

# WORLDVIEW: Preservation vs. Progress

## *Bullseye | Living A Jesus-Centred Life*

22.11.20 | Tom Loewen

I want to ask you a question. Don't overthink it; just go with your immediate reaction. Ready?

***“When you look at our world around you, are things generally getting better or worse?”***

Okay, at all our locations – *including online* – hands up if you think the world is generally getting *better*. And who thinks things are getting *worse*? I assume the vote is split. So, who's right? Well, the answer is... *I don't know*. It's probably a bit of both, but here's the thing: it was kind of a *trick* question, because the point wasn't to understand something about the nature of our *world*, it was to uncover something about the nature of our *worldview* – what *your response to the question* says about *you*. Kind of like a Rorschach Test (you know... *ink blots?*), what we see when we look at the world, reveals something about *us*. For example, in this case, whether we're generally *optimistic* or more on the *pessimistic side*. Obviously one simple test doesn't tell the whole story about you. But, whether or not we're aware of it, or could put it into words, each of us has a worldview – an underlying lens through which we *see, experience, and interpret* everything. Our worldview exists at a deeper level even than our beliefs; it's our perception of reality – closer to your *gut*, than your *mind* – and it governs how we live, what we *value* and what we *detest*, how we perceive *right* and *wrong*. It informs how we view everything from politics, ethics, money and morality, to friendship, family, even faith.

Our worldview isn't genetically hardwired into us at birth; it forms as we develop, shaped by our family of origin, cultural influences, major world events and life experiences, the songs, symbols, and stories that seep into our sense of identity. As we get older – *without some truly life-changing event or significant intentionality* – our worldview tends to not change much because, like an echo chamber, it's constantly reinforcing itself by interpreting all new information or experiences through the filter of what we already think. (*Spoiler: this is why your social media rants aren't changing people's minds, and why their rants aren't changing yours!*)

For the last two months, we've been asking what it looks like to live in the *Bullseye* of a Jesus-centred life – to build our lives around following Jesus, rather than simply functioning within a fixed religious framework. Basically, we've been deconstructing *the idea of being Christian* in an attempt to reconstruct *a way of being Jesus-followers*, seeking to move away from overly-simplistic and rigid, black-and-white, in/out thinking – *what we've referred to as a Bounded Set model* – in favour of a *Jesus-centred* approach to everything from how we view the Bible, sin,

and salvation, to what it means to have faith, to live in God's will, and to build community. Essentially, we've been taking a brick-by-brick approach to constructing a Jesus-centric *worldview*—drilling down into a deeper and fuller understanding of the Bible, to clarify the true foundations of our faith, challenging long-held assumptions and ideas, in order to re-emerge with a faith built on pure and simple devotion to the person of Jesus and the event of his death and resurrection. As we've been doing the hard but important work of rebooting and reprogramming our own individual worldviews to be more Jesus-centred, the question for today, as we end this series, is *what was Jesus' worldview?*

To start, *like in this series*, Jesus' worldview was shaped by *Scripture*. But, as Jeff Lockyer reminded us on Week #1, he didn't view Scripture as a restrictive, rigid set of religious rules, but as an inspired narrative intended to centre us on the *bullseye* of God's heart. His worldview was rooted in God's original design for humanity, found on the very first page of the Bible. It says:

***“God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it...’ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”***

(Genesis 1:27-28, 31)

Jesus saw the world as God's good creation, with the glory of God reflected in the very-goodness of humanity, God's image-bearers. But his worldview also recognized the corrupting influence of *sin*. As Jeff Martens explained in Week #2, Jesus saw the human condition and how we, as The Apostle Paul wrote, ***“fall short of the glory of God”***, missing the mark or bullseye of a life of love. And knowing how generations of laws and leaders, prophets and priests, sacrifices and sermons had failed to move humanity any closer to hitting the bullseye of God's glory, Jesus got, *as Jon Hand said in Week #3*, that no single, one-time *decision* can effectively remedy the issue; that salvation is more of a moment-by-moment lifestyle of what the Bible describes as ***“faithful devotion to the Lord.”*** And that devotion or *faith*, as Mandy explained on Week #4, isn't just some small, safe and static set of beliefs to *master*, but an invitation to enter humbly and honestly into the exciting, expansive *mystery* of God. A mystery that doesn't reduce *God's will* to some pre-scripted, carefully-controlled *plan* to be robotically followed, but as a wide-open, liberating life of collaborating with Jesus ***“to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose”***. A purpose that is lived out in a *community* called the church, not a gatekeeping, finger-wagging cult of conformity, but a community that, as Leanne Friesen explained, encourages and empowers, spurring one another on towards the bullseye of a life of love.

