

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor Rolly Estabillo
1 March 2015
Key verse: 1 Timothy 2:5

“THE MAN”

Good morning! It’s good to see you all once again, after a week. Today we’re experiencing bad weather again and I thought the county was going to close the school again but thank God they didn’t. And thank God you made it here this morning, braving the cold, and rain, and sleet. Good you’re all flexible. Someone said, ‘Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken.’”

Here we are the first day of March and spring is just around the corner. Hopefully. BTW, let me make the announcement already that next Sunday, you have to adjust your clocks. It’s the start of Daylight Saving Time. It’s Spring Forward. Adjust your clocks and watches one hour forward.

So, we’ve reached the last part of our series on the titles of Jesus. Two weeks ago, I mentioned that we’re starting a new series today. But I thought I might as well give you the last message in our “Jesus is” series. I thought this message is very interesting. I believe you’ll find it interesting as well. I got this idea from a pastor who got the idea from a pastor who got the idea from a pastor and on it goes. So, this is an idea whose time has come.

This morning, what I’m going to talk about is Jesus as “The Man”. Now, that is not really an official title of Jesus that you can find in the Bible. Of course, we know that Jesus is also a man aside from being God but I’m not gonna talk about the humanity of Jesus. What am I gonna talk about then?

Many years ago, I was a computer programmer at Morgan Stanley in New York and my boss assigned me a kind of challenging task. So, I programmed away, tested it, it worked, my boss appreciated it, came to me and said, “Rolly, you’re the man!”

I thought, “Huh? Did I do something wrong? You know, like when a crime is committed and the policeman comes and rounds up a number of suspects and asks a witness to identify the culprit it and pointing to someone he says, “He’s the man!” But my boss was smiling and honestly, I didn’t know at first what he meant because I never heard that before, not in the Philippines, not anywhere before I came to Morgan Stanley and as I was letting it percolate in my mind, it suddenly clicked. He was actually complimenting me and he was saying in other words, “You’re awesome!” “You achieved something great!” “You’re different from the rest!”

Well, I simply thanked him. And that was it. It never happened again. I never heard those words again. Maybe I was doing something wrong.

Anyway, I would like to tack on this new, kind-of-modern title to our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is... the Man. It’s pretty obvious, isn’t it? He is awesome, much much more awesome than any person we ever know. He is far, far more superior than anyone. And as the Bible tells us, he is the one who bridged the gap between sinful man and a holy God. 1 Tim. 2:5 says, *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* Who else can do that? He is unique. That’s why, Jesus is...the Man.

We’re grateful to Jesus for saving us, for acting as our mediator. But we should be thankful also for the influence he has in our lives individually on a daily basis but also in the lives of many people in this world since he came to earth

although many don't recognize it or realize it. Everywhere we see the influence of Jesus and the world as we know it would be a lot different if Jesus didn't come to earth.

And this morning, I'd like to talk about the influence of Jesus. Today I want to expand on this a bit, focusing on this very point and the implications it brings: Jesus is the most influential person who ever lived.

At present, do you know any other person of influence? Some of you are thinking...my wife. I heard the story of this guy who said that in their family, the wife makes the minor decisions while he makes the major decisions. He was asked, so what were the major decisions you made in the past 10 years? He said, "No major decisions. All minor ones." Seriously, probably you can think of President Obama. Being the president of the most powerful nation in the world, he wields great influence in the west, but not in the east, especially in the Middle East. How about the venerable evangelist Billy Graham? He exerts influence among Christians and non-Christians as well, for many of them came to know Jesus through him. How about Taylor Swift? She holds great influence among the young. They cannot shake it off. Let me tell you though. They may have influence now and in the years to come. But in 50 years, or even 25 years, how much influence do you think they will have? Like anybody else, their influence will wane until the memory of their deeds, actions and words fade away.

