

“DEAR... TINY BABY JESUS”

(Isaiah 52:13-15)

See, my servant will prosper; he will be highly exalted. Many were amazed when they saw him — beaten and bloodied, so disfigured one would scarcely know he was a person. And he will again startle many nations. Kings will stand speechless in his presence. For they will see what they had not previously been told about; they will understand what they had not heard about.

(1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

NLT

Context

I have heard it said by some over the years that perception is reality. For a long time I thought that was a pretty neat saying, so much so that I even used the quote in sermons and conversation. But reality has changed my perception and I believe something entirely different all these years later. Perception is not always the truth – SOP for our current world is that perceptions are specifically created to skew and manipulate a “psuedo reality.” Just because I perceive something to be a certain way does not always make it true. I believe that truth corresponds with reality, and because I believe this truth must be my pursuit and my practice. Since Jesus Christ is the “Truth” I can then build and form my life in Him with full confidence that my life is all about truth. This is and was God’s plan for us all along. The passages I have read this morning are truth and they directly correspond with reality. Unfortunately religious people with religious ideas and a religious agenda characteristically manipulate the truth and as a result they have created a very skewed perception of Jesus - leaving many with a false reality. Let me explain...

The passage we cited from the Old Testament book of Isaiah was written by the same who was a Hebrew prophet during the years 811 B.C. and 743 B.C. The

passage is considered the fifth of nine core prophecies concerning the degradation and collapse of Israel and subsequent loss of favor with God. This prophecy is about Israel although in the 1st and 2nd century Christian Church they interpreted this as a type and a shadow of Jesus and His life. They related to a disfigured, suffering, and sorrowed Jesus because of what they had seen and heard of Him first hand. After the Roman Emperor Constantine freed and empowered the Christian Church in the early 3rd century Christians began to identify more with a glorified and triumphant Jesus because of their own apparent political favor and success. Which interpretation is right? Probably both, but that is not the point. The point is... ***Truth is what corresponds with reality - not man's created perceptions or interpretations.*** In order for us to know and tell the truth about Christ we need to hear what God says through the apostle Paul in the passage from Corinthians... ***"God chose things despised by the world; things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important"...*** This is the truth, and quite candidly we have been fighting against this reality for centuries. And even more so now, as our own culture spins (manipulates) and creates perceptions that make or break the reputations, work, and worth of whomever they so desire. Most people end up rejecting the truth because it corresponds with reality... meaning that it is more than likely a reality that they do not want to be confronted with... too much truth.

We appear to be at a point in history where our world is being defined and led by misperceptions and deceptions (non-truth). As individuals where do we find the truth that navigates us through the difficulty and trouble that this lack of truth will eventually cause? The only answer is Christ, because He is the Truth. It starts there - with us knowing who He really is and not simply the ***"Tiny Baby Jesus"*** that we would prefer to relate to. We should understand that this is not a small or insignificant thing, but rather it is for us Christians and believers **everything** that is meaningful and true about our faith in God and Christ as His Son. It forces us to ask ourselves... Is He (Jesus) our ideal religion or is He our truthful reality? They are not even remotely the same. Religion can easily be defined as man's perceptions of who God is - or what they want God to be. Are

my perceptions of God always true or real? If they are not, then what does that say about my ideal religion? Well you know the answer to that... not too much. But on the other hand, if we dare to see Christ as God's reality for man, by forming ourselves in Him, then we have a real shot at knowing our Creator as He truly is and as He Himself wants to be known. His plan was for us to know Him through an intimate relationship with His Son Jesus and to develop a passionate faith in His power and purpose for our world and the world to come.

My Jesus, Must Die

I want to introduce to everyone this morning a difficult truth. A truth that is difficult because it requires that Jesus must die once again. Hear me out on this... I am not suggesting that He die as He did before not in suffering for the sins of all mankind, but dying in the sense that our own ideas and notions of who He is must die. Those ideas and notions must die so that He can freely reveal Himself to us, void of the misperceptions and twisted truth that most often exists in our hearts and minds. To explain further would be to ask each of us to look at ourselves and the unique circumstances and personal history that have led us to this point to form our ideas and notions of who Jesus is. Once those ideas were formed no matter how right or wrong we were – from that point on that is who we believed that Jesus was... period. And from then on our Jesus type responses all looked and acted like the Jesus we had created for ourselves by ourselves. Make no mistake everyone is in a similar place with this. But the good news is that we do not have to stay there. We can let our twisted ideas and notions of Jesus die, and we can ask Him from a pure and innocent heart to reveal who He is anew to us. This time without our help or input, well intended or not.

