

If this is your first time here, or, if this is your first time here this month, you have stumbled into our summer series entitled, “Does IT matter?”

For those who are new, we normally work through books of the Bible verse by verse.

But, this summer, each Sunday we are taking a relevant topic and unpacking it a little.

The last 2 Sundays Shawn reminded us why we, as human beings, matter greatly...because we were created in the image of God...and then last week he reminded us that matter, matters.

That this world in which we live matters greatly because it was created and sustained by God and we have a significant part to play in caring for it.

And now this morning, we are going to switch gears to a person.

Jesus. Does Jesus Matter?

An excellent question with, of course, an obvious answer.

Yes, Jesus matters.

You're either one of over 2 Billion people who claim to follow Jesus, or, you're living alongside those of us who do ... either way, with that large of a following 2000 years after His life...it's safe to say that Yes, Jesus matters.

So, it begs the question, WHY...

Why does Jesus Matter?

Well whether you're in here as a life long Christian, or a jaded Christian, or one who is simply curious about this Jesus, or a teen or young adult wrestling with this faith your parents have nudged you towards... or, if you're an elementary student in the early phases of learning about Him ... let's spend a little time this morning exploring this Jesus and why He Matters to us all!

For those of you who are exploring Jesus, it is good, and fair, for you to know that I will be operating under the presupposition that the Bible is indeed true and that the claims Jesus makes about Himself are also true.

We simply don't have enough time for me to explain WHY Christians believe the Bible and Jesus' words to be true...But I know that if you are in here investigating Jesus and his claims, having a pastor simply use the Bible and the words of Jesus to defend who Jesus is and what He says about the world and Himself doesn't qualify as a sound defense.

So, I've included a couple book titles (out of hundreds of options) in your worship guide.

These may be of interest to you as you explore Jesus.

(The 2 books were Tim Keller's 'The Reason for God' and NT Wright's 'Simply Good News')

Well just as there are so many books that talk about Jesus and the Bible...there are so many ways to address why Jesus matters. So...I figured an appropriate way to launch us into answering this question would be to see how some of our sports campers answered it this week.

Here is a short video with some of the campers and their answers to the modified question:

Why is Jesus important to you?

Thanks to those who bravely allowed me to interview you! And you know what kiddos...you're right. For all the reasons you shared, and more...Jesus Matters! He is our Helper, He played a role in Creation, He never gives up on us, and we can pray to Him. And of course...Jesus loves us...He did die for us **because** He loves us...and He offers life to us.

These two words will be our primary focus this morning when addressing Why Jesus Matters: Love...and Life

Let's start with Love...

And kiddos, while I potentially still have your attention, you are right...Jesus does love you, and ALWAYS will...no matter what...

But...Listen to me now.

A day is coming children when the world around you will begin to tell you a different story.

A day is coming when you'll start feeling like you need to be taller, faster, prettier in order to gain the love and acceptance of those around you. A day is coming when you'll start feeling as though people will only like you if you're one of the smartest in your class...

Ask the teenagers in the room, and they'll confirm this to be true...

And speaking of teenagers ...

Perhaps you're a middle schooler or high schooler, or maybe you're a college student or young adult in here and I just described your current scenario in life.

The scenario where receiving love **feels** as though it is based on your performance.

Where being loved feels like it's based on what you do, not who you are.

You might be feeling like your performance in school or music or sports or your job dictates whether or not you receive love and acceptance ...

Maybe you're beginning to wonder,

"does anyone **really** love me unconditionally? Am I **really** loved simply for who I am?"

And for us adults... we aren't off the hook here ... we tend to find it easy to tell the young people in our lives how Jesus loves them unconditionally.

Yet...we often fall into the same traps of unbelief, don't we?

The same fight our children, our teens, and our young adults fight...we fight too.

We are fed, and often believe, the lie that our lovability is conditional based on the value we bring to those around us...

Our world tells us our value lies in the jobs we hold, whether we own or rent our homes, the kind of cars we drive, and how extravagant our vacations are.

We feel the pressure to be the perfect employee, or in some cases the perfect employer.

We feel the pressure to be the perfect spouse, the perfect parent, the perfect son or daughter.

And depending on where we land on this scale of perfection we experience a corresponding level of love and acceptance.

