

Jesus in Your Face – the Audacity of Jesus
August 27 – Laird Crump

Jesus in your face

What comes into your mind when you hear the word Jesus?

For example if we were brainstorming on one-word descriptions of Jason Grills, we would use words like, friendly, gifted, musical, humorous, faithful, handsome....

And the list would go on and on. How about for Jesus?

What comes into your mind when you hear the word “Jesus”?

Give me some one-word descriptions of Jesus.

Many of these descriptions are true. But today I want to use another word to describe Jesus that may surprise some of you.

The word is

“audacious”. Have you ever thought of Jesus that way?

What does this term “audacious” mean? Well, the word means two things.

It means ***“a bold initiative” and “a disregard for social convention”***. Many organizations, in terms of strategic plans, speak of BHAGS. Big hairy audacious goals. By that we mean that we are pursuing goals that are bold initiatives and goals that disregard social convention. Have you ever thought of Jesus as one who was bold and had disregard for social convention?

Now, audacity is an interesting quality. Audacity can be a very good thing like in the case of Jesus. But audacity can be a negative thing as well as in the case of some athletes I know. Comedian Brian Regan talks about how in little leagues sports there is a lot of audacity promoted by coaches. The base ball coach would tell us to *raz* the batter so we would sneer and yell out – Hey batter batter, hey batter batter, swing batter swing - as if the batter couldn't hit the ball if we yelled “swing”. The coaches were trying to teach us to be audacious, to be in their face, but it's not exactly a transferable concept. Imagine doing that as you grew older and became, say, a lawyer? In the middle of a court case you would yell, “hey lawyer lawyer, hey lawyer lawyer – Sue lawyer sue!

Or you get on a bus and yell – “hey driver driver – turn driver turn”.

Some athletes think that if they can be in someone's face during a game why can't they be that way in the rest of life?

Most examples of audacity we see are negative examples.

When you think of being audacious by breaking social conventions or social norms what do you think of? Most things we think of are negative. For example, you can be audacious by doing all those things your mother told you not to do in public... especially in church. How many of you had moms who gave you a list of do's and don'ts before you went to church?

For example, if I were to be audacious and boldly break social convention or accepted norms for church here today I could do that negatively by, say, lighting up this cigar and opening a can of beer. Or I could pull out this donut from Tim Horton's and eat it in front of you and continue to talk with my mouth full. I mean, that would be really bold an audacious wouldn't it? But much of that kind of audacity has no point other than to just irritate people for the sake of irritating them. But some times audacity is a good thing. I could also be audacious and in your face in a good way, by confronting you with some kind of truth that would be really helpful to you. If there is a moral issue at stake or if your life paradigms were off base, and it required me to be audacious to help you see the truth, then me being “in your face” would actually be a good thing. Maybe it would be hard to hear but nevertheless my audacity in confronting you and boldly presenting

ideas could be healthy in snapping you back into reality and keeping you on the right track in life. That is good audacity.

In the video clip we just watched from Simon Birch there were examples of both good audacity and bad audacity. Did you catch them? The Minister and the Sunday school teacher had bad audacity. But Simon and Miss Wentworth had good audacity. In fact, I think Simon had a good point – if God has the church bake sale as a priority then I say we're all in a lot of trouble! I would like to propose to you today, that Jesus was an “in your face” kind of guy especially as it related to the religious establishment. I would like to propose to you today that Jesus was the kind of fellow who absolutely hated religion. That may come as a surprise to some of you but I think that is the picture painted of Jesus in the Bible. In this way Jesus was audacious! He took a bold initiative to change the world and he had a passionate frustration with social convention.

I want to show you a dramatic video clip that portrays this side of Jesus. Watch it and then tell me how this portrayal of Jesus makes you feel.

VIDEO CLIP FROM JESUS VIDEO DRIVING OUT THE MONEY CHANGERS IN THE TEMPLE

That is an audacious Jesus! A bold Jesus, a Jesus who was contrary to the social religious convention of the day. But also a Jesus who was passionate about helping people understand what God was really like. Passionate to the point of tears for people who were being spiritually misled.

For the remainder of our time today I would like to show you a few examples of how Jesus was audacious and then try to explain why.

Before we do I want to make a few

disclaimers.

- ***Although Jesus was audacious he was also extremely gracious with anyone who wanted to be honest about who they really were.*** He had compassion for those who were being spiritually misled and those who were hurting.
- ***Jesus was not against spiritual traditions but rather traditionalism.*** Likely Jesus had a Bar mitzvah and celebrated the Sabbath and other Jewish traditions. For Jesus, spiritual traditions were good as long as people understood what they meant and as long as the focus was God but it really irked Jesus when traditions got in the way of people really understanding spiritual truth.
- ***Jesus balanced his audacity with compassion and tenderness.*** If he was ever in someone's face it was because he loved them and knew that they needed a dose of tough love.