But not in the case of Jesus! Until now, people still talk about him. Jesus's influence has grown every year for the last 2,000 years, rising from being limited – regional at best – at the time of his death, to today, where he is history's most familiar figure. And he secured this global impact in spite of the fact that: he spent his first 30 years in obscurity, was dead before he turned 34 and did not do any of

the things most people do if they want to be remembered. He didn't write a book, build a building, get elected in office or conquer any land. He wasn't Linked In. He didn't tweet, he didn't blog, He didn't have a Facebook account.

Sometimes you can measure influence by the way people name things after a person or anything connected to that person. Like America, it was named after...Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer. The Philippines, it was named after King Philip of Spain. Alexandria was named after... Alexander the Great, not Kuya Alex. But I'm talking about the city in Egypt.

This city where we are was named after Captain Philip Alexander II, one of the earliest settlers here. And Franconia...who knows. Note though that all these people's influence was very limited and local. Unlike Jesus.

If you look at a map today you see his influence everywhere. My parents live in a small city in California that is surrounded by bigger cities like San Diego, Santa Ana, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, and San Bernardino. All these cities were named after people who followed Jesus. Further north, of course, is San Francisco who was named after the famous monk St. Francis of Assisi. Not far from San Francisco is Sacramento, the capital of California, which is sacrament in English that refers to the sacraments of baptism and communion which our Lord asked us to remember. Then, of course, there is San Antonio in Texas, St. Albans in West Virginia, St. Louis in Missouri, and St. Paul in Minnesota. In Virginia, we also have St. Erling. Do you know where it is? It's where I live. Actually, there's a St. Charles City in Virginia.

And, in the Philippines, of course, you know dozens and dozens of places named after people who knew Jesus like Santa Ana, San Juan, San Carlos, San Fernando, San Pedro, and the famous San Lazaro. There are at least two countries

with connections to Jesus, at least in name. The Dominican Republic was named after Santo Domingo which is the name of the capital. Then, there's El Salvador which means "The Savior" in English. So, when you start to pay attention to a map you begin to see that though Jesus didn't name anything after himself, a whole lot of things got named for him.

From the map, let's go to the calendar. You see, it was not uncommon for ancient writers to date things according to the birth of a ruler or when the ruler began to reign. That's why Luke writes in the first chapter of his gospel, "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar..." During the Enlightenment period, the French tried to reset the calendar according to the Age of Reason.

In the early 20th century the Soviets tried to reset the calendar according to the date communism was established. Jesus didn't try to impose a calendar on anyone. But today, virtually everyone recognizes the birth of Christ as the reference point –the hinge point of history. We reference Christ every time we mention a date. Today is March 8, 2015. That is 2015 years after Jesus was born. Or 2015 AD which stands for Anno Domini or "In the year of our Lord". And BC stands for Before Christ.

Now, let's go to names. At the time Christ died the big names were Herod, Nero and Caesar. And these men not only named cities and buildings after themselves, they named their children after themselves. Herod the Great – the King of the Jews at the time that Jesus was born – named all of his children, including the girls, Herod. Nero and Caesar did similar things. Jesus had no children but he had followers and today parents name their children after his followers like Peter, Paul and Mary while they name their dogs and pets Herod, Nero, and Cesar.

Christ didn't do the things people tend to do if they want to be remembered. And yet, 2,000 years later he stands in the middle of everything. More books have been written about him than about any other person – and new ones come out at the rate of three per month. More music has been written about him or in his honor than for any other person. He has inspired more art and inspired more acts of sacrifice than any other person. He's inspired more charities, hospitals, orphanages and schools than any other person. Once you start to pay attention to this, you see his influence everywhere. I mean, when people get mad and start to swear, they don't yell "Buddha" or "Washington!" It is Christ's name they take in vain.

There are lots of ways in which this man is part of the fabric of this world. Jesus is famous for a lot of reasons. But let me focus right now on three you may not have thought of. Why does Jesus have such a big footprint? Why is he so influential as a person?

I. Jesus raised the perceived value of human life.

It was not self-evident to the ancients that everyone was created equal – that every person had value. It wasn't self-evident to Socrates. It wasn't self-evident to Aristotle. It took Jesus to teach us to value everyone.

