

Kenmore Baptist Church Message Outline 15/4/2012 AM/PM (LOGOS) CHURCH: Is It Relevant Anymore?¹

GOOD PRODUCT, BAD DELIVERY: PROBLEMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Welcome to KBC. Over the last couple of messages we've been exploring what can make a church irresistible. For many people though, they can be repulsed by the church or wonder whether church is relevant any more in today's world.

Over the last thirty years, church affiliation has dropped by the same, 30 percent. McCrindle research recently presented the *Australian Communities Report*. The report examined some findings about major blockers to Australians believing in Christianity. What is interesting is that of the top 10 blockers, seven are not about the message. They're about US, the delivery mechanism, the Church.

Put simply, our product (Jesus) is good, but the delivery mechanism (church) has issues.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Church is not something you *go* to. It's not a hobby, a Sunday religious service, or even a building. In every one of the 114 New Testament references, the Greek word for 'church' is the *ekklesia* and it means an assembly of *people, belonging to the Lord*.

Whether meeting under an African tree, in a Cathedral or in a hut it doesn't matter. Church is a bunch of people who follow Jesus: we join together to grow like Jesus, to worship God, to share this life with others, and to care for each other. Our purpose is to represent the reign of God—God's Kingdom—through our actions and our words; above all, it's by the way we love each other that our neighbours will know God is real.

If we lived this, the church *would be relevant*. Yet often we're more known for abusive authority, harsh exclusion, and blatant hypocrisy. *How might a follower of Jesus respond?*

AUTHORITY VS. HUMILITY

A criticism made of the Church is that it is about controlling people. We're known more for what we stand against than what we stand for. Our grab for authority and casting of judgment has hidden God's grace and the call to life. At least that's how it's perceived.

The Church isn't an organisation; it's an organism. It's about people who when put together should look like Jesus. This means it is important to see how Jesus wore His authority. Was He about control?

Jesus was no authoritarian dictator; he wielded his ultimate authority with absolute humility. The show 'Undercover Boss' illustrates this, where the boss of a massive company dons the worker's uniform and enters into His company. If Jesus is God, as he claimed, then he in humility became one of us.

¹ For full notes, fact sheets, and a small group discussion guide, visit logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/church/

Consider the example Jesus set after Easter. There is a beautiful scene where Peter and the crew are out in the boat. But while they're out fishing and serving themselves, who should be on the beach cooking them an awesome meal of fish over the fire, but the leader Himself, Jesus. He beat death. He is the boss. But there's no lecture and no punishment for failure. Just forgiveness and love and a home cooked breakfast.

Another example of this is in John 9: we see the story of a woman who is caught in the act of having sex with someone else's husband. Under the religious laws, she should be killed, stoned to death. They throw her in the dirt in front of Jesus. But He turns the tables: "Whoever is without sin, you cast the first stone." One by one they drop the rocks, and leave. But notice what Jesus says. "Woman, where are your accusers? Now, go and *sin no more*."

"Sin no more." He's not there to judge. But nor is He saying, "Do what you want, keep wrecking marriages and doing damage." The church is meant to look like Jesus. Our role is *not* to judge, or grasp for control. But nor is it to ignore when stuff's not right. If we truly *love* someone, we won't watch silently on while they hurt themselves, or others. Our role is to help people turn from death, from sin/wrong doing, and choose what leads to life and freedom.

EXCLUSION VS. INCLUSION

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons people consider the Church to be irrelevant to their lives is that it is seen as being so exclusive. Exclusive in that it is seen to tell people "you must believe this and nothing else" and exclusive in that it is an insular and inward looking club obsessed with itself and judging those who do not belong.

The first thing is that the Church should genuinely acknowledge that we often fail to live up to the example of Jesus and we can wrongly exclude others. There is a distinction though between the truths of our faith being logically exclusive, and excluding people. All truth is exclusive, but the church is called to embrace all people. It's very important to realize that the Church should and can be a wonderfully inclusive place a refuge for all people when we follow the model Jesus lived. Jesus could not have lived a more inclusive and shared lifestyle.

The Church at its best is like Jesus, going out of its way to draw in those others reject. Examples include KBC's church community with the Helping Hands van going to Ipswich to love the homeless, Waiters Union in West End holding meals nights for the mentally ill, and Oxley Uniting putting on fun nights for those with physical or intellectual disabilities.

The Church can be exclusive and when it does it loses its relevance. It's not wrong to develop a healthy community within a local Church congregation. A close and loving community is the very thing that makes church communities so appealing—it draws people in. The key is to let them come and even go freely, always looking to love those who might not find their way.