So ... if everything around us places a conditional bar that we feel we must clear in order to receive love and acceptance...and if that conditional bar has been set close to perfection...

then let's be honest...it's no wonder ... that the mindset that we need to be perfect to be loved has crept into our spiritual lives.

It's no wonder... that if the world tends to reject us when we fail to reach whatever bar they've set, that we'd naturally fight the similar feeling when we think we fail in the eyes of God.

"Of course God doesn't love me," we might be tempted to think.

"Everyone else withholds their love and affirmation when I don't meet their expectations. Why wouldn't God?"

And we know all too well that a life of perfection is impossible on this side of eternity.

It's no wonder that many people are able to verbalize that God loves them unconditionally, but, at the same time struggle to **experience** this unconditional love in their hearts.

This kind of unconditional love is hard to find in our world.

And this my friends...this is one of the reasons why Jesus matters.

Jesus matters because He loves unconditionally.

He loves unlike our world loves. And this is ultimately seen in His work on the cross.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he writes

"**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:**

**While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8)

While we were **still** sinners...God loves us...while we were **still** imperfect...Christ died for us...

**while**... .. **while** we were sinners...

It's not, "once we are perfect."

It's not, "once we get our act together."

It's "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The death of Jesus is God's demonstration of his unconditional love ... for us all ... just as we are.

We are loved...you are loved. Just as you are.

And in a world where we are driven to live a perfect life...

God sits enthroned above, and He says,

"I love you. Just the way you are...Don't believe me? Remember Jesus."

Yes indeed my friends...

Because of the truth of this verse, Jesus most definitely matters.

But, the good news continues. Jesus dying on our behalf is the greatest display of love possible.

But...if it ended in his death alone, his death wouldn't be any more significant or relevant than the soldier who jumps on a live grenade in an attempt to save his comrades.

But, the story of Jesus doesn't end with His death...it continues to His Resurrection.

If Jesus matters because He died out of His unconditional love for us...His resurrection only intensifies His significance. A man coming back to life and never tasting death again?

Oh yes... that man matters. The resurrection of Jesus has forever and completely changed life as we know it...on BOTH sides of eternity.

When one of Jesus' friends, John, wrote about the life of Jesus, he quoted Jesus as saying:

[“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”](#) (John 11:25)

This is good news! Death has been defeated.

The grave holds no power over those who are in Jesus, for those who believe Him to be the Son of God who died and rose. For those who are in Jesus, who believe in Him, we share not **only** in His death, but also in His resurrection and His eternal life.

Death, the one thing common to EVERY person to ever live...has been rendered powerless.

It does not have the final say...Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus most definitely matters.

“But wait Ryan” you may be thinking to yourself...”how can you say that death has been rendered powerless, when every day we see reminders of death and experience pain?”

That’s a fair question...and it **is** our reality.

Death and its cousins... sin and evil still visit our world on a daily basis.

To live in this world means to experience the pain that death and its relatives bring.

But that doesn’t mean that death hasn’t ultimately been defeated.

Some describe this as an “already, not yet” scenario.

That Jesus has **already** defeated sin and death and has begun to bring about his eternal kingdom...

but, this is “**not yet**” complete. It will be completed upon the return of Jesus...

I’ve used an illustration with some students over time to try to help them get some handles on this concept. Admittedly, like most illustrations, it falls a bit short of painting the full picture, but, nonetheless...here it is...

It comes from my early days as a teacher. I got my teaching job immediately upon graduating with my bachelor’s degree. I had no credential to speak of. But ... I was hired anyway.

I was hired under the premise that while holding the position of a ‘real’ teacher, I would work diligently on getting my credential, to actually BECOME a ‘real’ teacher.

I was functioning ALREADY as a teacher, even though I had NOT YET fully gone through the entire process of becoming one.

I’d imagine I’m not the only person in this room who has held some sort of position, at one point or another, where you were operating as though you had ALREADY completed the necessary steps even though you had NOT YET actually done so.

We were holding a position in the present, that affected our day to day life in the present...

But the “real deal,” as it were, was still off in the distance...

And so it goes with Jesus. He has ALREADY defeated sin and death, he has ALREADY begun to bring about His Kingdom here on earth...But it is NOT YET complete.

The picture of what the completed version looks like is quite glorious...

