

Decaffeinated Christianity

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[0:00] I don't need two microphones on at once. There is an old legend about a pig and a chicken who were walking through a poverty-stricken area.

Full of compassion for the plight of the people, the chicken said, what these people need is a really good breakfast. Let's give them some ham and some eggs.

The pig was silent for a moment, and then he said, hey, wait a minute. For you, chicken, to supply ham and eggs would require only compassion, but for me, it would be total commitment.

Of those of us who call ourselves Christian, many of us live closer to the chicken than the pig, and Michael Marshall has called this decaffeinated Christianity.

A watered-down version that charms and warms our lives, but places relatively little demand upon us. Church, many Sundays, but mostly when it's convenient or we feel like coming.

[1:19] a contribution to the plate, but nothing sacrificial. Involvement in the community on occasion, but, you know, we lead such busy lives that even that can't be every week.

If this is not a fair description of your type of Christianity, then I apologize. But for the many, decaffeinated Christianity is where it's at.

But it is not what is expected by Jesus. In reading that Gospel of Luke, in the reading from that Gospel of Luke, Jesus is in the company with the Sadducees as they watch people place their offerings in the box.

And Jesus notices the poor widow put her two tiny coins in. Many others are putting in much, much more.

But as Jesus observes, it has less to do with the actual value of the money than it has to do with the cost to the giver. The widow literally gave everything she had.

[2:32] Sacrifice is an essential part of being the Jesus people. Giving of time, talent, treasure is expected, and we are to give as the pig, not as the chicken.

Following Jesus must cost us. If it doesn't, we aren't doing it completely, and the cost is by no means limited to money.

Have you fasted recently to help your prayer life? Do you read the Scriptures faithfully every day and pray for at least, at least 30 minutes?

Do you give this Christian community of St. Alban a solid portion of your time so that we can do more and take the Gospel further afield?

These are examples of fully caffeinated Christianity. One huge advantage to reading the entire Bible is having the overview of God's plan and a perspective on his personality.

[3:46] This is his world. We are his creatures. He is Lord and owner of all that is, all that was and all that will come after.

Every second of our lives is a gift from him and not a personal right of mine. Every item I own and call mine was his first and mine second.

Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, forever and ever. Everything in the heaven and in the earth is thine. All things come of thee and of thine own.

Do we give thee? So how is this reflected in our attitude to our material possessions? The money, houses, cars, bicycles, cottages, etc., they're all ours because of our hard work, right?

The product of our diligence is, of course, the property of each and of our families, right? Now, I realize that there here are many students, although most of them are away this weekend on a retreat, and students are notorious for having few possessions.

[5:02] And yet, your sense of pride, of ownership, of laptops and iPods, will be an indication of how you will manage greater wealth in the future.

God's attitude toward the world and us as revealed in Scripture is quite clear. It is his, and we live here through his creation and by his grace, whether we acknowledge this fact or not.

We are becoming more and more aware of the appalling stewardship of this world of ours. Some recent scientific research has shown, and we're very conscious of this at the moment, that where the temperature of our globe, the angle of its axis, the contents of its gases, different by even a minuscule amount, our life on this planet would not be sustained.

We are far more dependent than we think. Since the time of our expulsion from the Garden of Eden, we have had to work.

We labor to survive. The product of that work, from God's perspective, has always been his. He has asked for and expected us to tithe our total wealth.

[6 : 26] That is 10% of the gross, not of the net. It's supposed to be given with joy, out of love and gratitude for all the blessings we have received, such as life, health, strength, and these are indeed good things.

But greater by far is our salvation. The gratitude that we have for Jesus taking our sinfulness on his shoulders on the cross and removing its consequences from us should keep us dancing with gratitude every day, indeed every moment of our lives.

Does it? Does it keep you dancing and longing to give back in many and any way you can possibly do? For this is the bottom line.

Each of us comes to that place, and until we come to that place, our wealth and our wallets will only be partially opened. Come to the place of understanding and knowing what Jesus has done for you, and the wallet is automatically converted.

You only have to look at the statistics. The Christian Reform and Mennonite churches top the denominational list with an average annual giving per household of 9.8%.

[7 : 55] For the most part, membership in these denominations assumes conversion, a radical change in the lives of the members which brings with it the expectation of tithing, and they do.

In Canada, the only church below the Anglican church in giving is the United. Anglicans give 1%. Now, let's imagine that St. Albans were a tithing church. We have 160 households approximately, and I am going to guess that with the student population, an average income of about 40,000 is a reasonable guess.

If we all gave 10% of that income, this church would have \$650,000 a year. Quite staggering, isn't it?

With money like that, we could really do ministry. We could reach out to the community. We could have a major impact in the name of Jesus. At the moment, we limp along, as most Anglican churches do, every year, worrying if we can scrape together enough to pay our bills.

[9 : 12] It saps our energy, our ministry, our vision, and our outreach. Years ago, when Mother Teresa was visiting Los Angeles, a wealthy businessman approached her and asked if he could get a plane ticket to accompany her to Mexico because he felt such great peace in her presence.

She replied, I don't object to your doing that, but better, you take the same money, you find somebody who needs to be fed and clothed and ministered to, and your inner peace will be greater and will last longer.

He did, and he discovered a secret about giving. The more you do it in the name of the Lord, the greater the peace and joy you will have. Loving God because he first loved us, sent Jesus to us, showed us what God is truly like, then stepped into our place on the cross and died so that you and I can live.

What is not to be grateful for? What's not to rejoice over, and what's not to give back in as full a measure as we can possibly do? A foreigner, visiting the passion play in Oberamago, had an opportunity to meet the actor who played the part of Jesus.

The visitor wanted his wife to take a photograph of him standing beside the cross. He attempted to lift it and found he couldn't budge it.

[10 : 55] I don't understand, he said to the actor, why you carry such a heavy cross. why isn't it hollow? To which the actor replied, if I did not carry the weight of the cross, I could not play the part.

Caffeinated Christianity has a bite and a cost, but it is the radical form of discipleship to which we are called. As long as we deny God his due, so long will we limp along.

In the final analysis, it's all up to me and to you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.