**THE CONFRONTATIONAL CHRIST**

**(Matthew 11:16-24)**

On a Sunday morning in October of 1982, at the age of 18, I walked down the aisle of the church I grew up in, shook the hand of my pastor during the invitation, and told him, “God is calling me to preach.” The next month, on a Sunday evening, I preached my first sermon.

That was my first public sermon. Years before, when I was probably still in pre-school, I preached my true first sermon. In the garage of our home, I found an orange rim of a basketball goal that was not attached to a backboard. I stood in upright, and I stood behind it. With the garage as my sanctuary, the basketball goal as my pulpit, and our pet cat, Tiger, as the congregation, I preached my first sermon.

I couldn’t tell what my text was or if I even had one. I have no idea what I said that day, but I preached to our cat. To his credit, the cat didn’t move. He sat there and took it, took it like a man, even though he was a cat.

I must have felt that cat needed preaching because he was mean. He would just as soon scratch you as look at you. Every so often he would disappear and reappear a day or two later bearing the scars of some fight he had been in. He would look at you as if to say, “Well, you oughta see what the other cat looks like.”

Just maybe I called that cat to account and told him to reform his ways. I confronted that cat from behind my pulpit, and just maybe he didn’t move because he was under conviction.

If you are a Christian, you need to get used to being confronted because you and I are often in the wrong. Please keep in mind, however, that this confrontation does not necessarily need to come from other believers. There is a time for that, but I think confrontation from other believers is more the exception than the rule.

The One who most often confronts us is Jesus, and He does so by means of the Holy Spirit. That is what conviction is. It happens when we do what we should not do, or say what we should not say or think what we ought not to think, and the Holy Spirit taps us on the shoulder. He shakes His head, so to speak, and whispers, “No, no, that’s not how we act in this family.”

Have you ever been brought under conviction concerning that three-letter word we call, *sin?* If you haven’t, you aren’t yet a Christian. Conviction precedes salvation. You can’t be saved until you know you are lost. You can’t receive forgiveness until you know deep down that there is something for which you need to be forgiven.

This conviction comes by way of the Spirit of Jesus as He works in and on your heart. It is not my job or your job to convict someone else of his or her sin. Our county may have an Assistant District Attorney, but the Holy Spirit doesn’t need any assistants going about trying to get people to feel the weight and guilt of their sin. As far as courtroom jargon goes:

* We are not the jury.
* We are certainly not the Judge.
* We are not the prosecuting attorney.
* We aren’t even the defense lawyer.

You are I are witnesses; we simply tell what we know.

Jesus, on the other hand, is a Master Confronter. Jesus has been characterized as meek and mild, but He was hardly either when he fashioned a whip out of cords and drove the money changers and merchants out of the Temple.

Jesus often spoke hard truths. Sometimes He spoke pointedly to individuals and sometimes to certain groups of people. Today, we are going to witness what Jesus said to His immediate audience and also what Jesus had to say about several, entire towns. Our goal in doing so is to let Him speak to us. We are going to look today at, “The Confrontational Christ.” Our text is Matthew 11:16-24.

1. **CHRIST CONFRONTS THE CRITICAL; SO, LET’S BE CAREFUL WHAT WE THINK AND SAY.**

In v. 16, Jesus begins to describe the generation living at the time He was ministering. He uses a child’s game to do so.

What did you play growing up? Girls may have played house or dress up. Apparently, I played church, but I also played cops and robbers, as well as cowboys and Indians.

The boys and girls in Jesus’ day played wedding and funeral. Those were two big social events that I am sure caught the attention and imagination of children.

Weddings were celebratory affairs that involved music and dancing. I can imagine boys pretending to play flutes while humming some song, and while they did, the girls would dance.

Funerals, however, while still highly emotional, were on the opposite side of the emotional scale from weddings. Instead of a cause for celebration, funerals were an occasion for mourning. Instead of happy music, it was somber and mournful. Instead of dancing, there was wailing and loud crying.

Families routinely hired people to come to their homes and mourn when a loved one died. Professional mourners would come to the home where they would wail and tear their robes. When they went back home, they would stitch up the tear, and then be careful to tear their robe at that the same place when they got their next mourning gig.

So, when little girls and boys would play funeral, one group would sing dolefully while the other group would wail woefully. I suppose they thought it was great fun.

In Jesus’ description of the present generation, they weren’t playing well with one another. Look at v. 17. Their play had descended into criticism and fault-finding. The other group wasn’t playing their part right in the mind of the first group. The first group had an expectation, and the second group wasn’t living up to that expectation.

