

Dual Citizens

I was born and raised in New Zealand, the land of the long white cloud and a ratio of nearly six sheep for every one person. I often remember as a child watching the sun in summer sink below the horizon late at night, and, in winter, layering up as warmly as possible through the short, dark, freezing days of relentless rain and, oftentimes, snow.

An Easter Tale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

Let me tell you a tale.

It starts in a garden, long, long ago.

And what a garden it was – literally, a paradise on earth. A place of grandeur and beauty, filled with trees of every description and with leaves in every shade of green, soaring upwards toward a sky so blue it hurts the eyes.

The sound of a great river can be heard flowing through this garden paradise, a source of life and refreshing for all the living things that call it home. In the still shade of the trees, quiet pools of deep emerald green can be found, surrounded by rocks and ferns. If you listen carefully, you can hear the sound of animals scuttering through the brush, and, overheard, birds sing joyfully in the trees, lifting a chorus of praise to the One who created them.

A perfect garden; beautiful, unspoiled, glorious.

If the tale had ended here, it would be a short one, perhaps, but satisfying nonetheless.

But this is not the end of the story.

Come a little closer, deeper into the heart of the garden and you will see two trees, shimmering softly in the golden sunlight. Laden with ripe, juicy fruit, they're the most beautiful trees you've ever seen. You watch as a woman, standing underneath the long, slender boughs, reaches out her hand and plucks a piece of fruit from one. She passes it to the man standing beside her. Reaching out again, she takes another and, as they both bite into the fruit, you see movement in the branches as the sinuous form of a serpent winds itself up and away into the leaves of the tree.

Juice trickles down their chins and drips onto their bare feet. You long to join them, sharing in the delicious fruit and in a moment that seems bathed in the golden light of pleasure and contentment.

Yet, you suddenly sense a change in the air. You can see that the two humans can feel it too. Their expressions change and the sudden heaviness you feel is reflected in the set of their shoulders. Emotions chase across their faces. Discovery, understanding, disappointment, shame...

You hear a voice. A question. Even watching from a distance, you feel the need to hide, to shrink, and turn your face away in discomfort.

"What have you done?"

You listen closely as the conversation unfolds.

A punishment; life ending in death.

A promise; death ending in life.

The conversation concludes with words spoken with great love

but also great sadness *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.*

And now, you must leave."

A sharp metallic scent fills the air, new and unexpected in this place. You turn your gaze and see that a lamb has been slaughtered, its blood soaking into the ground. A mournful cry passes through your body, rising up towards heaven, and, with a deep heaviness, you realise that all of creation is echoing your cry, a keening filled with pain and loss.

Something terrible has happened in this garden. A darkness is falling in Eden. A great evil has entered paradise and Death close on its heels.

The two humans move eastward, clothed in the skin of the lamb, and then pass beyond the borders of the garden, out into wildlands they've never seen before. A flaming sword is placed at the entrance to the garden, turning every which way so that it appears to form a fiery cross. Shimmering creatures stand on either side of the sword, guarding the way back to what lies at the heart of the garden; the abundant and eternal life of God.

This is a tragedy too great to bear, a terrible price to pay, and yet you cannot look away. What did the voice mean, life springing from death? Is all lost? Surely there is still hope?

Centuries pass. The darkness only grows deeper and heavier.

The whole world lies under the power of the evil one and the heart of humanity has become hardened and sick. A long silence, nearly 400 years, has passed since anyone has heard even the voice of God. Hope seems lost.

But this is not the end of the story.

Under a star-sprinkled sky in a small middle-eastern town,

shepherds are out in the fields watching over their flocks. It's census time and the town is filled to overflowing with travellers from all over the nation. The fields are the quietest place to be right now, and the shepherds are welcoming the reprieve from the thronging crowds.

Suddenly a great light appears all around them, illuminating the fields for miles in every direction. A voice speaks aloud. *"Good news of great joy for all people! Your saviour is born!"*

Salvation! Hope! The shepherds know what these words mean. The words of the promise have been passed down, in hallowed whispers, through every generation since the beginning of time itself. One day, the saviour will come. One day, the way back to the garden will be opened again. One day we will go home.