Jesus' attack on religion.

When we look at the person of Jesus we have to ask the question:

why was there such a conflict between Jesus and the religious establishment of the day?

This was not a passive conflict either. This conflict was intense. In fact, I would argue from the Bible that Jesus went out of his way to intentionally offend the religious establishment. To the religious establishment of that day Jesus essentially was calling them to a showdown, as if to say: “this world isn't big enough for the two of us”. This showdown was so intense that the religious establishment killed him.

It is important to note that the religious authorities of that day were very controlling and oppressive.

The religious leaders had taken the original top ten commandments of God and added over 600 additional laws. God's original intent was to have a personal relationship with his people and he gave these guidelines for healthy living.

The religious leaders took this relationship with God and turned it into the "three R's" rituals, rules and regulations. Why did they distort a relationship with God into a set of rules and regulations? The reason for this is that it is hard for us as humans to comprehend that God loves us freely and wants to know us personally. We feel that we have to somehow earn God's approval and acceptance by doing certain things. The religious establishment of Jesus' day fell into this trap big time. As a result they had missed the whole point of having a relationship with God.

Let me give you some examples of how Jesus was intentionally offensive to the religious establishment.

Case study # 1. Mark 7: 1-8, 13-15, 20-22

Mark 7

¹One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to confront Jesus. ²They noticed that some of Jesus' disciples failed to follow the usual Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating. ³(The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. ⁴Similarly, they eat nothing bought from the market unless they have immersed their hands in water.

This is but one of many traditions they have clung to--such as their ceremony of washing cups, pitchers, and kettles.) ⁵So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, "Why don't your disciples follow our age-old customs? For they eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony."

⁶Jesus replied, "You hypocrites! Isaiah was prophesying about you when he said,

⁷ "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far away. Their worship is a farce, for they replace God's commands with their own man-made teachings.'

⁸For you ignore God's specific laws and substitute your own traditions."

¹³As such, you break the law of God in order to protect your own tradition. And this is only one example. There are many, many others."

¹⁴Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. "All of you listen," he said, "and try to understand. ¹⁵You are not defiled by what you eat; you are defiled by what you say and do! "

²⁰And then he added, "It is the thought-life that defiles you. ²¹For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness.

Oooooooweeee, that's hotter than Georgia asphalt!

Now let me make just a few surface observations. In an attempt to gain God's approval the religious establishment had rules and rituals about washing their hands whenever they were dirtied. I guess they thought that cleanliness was next to Godliness.

Now as some of my friends know, I have a germ phobia and I wash my hands several times throughout the day. I also keep a hand sanitizer in the car for after when I pump gas. I think of all the people who pick their noses in the car and then grab the gas pump nozzle. I hate that, but

I would never go so far as to say that “you must use hand sanitizer after pumping gas or else God will not be pleased with you”. The Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus’ day had these absurd religious rules that were enslaving the people. But note how audacious Jesus was. When they accusingly ask Jesus why his followers don’t follow their religious rules, he doesn’t say, “well let me explain, you know it really bugs me too but these guys are kind of earthy and I am trying hard to get them to shape up”. No. Look what he does. He quotes the OT prophet Isaiah and calls them hypocrites (not a nice term) and then goes further to call their worship to God a “farce”. Then to rub it in their noses even more look at what Jesus says in verse 14. He calls the attention of the crowd and audaciously points out how the religious establishment is wrong. They had made their relationship with God something external and Jesus declares loud and clear that it’s all about a heart relationship with God. He says don’t be hung up over clean hands and other do’s and don’ts, be concerned about having a clean heart before God. That is what really matters.

That is audacious!

Case Study # 2. Mark 2: 23-28, Mark 3:1-6

(Mark 2) ²³One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grain fields, his disciples began breaking off heads of wheat. ²⁴But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "They shouldn't be doing that! It's against the law to work by harvesting grain on the Sabbath."

²⁵But Jesus replied, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what King David did when he and his companions were hungry?"

²⁶He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was high priest), ate the special bread reserved for the priests alone, and then gave some to his companions. That was breaking the law, too." ²⁷Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath. ²⁸And I, the Son of Man, am master even of the Sabbath!"

