

Sunday November 29, 2009
Guest Speaker: Matt Chapman
CHRISTIAN CHAIRS

1.

Christian Chairs

30 identical chairs are placed around the stage.

Good morning... I'm really excited to be here this morning because we are going to be talking about 3 very important things... chairs, eggs and voting (show props: a chair, an egg, and the Kennedy poster). And we are going to be looking at what these 3 things have to do with the issue of justice...

Lets begin with chairs...

Perhaps you've noticed that there are quite a few chairs on the stage this morning... I would like you to imagine that this is a crowd of chairs – like a crowd of people – and that 5 of these are Christians

Can anyone tell me which five are the Christians? Take a close look...

It's difficult to tell, isn't it? Really, how can we tell the Christian chairs from the rest of the chairs? - - They all look pretty much the same!

And that's the problem, isn't it...

They all shop at the same stores
They drive the same kind of vehicles
They live in the same kind of houses
And they all eat at the same places

They live in a very similar way to every other chair... so we can't really tell which ones are the Christians...

I found a website the other day that was like a blog/survey site. People can write in and share a situation or a point a view, and people will respond. They then calculate how many people agree with you... In this way you can gauge whether or not you are "normal" in what you are going through or in the way you think...

This one entry was titled

"Is It Normal To Hate Christians?"

The writer wrote bitterly about the lifestyles and characteristics of your average Christian... and 60% of people agreed with him. I've seen this first hand so many times, and I've met so many people who just don't want anything to do with it...

2.

And I wonder if it's because they can't tell the Christian chairs from the rest of the chairs?

When we read the Bible, and we read what Jesus said, it's clear that the difference should be obvious - - we should be able to see the Christian chairs - - Like lights in the darkness! Take a look at these scriptures...

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven."

Acts 13:47 "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: " 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth...' "

Ephesians 5:8-10 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord..."

Colossians 1:12 "...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." (His is the Kingdom of light)...

This means that we are to look radically different: like light in the darkness. It means that our lifestyles, how we live, how we love, and how we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness should look unlike anything of this world. It should be obvious. For in Christ, we are supposed to be new creations.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 "If anyone is in Christ, he (or she) is a new creation... We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us." We should be able to see which 5 are living so differently, and seeking Jesus so earnestly... that they are like lights in the darkness. We read about this kind of living with the early disciples in the book of ACTS (people were drawn to this other-way of living.)

I don't often think of myself as a light on a hill... I think of myself more like a Mickey Mouse nightlight... something that adds a little light, to a little corner. But we are called to more than that, aren't we?

Prop: Open a carton of eggs...

While living for 3 weeks in a very poor village in Bolivia this summer I learned that eggs don't need to be refrigerated, particularly unwashed eggs. Greg Madely, the founder of HATN, and our fearless leader in Bolivia, laughed at me when I noticed the box of eggs in the corner of the bus, and asked him if there was a refrigerator in this little third world village we were heading to. "No Matt," he said in disbelief of my un-worldliness, "eggs don't need to be refrigerated."

Now, you, like me, may not believe it – but after 3 weeks of eating eggs that were stored in a small warm kitchen, I was convinced! (And I ate a lot of eggs – one of the only things I was not allergic to...)

This really challenged a significant part my worldview. I've always been taught to put eggs in the refrigerator. I never thought to question that. That's where eggs belong. When it comes to the storage of eggs, it's the only way I've ever known. This, for me, was an egg revelation!

There are things that we do everyday that we never think to question. These are things we do as part of our daily routine... Think of all the details that make up your day, and we do these things everyday.

But what if we learned that there are egg revelations within all of these things – what if we learned that hidden beneath these routine parts of our day, there was a truth that would shake us to our core?

A large white board is positioned on stage.

Imagine that this white board represents the world. (Draw a line across the middle, above centre). This (top part) is the world we live in. Up here we do everything we do... We go to sleep, we go to work, we go to school, we eat, we shop, we go to church, we email, we go to our cottage, we read newspapers – this is where we live. This is all we see. This is all we know.

This part of the world – down here – we don't see. In fact, we're not supposed to see it. It's hidden from us...

Now, take a look at the composition of this board. The part that we live in is up here, and the other part – a much larger part – is down here... It is down here because it is the foundation of this top part. In fact, "this" and all that we know this to be, would not be possible without "this." The egg revelation, for us, is hidden down here; and we'll get to that in a moment...

Let's examine this top part a little closer...

The truth is that we are very closed-in up here. (Re-enforce the line drawn around our top borders). We are pre-occupied with our own lives... aren't we? Our time and our money and our energy is consumed by the daily grind up here: We have things to do, bills to pay, places to go, things to fix, problems at work, sicknesses and anxieties to deal with, church to go to, our small groups, we have to drive, we have to get gas, groceries to buy, meals to cook, leaves to rake, snow to shovel, emails to write... and the list keeps going. - - Until all we see is our stuff and our agenda and our problems right there in front of us...