HYPOCRISY VS. GRACE-FILLED AUTHENTICITY

In recent surveys and studies done in Australia and abroad, one of the issues that often came up was that the church was seen as hypocritical: Christians said one thing but lived another. People have expressed they are sceptical of the Church's morally superior attitude and say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate.

It is true that Christian today can lack many of the qualities that make Jesus so attractive and winsome. Jesus himself condemned hypocrisy and that means it is something that we should strive to change in our lives and within the Church. We can't excuse where the Church is hypocritical. The best thing is simply to say sorry and admit where we as individuals and the Church corporately has failed to live up to the wonderful example of Jesus Christ.

The church can never be free of this problem of hypocrisy because the church welcomes every (imperfect) person including ourselves. What makes Christianity so special amongst other world-views is it is a religion of grace. The central message of the Church is the loving kindness of Jesus and his grace to all—when you have done something wrong, and you are truly sorry and wish to change, the Church is a community where you can ask for forgiveness and know you'll be not only forgiven but pardoned.

Two examples of this type of grace are the work of Betel who are in 80 cities and 21 nations around the world working exclusively with drug addicts and homeless people. They run houses where the addicts live and work in community as they overcome their addictions. Within our own church community we have a yearly charity bike ride, the Tour of Hope, where funds raised are invested in various community projects in under-privileged areas of the world. This kind of compassion is not uncommon for the Church.

Another part of the answer to the problem of the Church's hypocrisy is to see how authentic Jesus was and be honest about ourselves. Hypocrisy in part is being driven by denying what everyone else can see. Authenticity is about being open where the church corporately and we individually have faults or don't measure up, and not pretending to be something you're not.

IS THE CHURCH RELEVANT?

The Church is relevant because Christianity holds the most satisfying answers to the most meaningful questions in life. Many people feel for instance that death is wrong; the answer the Church gives is that it feels wrong because it *is* wrong. We weren't meant to die and we will continue to exist after death. The Church will always be relevant because it holds in its hands the most satisfying answers to life's most meaningful questions: Why am I here? Where did I come from? and Where am I going when I die?

The second reason the Church is still relevant is by what it does through the people who follow Jesus. What history has always shown is that the church is made relevant through the actions of Christians. Through God's power, we are to be the miracle we want to see in the world because that is what Jesus did and it is what he calls us to do. For people to know Jesus loves them, his followers must show love to the world.

CHALLENGE: The challenge to those here who follow Jesus is to be the answer to the question, Is the Church relevant? We do that by how we live and getting out and being an example in a hurting world.

What change will you make, starting today?

Authority vs. Humility:-----

Exclusion vs. Inclusion:-----

Hypocrisy vs. Grace-Filled Authenticity:-----

Questions for Discussion

1) What impacted you most in the talk? Download the *manuscript and small group discussion guide from* logos.kbc.org.au/blog/resources/logos-talks/church/ to jog your memory.

2) Try a word association. What comes to mind when you hear "Church"? Now, ask five non-Christian friends what word first comes to mind, and their opinion of the church.

3) "The best apologetic (reason/proof) for the Gospel is a community of people who believe it and live by it" (theologian Lesslie Newbigin). Is he right? Why? Has this been your experience?

4) What's your take on the church's image problem? Is the bad PR deserved, or a beat up?

5) Check out some of the key Biblical images for the Church. How are we like unlike what Jesus had in mind? ...

Family (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15; 1 Timothy 5:1-2) Bride of Christ (Isaiah 54:5-8; Jeremiah 2:2; Ephesians 5:32; 2 Corinthians 11:2) Olive Tree (Romans 11:17-24) Field of Crops (1 Corinthians 3:6-9)

Building of God (Exodus 25:8; 1 Samuel 4:2; 1 Corinthians 3:9) Harvest (Matthew 13:1-30)

Christ's Body (1 Corinthians 12:1-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:1-16) Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1; Psalm 80:8; Mark 12:1)

6) Consider the 3 issues discussed: *authority vs. humility; exclusion vs. inclusion; hypocrisy vs. authenticity*. For each, discuss your personal experiences: a) when has this been done poorly by the church? b) how does Jesus' model (especially in John 20:19-23) challenge the church? c) when has the Church been Christ-like?

7) "Is the church relevant anymore?" What do you think? ... Role play giving a one-minute response to this question

8) What's one change *you* could make today (as part of Christ's body) to better represent Him in the world?