John wrote about this future completion in his letter that opens with the words:

“the Revelation of Jesus Christ.” In Chapter 21 John writes:

[“Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of](#)

heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ (Revelation 21:1-4)

Isn’t that an amazingly beautiful picture. This... is the picture of God’s endgame!

This is often overlooked in the eternal life discussion. It can be so easy to get caught up in an over individualized version of eternity because we live in an “all about me” world.

But God wants to reconcile and redeem all of us...and all of **creation**...and then God wants to spend eternity with ALL the redeemed. in the New Heavens and the New Earth...

This has been the design from the beginning and all biblical history has pointed in this direction. God has always simply wanted to be with His people. We saw this first in the garden with Adam and Eve, and then in the tabernacle in the days of Moses, and then in the Temple in the days of the kings, and then in Jesus Himself ... there is coming a day where God will eternally dwell among us, His people. A day when He will come down, yet again, and finally complete the process of eliminating sin and evil...there will be no more death ... no more mourning ... no more crying ... no more pain... ...isn’t that a glorious picture to behold!!

Yet, we **are** still living in the “already, not yet” phase of history.

And until it is all completed, until Jesus returns, there **will** be reminders of sin, evil, and death and the pain they all leave in their wake.

But perhaps you’re a bit confused, or, like some of my students in the past, a bit angry that God would begin the process of eliminating death and its waves of destruction, yet force us to live in a world where it seems to be all around us.

I can understand and empathize with their pain...or your pain, if that is where you find yourself today.

And this leads us to why Jesus actually matters **already**, in the here and now.

This world offers us a million and one ways of going about our lives.

It tells us that we can each, every last one of us, define our own truths, establish our own ways of living based on those truths. And this world tells us that in following our own truths and our own ways, we will find a life of happiness, contentment, joy, hope, and fulfillment.

Friends...hear me now.

You don’t have to look very far, perhaps you don’t even have to look further than your own mirror, to realize this is simply untrue.

I have watched countless high school students over the years follow the way of the world.

The way of the world that tells them, if they get these grades, in these classes, they’ll be able to get into these schools and one day get their dream job...

and I've watched so many of these students only become filled with stress, depression, anxiety and so on...in an attempt to stay the course on the world's prescribed way.

And then I've seen many of these same students successfully follow the world's way only for the promised outcome to not work out in the end...

Maybe you're an adult in here and you feel like I just described your current life.

Maybe you actually hold your dream job...whether it's high tech or a stay at home mom...yet, something is missing?

Is that you this morning?

Are you living the life you always dreamed of living, whether you're a student in the early phases of the dream, a working adult trying to live, or simply find, this supposed dream, or maybe you're retired, looking back, trying to discern if you actually lived the dream.

Do any of these describe you this morning? Have you done everything 'right' according to the way of the world? Have you followed your 'truth' and your 'way' as well as you could...

... yet...yet, somehow you still feel less than fulfilled...somehow it wasn't all it was promised to be.

Well...if that is you this morning, you should know that the Good News of Jesus Christ transcends **beyond** His victory over death at life's end...and the Good News of Jesus Christ is available to guide you and transform you... right now...

Jesus said,

["I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."](#) (Jn 14:6)

Jesus didn't simply snap His fingers on Easter Sunday and say "See y'all on the flip side."

No...on that Easter morning He made access to the Father possible...and this verse is another confirmation of what we've already discussed...Jesus holds the door open to the Father for whoever wants to walk through it. But again ... Jesus didn't simply open the door to the Father and then wish us good luck and leave us to blindly navigate this difficult and painful world.

No ... not at all.

He is THE Way...

In a world that tells me that I can do it MY way, according to MY subjective truth, and in so doing I will find MY life...Jesus' voice rises above all others and says

"NO...that is not true. I am the way ... the truth ...the life."

You know...As soon as you leave here this morning the world will be whispering, or maybe yelling, in your ear... "keep living life your way, according to your truth."

The world will continue to promise us all that just around the corner is the life we've been waiting for. Friends ... that's a LIE!

How many times do we have to hold out hope that just around the corner is the life we've always wanted before we finally wake up and realize

that MY way according to MY truth will NEVER ... NEVER lead to that promised life of fulfillment and contentment.