You see your problems and your list of things to do, and I see my problems and my list of things to do... With this kind of pace, our neighbors disappear to us...

And the greatest consequence to how we live is that we somehow come to think that God's work, and everything He wants to do, His plan and His mission exists up "here." We come to believe that this is where God wants to work – that this is where He is attention is focused, and that everything we see and know up here is what God cares about. We are living out egocentricity; perhaps even accidentally! But the truth is we are way too focused on ourselves.

But when Jesus came He modeled a very different way of living, didn't He? – He was light in the darkness – and everyone could see this incredibly unique character, lifestyle and quality: In a world of people concerned about their individual lives, Jesus gave up His rights as an individual and as a King, He sacrificed everything to love and to bring the gospel and to bring

the Kingdom of heaven. And He said to those who claimed to love Him: Follow Me; Do as I do... Don't you see... your life is not about you...?

Perhaps for some of us, this is the first egg revelation this morning: that the new life that Jesus gives to us is not about us. Put another way, we are not rescued by God so that we can simply go to church and include Him more often in our daily routine, until one day we get Heaven...

We have been rescued so that we can become rescuers.

God has given us new life so that we can become the body of Christ on this planet – and Jesus wants to bring His kingdom to this broken world through us – His Body.

Which brings us to our next egg revelation: We, together, are to be Kingdom-bringers, with the power of Christ working in us and through us... And God's Kingdom comes not for "this," but for "this. (Erase the line, referring to the whole board).

We must remember that by living as one with no lodging (Lk. 9:58), Jesus identified with the poorest of the poor. And by giving so much of His attention to those who were despised in society, or abused, or generally forgotten, Jesus made it clear that every human being is valuable to God... every single one.

The egg revelation that God wants us to WAKE UP TO is hidden down here, in the invisible factories filled with the women, the men and the children that sew our clothes, glue our shoes, and make our toys. God wants us to wake up to those boys in the Congo mines, and all the others like them that farm our coffee and our chocolate, and who live invisible lives...

Here is a glimpse of the world down here...

VIDEO

It's ironic that in school we are taught about people like Lincoln and MLK, and how they abolished slavery and secured equality – "when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands..." This great speech marks our victory over slavery and oppression, right?

Slavery was a problem of the past! Isn't it?

My friends, modern day slavery is a multi-billion dollar industry. The slavery industry is the foundation to this top part of the world. That's what is going on down here... Everyday men, women and children are bought (or stolen) or coerced, and sold into factories or brothels. This is the job of the human trafficker.

Traffickers buy or steal people, mostly children from impoverished countries, and sell them or coerce them into the slave industry. They move people, like products, across borders and into brothels or factories... And working as laborers or sex slaves these forgotten people generate an enormous industry of production and services...

And this is not a small thing. Last year human traffickers made 32 billion dollars. This is the largest and most profitable slavery industry the world has ever seen. And as consumers we

have a central role in its existence. Now I know this is difficult to see and to hear about. I know this makes a lot of us uncomfortable. This is really unfamiliar territory for us. And we probably don't have a firm grasp on why we need to be involved with this stuff. So with that in mind we tend to move into self-defense mode... and we think to ourselves...

“But wait a minute... If we stop buying things that are manufactured ‘down there,’ than all of those poor people would be out of a job...right? We're providing an economy for them, aren't we?”

What we don't see – what is hidden from us – is what is happening behind the scenes. The attitude towards these “employees” more often than not goes like this:

“Because you are poor, because you are uneducated and wouldn't know the difference, because you are desperate, we will pay you a fraction of what you're worth. We will force you to work 18-hour days. We will employ people to beat you if you don't meet your production quota. And because you have no rights, it is not our concern if you are abused or raped at our factories, as long as you produce the work. We will force you to work in silence, and we will remind you everyday that you have no worth. And if you do complain, we will dispose of you and take the next desperate person in line...”

That is the definition of injustice: it is the abuse of the powerful upon the powerless.

So, then, what shall we do? What can we do? What are we doing?

Edmund Burke said **“all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing.”**

And why we may do nothing will generally boil down to any or all of these 3 reasons:

- **Ignorance: We just don't know enough about modern day slavery. We are focused on our own lives...**
- **Despair: The problem is just too big; there's no way that I can do anything about it. This is the world we live in. It's sad, but there is nothing we can do.**
- **Fear: We are already dealing with fear and anxieties on a daily basis – this issue is unfamiliar territory and out of our control.**

(We are fearful already – not even trying to be the light of the world!)