The first part of the journey is to accept the fact that we are probably wrong about many things concerning who Jesus is. That is where we start... and if that does not happen then there is no need to even consider moving forward. Part of our struggle is that we do not bring ourselves to the critical point of admitting that we primarily look to ourselves for what is right - instead of looking at Jesus. He said ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life... no one comes to the Father except through me.”*** If we do not conform our thinking and change our hearts to these words, we will never know the real

Jesus. We will be paralyzed, left only with our skewed and twisted version of Him. How we begin this process in knowing Jesus and learning to truly think like Him is even more critical and important than merely repeating a few rehearsed words that have prompted to us. There is a clear and proven path that we can follow; Jesus said that path was Him and Him alone. Start with our text from Corinthians for example.

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. NLT

The fact is, most of the ethical or moral ideas that we on our own view as right or wrong - or we, in and of ourselves consider important; more than likely at some level skewed, and do not characterize completely who Jesus really is or how He thinks. And since we know this is true - why would we want to continue on this way? Unless of course it is because - **One)** I am deceived, or **Two)** I believe that my own view of Him best benefits me and my personal interests more than the truth. Enter... “Dear, Tiny baby Jesus”, the Jesus that works and feels for right me – just the way I want Him to be. This is a great error, not just because it keeps us from coming to know the real Jesus but it keeps the world from seeing who Jesus really is, as well. You see, I am convinced that we are living in a culture and society without compass or conscience. I’m sure that sounds like a line from one more sermon of “Let me tell you What is Wrong with our World.” But I assure you it is not. What I am saying this morning, we all know... and we are I am afraid, just being pulled away from the truth by the flow of a strong cultural current that quickly turns into very dangerous rapids. These dangerous rapids take us wildly down a river that too often is going the wrong direction. It says to us, “*No need to tell me which way to go (compass), I can find **my** own way, one that works for me.*” That rapid current also declares, “*No need to explain to me about what is important in life, or how I’m living it (conscience)... after all, I can decide what is important - it is **my** life.*” Any one of us who buys into that rapid post-modern **cultural current way of thinking** has consciously or unconsciously rejected any real notion of Jesus, and needs desperately to quickly let their imaginary Jesus die before too much damage is done to your reasoning. That

simply is not Jesus... it is just another “Dear, tiny baby Jesus” that we have created for ourselves mostly because our Jesus doesn’t ask of us the things we don’t want Him to ask.

Galilee Jesus – Nazareth Jesus (Mark 16:1-8)

The next evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene and Salome and Mary the mother of James went out and purchased burial spices to put on Jesus' body. 2 Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they came to the tomb. 3 On the way they were discussing who would roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. 4 But when they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone — a very large one — had already been rolled aside. 5 So they entered the tomb, and there on the right sat a young man clothed in a white robe. The women were startled, 6 but the angel said, "Do not be so surprised. You are looking for Jesus, the Nazarene, who was crucified. He isn't here! He has been raised from the dead! Look, this is where they laid his body. 7 Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you before he died!" 8 The women fled from the tomb, trembling and bewildered, saying nothing to anyone because they were too frightened to talk. NLT

The point is this. The Jesus “we” are creating and looking for is not always the Jesus that “is” and that is frightening and faith shaking. As evidenced by the women who met the angel that morning at the tomb. The message is this... ***I clearly must not seek or look for my ideal Jesus, my preferred Jesus, or even my fondest memory Jesus.*** I must whether out of my faith or my fear... seek the **Galilee Jesus**; the one true Son of God, not just my own creation of Him. Surely that He is out there waiting for me. He is Jesus who stands at the door and knocks and waits patiently for me to answer (Matthew 7:7, Revelation 3:20). He is Jesus who stands among His sheep and calls to them (John 10:2-18); and He is Jesus (Mark 8:35) who says to me, *“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.”* He is Jesus who also said to his disciples, (Mark 9:35) *“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”* That is truly bewildering, and far too intense for the natural person to soak in, and it is in a pure sense a spiritual paradox. But that is the real Jesus - the Jesus who goes on and says to us, *“If you seek Me, you will find me.”*