It was Jesus who elevated the status of women. He was born into a world where there was a dramatic shortage of women – by some estimates, there were 140 men for every 100 women – because baby girls were far more likely to be left to die. He was raised in a time when the Greeks considered a woman a child no matter her age, where laws about women were laws about property and where

few women were allowed to attend school or encouraged to learn to read. In that setting, his longest recorded conversation is with a Samaritan woman. It's a conversation in which he not only showed that he cared for her, it's one where he listened to her – where he took her mind and thoughts seriously. And when Mary and Martha chose different paths – Martha was cleaning and cooking and Mary was sitting at Jesus feet, a shocking, radical thing in that day – Jesus affirmed Mary. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Jesus gave women human dignity...Prior to Jesus, women were regarded as inferior beings, religiously speaking.” Christ's treatment of women led to the formation of a community that was so congenial to women that they joined it in record numbers. In fact, the early church was disparaged because of the status and value it gave to women.

It took Jesus to teach people also that children had value. In a book entitled, “When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity”, O.M. Bakke explains that prior to Christ elevating the status of children, many viewed them as less than fully human. It was customary not to name a child during the first week of its life because it was a while before you decided whether or not you were going to keep it. They – especially girls – were often abandoned on the garbage heap to die of exposure.

It was a Christian Emperor – citing Christ's call to let the children come to him, and who said, “unless you become like a little child you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” – who made this practice illegal. And it was the value that Christians placed on children that led those who were going to abandon their child to start leaving them outside churches or monastic communities – which was the beginning of orphanages.

It was also Jesus who elevated the value of the sick. In “The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries”, Sociologist Rodney Stark notes that during the reign of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius – around 165 AD – an epidemic of what we now think was probably small pox killed as many as one-third of the people of Rome. A second epidemic hit about one hundred years later and 5,000 people died every day in Rome alone. In both events, panic set in. People abandoned anyone who got sick. After all, there was no call to compassion from Homer or Zeus. The followers of the Greek gods were not told to put themselves in harm’s way to care for those who couldn’t care for themselves. Consequently, many who might have lived died.

The Greek historian Thucydides writes about what happened in Athens when the plague hit there. “They died with no one to look after them. Indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any intention for care. The bodies of the dying were heaped up, one on top of the other...No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence.”

The epidemic eventually spread to Rome, and when it did a Roman historian wrote that at the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead... hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease.

But, those who followed Christ – those who followed the example of the man who touched lepers and who instructed the disciples to tend to the sick – took a different tack. They cared for the sick. They put themselves in harm’s way. When everyone else fled the city or abandoned the sick, the Christians did the opposite. Diony’sius, a 3rd century bishop of Alexandria, wrote that during these

plagues Christians, “Heedless of the danger, took charge of the sick, attending to their every need, and ministering to them in Christ.”

Jesus had persuaded people by his example and teaching that we need to care for one another. That everyone has value, even those who are sick and weak. This was revolutionary. One writer stated that it’s part of what fueled the rapid growth of the early church. In fact, he argued that it was not just that the Christians were growing because they were raising other people’s babies and gaining converts from those they nursed back to health and picking up lots of other people who saw the way they loved one another and wanted in. He argued that part of what led the church to explode is that their care for others helped them develop immunities to a number of the diseases that later devastated other communities.

There is a lot more that could be said on this theme. I’ll simply note that one of the reasons so many hospitals or aid groups have names like Good Samaritan, Good Shepherd, St. Mark’s, St. Luke’s, Red Cross is because hospitals in general – the idea of caring for the sick – grew out of Christ’s teaching and example.

And it wasn’t just women, children and the sick whose value was championed by Christ. The value of slaves was also changed. Slavery was universal in the ancient world. Unlike American slavery it was not race-based. You fell into slavery when you got into debt or were captured. Slaves had few rights. In the Roman world they were “non habens personam” – literally, “not having a person” or “not having a face.”

It was Christians – confronted with the idea that God had not only become a man, and that this man had not only come to serve – to wash the feet of others

– but who identified himself as a slave and who championed the rights of the least of these – it was Christians who eventually moved to abolish slavery.