The life and light of humanity was appearing, at long last. Light was piercing the thick gloom, shining in the darkness and now they knew the truth and a promise realised, that the darkness will not overcome.

But when? And how?

The ruler of this world has a foothold in every corner and many are enslaved to his bidding. The child must be kept safe, hidden in plain sight in a small, non-descript town, thought to be of little worth, until the time is right. Not even his own family would know the truth of who he is. Not yet.

Seasons come and go. The moon waxes and wanes. Time passes.

The child is now a man, fully grown, and full of grace and truth. One day soon he will wage war against the kingdoms of this world; one by one they will fall at his feet and he will stand victorious, the triumphant conqueror and saviour of humanity.

And, even now, you think that the moment must surely have arrived. You find yourself standing in another garden, known

as “the oil press”, due, most likely, to the presence of the young olive trees growing in abundance all around. The ground is rocky under your feet and the moon bright overhead.

A small band of men lie asleep and, as you come closer, you see that the man is a little way off from the sleeping men, kneeling down with his hands clasped in prayer.

You can sense the great weight and desperate solitude that lies upon him; sorrow is clearly etched across his features and, as you watch, great drops of sweat fall from his brow, soaking into the ground like blood.

The sound of footfalls and the murmur of voices can suddenly be heard floating on the still night air. A crowd of men draws close, some who look to be perhaps priests of the city, others of more humble occupation, all carrying swords and clubs. The man and his friends, now roused from sleep, stand waiting.

The leader of the crowd steps forward and kisses the man’s cheek in greeting and, all at once, the rest of the crowd moves forward, as one, to seize the man, a signal having clearly been given.

Chaos erupts, a sword swings wildly and a man screams, clutching at the bleeding side of his head where moments before his ear had been. Then, suddenly, his ear miraculously reappears, reattached and healed, and the crowd falls away astonished and afraid. You can hear the man sternly reprimanding the one in whose hand the sword is found.

“Put your sword away, for all who take the sword will die by the sword.”

You are confused and suddenly afraid. This is not how you expected this to go. You want to run away and, turning your gaze, you see that the small band of followers that had come with the man have done just that.

He is left alone, surrounded by a crowd who are at once afraid of him but also enraged by him. Their hate for him is palpable, and envy and violence are thick in the air.

They step forward again in sudden decision; the man is seized, unresisting, his hands are bound, and, as he is led away to be tried, you want to weep. All those years of obscurity and safety, all the hope of the world resting in this man, and even he was no match for the dark evil in the world.

You hope for a miracle but you have seen what men can do.

The sun finally rises, illuminating a terrible sight. The man is struggling up a hill, the weight of a timber crossbeam pressing down on his bruised shoulders and back. He has been viciously beaten and his back is covered in deep welts, A rough circle of small, gnarly branches, fashioned to resemble a crown, has been jammed upon his head. The sharp barbs of the thorns cut deeply into his flesh, blood dripping down his neck and onto the wood of the crossbeam across his shoulders.

At the summit, the man is unceremoniously stripped naked, his arms are forced apart, bound to either side of the timber crossbeam, and heavy, iron nails are hammered through his wrists and into the timber.

The crossbeam is raised high above the gathering crowd, the man sucking in shuddering breaths with each jostle, and attached to a large, upright post already fixed in place. The post, stained with darkened streaks, tells the terrible history of this place, and, as the man's ankles are hammered to the upright, fresh blood flows, joining the old.

You want to turn away, you cannot bear to look any longer on the horror and humiliation, but you cannot. It seems as if the whole world's gaze must surely be turned towards this sight, forced to give witness to the deprivation and evil endured by this man.

You can taste misery and guilt, like sawdust in your mouth and feel a terrible clawing in the pit of your stomach.