Everything Jesus did and said flowed from *this* worldview. And as people were exposed to his unique perspective, we're told they were *astonished* and *amazed*, saying they'd never heard

anything like it! *Their* worldview had been shaped almost entirely by the religious leaders of their day, namely the *Pharisees*. If you're new to the Jesus story, the Pharisees are his main antagonists and, as such, they understandably get a bad rap, but they weren't just *bad people*. Their worldview was shaped by their own context and history, specifically the stories of how generations of God's people had been exiled from their homeland, held in captivity by the Babylonians, the Assyrians and, by Jesus' time, the occupying forces of the Roman Empire. Israel had suffered greatly, and they saw that suffering as God's judgment for their spiritual failures. The Pharisees figured if they could get people back inside the lines, the punishment would end. So they enforced strict religious adherence, exercised suffocating spiritual control to keep people inside the boundaries. For extra security, they built fences around the boundaries, and walls around the fences. In time, this *bounded set* approach became so entrenched in their thinking, their identity became all about preserving the purity of their religion. Jesus entered their world with a view that threatened to dismantle all they'd built. Instead of maintaining their Biblical interpretations, he opened people's minds to new ideas and insights. Instead of upholding their customs and traditions, he openly and deliberately flouted them. Rather than reaffirming the old commandments, he had the audacity to issue a new one. Instead of preserving and polishing their boundaries, he toppled their walls, tore down their fences, and ignored their restrictions. Far from being an ambassador of religious preservation, Jesus emerged as an agent of spiritual progress. Nowhere is this contrast more clear than in a parable he told about a king – *representing God* – who gave each of his servants some money to invest on his behalf. In the story, the first servant returns with 1000% profit and is rewarded for being a *good and faithful servant*. The second reports a 500% profit and is rewarded similarly. But the third servant – *the focal character of the story* – returns to the king, saying, ***“Lord, I have successfully preserved the money you gave me. I wrapped it up in a napkin and hid it away because I was afraid of you.”*** (Luke 19:20) Can you guess how the king reacts to *that* servant? He describes them as *wicked* and his investment in them as *worthless*.

I want us to consider, as the parable intends, the ways *we* let fear cause us to simply *preserve* what God has entrusted to us. Rather than investing in growing God's kingdom, how are we tempted to bury our faith, avoid risk, and play it safe, for fear that we'll get it wrong? How many of us are actively working to earn income for our king – *not material wealth, like in the story, but a profit of spiritual progress* – moving God's kingdom-building project forward? If you've been reading through Mark's gospel with us, you've probably noticed it's an action-packed story. Jesus is *on the move*, enlisting new recruits, announcing heaven's immanent arrival on earth. He heals diseases, forgives sins, pushes back against dark forces, reframes our view of God, and extends the table of welcome to the previously excluded. He touches the untouchable, feeds the hungry, befriends the outcast, and mobilizing apprentices to do the same. He exercises dominion over creation, overrides the laws of nature, and unravels the social fabric. His vision of God's kingdom is of a plant that grows, a loaf of bread that rises, and

a vineyard that yields a great harvest. He constantly points forward, whether predicting his own death, promising resurrection, or prophesying the destruction of the Jewish temple, the centre of the previous era. Jesus is a person of progress, a disruptive agent of change, unsettling those who want to treat God like a fossil you dig up from the past to display in a museum. Jesus' concern is forging the future, not protecting the past. He's on offense, not defense. And he invites us – *his followers* – to join in. What's wild is it that the church, so often, has reflected more the heart of the Pharisees, emphasizing boundaries, promoting traditional values and ideas and, in many ways, acting as a valve to stem the flow progress. Church, when did we decide it was our job to be the brake pedal of history, when Jesus so clearly has his foot firmly pressed down on the gas?!

Like the Pharisees, or the third servant in the story, it's not that we're bad people; I think it's just that we're afraid. Afraid to risk, afraid of change, afraid of the unknown, afraid to get it wrong, afraid to incur God's judgment. So we revert back, camp out on the old, rather than forging ahead. Our identity becomes about *defending the faith (as if God needed protection)* doubling down on the boundaries, rather than joining Jesus in reshaping the world.

This fear that leads to this kind of *preservationist* thinking seeps into other areas as well. We see it in the cult of youth, how we obsess over preserving our youthfulness, rather than embracing the natural progression towards maturity and wisdom. Or how we idealize the early stages of romantic love, bailing on any relationship that has the audacity to advance past the honeymoon stage, rather than celebrating the beauty of a relationship that has ventured beyond the shallow waters of infatuation into the deep blue sea of a love that has withstood storms and been sustained through seasons of struggle and change. If you're a parent or caregiver of a young child, we see it in how we try to freeze them, keep them from *growing up too fast*. We want to preserve their innocence, not let them be spoiled by the world. And while those instincts are natural, we can be so focused on preserving their innocence, we fail to guide their progress towards maturity. Even when kids get older, many parents find it hard to learn new ways of relating to adult children, because embracing progress is scary and uncomfortable.