And yet despite these things, and despite our business, the Bible tells us to love God and to love people in this way:

Isaiah 58:6 “... loose the bonds of injustice and untie the chords of the yoke... set the oppressed free and break every yoke...”

Micah 6:8 “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Proverbs 21:3 “To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice...”

Philippians 1:27 “...live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Luke 10:25-27 “Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor...”

And who is your neighbor? That’s a good question! A lawyer asked Jesus the same question. We find this in Luke 10...
The lawyer asked Jesus:

"Teacher... what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and, Love your neighbor as yourself."

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he (the lawyer) wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In reply Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, where a man on his way to Jericho was abused and left for dead by robbers. People passed, saw the man, and did nothing. But a Samaritan traveling saw him and took care of him.

This man spent considerable time, money and energy on caring for this wounded man who he DID NOT KNOW. Jesus finishes the story by saying to the lawyer: “Go and do likewise.” All who are persecuted, abused or forgotten are our neighbors...
We cannot love God without loving our neighbors. That is made clear.

1 John 4:20 “Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”

What a profound statement. The truth is, if we really did love our neighbor then we wouldn’t want him to be mistreated; we wouldn’t want her to be abused...
We need to get intentional about finding out what is happening below this line.
And we need to ask God to break our heart for what breaks His...

And Justice is not an issue for the few radicals who care about these things...
This is the thing we neglect the most in our inward-focused lives.

And in order to respond to the emergencies of abuse and injustice throughout is this world, we must lift our eyes from ourselves and look out – and Go out – and seek out what God is inviting us to. God is inviting us to this...

Prop: A framed JFK election poster...

Many years ago Blaise’s father was putting together a little garage sale, and as Blaise was rummaging through the loot she comes across this old, pre-election campaign poster for JFK. I think the price tag on it was \$5.00. So Blaise quickly snatches it up and asked her dad if she could have it. “Sure,” her dad says...

So Blaise brings it home, and some time later she has it framed. One day, a couple of months later, her father, having long forgotten about the poster, comes over to our house and sees this incredible thing on our wall. Well, let me tell you, he was not happy... and he wanted it back! You see, he had suddenly recognized the intrinsic value of the poster...

The reason the Bible talks so much about justice and about loving others, is because (Referring to the white board) God wants us to suddenly recognize the intrinsic value of the people 'down here'... the least of these... and He wants us to get engaged whole-heartedly with His work to bring the Kingdom "here"

(Whole board).

If I could encourage you to get active about two things, starting today, it would be these:

First, recognize that every time we run a product over a scanner we are voting for the companies that manufacture them. It's like the elections: we vote for the candidates if we agree with their policies and ideals... We vote for the candidate that we think will make the changes that we hope for.

The average North American family spends around \$18,000 a year on consumables (food, clothing, various products, etc.). If every time we run a product over the scanner we are voting... that means we are casting thousands and thousands of votes every year for companies without thinking about it.

Whether we know it or not we are voting for their manufacturing practices, their treatment of employees, their placement of factories and policies overseas, their attitude toward environmental issues... etc.

And just like how we read about and research whom we are going to vote for in an election, we must begin to do the same with how we vote with our money. It is a powerful vote!

You received a bulletin on justice this morning that I would like you to hold on to. It has within it several resources to help get you started in the discovery process...

Begin to research what you are paying into... some things cost more than we would ever imagine.

The second thing: I encourage you to get active about asking new questions.

On the back of that bulletin on Justice there is a list of questions that I hope you will bring home with you, bring them to your small group, or to your Bible studies, and begin the discussion that must happen if the Spirit of God is going to be allowed to work powerfully in this world through our lives:

1). Are we living as lights in the darkness? If our lifestyles look just like every other chair, then are we really following Jesus as closely as we should be?

2). How can we begin to seek and to bring God's Kingdom in everything we do, in every purchase we make, and in every endeavor we undertake?

3). How can we get intentional about being rescuers and advocates for the least of these? How can we find them? How can we love them?

4). Are we prepared to evaluate our lifestyles, and to hold them up to the light of the Gospel?

5). Do we really believe that God is capable of salvation, healing and rescue? And do we believe that all people matter to Him?

6). Do we believe that He desires to work through us? Not to mow lawns or to grocery shop or to decorate Christmas trees, but to bring His Kingdom for all people?

7). And are we willing to follow Him wherever He wants to lead us, knowing that His will is all that matters; submitting ourselves to His pleasure and purpose?

Blessing. ...Get to know our legacy. Christians down through history stood up to injustice in the face of overwhelming persecution. Get to know these heroes – some of them are listed in our bulletin. Be inspired by their action and their willingness to follow the call to do justice...

Don't miss next Sunday, when the President of IJM Canada will be here with us.