At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the man dies. The crowd, who came at first for sport, are now deeply shaken by what they have seen, and return to their homes full of sorrow and contrition. A Roman centurion standing nearby raises his voice, surely in protest of what has taken place. "*This*", he exclaims, "*was an innocent man.*" You, too, lift your voice in agreement but it is lost on the wind.

Yes. A perfect human, good and true, and all the hope of the world rested in him. An innocent man but also now a dead man.

There is nothing more that can be done.

The man's body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a newly cut tomb; he is the first to rest in this place. A stone is rolled across the entrance and the long-hoped-for saviour of the world is left alone, in the still darkness of the grave.

But this is not the end of the story.

A soft breeze is blowing as the first streaks of dawn creep over the distant horizon. A bird sings sweetly from a branch overhead and the grass is cool under your feet as you wander through this peaceful place.

You are in yet another garden and, as you draw closer, you realise you are near to the place where the man's body had been laid. You can hear voices, the low, intimate conversation of a man and a woman, and, as the path rounds a corner, you see them standing together beneath the trees, close but not touching. The woman has been crying, you can see her cheeks are wet with tears, but, strangely, her eyes are shining not with sorrow but instead with joy.

She turns suddenly and brushes past you, breaking into a run

and is quickly lost to sight. Only the man remains.

And now you can his face clearly and you draw in a sharp breath, hope suddenly fluttering inside your chest; it cannot be!

For you saw this man betrayed, beaten, brutally executed, buried...not three days past. You saw the light of the world, condemned and put to death and yet here he stands before you, alive.

Radiant. Restored. Resurrected.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega" he says, his voice warm with feeling, "the beginning and the end. The one who is and who was and who is to come. Fear not.

I am the first and the last. I died and, behold, I am alive forever."

He smiles and now a sob catches in your throat.

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though they die, yet will they live. I have swallowed up death in glorious victory and all those in me will be made alive too, an abundant and eternal life.

Do you believe?"

You nod, scarcely daring to trust what your heart knows to be true. The curse *has* been overcome, the promise *has* been fulfilled. *"Life to death, death to life, like seeds, like soil, like stars."**

"In this world, you will have trouble" the man continues "but take heart! I have overcome the world.

It was prophesied that I, the Christ, should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name to all

nations, beginning in this place.

And now, dear heart, go, and tell the world the good news.

I am risen!"

Genesis 3:19, 1 John 5:19, Malachi 1:1, Luke 2:10, John 1:14, Luke 22:44, Mark 15:25, John 20: 18, Revelation 1:17, Revelation 22:12, John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:22, John 16:33, Luke 24: 44-46, Matthew 28:19-20

***quote by author Rachel Held Evans (1981-2019)**

This article was first published 14 April 2022

Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I don't know about you but sometimes I feel bad for not *knowing then what I know now.*

Bad, as in, I wish I'd *known better*, I wish I had *known more*, I wish I had *known sooner* or *responded better* or *chosen differently.*

But here's the thing. We only wish this *because* of what we know now. Which is to say, in all the time that's passed from *then* until *now*, we've learned something, we've grown, we've become more equipped, less reactive, we can make better choices *only because* of what we've experienced in the past, both good and bad.

This is the value of life experience, it's what we often call the beauty of hindsight; those lessons from life that can be seen today *only because* they've been learned from what has been experienced in the past. In order to gain the wisdom needed for our tomorrow, we had to learn from experiences, both positive and negative, in our yesterday.

If I'm Honest...

There are things in my life that I look back on and still blush over. There are things said and unsaid in my past that still cause me regret when I recall them today. There's definitely a sense, at times, that if only I could go back and do *that thing* over, things would be different.

But do you know what? Things probably wouldn't be any different. Because that was *then* and *this is now*. I'm not the same person I was yesterday or the day before that. Life is changing me.

I may face a similar situation in the future and have learned enough from the past in order to do things differently. I perhaps wouldn't make the same choices or mistakes today as I did then, but only because those choices in the past *taught me differently* and *made me different*.