Jesus elevated the value of life – of the value of those others overlooked. Another reason why Jesus is so influential is that

2. Jesus elevated the value of the mind.

Though he never wrote a book, his call to love God with all our mind led to the formation of a community that not only promoted literacy and learning, it changed our world in three huge ways.

First, it was the church that pulled Europe out of the Dark Ages. If you read Thomas Cahill's book, "How the Irish Saved Civilization", you know that when Rome finally fell and the classical world stumbled into what is sometimes called the Dark Ages, it was Christian communities – particularly the Irish monasteries – that helped pull it out. They loved people and loved learning. They had preserved books – and not just the Bible, but all books – and kept literacy alive. And it was Christian missionaries – who not only took The Book with them as they took the message about Christ, but who also took reading – that helped spread literacy around the world.

Second, it was Christians – and the Christian worldview – that gave us the scientific revolution. Many are shocked by this. They think that science and faith line up against each other, missing the fact that those who gave us the scientific revolution – I'm thinking here of people like Francis Bacon, Galileo, Blaise Pascal, Louis Pasteur, Isaac Newton and others – were followers of Christ. And they gave

birth to science because as Christians they believed that creation was orderly and good as God said so in his Word. This meant it could be studied and analyzed.

And they were motivated to do this in part because they believed that the Creator had revealed himself in his creation. Science grew out of the Christian worldview.

Third, it was Christians who were the driving force behind higher education. The call to love God with our mind not only spilled out in broad sweeping pushes for learning and literacy, it led to the formation of the university.

It was Christians who formed Oxford and Cambridge – because Jesus had told us to love God with our mind. In fact, the motto of Oxford, the oldest university in the English-speaking world established in 1096, is “The Lord is my light” from Psalm 27:1. Harvard was named after its first benefactor, John Harvard, an English minister, and the university’s original mission statement was that “every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life, and to lay Christ as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.” Yale, Princeton, William and Mary, Brown and hundreds of other schools were founded with similar missions. Ninety-two percent of the first 138 colleges were founded by Christ followers. And well into the 19th century most college presidents were pastors – and that was often the case in state schools. Things have changed a fair bit, many of these schools have become liberal but let’s note, higher education was driven by Christians because of Christ’s celebration of thinking.

Finally, in addition to Jesus changing the way people think about others and leading a revolution of the mind,

3. Jesus changed the value of strength and weakness.

For instance, he is the one who elevated humility. Before Christ, humility was understood to be a sign of weakness. The Greeks and Romans looked down on those who admitted their faults. But there was a “humility revolution” that secular historians have traced back to Jesus.

His followers were so taken by his life and his teaching that they decided that greatness looked and acted very differently than they previously thought. Before Christ the idea that a great person would serve others – would wash someone else’s feet – was unheard of.

Before Christ, the moral high ground was “only do to others what they had done to you.” Limit revenge to “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” You were to help your friends and punish your enemies. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus changed that. He said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your*

own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:38-48)

Jesus is the one that persuaded us that forgiveness is an act of moral beauty not a sign of weakness. Folks, this man changed the world. I could go on – there is more to say. This uneducated, itinerant, never-wrote-a-book carpenter changed the world more than anyone else.

But I want to be sure you hear this. He stands alone in terms of global historical impact. The map is littered with references to him. He is the hinge point of history. He raised the value of human life. He elevated the status of women.

He elevated the status of children. He changed the way we view the sick and the oppressed. His ideas about thinking reshaped our world – fueled the spread of literacy, helped pull Europe out of the Dark Ages, gave birth to science and essentially led to the formation of colleges and universities. The way the world thinks about strength and weakness, no one has changed the world in these ways. No one has a resume that includes things like – elevated the status of all people! And yet – hear this – we tend not to talk about these things because there are other things about him that are more amazing. We tend not to talk about the remarkable way he changed the world because other things about him – other things he did – were even more amazing.

Jesus is the most influential person who ever lived. And you know why? He is still living! All the others have come and gone but Jesus lives forever because he is King, he is Lord, he is the Savior, he is God. Jesus is The Man. Amen?