

## Skip the details; what really matters?

### # 1 in a series on The Essentials

Message for Sunday, January 11, 2015  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

#### Children's Message:

1 Peter 3:15-16, Today's English Version:

**Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.**

I heard on the news last week a story from a place in Africa, where some Christian people were murdered. It wasn't for their money. It was simply because they followed Jesus.

Has anyone ever murdered you for being a Christian? I guess not, because you wouldn't be here if they had! But have you ever been teased about going to church, believing in God?

I read about what happened with a boy who moved, and started going to a new school. He was a Christian, and always had a Bible with him. He usually carried it in his shirt pocket, like this one I have.

He got picked on a lot. The school bully in particular waited for him on the way home most days after school. The bully would push him to the ground, or grab whatever he was carrying and throw it in the air.

One day, the bully grabbed the Bible from his shirt pocket. "Well, look what we have here. The goody-goody's good book. He turned to his pals [Have you ever noticed that bullies never work alone? — they always have a gang of people with them; that's because they're afraid.] "Do you think I can throw this up in the tree and make it stick there? Ha ha!"

The other boy simply said, "Please give it back to me."

The bully answered, "Maybe you'd like a push with it, huh?"

The other boy said, "You think you're big and tough, don't you? Let's see how big and tough you really are: *you* carry the Bible around for a week, and see what people say to you."

The bully stopped in his tracks, looking at the boy with wide eyes. "Humph. I never thought of it that way. Maybe you're not so bad after all. Here, have it back."

It would be an exaggeration to say those two boys became good friends after that. But the bullying stopped, and that boy was respected by everyone in that school.

Like the Bible says, he gave his answer "with gentleness and respect."

**Sermon** "Skip the details... what really matters?"

#### What really matters?

Max Lucado tells about having coffee with Ian, a university student.<sup>1</sup> Ian spoke with a deep Irish brogue. His eyes were dark and serious.

Ian talked plainly and sincerely. "I just want to know what counts. Don't talk to me of religion, I've been down that road. And please, stay off theology. I have a degree in that. Get to the heart of it, okay?"

Ian had wanted to be a Christian, but was disenchanted. "I grew up in the church," he explained. "I wanted to go into the ministry. I took all the courses, the theology, the languages, the Bible. But I quit. Something didn't click."

Then he summarized his frustration with one question: "What *really* matters? What counts? Tell me. Skip the periphery. Go to the essence. Tell me the part that matters."

Stop for a second and really listen to Ian. Can you hear his question? Can you taste his frustration? "Don't give me religion," he was saying. "Give me what matters."

What *does* matter?

Many of you have wrestled with this question. Maybe you've gone through the motions of religion and church and yet found yourself more often than not at a dry well. Prayer seem empty. God seems far away. If not you, then a lot of your neighbours and friends wonder about the same things.

#### ***What is the most important thing about having faith in Jesus Christ?***

If someone on the street asked me that, my answer right off the top of my head would be "fellowship with God." Philippians 1:21 sums it up for me:

**Philippians 1:21, Today's English Version**  
**What is life? To me, it is Christ.**

But then, what I start to think about this, other things come to mind:

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado includes this conversation as part of one of his books, *No Wonder They Call Him Savior*, p. 11.

- Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God;
- He then said the next most important thing is to love other people;
- He also talked about rearranging the priorities in our lives: seek first the kingdom of God; don't worry about the little things.

Cut away the fluff; forget the denominational debates; this is what it's all about. These are the things that really matter. I invite you to join with me as we explore these areas over the next four Sundays, beginning today.

### 1) The greatest importance: Jesus Christ

The Bible contains more than 1,000 pages. What is the single greatest thing in the whole book? The apostle Paul would answer simply, "Jesus Christ." Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

**1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Today's English Version:**

I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; that he was buried, and was raised to life on the third day, as written in the Scriptures.

There it is. Almost too simple. Jesus was killed, buried, and resurrected. That's it. Surprised?

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the central events in the Bible. They are the central events in the history of the human race.

### 2) Jesus died on the cross

First of all, he died. Since then, the cross has become a symbol for Jesus Christ. The cross is amazing in its power! History has idolized it and despised it. People have worn crosses; people have burned crosses; they have been made of pure gold; they have been outlawed. History has done everything to the cross but ignore it.

That's one option that the cross does not offer. No one can ignore it! You can't ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history. A crucified carpenter claiming that he is God on earth?

People in business talk about "the bottom line." The bottom line of the cross is sobering: if the Bible is true, it is history's hinge. If not, it is history's hoax. Period.

### 3) Jesus died for our sins

Paul goes further than just that Jesus died. He writes, "Christ died for our sins." By his sacrifice our sins are forgiven. I can't say I understand the how and why of our salvation — but I believe it and enjoy it!

To be forgiven means to be reunited. When I've done something to hurt someone, I know how wonderful it feels to hear them say, "I forgive you." It means we can be friends once again. That's what Christ means for us: we can have fellowship with God.

### 4) Jesus was buried and rose again

"... was raised to life on the third day."

When Jesus rose from the dead, he prepared a way for us to follow. We do not need to have any fear of death — the pain of dying, maybe, but not death itself. With Jesus, death is not defeat, but rather the doorway to a new life with God in heaven.

If having fellowship with God while we live on earth is wonderful — and it is! — then what will it be like to live with God in heaven? Better than we can possibly imagine! Earlier I quoted Philippians 1:21, but I left off the ending. Here it is complete:

**Philippians 1:21, Today's English Version**

What is life? To me, it is Christ. Death, then, will bring more.

### 5) Jesus Christ is the heart of it all

God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore we call Jesus our Lord, our Saviour, our ever-present guide and friend.

- He came to show us what real love is
- He lived to show us what real life is
- He died to show us what death really is — a doorway
- He rose again to show us the way home
- He lives in us now as a our companion and guide.

Everything we do in this church is built around our mission of personally knowing God's love, and in making that love known to others.

Thank-you, Lord! Jesus Christ is the greatest gift in the world!

### Next Steps:

- Think: for you, what is the most important thing about being a follower of Jesus?
- Practise: how would you tell someone else about that? How would you answer, if someone asks you why you do it?

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