Christian Facebook group page the other day, and someone posted the following meme: “If you’re struggling and your people are just sitting there watching you struggle... They’re not your people.” It just hit me so wrong that as Christians we believe that. I responded back with these words, harsh as they may sound, “As Jesus hung on the cross, bleeding and dying, he looked out over the sea of people, most of whom had put him there, and said, ‘Forgive them Father, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ Those people tortured him, beat him, spat on him, cursed him, put a crown of thorns on his head, and hung him

on that tree, but they were still his people. I can only pray for the strength to be as forgiving and embracing of God's people.” I didn't get a lot of response when I wrote that. I know the reason. Jesus is the heart of the Christian experience, but his example makes us uncomfortable. Especially when someone points out that we aren't living up to his example.

How does an effective leader lead? How does that coach, officer, or director get their people to follow them? They do it by setting an example, just as Junior sets an example for Trent in our story today. Junior never set out to be a leader for Trent, but allowing Trent to join him in his adventures and doing things that exemplified a love for people encouraged Trent to be like him.

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

You can't accomplish much in the Christian life and you will constantly be frustrated, feeling like you don't measure up, if don't let Jesus do the leading. He sets the example. He sets the pace. He orchestrates the action. He brings the vision and the plan to the game. He leads by example. He became fully human to show us how to live.

I brought you two verses at the beginning of this message and at first glance that may not seem poignant or relatable to what we are talking about. They may not seem relevant. But let's read them again.

Mark 2:27

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Matthew 5:43-44

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

We’re quick on the draw to tell people how Jesus died on a Roman cross for our sins, was beaten, spat upon, and made to carry that cross that they nailed him to, to wash us clean, to purge us of all the dirt that weighs us down, to offer himself as a living sacrifice, to make us worthy to kneel at the throne of our Creator, to make us whole, sanctified, and complete. And that is true. And that message should never be watered down.

But he did more than that. When he came to earth as a baby in a manger, he came to tell us that we had been reading from the wrong playbook. That we had been following the wrong script. That our understanding of our purpose, the purpose that had always been intended for us, was compromised by our own pride and stiff-necked ways.

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

**We, God's children, are more important than the law. Let me repeat that.
We, God's children, are more important than the law. If a choice has to be made
between the law and loving our neighbor, loving our neighbor wins.**

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your
enemy.’**

**But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute
you,**

Matthew 5:38-42

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’

**39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the
right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.**

**40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat
as well.**

41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

**42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who
wants to borrow from you.**

Luke 23:46

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

“Father, forgive them. They are trying so hard. They just do not understand that they have been following the wrong message. They don’t know how much you love them. They don’t realize that the law can’t save them, that the law was meant to guide them to care for each other. Put me in coach, so that I can show them a better way! Let my life be an example of how they should live their lives. Let me be the light in their darkness. Please Father, let me try to show them the way it is supposed to be, even if it kills me!”

Every one of us has two Relevant Jesus meters in our lives. Even non-believers have these. When faced with moral or dangerous dilemmas, those meters give us information to help us make decisions. The first Relevant Jesus meter is always pegged out on the side of love, no matter the situation or persons involved. It is the true reflection of the heart of Jesus. Jesus always put love and compassion first. But that meter makes people uncomfortable. It’s great when we agree with it, but when it doesn’t reflect our own hearts, it becomes an annoyance.

The second meter is one we create ourselves, a meter that allows us to adjust our perception of the first meter. It takes the value of the first meter and modifies it to reflect our own hearts as we determine the actual relevance of that first meter to the situations that we face. It gives us the ‘leeway’ to adapt our response and justify our selfish desires.

As Christians, we know that the first meter is the one that we should always look at when we make our decisions to reflect the true nature of Christ in the world around us. But most of us look at the second meter first to determine if

the first meter is even relevant to the situation, forgetting that the first meter is actually the only relevant meter in any situation. The second meter is driven by our own desires, our own prejudices, our own pride, our own level of courage, our own doubts and our selfishness. As Christians, we are called to die to self and surrender that second meter over to Christ, lay it at the foot of the cross, and walk away from it, making it irrelevant to the decisions we face. As Christians, the meter that reflects the heart of Christ is the only meter that we need when making a decision or perform an action. We should always peg out on the side of love.

That's what I want us to think about this week as we examine the relevance of Jesus in our lives. Are we looking to him as our coach, leader, conductor, choreographer, director? Our EXAMPLE? Or are our eyes focused somewhere else thinking that the answers we seek will spring up from the earth rather than come down from the throne of God? Is Jesus relevant in our lives, even when everyone else tells us that he isn't, that he is outdated, that his message doesn't make sense in our chaotic world? Is the message of Jesus relevant to us in our everyday lives? I stand convinced that his message is the only relevant thing that makes any sense in this world.

God bless you all

AMEN

Copyright © 2023 Rev. Walt Wellborn

Scripture references provided under copyright by:

**THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION©, NIV© Copyright © 1973,
1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. © Used by permission. All rights reserved
worldwide.**