

## Kenmore Baptist Church Message Outline 21/3/10 (AM-PM/RB)

### **SIGN III:** *Pointing People to Jesus as a LIFEGUARD*

(Luke 15:1-10; Matthew 5:13-16; John 3:16-18)

Remember the story Jesus told about a shepherd leaving the secure 99 to save one lost sheep? He totally left his comfort zone to track it down, and threw a huge party when all was well. There are no two ways about it: Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost – and He sends us to do the same. *Do I care about those away from Jesus? Does my diary reflect this? How am I throwing a lifeline to those sinking all around me?* Salt is for meat going off, not for heaping in a pile; light is for dark places, not for one more bulb in an already bright room. True Christians aren't stuck in a "church" building; the true church is a people who, like Jesus, are willing to cross the universe out of love to save a wayward planet.

***So if you want to point people to Jesus, then be a LIFEGUARD ...  
Leave the "church" to embrace the world.***



Life guard

#### **(A) PERCEPTION: IMAGE PROBLEMS AND ISOLATION—**

##### ***"THE CHRISTIAN BUBBLE"***

- Christianity has an image problem: we're perceived as *UnChristian* (David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons) ... hypocritical; using rather than caring for people to make converts; anti-homosexual; sheltered; too political; judgmental
- Like *Seinfeld*, with the boy in the bubble, the contemporary Christian church has increasingly become isolated in a Christian bubble—preoccupied with its own inward life and agenda, but disconnected from a hurting world outside. Far from being compassionately engaged, we've sealed ourselves off inside the "church" walls, and have sought safety from external contamination
- How unlike our calling—to be agents of reconciliation, living and sharing the Kingdom of God. And how unlike our radically connected God, who left the safety of Heaven, headed for a dirty stable. Christ came to seek and save the lost and the dirty, not those impressed with their own self-righteousness (Matthew 9:10-12). God so loved the world, embracing the cosmos, that He sent His son (John 3:16-17). Do we as Christians look like the Christ?

***"Jesus evacuated the bubble of Heaven at His birth and came amongst fallen humanity. He destroyed the bubble once and for all when He died on a cross between two thieves."***

- Pharisees are citizens of the bubble: they have a ***fortress mentality*** and are walled up for safety, only emerging for crusades as they make converts and attack the infidel. Christ-followers, however, must never treat people as a project or a target. Unconditional love is our calling. But for this, we have to get out of our religious cliques and enter people's lives. We have a mission: ***We need to leave the "church" to embrace the world.***

### ***How did we get in this bubble?***

- Dan Kimball in his book, *They Like Jesus but not the Church*, explains the journey from excited missionary into citizen of the bubble:
  - Phase 1: We become Christians*
  - Phase 2: We become part of church life*
  - Phase 3: We become part of the Christian bubble*
  - Phase 4: We become a Jonah*
- How unlike our calling—we must be **salt and light** in a bland and dark world (Matthew 5:13-16)... rubbed in to this world's wounds, and spread abroad to light up the way to life

### **(B) THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP—LUKE 15:1-7**

- **Background:** Jesus criticized for befriending sinners (Luke 15:1-2)
- **The Parable:** The shepherd and his lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7)
- **The Setting:** Jesus offends His listeners

The “shepherd” isn’t a familiar an image on our shores. (Try New Zealand for that!) So, let’s reframe this parable through a more culturally relevant Aussie icon:

### ***The Lifeguard.***

Just as we have good shepherds and bad shepherds, two divergent “lifeguard” images emerge:

- **Image 1: The Surf Lifeguard ... On Watch with Bondi Rescue**
- **Image 2: The Social Club ... Out of Action with the Lifesaving Station**

***Isolation, indifference, and insularity is out. Radical identification is in.*** But note that we must balance ***radical identification*** with ***radical difference***, or we have nothing to offer a drowning world:

- If lifeguards never get in the water, who will they save? But, if lifeguards get caught in a rip and go under, how can they rescue anyone?
- Likewise, we need to ***radically identify*** with our fallen world to ensure that we have an ***audience***. But we must balance this by being ***radically different*** from our fallen world to ensure we have a ***message***. We must be *in* but *not of* the world (John 17)
- True Christians aren’t stuck in a “church” building; the true church is a people who, like Jesus, are willing to cross the universe out of love to save a wayward planet. ***So if you want to point people to Jesus, then be a LIFEGUARD ... leave the “church” to embrace the world.***