But I can't change the past, no matter how much I wish I could. I can't take today's insights into yesterday's mistakes, I can only use today's insights to grow tomorrow's wisdom.

And perhaps I shouldn't wish to change the past. Maybe I should be learning to make peace with it. Maybe I should be more thankful for yesterday's mistakes, as strange as that seems, because of the valuable lessons I learned, not just about life but also about myself.

We often look back on our past, our mistakes, or our decisions and hate ourselves for them. And while I'm not for a second

suggesting we glory in sin or our mistakes (Romans 6:2), these things can nevertheless be seen from a different perspective – as powerful lessons from life – and what we learn from them can be used for good in the future. We can take the pain or regret or shame that spills over from the past and use it to empower us to do better today, to choose more wisely, and love more deeply.

We do not need to be only the sum of all our mistakes or regrets, we can be so much more than that.

Cancel Culture < Grace

I've been thinking a lot about cancel culture and how it's the antithesis of grace. The current climate seems so quick to cancel others, on account of one mistake, one indiscretion, one ill-formed thought spoken out loud, one ugly sentence spoken out of the season. Yes, those things are disappointing when they happen, and sin is still sin. We ought not to shy away from calling out sin and calling each other to repentance, reparation, and renewal.

But in others, and, specifically in the light of this article, in ourselves, our mistakes only become who we are when we embrace and celebrate them. When we show remorse, or regret, when we apologise and repent, and commit to doing better in the future, our mistakes become valuable building blocks to a better version of ourselves. Grace towards ourselves or others becomes the fertile ground for spiritual renovation and renewal. It is in our weakness that God's power is perfected (2 Corinthians 12:9).

We cannot condemn sin or mistakes or the things in our past that we're ashamed of without also offering ourselves the much-needed balm of grace that dispenses kindness, favour, advocacy, and forgiveness. We hold both in tension; the disappointment of our (or life's) failures with thankfulness for what we learned from these experiences; the grief of sin

that stains alongside the healing embrace of grace that cleanses.

I can recall some unthoughtful words I once spoke about someone, a criticism of sorts I suppose. I think about these words often, actually, and still deeply regret speaking them. While I can give all sorts of reasons as to why I said them and argue that *my* underlying feelings were justified, I still wish I hadn't said them. They weren't particularly kind or graceful and, mostly, I can look back now and see that, in that moment, I was a terrible witness for Christ. The way I spoke and acted was so detrimental as an example of discipleship to others and was deeply hurtful to another person.

Although I felt *I* was on the receiving end of critical words, instead of taking a beat, thinking the situation through, and responding with grace, I simply responded in kind. There were a million different ways I could have probably responded but the reality is, at that moment, I didn't. Of course I wish I could do it differently now *but I can't*. I can only apologise (and I have done so), learn from this mistake, and use it as wisdom for tomorrow.

I learned four valuable lessons from that experience, which I have endeavoured to implement today.

Words Matter

Words matter, even when said in the heat of the moment or when we believe our feelings are justified. There's a way to speak truth but do so in love, in a way that isn't harmful or wounding. Just because we're upset, or feel maligned, criticised, or challenged doesn't mean that the way we speak doesn't matter.

I think we have all been taught to avoid having difficult conversations as a way of securing some kind of false peace. What we really should have been taught is how to have civil

conversations with those very different from us, in a way that communicates our feelings or opinions well, without wounding the other.

I learned that words matter. And that I needed to guard my heart for it's out of the heart that the mouth speaks (Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:45).

The second thing I learned flowed from this:

I Belong To Jesus

I was painfully unaware of just how important other people's opinions and validation were to me. I had long considered myself to be a bit of an island, quite secure in my own company, likably sociable when necessary, and generally unaffected by others' criticisms. But this piece of stray criticism, directed at me in a time of deep upheaval in my personal life, struck like a barb in my soul. I learned at that moment just how affected I actually was by what other people thought of me and how little security I was actually placing in Jesus's opinion of me. It came as a shock and it really rattled me.

