

“Not Another Jesus”

Malachi 3:12-18 • 2 Corinthians 11:1-15

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX
Rev. Dr. Charles S. Blackshear • January 30, 2022

Several years ago in Kentucky a man walked into a Dairy Queen, placed his order and then paid for it with a \$200 bill. The cashier gave him \$198 in change and he drove away. Some time later in the day I guess the manager noticed that something didn't seem right about this \$200 bill, maybe because it had a picture of then-president George Bush on one side or maybe it was the picture of the Whitehouse on the back with an oil well in front and funny signs in the lawn. Police were able to track down the man and he was arrested for theft by deception.

As you probably know, real U.S. currency has a number of features designed to make it harder to counterfeit. If you hold a \$10 or \$20 bill up to the light you will see that there's a strip embedded in the paper that has the denomination of the bill printed on it. That strip also glows under UV light. There are several features that you need a magnifier to see as well. All of these things are included to distinguish the real bills from the fakes and also to make it harder to counterfeit. The reason the government goes to so much effort is so that when you have that \$20 bill you can be sure that it's real; that it's really worth \$20.

Money is not the only thing that people try to fake. Companies that make the different products we use every day spend lots of money creating what's called "brand identity." That means they create a logo or identity for their company or product that is easily recognizable. Probably the most successful example of creating this brand identity is the familiar shape of the Coca-Cola bottle or their red can. When you see a can or bottle of Coke, no matter what language it's in, you know it's Coca-Cola.

The same is true for most successful products. The idea is that when you see that logo or name, you know you're getting the real thing, the genuine product. So these same companies spend lots of money every year to keep others from duplicating their product or their identity. Today, however, one of the big problems is

copycat products being produced in Asia that are trying to imitate the genuine product. For example, authorities have found clones of a popular brand of down jacket for sale on the internet. But when the jackets were tested, it was discovered that they were not filled with down at all but with all sorts of other things, like chicken feathers (and other parts) swept up from the floor of a poultry factory. As you can imagine, these fake jackets can pose a real health risk by carrying bacteria and disease. Counterfeit medications that people purchase hoping to save money are an even bigger health risk. I think it's obvious how harmful those could be since they may not have any of the needed medication in them.

In the same way that we can be fooled by counterfeit products or money, we are also in danger of counterfeit religion as well. To be more specific, we are in danger of having a counterfeit faith, of believing in a fake Christianity. We are in danger of believing in a "different Jesus, a different Spirit a different gospel."

This was the situation the Apostle Paul was dealing with in Corinth nearly two thousand years ago. As we have talked about throughout our study of Second Corinthians, some "professional" apostles have come to Corinth and begun teaching. In the Greek and Roman world at the time there was a big interest in professional speakers who would travel from city to city speaking. They charged very large fees to come. The same thing still happens today. Former politicians, CEOs, and athletes are all available to give a speech at your event – if you have the money. People like Dr. Ben Carson charge around \$40,000 for a speech. Chelsea Clinton will cost you \$65,000 while her parents will cost you between two and four hundred thousand dollars for one talk. These days near the top of the list is former Prince Harry and his wife Meghan Markle who were recently paid one million dollars by J.P. Morgan for a speech about how hard it is being in the Royal Family.

These professional teachers that had arrived in Corinth openly criticized Paul and opposed his teachings about Jesus. They gave slick, polished sermons and they were very convincing. It sounded very spiritual and they seemed to speak with authority about how they were the true apostles, not Paul. In fact, they talked so much about how great they were, Paul sarcastically refers to them as the “Super Apostles,” or literally the “over-the-top” apostles.

The problem for Paul was not that they were criticizing him, but that what they taught was simply false. They were preaching and teaching a form of Christianity that was much more than Christ. Paul says they are proclaiming “another Jesus and a different gospel.” And they did it in a way that seemed true to the Corinthian Christians. Today there are lots of pastors and churches that will teach similar things. The prosperity gospel that teaches that what God wants for your life is for you to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. If you’re not happy, healthy, and wealthy it means *you’re* not doing it right. But that’s not biblical Christianity. The way of Jesus includes suffering and self-sacrifice.

The thing about this kind of false teaching is that it is so subtle. As one commentator puts it, “The wolves in the church that devour sheep do not howl and bare their teeth. They come in sheep’s clothing, smiling, reciting Scripture, full of understanding, promising something *more* than Christ.” It’s the promise of a better, victorious, prosperous Christianity. It’s the promise of heaven now, here on earth. That’s a very appealing message. Paul tells the Corinthians that when false teachers come teaching a different gospel and another Jesus that they are always willing to believe it. He says “you put up, or bear with their foolishness, readily enough.”

To counter these false teachers, then, Paul asks that they would bear with him, too, in some foolishness. The reason is because Paul loves this church so much and he’s worried about them straying from the truth, from pure devotion to Christ. So he resorts to doing something he

doesn’t really like doing. He acts a little crazy. I think a good way to understand what he’s doing here is that he is pointing out the false teachers’ absurdity by being absurd and sarcastic.

He writes, “Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles.” He’s using false boasting to shine a light on the boasting of the false teachers. Then he says, “Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge.” Of course he was not unskilled in speaking. That’s more sarcasm. The false teachers accused Paul of being ignorant and uneducated. They said that reason he didn’t charge for his speeches is because they weren’t worth anything. He’s saying something like this: “Well, I may be just a redneck from nowheresville, but at least I know more than the slick-talking city folk,”

Paul then shows the Corinthians that the reason he did everything he did was a sacrifice for them. He humbled or lowered himself so that they might be lifted up. Again with thick sarcasm he says, “I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you” for free. Of course he didn’t rob other churches. Those churches gladly supported Paul’s ministry. It was important for him not to take money from the church where he was currently working so that they wouldn’t feel like he owed them something. He continues with his sarcasm, which is in the form of crazy talk. He says, “when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need.” Remember from a couple of weeks ago that the Macedonians were dirt poor. Paul is telling the wealthy Corinthians, “I don’t need your money, the dirt-poor Macedonians have taken care of all my needs.” Why does he do it? Because he wants the Corinthians to understand that his ministry is in the way of Jesus. The true gospel, the authentic Jesus, can’t be bought. Jesus gives himself to us and he is enough. Jesus plus nothing equals everything.

Today we are just as susceptible to false gospels as the Corinthians. There are lots of

people who claim to be pastors teaching lots of things that are not in the Bible. The only way to protect the church from this kind of false teaching is for every person to know the truth. You need to know the true gospel. You need to know the truth about who Jesus is and what He said. That only comes through Scripture. We don't need to look for other revelations from God. Everything you need to know about God is already in the Scriptures. As we sang in our first hymn, "How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word. What more can he say than to you he hath said, To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

The question for you today is which Jesus, which gospel are you following? Are you looking for a "better" gospel? One that will provide you with health, wealth, and happiness? Or are you following the Jesus of the Bible, God incarnate, who said, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve," and "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." The church depends on each one of us knowing the truth of Scripture.

Amen.