While we are living in this season of the already/not yet...the season where Jesus has done away with the eternal effects of sin and evil and death, yet the temporal effects of them all remain...

We would do well to heed the way of Him who has defeated sin and evil and death.

And if we follow Him now as THE way, in the season of the already/not yet, we won't live a life of no pain, or even less pain...life will still be hard.

But when we follow Jesus and live this life according to His Way and His Truth, we discover that, among many other things...He will be our buoy in life's greatest storms.

And when we cling to Jesus in life's undeniable and unavoidable hard storms, we will find ourselves not just surviving them, but coming out on the other side of the storms transformed a little bit more into the likeness of Jesus. He is the way through the storms of this life...and He is the way to the Father at the end of this life...Eternal life, **and** life in the here and now, have been forever altered because of Jesus...

so yes, Jesus matters!

I'd like to take the last 5 minutes or so to suggest a couple implications from Jesus' life of love for both those of you who follow Him, as well as those who are still exploring Him...

Those who are trying to choose between following Jesus and His Way, or, following your own way as encouraged by the world.

To those of you who are trying to figure this Jesus thing out...

It has been my prayer coming into this morning that God would open the eyes of your heart to His great love for you. This fact, above all else, is critical to understanding Jesus.

God loves you unconditionally. There are no ifs ands or buts about it...you are loved by the Eternal God unconditionally. And His love for you is so great that He wants **you** to enjoy the new heavens and the new earth with Him for eternity.

Not only so... Jesus is also the way to live a life of contentment and hope and purpose and joy on this side of eternity...together...in community with all those who follow Him.

Perhaps you're here this morning because you appreciate Jesus' life and find Him to be a good Moral Teacher. Unfortunately, Jesus doesn't give us that option.

CS Lewis, a well known author who was an atheist turned Christian, once made famous, the term, trilemma. Essentially, Lewis said that Jesus is either a Liar, a Lunatic, or Lord...

He cannot simply be a good moral teacher. He made so many claims, a couple of which we looked at today.

In making those claims, Jesus was either flat out lying...which a good moral teacher cannot do by definition...or...Jesus actually believed the claims He was making and they simply weren't true... in which case he was a crazy lunatic, and certainly no one would call a crazy lunatic a good moral teacher ... OR ... OR what Jesus said about Himself was actually true...which would make Him Lord of all. Because this would mean that, among other things, He rose from the dead NEVER tasting death again.

Jesus simply cannot be a good moral teacher alone.

He is either a liar, a lunatic, or He is Lord.

Which of these do you believe Jesus to be this morning!?

And for those who claim to follow Jesus in this room...For those who claim that Jesus is Lord, let me encourage you this morning.

In response to God's unconditional love for you... follow Him. Be transformed by Him. Trust Him to be THE way, THE truth, and THE life...

Much like the one who is exploring Jesus doesn't have an option to say that Jesus is simply a good moral teacher. If you are in here and claim to follow Jesus...you don't have the option to simply claim Him as **only** your Savior and not your Lord.

Craig Gay of Regent college has said that many Christians today live as practical atheists.

Basically, he is saying we live as though Jesus is savior, and not Lord...

I wonder...is that you this morning?

If you claim He is your Savior, He must, by definition, be your Lord.

And while none of us will ever fully reflect Him on this side of eternity because none of us will ever be perfect, we are to be his representatives on this earth...his representatives and conduits of that which we constantly receive from Him...grace, forgiveness ... and above all, love.

Jesus' **way** is love.

His **truth** is rooted in love.

And His **life**, was all about love.

**When** we follow Jesus as THE way THE truth and THE life,we will naturally be transformed into His likeness... we will naturally live a life of love.

We will love God and love others...And we are to love others the way God has loved us... Without condition.

Just as Jesus didn't withhold His love from us UNTIL we got cleaned up...

We are to love others, all others, just as they are...right now!

Remember: **They will know us by our love** ...

What a terrible tragedy it is, when people who claim to follow Jesus are better known for being judgmental and hateful.

For those of you in here who are my brothers and sisters in Christ ...

Follow Him as Lord....

Allow Him to transform you...

Walk in His way of love...

Let the world know that Jesus **matters** ...

because Jesus LOVES the world and all who are in it....

For God's sake...Love!!

Amen