I had to seriously rethink where I was getting my validation from. I had to reevaluate what was guarding my heart. Was my validation placed in Jesus, the rock of the ages, or did I have it resting on the unpredictable, shifting sands of popular opinion? Was I living in the freedom of Christ or stifling under the suffocating need to please people?

I needed to get more intimate with Jesus and this was an invaluable lesson to learn.

There Are Consequences

Every choice, every decision, and every failure has consequences. Sometimes we or others do or say things that have irrevocable consequences in our life. And sometimes those consequences are painful and hard to live with. Other times,

those consequences prove to be God moments, times when our focus was redirected or the direction of our life shifted, for good. Sometimes, they're both.

Sometimes that regretful indiscretion spurs a greater commitment to faithfulness in our relationship. Sometimes that reduced income refocuses us on what we really need in life. Sometimes that failed leader redirects our gaze towards the One we should really be following. Sometimes that disappointing verbal exchange convicts us to do better with our words. Sometimes that closed-door signals a new beginning.

And in every choice, in every consequence, Jesus is with us in it all. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, he is the same. He's been with us in our worst moments – yesterday's regrets, he's with us in our current circumstances of fear, doubt, growth, and joy – today's insights, and he'll be with us in our greatest triumphs – tomorrow's wisdom.

Don't Beat Yourself Up About The Past

Choices have consequences and sometimes those consequences are negative, with reverberations that echo down through our and others' lives. You only need to look at the life of King David to realise that one poor decision can cause ripples of pain and fracture in individuals and families for generations. Where we can, we ought to make reparation and we should, rightly, regret our part in consequences that cause pain or injury to others.

But I think we also need to draw a line in the sand. We need to learn to forgive ourselves, to afford ourselves the same kind of grace that God so willingly offers to those who repent. We are not that terrible decision we made five years ago, five months ago, or five days ago. We don't have to stay in that place or be that person.

Jesus' sin-covering sacrifice means that we get to start each day new, means that we are washed clean and made perfect in

his righteousness and that, although we are weak and often stumble, God is committed to completing His good work in us (Philippians 1:6). Jesus died for us, not because we weren't at fault but precisely because we were, sinners completely unable to save ourselves. God is not surprised by our weakness or our failure; it was part of the equation in the sending of His Son.

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." | 2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV

We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us. We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again. We face death every day because of Jesus. Our bodies show what his death was like, so his life can also be seen in us. This means that death is working in us, but life is working in you." | 2 Corinthians 4:7-8 CEB

Will Progressive Christianity Destroy The Church?

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

I want to talk about something that's been on my mind for a while. Some time ago, I watched a commentary by a 'Christian pastor' that totally shocked me. In fact, I haven't really stopped thinking about it since.

I found it disturbing; equal parts ridiculous and horrifying, and I really couldn't believe it was being presented under the guise of legitimate Christianity.

For me, it highlighted a disturbing and, frankly, heartbreaking direction that modern Christianity, or at least a part of it, has taken; a wild trip sideways down the labyrinth-like rabbit hole of progressive Christianity*. And I believe this pervasive ideology, left unchecked, could signal the death knell of the church as we know it.

Here's the commentary and then I'll get to discussing it (this video has been removed from YouTube since the writing of this article, only the transcript is available, which is below):

"There's a part of the gospel where Jesus uses a racial slur [for context, the story of the syrophenician woman in Mark 7 and specifically Mark 7:24–30]...what's amazing about this account is that the woman doesn't back down, she speaks truth to power. Her boldness and bravery to speak truth to power actually changes Jesus' mind. Jesus repents of his racism and extends healing to this woman's daughter. I love this story because it's a reminder that Jesus is human. He had prejudices and bias and, when confronted with it, he was willing to do his work..." | [Brandan Robertson](#)

Brandan Robertson, poster boy for the progressive Christian movement, is, by his own declaration, 'spreading the good word of an inclusive, modern gospel'. Progressive Christianity, part of a larger movement called "the emerging church", claims that at the heart of this movement is the desire to articulate a way of being Christian that is an alternative to the traditional Christian faith portrayed in the public realm.

