

Walking with Jesus in a Weird World

Where Were You When the World Went Weird?

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Well, let's begin here with a shout out. We're going to greet and welcome to our Bible study eight men. They've been meeting for about six months at 6:00 on one Sunday each month. They're called the Men's Ministry. They're part of the Blountstown, did I say that correctly? First Pentecostal Holiness Church in Blountstown, Florida. Doug Bulzer is their leader. I wonder if you'd join me in giving a warm and a rousing welcome to the Men's Ministry up in Blountstown. One, two, three, hoorah. Men, we're really glad to have you with us. Welcome.

We are beginning a new series this morning. I have, for the last little while, taken up a new hobby, sport, avocation, whatever you might call it, hiking. I was moping around the house after my last avocation, kind of ran out of money for that one, racing. My wife, for a few years, kept saying, "You need to get a new hobby." Finally I said to her one day, I said, "Honey, I appreciate that but at this point in our life, I'm just not really interested in doing anything unless it's something we do together." We ended up landing on camping. I've told a few camping stories. I don't know if I've told any hiking or stories or not. In the process of all this, I've gotten into hiking.

Over the last eighteen months, I've been in 74 hikes, I've hiked 312 miles, I've averaged 3 hours and 38 minutes per week, I got an app for this, and hike 8.2 miles on average a week. It's 3 hours and 38 minutes a week. It's a pretty good commitment to a hobby. By the way, my wife said, "I sure hope they have numbers in heaven." I said, "Why is that?" She says, "Because if they don't have numbers, you're not going to be a very happy person up there." I just love numbers. I love counting.

Well, when I started out, I was just using my sneakers and I bought a little \$5 backpack or something like that. After I realized I was really going to do it after about year, about six months ago, I really started getting the proper gear, trekking poles, and watching the YouTube videos of how to use them. I bought a backpack that has a hydration pack with a little tube that you can drink and that sort of thing. I bought some GPS tracking stuff and so forth.

It's been interesting because I learned that one of the most important things you need to have in hiking is just a good old fashioned map, a good old fashioned trail map. I've got a lot of different trail maps. Now, when you're hiking in some of the more well maintained trails, there are blazes on the trail. You've been out, most of you, and there will be a little blue or an orange or yellow or white or red blaze. They'll be every so often to help keep you on the trail.

Well, recently I went hiking in the Linville Gorge Wilderness. When it says Linville Gorge Wilderness, it really is a wilderness. They don't have blazes. They have trail heads where you start but then you're kind

of on your own. It would be very difficult to hike in the Linville Gorge without a map and a compass. I've got all these different trail maps to all these different areas. This one to the Linville Gorge Wilderness is such a blessing because I would have really been in trouble without this trail map. Even so, I had some crazy experiences in there. I did get lost a couple times. When I say "lost", I mean misplaced. Really, I've never been lost, I'm a guy.

I'm going to give you this one example. There's a trail, when I finally decided to come out of the gorge, I decided to go up Cabin Trail. That sounds pretty innocuous, right? I start up the Cabin Trail. Well, listen, the Cabin Trail goes like that. The next thing after trail is rock climbing. I mean that's what this was. In fact, much of it, it's about three-quarters of a mile, almost straight up out of the gorge, and a lot of it is rock scrambling. Well, I get about, I think, two-thirds of the way up. I'm not sure how far up. I come to this sheer rock wall. As far as I can see in both directions, there's this wall. It's higher than I am. I looked around and I said, excuse me, I said this out loud, I said, "Where in the hell did the trail go?" I went down this and I then I went down there and then I went back down there to see if I'd missed a turn somewhere. No. I said, "Could it be possible that the trail's on top of this cliff?" Sure enough, I found a way up the eight or nine feet and there it was and the trail continued.

The point of all this is that sometimes things get a little weird out there. It's important to have a map. The title of our series is **Walking With Jesus in a Weird World**, because things have been getting a little weird. Our first message: **Where Were You When the World Went Weird?** Remember what you were doing when you finally decided that the world had gone completely weird?