This was exactly the problem the people had with both John and Jesus. They weren’t playing their part right. The people viewed John as playing funeral when they wanted to play wedding. They thought Jesus was playing wedding when they wanted to play funeral. John was too mournful and Jesus was too celebratory. The people couldn’t get on board with either one, and so they just criticized the two.

A few weeks ago, I spoke about unmet expectations. God doesn’t always do what we want Him to do, when we want Him to do it, and how we want Him to do it. Many people are at odds with God because He is not playing to part of God right.

Furthermore, we are at odds with other people because they aren’t living up to our expectations. They are not saying things and doing things as we think they should. So, what do we do about that? Do we just sulk in silence? Oh no. We criticize. Often, we criticize them to whomever will listen, and some of us will have the courage to criticize them to their face. We let them know they aren’t doing things right because they are not living up to our expectations.

In their book *Unchristian,* David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons say that almost 9 out of 10 people who are outside the church view those inside the church as judgmental. I think the world views the church as judgmental because we actually are judgmental. We are quick to point out the wrong in a person’s life even before we get to know them. Let’s develop a relationship of friendship with someone before we try to fix them.

Kinnaman and Lyons point out where this judgmentalism comes from: “Pride fuels judgmental attitudes. Arrogance is perhaps the most socially acceptable form of sin in the church today.” If you are highly judgmental and hyper-critical it is because you are building yourself up by tearing others down.

We need to be careful how we think about others and what we say to or about others. We are not better than and others are not less than. We need to focus on the goodness of Jesus, His mercy, His grace, His love, not on the behavior of others.

Recently, my wife and I had a discussion. Now, you know what that means when a husband and wife have a discussion. Usually it means the husband is wrong. But our discussion was about one of today’s hot-button topics.

Afterwards, she said she felt I had been overly judgmental in my comments. I gave thought to what I had said. I have concluded that one of two things are true. Either I did a poor job of articulating my position or I was, in fact, overly judgmental.

I suppose, in theory, there is a third option, but I consider it highly unlikely. The third option is that I was right and she was wrong. Since that hasn’t happened yet, I’d like to think I just didn’t do a good job of saying what I meant to say, but it is more likely that I was being overly judgmental.

At the end of His words to the critical, Jesus says, “Wisdom is justified by her deeds.” In essence, He is saying, “Being critical is not wise. It is a foolish way to live. There is a wiser way to live.”

So, how do we conquer this judgmental, critical spirit? We need to discover what C.S. Lewis discovered. He wrote, “There is someone I love even though I don’t approve of what he does. There is someone I accept though some of his thoughts and actions revolt me. There is someone I forgive though he hurts the people I love the most. That person is me . . . If I can love myself without approving of all I do, I can also love others without approving of all they do.”

Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. If you give yourself a break, you need to give others a break. If you can forgive yourself, then you should forgive others. Let’s work at loving others the way we love ourselves.

1. **CHRIST CONFRONTS THE COMFORTABLE; SO, LET’S BE CAREFUL HOW WE VIEW OURSELVES.**

Notice again what Jesus said in vv. 20-24. Jesus pronounces judgment on three separate cities in the Galilee: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. All three were on the north side of Lake Galilee, and all three were Jewish towns while the Galilee region was mostly Gentile. Capernaum was the headquarter for Jesus’ ministry. Bethsaida was a fishing village and the hometown of Peter and Andrew. Chorazin was directly north of Capernaum just a few miles. An excavation of the town revealed the ruins of a synagogue that Jesus mostly certainly would have visited. Many of Jesus’ miracles were performed in and around these three towns.

Jesus draws a contrast between these three towns and the cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. In the Book of Genesis, we read of the destruction of Sodom by God due to the utter wickedness of the people. Tyre and Sidon were coastal cities in the land of Phoenicia, which is north of Israel (present-day Lebanon). From history we know that both of those cities were destroyed—Sidon by King Artaxerxes and Tyre by Alexander the Great.

According to Jesus, those pagan, wicked cities will be better off in the judgment than will be these Jewish towns in which Jesus ministered. Jesus had shone His light brightly in those towns. The inhabitants of those three villages saw Jesus perform great miracles, but in the end, they did not trust Him. They rejected Him as their Messiah.

No doubt, they thought to themselves, “We don’t need what you have to offer. We are just fine, thank you very much.”

Jesus came to offer them the Kingdom, and they wanted a Kingdom all right, but the one they envisioned was far different than the one Jesus sought to give them.

N.T. Wright explained:

Their vision of the kingdom was all about revolution. Swords, spears, surprise attacks; some hurt, some killed, winning in the end. Violence to defeat violence. A holy war against the unholy warriors. Love your neighbor, hate your enemy; if he slaps you on the cheek, or makes you walk a mile with him, stab him with his own dagger. That’s the sort of kingdom-vision they had. And Jesus could see, with the clarity both of the prophet and of sheer common sense, where it would lead. Better be in Sodom and Gomorrah, with fire and brimstone raining from heaven, than fighting God’s battles with the devil’s weapons.