Brandan is a “noted author, pastor, activist, and public theologian working at the intersections of spirituality, sexuality, and social renewal” (taken directly from his website). He currently serves as the Lead Pastor of Metanoia Church, a “digital progressive faith community”. In July 2021, *Rolling Stone* magazine included Robertson in its annual “[Hot List](#)” of top artists, creatives, and influencers who “are giving us reason to be excited about the future.”

Well, I, for one, am not excited in the least.

There’s a lot to unpack in his words and, to be honest, it’s hard to know where to start. The problem with progressive Christianity is that it is, by nature, slippery and hard to pin down at a glance; it comes so prettily packaged and cleverly articulated.

Words like inclusivity, deconstruction, equality, and truth-seeking are marched out in quick succession and used in such a way so as to sound noble but humble, and demonstrative of authentic faith.

Issues such as social justice or economic disparity and the marginalisation and discrimination of certain social or ethnic groups are highlighted and cited as key issues for which the progressive Christian will boldly campaign.

While these kinds of issues are certainly addressed within the biblical texts, they do not stand alone from the sound theology or biblical context in which they sit.

And this is one of the core issues with progressive Christianity; seemingly meritable values are affirmed and offered up as convincing proofs of a reshaped and reimagined 21st-century gospel, but, the reality is, they’ve been cleverly detached from the context or theological truth in which we find them in scripture.

For example, progressive Christianity **affirms the right of**

women to choose what happens to their bodies**. Initially, we might chorus a resounding yes; surely this is speaking to the unarguable value we place on free will and the intrinsic liberty of every human to choose their own destiny...until we realise this is really another way of supporting the legalisation of abortion, in any circumstances and for any means.

Progressive Christianity offers the statement that **Christianity is the truth for us. But it is not the only truth. We share our lives with people who are Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist. We experience these people as loving and caring by following their religious traditions. We believe there are many trains [to God] and God welcomes them all***.

Again, we may begin to agree. Many religions affirm values in which we see merit (such as love and care for others)...but this is not what is really being said. This is really another way of advocating the post-modern ideology that there is more than one truth, that, in fact, there are many truths, different from each other but all true nonetheless. Critically, this statement asserts that Jesus is not the only way to God and that *being a good person* – “loving and caring” [of others] – will do the job just as well.

Not only that, personal experience is given primary authority in determining truth. Instead of the Word shaping the conclusions we draw from our experiences – *sola Scriptura*, our experiences become the primary authority in determining truth, requiring the Word of God to conform to and find agreement with our own conclusions and experiences.

Our experiences certainly form part of a raft of resources that provide value in decision-making or conclusion-drawing, but only when the conclusions we draw or the decisions we make are first and foremost shaped by the sound theology expressed in God’s Word and in light of the truths expressed therein. Our experiences are not to be considered reliable in and of

themselves; scripture warns us that the heart of humanity is deceitful above all things and that our way of viewing the world is shaped by a mind that defaults to our own self will and not the will of God.

The conclusion expressed in the statement that **because we experience people as loving and caring therefore their expression of religion [without the need for Jesus] is still an acceptable path to God** is in direct contradiction to what scripture teaches. *Sola Scriptura*, therefore, demands that this conclusion must be reworked and submitted under scripture; reason, logic, tradition, and experience are valid but subordinate to what God's Word teaches.

Dig a little deeper and you begin to see that progressive Christianity has an agenda, one that claims to be supported by biblical truth but is, in reality, a radical reappraisal and, often, rejection of traditional Christianity in favour of what is largely a human rights agenda.

The words employed and issues raised are used in ways that are deceiving, that relegate Jesus to simply a remarkable helper, spiritual teacher or life guru, that advocate for the inherent divinity in humanity, and that change the meaning of the gospel and its call on believers' lives entirely.