First up, it is a weird time to be a Christian. We're going to get to this text, 1 Peter 1, in a minute. It is a little weird to be a Christian at this time. Here is what I want you to know: It is not you that have become weird. The weirdness of the world is that it's become so weird that it wants you to think that you're the one that's weird. You tracking? The world has become so weird that it wants you, the Christian, to think that you are the one who's become weird.

One thing to keep in mind is that there's so much freedom in our country and there is a freedom of Christianity that is astounding. Juxtaposed against the weirdness that's out there, it's a great time to be a Christian.

Do you know that in the year 1800, our country founded in 1776, in the year 1800, there were 350,000 Christians who belonged to a church? That was only one out of every fifteen Americans. There were 5 million people in the United States. 350,000. That's one in fifteen. At the beginning of our country, only one in fifteen people were Christians. By 1850, that doubled to one in seven. Now there were 5 million Christians in the United States. Then today, we know that it's doubled again and one in three people profess to be born again Christians. That would be about 100 million Americans who are professing faith in Christ. People talk about the church being in so much trouble and so forth, the church has always been in so much trouble. Do you know that between 1980 and 2000, there were 50,000 new churches started in the United States? There are a lot of narratives out in culture about the demise of Christianity, about the demise of the Christian church. It's just part of the weirdness. The narratives that you hear out there, it's just part of the weirdness.

Actually, Christians are pretty much the same as we always have been. It's the world that's become weird but the world wants you to think that you're the one now who is weird. You haven't changed. The world has changed. The world is constantly changing. In fact, Kierkegaard said, "The wisdom of the

world is always changing and is confusing. It's only the wisdom of eternity that is edifying." Christianity hasn't changed. It doesn't change.

The result of all this weirdness is there's a lot of misunderstanding out there. There's a lot of suspicion out there. For example, one Christian ministry person, I won't mention who it is. One Christian ministry person has made a practice of asking people in the LGBT community how they think Christians view them. The almost categorical answer is, "They hate us." People who have alternative sexual preferences that are not in line with Christian principles, their basic understanding is that you hate them. That's their basic understanding is that you hate them. It's not that you disagree with their sexuality, but that you hate them like it's the sin, like the other sins are not that important, like that's the sin. Well, what you and I would all love for them to know is that, hey, we're sinners too. Maybe I'm heterosexual so my sin is not same sex attraction, my sin is opposite sex attraction and I deal with it everyday, you see. It's very confusing. It's just this is the way it is.

Out of this, we come to 1 Peter. Peter wants us to learn something about how to live in a world that is increasingly weird and a world where things are changing and what he wants us to learn, here's the big idea for today and probably for the whole series. This is the big idea. Peter wants us to learn how to **be a thermostat and not a thermometer**. In other words, the world is constantly changing. The temperature of things is constantly changing but Christianity is not changing. Christianity, we can be the thermostat that helps regulate the temperature of culture. Do you get that? Of course you do. We have the incredible, immense privilege, opportunity, responsibility, duty to be a thermostat, to help set the temperature in culture, to help set the climate of culture, not to adjust to the climate of culture, not to go up and down in weirdness, but to show the weirdness where they ought to be. How thrilling is that?

Now, it's not just that it's a weird time to be a Christian, it's also we need to look at the idea that it has always been weird to be a Christian. It has always been weird to be a Christian in the eyes of the world which is really where the weirdness is. Now, this is a perspective.

1 Peter chapter 1 verse 1 says this, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers," other versions, aliens, "To God's elect, strangers, aliens, in the world." You are strangers and aliens in the world. That's what Peter's calling us, God's elect Christians. Christians are being called strangers and aliens in the world, "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ in sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance," all hundred million of you.