When we get right down to it, we have to decide: Am I going to live life based on what I want and what I think or will I live my life based on what God wants and what He has said? Those who are comfortable with the way life is going all too often choose to base life on themselves—their wants, their goals, their dreams, their abilities.

I was probably a teenager when I picked up the newspaper one morning and came across the Ann Lander’s column. Do you remember her? She wrote her own advice column for 50 some-odd years. She wasn’t the first Ann Lander’s by the way. That was a pseudonym. Another advice columnist published under that name for nine years. Another interesting fact is that the one we know of as Ann Landers had a twin sister who started her own advice column under the pseudonym Abigail Van Buren. Her column was Dear Abby. The two sisters were journalistic competitors.

But on that day many years ago, I read that Ann Landers believed it was the job of the minister, the preacher, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. That is exactly what Jesus did.

Let me ask you: Are you comfortable? Is life going your way? Are you living life on your own terms? Jesus is here to confront you.

On the Acknowledgment page of one of his many books, Max Lucado wrote:

On a summer day in the late nineties I ran into a friend in a hotel lobby . . . We had a few minutes. I had an empty stomach. So we bought deli sandwiches, found a table, and took a seat. “What has God been teaching you this year?” My question was expectation-free. But his answer gave me more than a sandwich to chew on.

“What has He been teaching me this year?” he reflected. “He’s been teaching me that: It’s not about me.”

In 2004 Lucado released a book he had written. The title was the answer his friend had given: *It’s Not About Me.* If it is not about you, then what is life about? It’s about Jesus. Listen to some of chapter title’s to Lucado’s book:

* My Message Is About Him
* My Salvation Is About Him
* My Body Is About Him
* My Struggles Are About Him
* My Success Is About Him

I’m going to conclude my message the way Lucado concluded his book. He tells a story about a time he was seated on a plane. He was seated by the window reading the Bible. Another man was seated next to him by the aisle. The stranger leaned over, and with a twinkle in his eye asked, “So, you like Jewish authors.”

The man next to Lucado happened to be a Jewish rabbi. He had chest-length beard, had tassels hanging from shirt-tail, and he wore a yarmulke (a Jewish skullcap that men wear). This rabbi was not the silent type. He loved to talk, especially about the Torah.

It is not often that Protestant pastors get to sit down and talk about the Jewish Scriptures with Jewish teachers. Lucado had some questions. He asked the rabbi to explain the meaning of the third commandment: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

The rabbi answered, “Don’t think language; think lifestyle.” Then, like every good rabbi, he told a story. Let me summarize the story.

Suppose the CEO of a large corporation has his office on the top floor of a Manhattan skyscraper. Every one in the building works for him, but most people have never seen him. They haven’t seen him, but they see his daughter. She exploits her family position for her benefit.

One morning she orders the security guard to go down the street and buy her a Danish. He thinks he shouldn’t leave his post, but when she demands, “Come on, now; hurry up,” he does what she says. He thinks to himself, “If the daughter is so bossy, what does that say about her father?”

While she is munching on her muffin, she bumps into a secretary who is carrying an arm-load of papers. “Where are you going with all those papers?”

“To have them bound for an afternoon meeting.”

“Forget the meeting. Come to my office and vacuum the carpet.”

The woman has no choice. This is the boss’ daughter. This makes her wonder about the boss.

And on the daughter goes. Making demands. Calling shots. Interrupting schedules. The rabbi points out that the daughter dishonored the name of her father, not with vulgar language but with insensitive living.

Then, the rabbi re-tells the story. This time, the daughter goes out and buys the security guard a muffin. As she presents it, she says to him, “I thought of you this morning. You always arrive to work so early.”

Wen she bumps into the paper-laden secretary, she says, “Here let me help you.” She takes half of the load and follows her to the copy room.

The daughter engages the co-workers. She asks about their families, offers a helping hand, expresses kindness, and raises the happiness level of the entire company. She doesn’t mention the father’s name. She doesn’t speak on his behalf, but because the employees think highly of her, they think highly of her dad.

The rabbi asks Lucado, “Do you know how the story ends?” Lucado admits that he doesn’t. The rabbi draws the story to a close. He says that the boss knows the good things his daughter is doing and how the people think highly of him because of her. When she takes the elevator to the top floor and walks into his office and the father greets her with six words. The rabbi pauses. Lucado asks, “What are they?”

Quoting Jesus, the rabbi answers, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

If you want to be a good and faithful servant, you cannot join the company of the critical, and you must avoid the company of the comfortable.