### (C) WE ARE ALL SHEEP BEFORE WE'RE SHEPHERDS

*We need to be rescued before we can become rescuers*

- *Only Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died, in order to bring us all the way home to God*
- Sheep teach us that we are totally lost, totally unable to save ourselves, and need to be totally saved

### (D) SHEPHERDS RESCUE THE LOST SHEEP

In order to rescue the lost sheep, the shepherd had to leave the other 99, venture out beyond the safety of the night enclosure, locate the lost sheep, wrestle it to the ground, and carry the animal all the way home. Tired and exhausted the shepherd would return and together with the other shepherds, celebrate the successful rescue.

Returning to our *modern day parable of the lifeguard*, we see three keys to saving the lost....

#### **KEY #1: LIFEGUARDS LEAVE THE CLUB HOUSE ... Leave the "Church"**

*Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country...? (v. 4a)*

- The true "church" is the *Ekklesia*—the "called out ones" to model the Kingdom of God (Matthew 16:18-19; Luke 4:18-19; Acts 2:47), sent through the scars in Christ's hands to bless a scarred world (John 20:21)
- This calls us to radical identification (1 Corinthians 9:22). As E. Stanley Jones notes, in reference to Jesus' baptism, "*He would be a Saviour from within—not from above, apart from, or separated.*"
- A "Yes" to God's mission means a "No" to over commitment in church programs
- Do you really love the lost, or are you stuck in the club-house? Check your diary

#### **KEY #2: LIFEGUARDS RISK THEIR SAFETY ... Embrace the World**

*... he goes after the sheep until he finds it (v. 4b)*

- Whether you're saving sheep, or rescuing lives in the surf, it'll take real risks and an arduous journey to bring the lost back home
- Lifeguards always need support, so look to play a part in the bigger team
- As with *The Big Story*, those designed for good have been damaged by evil and are lost and drowning. Jesus showed the way to restoration, and has now sent us together in the power of His Spirit to save people by reconciling them to God
- Jesus left the safety of Heaven to embrace the cosmos. If you want to play your part in gardening a fallen world, you'll have to get your hands dirty. It will take sacrifice of time, talent, treasure, and testimony so others might be saved. What changes will you make to evacuate the Christian bubble and reach the lost?

### **Key #3: LIFEGUARDS PARTY AFTER SAVING A LIFE**

*... Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep (vs. 5-6)*

- All of Heaven celebrates when a sinner is saved: “Rejoice!” The lost are found, and the whole community celebrates the safe return of shepherd and sheep
- Likewise, lifeguards party back at the clubhouse when a life is saved. They don’t make the recently saved hose off or clean up before coming in to celebrate ... “Welcome in, just as you are!”
- For all the partying, the club house is still a centre for sending lifeguards to save, not an isolated clique existing to remember old times and judge those drowning. When the saving stops, the parties soon stall
- When we hear that someone has been saved, do we want to throw a party? Does our community come together to celebrate? Why, or why not? The true church is a partying community, as we’ve got good news that has genuinely saved millions

### **(E) THE BLACK SHEEP: LETHY’S STORY**

### **(F) THE CHALLENGE**

*The Bottom Line: Isolation is out; radical identification is in.*

*If we want to point people to Jesus, then adopt the Sign of the LIFEGUARD:  
leave the “church” to embrace the world.*

- God has commissioned you as a lifeguard, sent together with other believers to help heal a hurting world. So, who has God given you to rescue? Who are the people God has laid on your heart to pray for, engage with, and point to Jesus?
- What would need to change for your life to reflect obedience to God’s call as a Sign that points people to Christ and His Kingdom?
- Using your Impact Card write down the 5 names of people you’ll commit to regularly pray for, connect with, and invite to “Church in the Park.”

*Together, let’s commit to building and participating in an authentic faith-based community of grace, love, acceptance, and forgiveness. Radical identification and inclusion begins at home. Let’s embrace beautiful unified difference, in which people are free to admit they are sinners, and we’re all prepared to leave the “church” building to embrace our world by radically engaging with our community.*

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. What challenged you most in this message?
2. How would your life and witness look different if you took on the *Sign of the Lifeguard*?