(Mark 3) ¹Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. ²Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. Would he heal the man's hand on the Sabbath? If he did, they planned to condemn him. ³Jesus said to the man, "Come and stand in front of everyone." ⁴Then he turned to his critics and asked, "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?" But they wouldn't answer him. ⁵He looked around at them angrily, because he was deeply disturbed by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Reach out your hand." The man reached out his hand, and it became normal again! ⁶At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to discuss plans for killing Jesus.

Again allow me to make a few observations. The religious establishment had dozens of rules about the Sabbath. God’s commandment was to rest one day out of seven and to have a spiritual emphasis for that day. That is all God said about it. The Pharisees insisted that if one wanted to be in good standing with God they could not lift a finger.

They couldn’t prepare food or carry water or repair anything, or even go for a walk. They allowed people to only walk a certain distance because they figured any more than a hundred yards or so would be hard work. So all these people thought, “oh man, if I want to be in good standing with God I better sit still all day on the Sabbath”. Now here, Jesus and his followers are walking through a grain field, which was against the rules and even worse they broke some of the heads off the grain and began to munch on them. This broke the religious law of harvesting

on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were outraged but look at Jesus' audacious response. He boldly gives them an example of King David doing a similar thing on the Sabbath and then breaking apart their religious paradigm he declares, "the Sabbath was made to benefit people and not people to benefit the Sabbath". You can almost here Jesus saying; "for goodness sake, lighten up".

And then the same kind of thing happens when Jesus heals this man's hand. But note verse 3. Before Jesus healed the man he had him come and stand in front of everyone. Why? Jesus was calling for a showdown. Jesus was intentionally offending the religious establishment to snap them into reality and to show the futility of rules and regulations and rituals in getting one closer to God. Jesus was audacious. He was bold in his initiatives and had a disregard for social convention. He was tired of the oppressive approach to spirituality that focused merely on externals rather than the condition of a person's heart.

Now, there are many other examples I could show you. But you can read these for yourselves. Just read through one of the accounts of Jesus in the NT and you will be amazed at how audacious Jesus was.

Why was Jesus so 'against' religion?

But why? Was he just a guy who liked to disturb the peace? No, there was a purpose in his audacious behaviour.

Jesus fully understood how religion could actually take people farther away from God than bring them closer to God.

Think of any religious expression, be it Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and even religious expressions of Christianity. A religious approach to faith is a persons attempt to climb the ladder closer to God. As a person conforms their behaviour to a list of rules, rituals and regulations they usually get a sense of pride and self-sufficiency. Although this is never said out loud, people feel that they have earned God's approval, so in essence they are their own saviour. They have pulled themselves up by their own boot-straps. Really this is an expression of pride and independence. This attitude runs contrary to what God really desires.

Christianity really has nothing to do with religion. It has everything to do with relationship... an honest relationship with God.

While all religions represent a persons attempt to climb closer to God, in Christianity, it is Gods attempt to come down the ladder to rescue us. That is what Jesus is all about.

Jesus is God with skin and bones, in the flesh, who has come down to our turf to teach us how to cast off religion and embrace a relationship with him.

Jesus wants to rescue us from our natural bent toward a religious mindset. We try to figure out a system of faith and then try to fit into it so that we feel we are doing OK. It might be one of the classic world religions or maybe even the religion of "I do my best", or "I am trying to do good things" or the religion of "being a nice Canadian person". But being nice doesn't get one closer to God. Jesus came to earth to destroy the system of religion and to tell us that it is all about relationship.

Think of a marriage relationship. It can be a contract or a relationship. A man and woman can live together and go through all the motions of marriage without really having a relationship. The wife might say, "honey, I want us to have a good relationship" and he replies saying "but I have been a good provider and I shovel the driveway and cut the grass and I clean the garage and I try to do my own laundry and, and... She says to him "I appreciate your efforts but I don't really care about that, I want your heart and I want us to connect heart to heart. I want us to not just go

through the motions of a marriage, I want us to have a relationship”. If he keeps ignoring this reality and continues to go through the motions it may be necessary for her to grab him by the collar, be audacious and say “for goodness sake, you have missed the whole point of this marriage, it’s not about duty and checking off a to do list, it’s about you and I relating personally”. I think that is why Jesus was so audacious toward the religious establishment. They didn’t get it and they were leading others down the wrong path as well. He wasn’t in their face because he hated them. He was in their face because he loved them and needed them to see the truth, the truth that;

rituals, rules and regulations are meaningless without a personal relationship with God.

Only Jesus can restore the relationship between humans and God.
Now, how do you react to all this stuff?

Q and Eh?

Reactions to the audacity of Jesus

Maybe you will have one of several reactions.