The primacy of personal experience, as expressed by progressive Christianity, propounds the idea that *our truth is true* and therefore cannot be argued against but must be accepted as valid, irrespective of God's Word saying differently.

Progressive Christianity teaches that you can find God within yourself, that sexuality and gender are fluid, that morality is relative, and that the primary call of Christian faith is to "love God, love our neighbour, and love ourselves", which is simply a clever reworking of Jesus' words in order to redefine 'love of neighbour' as including "affirmation of the

LGBTQ+ community...”

“The significance of the word ‘progressive’ in a sociological sense is rather deceptive in that it misrepresents and downplays the very gospel the church exists to proclaim. It implies and claims that the traditional Christian faith has served its purpose, it is now old-fashioned, restrictive, irrelevant and even repressive.” | Rev E.A. Curnow

“At its core, progressive Christianity is a different religion. It gives you a different God and a different Jesus. It’s not a Jesus who can save you.” | Alisa Childers

I want to analyse some of the ideas inferred in Brandon Robertson’s commentary, who, by the way, states that he “cannot know if Jesus was the incarnation of God with any degree of certainty”, and who “sometimes, believes in the divine claims Christians have projected back onto the historical Jesus and sometimes doesn’t.”

1. Jesus Was A Racist

I’m appalled even typing that sentence. However, it has been said so it must be countered.

Racism is defined as *prejudice against or antagonism towards a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalised*. However, throughout the Bible, God makes no distinction between people based on their social status ([Jeremiah 22:3](#)), their ethnicity ([Acts 10: 34-35](#)), or their gender ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

He sends rain on the just and the unjust and causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil (Matthew 5:45). His message of good news, first preached to Abraham, was intended to be a blessing for all humanity (Genesis 12:3). The whole world is separated from God by sin and His salvation through the

sending His Son is for the whole world to receive, if they will (Romans 5:12, Ephesians 2:12, 2 Peter 3:9).

God is just, holy, perfect, generous, impartial, and good. If this is who God is, then this is also who Jesus, God-With-Us, is. Jesus was no racist.

2. Speaking Truth To Power

While the woman mentioned in this story ‘spoke truth’ and while Jesus certainly was ‘power’, the use of this phrase is intended to convey something else entirely. The idea behind the phrase *speaking truth to power* is that of an individual courageously confronting (possibly corrupt) authority, calling out injustices, and demanding change. It presumes that the one speaking is the true moral authority in the matter, someone who is willing to proclaim ‘what is right’ in the face of criticism or consequence.

Again, if we’ve seen Jesus then we’ve seen God and any display of power sits alongside absolute morality, justice and truth. Jesus himself *is* truth (John 14:6) and the use of this phrase here to imply he manifests injustice or untruth is plainly ridiculous.

3. Jesus Was Willing To Do His Work

This phrase *willing to do his (or her) work* is another favourite in progressive circles and is used to imply there is some character deficit or lack in an individual (in this case, Jesus), which needs adjusting or repenting of (a word which Brandon also employs in his commentary regarding Jesus).

Jesus was certainly prepared and “willing to do his work”, but it wasn’t the work of self-improvement or repentance.

The Lamb, without spot or blemish, sent into the world to reconcile the world again to God, his work was to do the will of his Father (Luke 2:49, John 5:36). Though he entered into our human experience and is, therefore, able to understand us

in every way, right down to the alluring call of sin and the temptation to choose self will that we experience, his life and character were perfect. It could not have been otherwise, else our forgiveness and reconciliation could not have been obtained (Hebrews 9:14, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22).

This is just a poor attempt to reinvent Jesus into a caricature that serves the cultural slogans and trends that the progressive Christian movement wants to advance, and which bear no resemblance to the real Jesus of the scriptures; perfect lord, saviour, king.

4. Brandon Robertson's Conclusion: 'A Reminder That Jesus Is Human'

It's sad but unsurprising that this is Brandon's take-home point from this story. In reality, the story in Mark 7 marks a significant turning point in Jesus' ministry of kingdom-preaching and repentance-calling, where the mission is expanded to include the Gentiles; obviously super good news for you, me, and anyone else of non-Jewish heritage!