Paradox Jesus

Our idea of the nicest, kindest, most loving person we know – is more than likely, Jesus. But yet, when we do not get what we want from Him, and or get it when we want it - He quickly becomes the most frustrating, disappointing, and most doubted person that we know. Is He the nice, kind, and loving Jesus? (Of course He is). But the paradox is that He is also the Jesus that asks us to accept and embrace His will above our own. And that does not always come across as nice, kind, or loving. In fact, most view it as intrusive and abrasive. He also asks us to consider His words as truth, and not our own. Then He asks us to choose His thoughts and character above our own, and then He asks for the final piece – which is to give Him our life, and to accept His life for our plans, hope, and future. All along in this process life continues to happen; some of it good and of course some of it bad. We all know that when life is good it is very good, and when it is bad it can be very bad – but there it is, finally, the truth. Most think... “How can such a nice and loving Jesus be so inattentive when things go bad for us?” “How can He let evil run wild and cause us pain or suffering?” “If He can indeed do ‘all things,’ then why can’t He fix things for me when they do go bad?” So we in all honesty think to ourselves “maybe He’s not really in charge.” At some point in all of this line of thinking comes a wave of doubt that crushes our imaginary Jesus (Dear Tiny Baby Jesus) so we doubt and we lose some of our faith. But that is not the biggest problem (we’ll discuss that later). At the point where many lose faith because their imaginary Jesus did not come through for them, many consider just quitting, but most of us don’t dare to quit at that point because we have too much of our own identity or our family tradition wrapped up in our idea of Christianity. After considering all options, we just go on acting like He fixes everything for us and that everything in life is “all good.” We go through with the motions of honoring Jesus because we know everyone expects that of us and basically it’s what we are supposed to do. But just like the women who brought spices and ointment for the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, our version of Jesus is dead and we are just going day after day to an empty tomb. When we get there we already know the routine – first the acknowledgement that things aren’t as we imagined. Then some panic and fear, followed by self pity, then anger (at Jesus), and a finale of hopelessness and cynicism. Or we simply just feel as empty as the tomb.

But without realizing it this is the most amazing time in our relationship with

Jesus, because it is the time when we in honesty and sincerity can now seek Him for who He is and who He wants to be in our lives. It is a time when we are finally asking for a revelation and for a reality that includes the truth, whether we want to hear it or not. We are free to even wonder or question where to find that revelation and reality? Where will it come from? We have concluded it will come from Jesus – but how? Here is the key... “He will not always look like what we want or expect Him to.” The following is a process that can help us all in what we are truly needing in Jesus and what we should seeking in Jesus. We can call this... the how to avoid Tiny Baby Jesus – Syndrome” or TBJS.

HOW TO AVOID – TBJS

ONE) - WE MUST ASK HIM TO COME TO US.

That means that we ask Him to come to us in all of our life... wherever and whatever

that may be... not just in Church, but to come to us in dispute and conflict, in anger and frustration, in jealousy and pettiness, in pride and immaturity, in our selfishness and ugliness, in our deceit and betrayal. And most of all we must ask Jesus to come to us in our limitation and weakness. When Jesus does come to us in that circumstance it sometimes surprises us, because we finally realize that He is more than capable of handling the “darker side” of our humanity. **This is the real Jesus – the one who is unafraid of the real me.** I think most people honestly believe that Jesus will not come to us with our diseases, our phobias, our neurosis, and most of all our prideful self-centered thinking. But this is simply not true. He came to the tormented and possessed man in Mark 5:1; He came to the faithless doubting disciple in John 20:24; He came to the fearful Nicodemus in John 3:1; He came to the diseased man in Mark 1:40; He came to the adulteress woman in John 8:4; He even came to the dead man Lazarus in John 11:1... why do we somehow think that He won't come to us. The real miracle is that as we ask Him to come to us and awkwardly stumble upon complete reliance and faith in Him we are astonished at what He is truly capable of; and **we are actually re-invented and made new** by the hope He gives to us when there was no hope in sight. We must also understand then that He comes to us for a reason. That reason is for change... a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of circumstances; he comes for the reason of change. If we are not ready for that change we can't expect Him to come to us.