1. You might be sitting there thinking,

“I totally disagree, and these thoughts are absurd. I have never pictured Jesus as being audacious”.

And that is Ok if you feel this way but I challenge you to examine Jesus in the Bible and to see if your impression of Jesus is a Biblical one.

2. You might be sitting there thinking,

“This is cool, I like this picture of Jesus with an edge. I am going to try to be audacious like Jesus”.

If so please be careful because Jesus was not audacious for the sake of being audacious. The purpose was to confront the people he loved into thinking differently about faith. He saw the people he loved moving down a wrong path in a wrong direction away from God and he needed to intentionally get their attention with some tough love. Most people are not argued into change. They are loved into change. Too many Christians are audacious in ways Jesus would never be. When I listen to some TV preachers and hear them yell and accuse, I think ‘man, you need some anger management counselling’. As Aristotle said – anyone can get angry, that is easy... but to be angry in the right way at the right time, with the right person and with the right attitude... that is not easy. Jesus had very controlled audacity. It is difficult for us to imitate him.

3. You might be sitting here thinking,

“all this time I thought Christianity was just a philosophy of life or an adherence to Christian values, rules and regulations. This whole relationship thing is new to me”.

If so, can I encourage you to take a step forward to personally respond to Jesus? Maybe you can pray a simple prayer to him saying something like,

“Jesus, I don’t really know you in a personal way, but I would really like to. Can you help me understand you more please”? From what I know of Jesus, he would be thrilled with you praying that kind of prayer and would begin to reveal himself to you and deepen your friendship with him.

But in closing I want to show you another really bold thing Jesus said.

As we wrap up, I want to show you a statement Jesus made about himself that is quite radical and audacious. In fact it is the type of statement that got Jesus killed.

It is from John 14.

***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me".
(Jesus, quoted in the Bible in John 14:6)***

Here Jesus is saying three things about himself and then draws a very significant conclusion.

Jesus says – "I am the way". What does he mean by that?

Well, the word "way" means a path or a road. Like the Don Valley Parkway. I think ***Jesus is saying that he is the way, the ultimate path to follow in life.***

We all need some path, some way to follow in life. Jesus says to us – don't follow the way of a philosophy, or a religion or an ideology, rather, follow me because I am *the* way that leads to God the father. That is quite a bold claim.

Then Jesus says – "I am the truth". What Jesus means here is not just that he has elements of the truth but he is saying that the very truth of God resides in him. Jesus is implying that he is reality. Jesus is not describing truth as an ethical virtue or a philosophical concept but rather ***Jesus is saying that He Himself is truth and that to know the truth requires that we enter into the experience of becoming a follower of Jesus. Truth is not an abstract concept but rather a person,***

Jesus Christ. Jesus is implying that he is *the* truth that leads to God the father. That is quite a bold claim.

Then Jesus says – "I am the life".

Jesus is saying that He is the source of meaningful life for the here and now, but also the one who gives us life after death.

That too is quite a claim.

Jesus is declaring that he is the way to God, the truth of God and the life of God. And then he adds his conclusion. He says –

"No one comes to God the father except through me".

What an incredible statement.

And this is why

it is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ.

You either believe what he says about himself or you don't. When it comes to Jesus we have to fish or cut bait.

This is hard for us because as Canadians we value being neutral. Ask a Canadian what their favorite color is and they answer - "Plaid". Like the fellow who said to his psychologist – "I know I used to be indecisive but now I'm not so sure". Or the bumper sticker that read – indecision is the key to flexibility.

It is easy to be foggy about a lot of things in life, but when it comes to Jesus, it is very important that we have clarity.

Jesus was definitive about issues of faith and life. And, because he loves us, he wants to get in our face so that we can really understand that he is the way, the truth and the life. And he wants us to understand this about him, not just to irritate us, but rather so that he can help us become all that God wants us to be.

You know, perhaps the most audacious and bold statement of Jesus involved two words. Two words with which he challenged people. Those two words were – “Follow me”. When you think about it those are pretty audacious words!

While religion says do this and do that and you will earn God’s favour, Jesus simply challenged people to follow him. Yet it is a bold request.

I hope this week you will remember this “in your face” kind of challenge from Jesus. I hope this week that you will think about Jesus’ claim of being the way, the truth and the life. And I hope you realize that Jesus is not making this bold audacious statement just to make life difficult for you but rather that he is getting in our face because he loves us and only wants the very best for us. Religion can often get in the way of a sincere relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And I hope that this week you can stop going through all the motions of being a Christian and simply follow Jesus. Because being a Christian has nothing to do with religion but every thing to do with a sincere heart to heart relationship with God.