The world that we see in the Bible and all around us still is one where all of creation, including humanity, groans to be set free from the bondage of sin. The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus, who is both saviour and king, God is saving, rescuing, atoning, justifying, ruling, and reconciling people for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

The story of Mark 7 is about the inclusive call of the gospel, the invitation extended to all to come out of the dominion of darkness, ruled over by the prince of this world, and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, a kingdom of light and life. A call to *come as you are...but not stay as you are*; a challenge to surrender, to receive forgiveness and renewal, and to be transformed into the kind of human God always intended you to be (John 5:24, Acts 26:18, Luke 24:47, Colossians 1:13).

Will Progressive Christianity Destroy The Church?

*“Progressives are not just a group of Christians who are changing their minds on social issues and politics...they often **deny core essential doctrines of the faith**, which leads them to preach an entirely different gospel.” | Alisa Childers*

Despite the descriptor, I don't believe progressive Christianity to be Christian at all. The movement often denies key tenets of the Christian faith; the primary authority of the Bible as God's inspired Word, the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus, the dark reality of sin and the resultant separation it creates between God and humanity, and the need for Jesus' atoning sacrifice as a means of reconciliation with God.

Sin itself is often redefined, simply becoming *“all of our greedy impulses that create inequity in the world”* (Brandan Robertson), rather the biblical definition of rebellion against God's law, *“a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God”* (Augustine of Hippo) (1 John 3:4), *“evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; hatred, discord, jealousy, and rage; rivalries, divisions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, false testimony and slander and the like.”*

The truly dangerous reality is that the insidious ideology of progressive Christianity is infiltrating and hijacking genuine Christianity, silencing the church's ability to speak into and about the real-life situations for which she exists.

We are becoming less comfortable about naming sin and preaching the need for true biblical repentance and more concerned about being labelled as intolerant, judgmental, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. When did morality become simply

degrees of relativity and we became afraid to speak up and say, "*that is wrong*", or conversely, "*this is right*"?

We are becoming confused by cries of inclusivity, tolerance, and *love of the other*; mistaking the inclusive call of the gospel for the exclusive reality of the church.

We are uneasy repeating the biblical truth that "*narrow is the way and few there be that find it*", preferring instead the idea that multiple superhighways of every description will surely lead to God. The discovery of our *true, inner self* through spiritual evolution seems a more palatable message for the masses than the sombre alternative; the biblical narrative of *death to self* and radical rebirth in Jesus.

Despite her flaws, the church still needs to be the voice, the hands, the beating heart of Jesus in a dark and sin-enslaved world. We need to speak with sensitivity and compassion, yes, but we ought not to shy away from talking about the things people may not want to hear about but desperately need to; sin, estrangement, sacrifice, surrender, death, reorientation, transformation. We need to speak about these things too, with boldness and conviction.

Will progressive Christianity be the death of the church? No, I don't think so. I think the blood of Jesus, by which his church was purchased, is more powerful than that.

But I do think the church is facing one of her greatest challenges yet; not through external persecution as in times past, but through subtle, internal perversion. There is a desperate need for discernment and a deep commitment to the gospel of the Bible, in doctrine and practice.

I think we need to pay attention, to have our wits about us, wary of those who may come in sheep's clothing, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness. We need to be unafraid to boldly and confidently lay their claims and teachings alongside the sound words of Jesus Christ, the

living Word of God, for scrutiny and assessment, acceptance or rejection.

And I think we need to courageously recommit to our commission that, collectively, we, the church, the 'woman of valour' for whom Jesus died, will shine brightly in a darkened and impoverished world through our most basic and guiding principle: that is, to incarnate Christ.

"But test everything; hold fast what is good." | 1 Thessalonians 5:21, BSB

* <https://www.bethelbeaverton.org/progressive-christianity>, <https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Christianity

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/05/progressive-christians-abortion-jes-kast/590293/>