We do this spiritually, too. Maybe your early faith experience was really positive: a great Sunday School teacher, a solid youth group, a life-changing missions trip or summer camp. These mountain-top experiences can be powerful, especially early in our spiritual development, but some of us never mature beyond them, only to discover far too late that Sunday School answers and summer camp highs simply can't sustain us through the valleys of life, where the real growth happens. We need to progress beyond spiritual adolescence to become mature, stable, and committed followers of Jesus and contributors to his church. Some of you have, and you've had a great church experience as an adult, either at Southridge or somewhere else, but things have changed since then. When we've experienced God in certain ways before, it's easy

to want to preserve those methods. As a result, we begin to resist change, becoming unmoved and immovable, unable to see beauty in a new way for a new season. I get it. How God worked *then* was great, but that doesn't mean that's how God is working *now*. The Bible is littered with stories of people who expected God to move in the familiar way they'd experienced previously, only to miss what God did next. To them God says, as he did through the prophet Isaiah:

***“Do not call to mind the former things, or consider things of the past.  
Behold, I am going to do something new.”***

(Isaiah 43:18-19)

Now, that's not say that everything behind us is bad or that all traditions are worthless. We stand on the shoulders of spiritual giants, having been handed down a treasure trove of well-worn pathways, practices, and traditions that have sustained people of faith for centuries, many of which we're learning to embrace in our own context. We ignore the past at our peril, but we must evaluate our traditions by whether they are producing greater Christ-likeness in us. And don't hear me saying all change is positive, either. These days, it seems every new idea immediately becomes the new norm, and anyone who can't keep up is, at best, a dinosaur and, at worst, a bigot. Our world is changing more rapidly and pervasively than any other time in history. We need wisdom in this age, to see that not all *movement* is *progress*. But *all progress requires movement*. We can't stand still. To be clear, the progress we're talking about is change that moves us closer to Christ-likeness. That's spiritual progress.

The church of Jesus is a *movement*, not a *museum*. Our mission is not to simply hold *still* until Christ returns or, worse, go *backwards* to some misguided idea of the *good old days*. We're called to be God's restorative agents in the world, energized by the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's original creation mandate that we read earlier – *to be fruitful and multiply* – which doesn't just refer to *procreation*, but to *progressing* the work of creation. To create, to improve, to spark truth, beauty, and goodness in the world, pursuing growth, producing fruit, multiplying and magnifying Christ's presence, in all ways, at all times. Advancing God's kingdom through compassion and innovation, extending joy and justice, widening the welcoming, spreading love and wisdom, to remake the world according to the glory of God. To carry the human story from the *Garden of God* in Genesis to the shining *City of God* at the end of Revelation.

Twenty years ago, I lived in Calgary, Alberta, working as a young pastor at a brand new church. One thing I've never forgotten was attending a workshop for church leaders, put on by two guys from Australia. They'd landed at the Calgary airport that morning and driven straight to where we were meeting – a beautiful spot nestled in the shadow of the rocky mountains. As they introduced themselves, they described how they'd wined their way through the vast Alberta farmland, taking in the scenery, but asked why Canadian farmers spend so much energy

and money building fences around their farms and ranches. The explanation offered by someone in our group was simple: it keeps the livestock from wandering off their property and onto someone else's farm. The fences keep everything where it's supposed to be. I'll never forget their reaction. *"In Australia,"* they said, *"farmers don't build fences around their farms; they dig wells at the centre of their property. See, the animals will never wander far from a reliable source of water, because they know it keeps them alive."* Friends, do we know what keeps us alive, spiritually? It's not the fences we build to keep people where their supposed to be. Not only do those fences not keep us alive, they actually keep us from the life God created us for. The life that can only be found in the well at the centre – the living water source that never runs dry: Jesus – the source of all life.

Here at Southridge, we see the church as a community of people who hang out at the well, a subversive society-within-society who harness the presence of Jesus to turn graves into gardens, mourning to dancing, dry deserts of depression to rivers of joy, where compassion and kindness push back against selfishness and greed. It's not static or stagnant; it's a *movement*, it's about growth. That's why we're not the same church we were a decade ago, and why we're not the church we will be a decade from now. Frankly, we've always been at our best when we're *taking the next hill*, so to speak. Because we're not interested in handing the next generation a clean, safe, unstained, still-in-the-package, nothing-ventured-nothing-gained kind of church or faith. We hope to one day stand before *our* king and hear *"well done, good and faithful servant"*, not because we hid the gospel in a napkin, buried it in the ground, and gave it back to God un-risked but fully-preserved. Not because we played it safe or stayed inside the lines, but because we took our shot, risked everything, and delivered a worthy return-on-investment with the one-and-only life God gave us. The kind of people who, as our friend Greg Paul wrote:

***"Instead of spending most of our time and resources on a razzle-dazzle Sunday morning service, together we'd heal the sick, feed the hungry, embrace the unwelcome, set prisoners free, restore the dignity of people who have been humiliated, flip the tables of oppressive economics, offer forgiveness instead of seeking vengeance, sacrifice rather than protect ourselves, and much, much more."* – Greg Paul, [Resurrecting Religion](#)**

*(Note: if that inspires you, join us the next four weeks for our annual HOPE LIVES series)*

Adopting a Jesus-centred worldview means orienting ourselves around a reality aimed at Christ-centred *progress*. To be fruitful in our faith, to multiply the mission of God, to resist static, motionless faith, and instead join the movement toward the bullseye: Jesus. Our calling is to bend the arc of history towards life, love, and justice, recognizing that the church is God's Plan

A, and there is no Plan B. So let me ask you again, *“Is the world around you getting worse or better?”* The answer to that question, depends entirely on how we respond.