Why does he call us strangers and aliens? Because we live in a weird world and there's a lot of weirdness out there. The point is there has always been this weirdness out there. In the early church, Christians were encouraged to call each other brother and sister and to greet each other with a holy kiss. In the weirdness of the world back then, the non-church people began to accuse the Christians of incest. In other words, they heard that Christians greet each other with a holy kiss and call each other brother and sister. The rumor began and gained some traction that Christianity is about incestuous relationships, weirdness. That's not all. When Christians talked about partaking of the blood of Jesus in holy communion, people who didn't understand what was going on, on the periphery of the weirdness of the time, they began to accuse and the rumor spread that Christians were cannibals. Non-Christians in the early Christian church viewed Christians as a group of incestuous cannibals. There's always been weirdness around what it means to be a Christian.

What makes us aliens and strangers? It begins in verse 3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope," a way out of the weirdness, if you will, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade."

If you are a believer, you have an unchanging hope, you have an imperishable hope. As the world shifts from new idea to new idea to new idea, you have this constancy. Because you hold to the constancy, the imperishableness of your faith, the world looks at you like you're the one who's weird. They're the ones who are weird. They're the ones who keep changing their mind.

Hey, people say that Christianity is built on superstition. Let me tell you what's built on superstition. The world is built on superstition. Christianity is not superstitious. There is no superstition in Christianity. It's built on a set of principles, clearly laid out, they've never been amended, adopted, rescinded or altered in any way. Christianity is an unchanging idea that's built on the facts that are presented in the Bible. Christianity is not superstition. It's not Christianity that's superstitious. That's why they keep changing every few years and getting more and more weird, so it seems, but it's always been that way.

Reading on, verse 3, "It's kept in heaven for you who through faith," us, "who through faith, we are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." We are shielded from the weirdness. Now, you can drink the Kool-Aid but you can choose, if you will, to be shielded if you allow your faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can be shielded from this weirdness.

Verse 6, "In this, you greatly rejoice," your ability to not be caught up in the weird world, "though now, for a little while, you may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." That's part of the deal. There is weirdness out there and you're going to suffer because of it, reading on, "These have come," verse 7. "These have come, these trials, so that," there's a reason for it, "so that your faith of greater worth than gold," your faith is more valuable than gold, "which perishes even though refined by fire." Even gold perishes. "But your faith may be proved genuine and result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. For you are receiving the goal of your faith." You will receive the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul.

We are aliens and strangers, but what Peter has to say to us about being aliens and strangers is that what you have is amazing. However weird it gets out there, here's what you need to do: focus on the amazing thing that we do have, remember what we have, don't get confused by all of the weirdness that's out there, be mindful of the things that don't change, and pay attention to how we should respond. Because of this, Peter is laying down this idea that you can be a thermostat, not a thermometer. That's the big idea today is that you can be a thermostat, not a thermometer, because of this unchanging gospel, this wonderful salvation of our souls that we have by faith.

Then, finally, first we said it's a weird time to be a Christian, but it's always been a weird time to be a Christian. We see what Peter has to say because of the weirdness that was going on in his time, which is also going on in our time, kind of a preface if you will. He's saying that, "Hey, look, you have this constant thing, the gospel, the salvation of your souls by faith. You can be a thermostat, not a thermometer."

Now, in the rest of the book, he's going to help flesh out how to do that and what that might look like. Let's finish up today with this idea that it really is a perfect, it's not the perfect because there have been many perfect, any time to be a Christian is really a perfect time. This is an especially perfect time to be a Christian with all this weirdness that's going on. I don't know when it started. I remember as a very young businessman having thoughts regularly, "Well, okay, now we've finally gone over the cliff. Next year, somebody will find a bigger cliff to go off." It just seems like every year people drink more and more of the Kool-Aid.

You remember this story of, I'm sure I told it here, of the wise king, the bronze parable of the wise king. There was this very wise king and he was a benevolent person. The capital city was the only place where they could get water and so the people would come to the well and they would drink the water. One night, a witch decided to poison the well so that all the people would go mad. The next day, sure enough, all the people went down to the well, they drank the water, and they went mad. The king didn't drink from the well that day. The people began to complain how the king had lost his reason, the king had gone mad, we need to get rid of the king, the king is crazy, the king is weird. The king sent his servant down to the well to get a goblet of water, which he drank, and then he became mad and the people rejoiced because the king had regained his reason.