Two) - WE MUST SEEK HIM

That means we seek Him in the people, places and things, not always common, comfortable, conscious, or just in context to us. In doing this there may be times that we find Him in the people or places and things that are a contradiction or different to how we had determined them to be – outside of our “box” so to speak. We get stuck in that “box” and eventually look for Jesus within that box. Now don't get me wrong – He can definitely show up in our box but don't expect Him to stay there. **It is a great day when we realize that Jesus can be found in such different and diverse people, places and things; even beyond what we have ever dared to believe or imagine.** Even John the Baptist had to open His very rigid thinking so that He might see Jesus with people in places, doing

things, which He himself would not do. Was John seeing a liberal, cheap, lawless and hypocritical Jesus, or was He being stretched and challenged to see Jesus where others could not or would not dare see Him? Knowing the life of John the Baptist and the sacrifice and discipline that he demanded of his own faith – it is easy to imagine that he did not like what he saw of Jesus while he (John) was sitting in a Roman prison. This was mostly because what he saw of Jesus did not look like Him. He questioned Jesus to see if He should look for another Messiah. John was in a box, and most of the time so are we. To get out of that “box” we must be open to the possibility that we can and often will find Jesus where it is ***not always common, comfortable, conscious, or in context to us.*** This passage from Psalms 19:1-4 is a powerful explanation to this.

*The heavens tell of the glory of God.
The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or a word;
their voice is silent in the skies;
yet their message has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to all the world.*

Not common, comfortable, conscious, or just in context to me...

(Matt 11:16-19) “How shall I describe this generation? These people are like a group of children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends, ‘We played wedding songs, and you weren’t happy, so we played funeral songs, but you weren’t sad.’ For John the Baptist didn’t drink wine and he often fasted, and you say, ‘He’s demon possessed.’ And I, the Son of Man, feast and drink, and you say, ‘He’s a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of the worst sort of sinners!’ But wisdom is shown to be right by what results from it.” NLT

I truly love these words spoken by Jesus. They of course are the definition of people, places, and things not common, comfortable, conscious, or in context to us. This is Jesus at gut level exposing the religious and pious of His day for the unappeasable (nothing pleases them), divisive group that they are; and it is Jesus tearing open the “box” that those same religious people had tried to corner Him in. ***They were never going to***

find Him because they were not seeking Him, they were trying to squeeze Him into the box of religiosity”

Jesus Seekers...

1) Uncommon

Matthew 8:4-13 - Faith of the Roman Officer

5 When Jesus arrived in Capernaum, a Roman officer came and pleaded with him, 6 "Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and racked with pain." 7 Jesus said, *"I will come and heal him."* 8 Then the officer said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed! 9 I know, because I am under the authority of my superior officers and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this or that,' they do it." 10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd, he said, *"I tell you the truth, I haven't seen faith like this in all the land of Israel! 11 And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. 12 But many Israelites — those for whom the Kingdom was prepared — will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* 13 Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, *"Go on home. What you have believed has happened."* And the young servant was healed that same hour. NLT

2) Uncomfortable

Luke 6:6-11 - Healing on the Sabbath

On another Sabbath day, a man with a deformed right hand was in the synagogue while Jesus was teaching. 7 The teachers of religious law and the Pharisees watched closely to see whether Jesus would heal the man on the Sabbath, because they were eager to find some legal charge to bring against him. 8 But Jesus knew their thoughts. He said to the man with the deformed hand, *"Come and stand here where everyone can see."* So the man came forward. 9 Then Jesus said to his critics, *"I have a question for you. Is it legal to do good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing harm? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?"* 10 He looked around at them one by one and then said to the man, *"Reach out your hand."* The man reached out his hand, and it became normal again! 11 At this, the enemies of Jesus were wild with rage and began to discuss what to do with him. NLT

3) Unconscious

Luke 6:32-36 – Loving our Enemies

"Do you think you deserve credit merely for loving those who love you? Even the sinners do that! 33 And if you do good only to those who do good to you, is that so wonderful? Even sinners do that much! 34 And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, what good is that? Even sinners will lend to their own

kind for a full return. 35 "Love your enemies! Do good to them! Lend to them! And don't be concerned that they might not repay. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to the unthankful and to those who are wicked. 36 You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate. NLT