That's very suggestive of the culture in which we live today. It's a perfect time to not drink the Kool-Aid. It's a perfect time to not drink the water. It's a perfect time not to go mad. It's a perfect time not to go weird. It's a perfect time to do three things, three ways that you can execute here.

I think the first that I would mention is this idea of truth. It's Ephesians 4, I forget, 15 maybe, speaking the truth in love, but it's the truth, it's holding to the principles that you see in the Bible, understanding that people are going to be weird to the right of them this year, and five years from now, they'll be weird to the left of scriptures. It's sticking to the truth.

CS Lewis formed a club at Oxford University called the Socratic Club. The purpose of the club was to get Christians and atheists to debate each other. He said something very interesting. He said when these people came together, they didn't really know very much about each other. He said, and I'm quoting, "Everyone found how little he had known about everyone else." He said, "We of the Christian party discovered that the weight of the skeptical attack did not always come where we expected it."

You probably didn't know that the LGBT community, that their primary way of looking at you is that you hate them. You probably didn't know that. Some of you did. Most of you probably didn't know that. "The attack comes," Lewis says, "where we didn't expect it." Then he says that, "We found that our opponents had to correct what seemed to us their almost bottomless ignorance of the faith they supposed themselves to be opposing." It's a perfect time to be a Christian because people have this bottomless ignorance of the Christianity they presume that they oppose. What a wonderful opportunity just simply to share the truth of Christianity, the simple story of Jesus and his gospel. Machen reported that it's the simple story that has changed the lives of so many millions of people.

The second thing beyond truth is this idea of love. 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verse 14, "Let everything you do be done in love." You can speak the truth. Some people will, you've heard a person boast say, "I'm brutally honest." You've heard that? I'm brutally honest. Some of you have probably said it. Anybody that says that, they're not brutally honest, what they are is they are brutally arrogant. Brutal honesty is a euphemism for brutal arrogance because honesty, for the Christian, is never brutal. It's

always loving, it's speaking the truth in love. 1 Corinthians 16 verse 14, "Let everything you do be done in love."

The third thing is just don't drink the Kool-Aid. Protect yourself. Stay alert. Right before that 1 Corinthians 16:13 says, "Stay alert. Be on guard. Act like men," it says. Then it says, "Let everything you do be done in love."

If you do this, if you do the big idea today, if you are a thermostat, not a thermometer, in other words, if you speak the truth in love, hold the line, love people but don't compromise, don't cater to ... If you do that, what's going to happen? You're going to be criticized, you're going to be persecuted, you're going to be misunderstood, and you're going to be accused of things. That's just by the Christians.

Seriously, my pastor is very involved in community affairs. My pastor is constantly out with people who are not of the Christian faith and he's been building bridges with them for decades. Nobody I know in this community has been more brutally criticized than my pastor. Think about it. Think about this. Think about the absurdity of asking a pastor who is an evangelist to never talk to people who don't know Jesus. Think about that for a moment. The idea of asking somebody who views their role in life to help people become Christians, in order to make the Christian population happy, that person would never talk to somebody who doesn't know Jesus. Do you see how weird we have become? We can become weird too. The **Big Idea today: be a thermostat, not a thermometer.**

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for giving us the constancy of the gospel in the weirdness of the world. We pray that we would hold the line, that we would be the thermostat, and that we would help the rest of culture just adjust to the setting that we would have of the gospel, that we would not drink the Kool-Aid, that we would not go down to the well and become, but rather we would be the people that can lead our communities, not only the community here but the communities online into the glorious freedom that is talked about here in 1 Peter in which we can greatly rejoice. We ask this in the loving name of Jesus. Amen.