4) Not Just in the Context of Me

Luke 7:44-8:1 – Anointed by a Sinful Woman

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to come to his home for a meal, so Jesus accepted the invitation and sat down to eat. 37 A certain immoral woman heard he was there and brought a beautiful jar filled with expensive perfume. 38 Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them. 39 When the Pharisee who was the host saw what was happening and who the woman was, he said to himself, "This proves that Jesus is no prophet. If God had really sent him, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" 40 Then Jesus spoke up and answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "All right, Teacher," Simon replied, "go ahead." 41 Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people — five hundred pieces of silver to one and fifty pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" 43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You didn't give me a kiss of greeting, but she has kissed my feet again and again from the time I first came in. 46 You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. 47 I tell you, her sins — and they are many — have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." 48 Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." 49 The men at the table said among themselves, "Who does this man think he is, going around forgiving sins?" 50 And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." NLT

Conclusion – The Reckoning

(2 Corinthians) 5:16-21

So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being.

How differently I think about him now! 17 What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the

old life is gone. A new life has begun! 18 All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. 20 We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. NLT

It is no longer easy to see the New Testament as the New Testament, in the same sense that it is no longer easy to realize the “Good News” as new. We, in our present world are absorbed into the technological age of access and information. As a result we are almost too familiar with the “good news” and unimpressed and over-exposed to more and more new ‘good news.’ Of course as Christians at first we deny this but as we watch our children and grandchildren leave our churches and religious traditions the first chance they get there is no sense in denying it. Some believe of course that a more culturally sensitive model is the answer. And so whoever can create the most relatable ambiance and spiritual sensitivity believes that they have the answer. But the real issues still lay beneath the surface, hidden behind the same religious agendas... just a different name and another coat of paint. What we have learned the past six weeks about the religion of “Tiny Baby Jesus” is that above everything else He is not the gospel Jesus. Our greatest need is not for “our Jesus” to come to us - but for “Jesus of the Gospels” to come to us. We need the Jesus that was from the beginning God - who became man – and who remains forever God. The Jesus of the Gospels was both - but the present day Jesus of the Church is not; He is now just God. The human Jesus not marketable - and His torn flesh too morbid - His demands and high expectations not sensitive or user friendly. And that was a problem then, and it is still a problem today. Jesus of the Gospels was in the flesh doing for us what had to be done. As He did it He did things as no religious man had ever done things before. He did things and then said, “this is how they should be done from now on.” Today those things do not fit nicely in a tolerance culture where the distinct lines that Jesus of the Gospel drew in the sand are washed away with the tide of indifference and a relative self-truth. Jesus of the Gospels seems at times a paradox, His words seem often contradictory, His temperament appears on more than one occasion

volatile and polarizing. Sure, there was the compassionate, loving, merciful Jesus.... the Jesus who died for us. But the mystery is the Jesus who looks at His disciple Peter and asks with forgiveness and affection, *"Do you love me Peter? Then feed my lambs."* This is the same Jesus who turns and looks at Peter in the eye and said...

"Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God's." NLT

For today's Church and for today's Christian this leaves to much unsettled and unresolved. It leaves too much mystery, a mystery that can never be solved without a reckoning. TBJs seeks to ignore the real Jesus of the Gospels and to replace Him with a glossy Church Jesus. In doing so this misrepresents Christ and leads us to what we have described these past few weeks as TBJs. TBJs is killing the Church with this gap that absolutely makes no sense to someone seeking the truth. In doing this we even more importantly take away the most relatable Jesus we have to offer our world – Jesus in the flesh... human Jesus, suffering Jesus, volatile Jesus, struggling Jesus, tempted Jesus, betrayed Jesus, forgotten and lonely Jesus... sound familiar? Jesus of the Gospels did the work that would reconcile us to God, and for doing it He was crucified. When we irresponsibly and conveniently separate the two we are for all intent and purpose crucifying Him all over again. For us to avoid TBJs it demands from us as true believers "a reckoning." A reckoning is a ***settlement of an account***. The only way for us to truly avoid creating our own personal Jesus is to have that reckoning and to settle the account with Jesus (not to be confused with the account that Jesus of the Gospels settled for us on the cross). ***To close the gap between Jesus of the (Gospels), and Jesus of the (Church) is the beginning of our reckoning.***

To complete our reckoning we must include...

1) Stop evaluating others by what the world thinks of them.

2) Never evaluate Jesus by what the world thinks of Him.

3) See everyone in Him as new – no matter how much of the old you saw.

4) Accept both the divine grace and human grit of Jesus of the Gospels.

5) Let the Gospel Jesus reconcile the Church of Jesus.