What Difference Does Jesus Make?

Selected Scriptures

One time I had a fellow Christian, and friend, ask me, “What difference does Jesus make in our lives?”

I’m guessing that he asked because he felt like his life was full of the same types of mistakes, difficulties, and disappointments as other people. Or maybe the question originated because it seemed like he just wasn’t seeing himself or other Christians making a difference in the world.

Aren’t Christians supposed to be different?

Aren’t our lives supposed to be the epitome of excellence, success, and perfection?

Doesn’t Jesus give us everything we need to have successful careers, healthy bodies, powerful influence, and unlimited wisdom?

Just what kind of difference does, Christ in us, make?

I would propose that Jesus absolutely makes a difference in our lives. But it isn’t the kind of difference that many people are looking for. At least it isn’t the kind of change that appeals to our basic human nature. It isn’t what Timothy Keller calls:

Moralistic, Therapeutic, Diesm.

Jesus changes lives by changing the way we relate to God and the way relate to other people. Today I would like to present four ways that I believe Jesus makes a difference in how we relate to God and how in turn those ways that we relate to God carry over into how we relate to others. For the sake of remembering the four points of the sermon rhyme.

Those who put their faith in Jesus have been given four things that absolutely make a difference…

As Christians we have been given:

Slide 2 (Each Line Flies in on Click)

Grace

Space

Power to Race

And a Promised Place

And just as Jesus said, “Those who have been forgiven much love much.” So it is true, that those who have experienced Grace, Space, the power to race, and a promised place pass those things on to others. After all Jesus said:

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“34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

John 13:34-35 NLT

Let’s first take a look at **Grace**. Which really is the basis for everything else. Without grace we wouldn’t have anything. Ultimately, the ability to love stems from grace. If Love is…

Patient and kind and it is not jealous, boastful, proud or rude…If it does not demand it’s own way, it isn’t irritable and keeps no record of wrong…and it never gives up and it never loses faith…and endures through every circumstance…then it has to be based on grace. Only unmerited favor could keep no record of wrongs. Only unmerited favor could endure through every circumstance. This is why Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Slide 4

“8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. 10 For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Ephesians 2:8-10 NLT

This is also why it is so important that we do not take credit for our works. It is only because of what God has done that has allowed us to do the good things He planned for us.

Have you ever seen someone take credit for something someone else did?

It’s pretty disrespectful isn’t it.

Say, for example, you see a 16 year old kid driving a brand new Corvette. If they told you it was theirs would you believe them? Or would you assume that it belonged to their parents. If we can all see how foolish it is to take credit for owning a parents car, how foolish is it to take credit for our salvation.

We owe our whole life to God and what we have in Him isn’t because of us. As Titus says:

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“4…When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, 5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. 6 He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. 7 Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.”

Titus 3:4-7 NLT

God’s grace is the key that unlocks all the benefits of life in Christ. Without it God is against us. As John wrote:

Slide 6

36 And anyone who believes in God’s Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn’t obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God’s angry judgment.”

John 3:36

Thankfully, this grace that God gives us is way bigger than the power of our sin.

As Paul wrote to the Romans:

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“20 God’s law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant.”

Romans 5:20 NLT

In turn, this grace that God shows us in our relationship with Him, is the kind of grace that we are to show others in our relationships with them.

It’s not based on their works. And our grace for them should get bigger and bigger as their sin gets bigger and bigger.

Is this different than people without Jesus? You bet it is! When we pass this kind of grace on to others it leads to the next point of my sermon today which is Space. Jesus’ death on the cross gives us a safe space with God. This is what the writers of the scriptures are talking about when they say that God gives them safe pasture.

Moses wrote in Deuteronomy:

Slide 8

“The eternal God is your refuge,

and his everlasting arms are under you.

He drives out the enemy before you;

he cries out, ‘Destroy them!’”

Deuteronomy 33:27 NLT

And…

David said in the Psalms:

Slide 9

The Lord is my shepherd;

I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows;

he leads me beside peaceful streams.

Psalm 23:1-2 NLT

Jesus, Himself, talked about the space He gives his followers:

Slide 10

8 All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. 9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. 10 The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:8-9

Jesus through His gracious sacrifice and, continual intercession for us, provides for us a safe place to grow. We are safe with Him from the moment we believe even though we are sooo far away from being righteous.

This is a big deal, because with Christ we are free from having to live in the shame, guilt, and fear that are usually associated with our lives.

It is like Jesus gives us training facility that is free from dangers so that we can grow strong and healthy. Do you make it your goal to offer this kind of space to others? This safe space to grow is important because it builds our faith and brings us to the third difference that Jesus makes in our life, He gives us the power to race.

The apostle Paul, and the writer of Hebrews used racing references in the scriptures:

Slide 11

24 Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!

1 Corinthians 9:24

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

Hebrews 12:1

The safe pasture that Jesus gives us to train helps us to have the strength and endurance run the race and fight the good fight. He empowers us for every good work. It isn’t easy living a life of faith. I think this is what led my friend to ask the question “What difference does Jesus make?” Getting to know Jesus and demonstrating His love to others is like training for and running a hard race. Bible study, prayer, thinking on the things we learn, talking with other believers, and telling others about Christ takes time, energy, and effort. It doesn’t just happen. Thankfully, God gives us the will and the strength to do His work.

As Philippians 2:13 says:

Slide 12

13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:13

The scriptures say that this power comes from the power of the resurrection!

Slide 13

11 The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Romans 8:11

Remember, as I said earlier, the things that Jesus does for us in our relationship with God are like the things we are to do in our relationship with others. As God empowers us and gives us faith and perseverance so we can help encourage and empower others in the spirit.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Slide 14

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 5 For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. 6 Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. 7 We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

2 Corinthian 1:3-7

Paul, also wrote to the Galatians:

Slide 15

“…if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. 2 Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. 3 If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.”

Galatians 6:1-3

When it comes to racing, the only thing better than an off-road motorcycle race is an off-road motorcycle team race!

Jesus changes our lives!

He gives us grace so we can give ourselves and others grace.

He gives us space so we can grow (even though growth sometimes has some setbacks) in love, joy, patience, peace, goodness, gentleness and other Christian virtues.

He gives us all we need to run the race, and it is a team race where we can encourage and empower others and they can help encourage and empower us.

Knowing these things is one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul wrote:

Slide 16

14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Philippians 3:14

Which brings us to the last point of my sermon today. It is one of the biggest differences that Jesus makes in our lives.

He assures us of our eternal place with Him. In John Jesus is recorded as saying:

Slide 17

14 “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

John 14:1-3

Slide 18

24 “I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

John 5:24

This is huge! We have a place to go home to, forever! And Jesus our Savior is going to be there with us. In fact, it’s like He is who we are going home to. He is the eternal dwelling place.

In John’s vision of heaven he said:

Slide 19

22 I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

As Christians, we really have nothing to fear an no need to be anxious about anything!

That is the difference that Jesus makes in our life.

Slide 20 (Each line flys in on click)

He gives us grace

He provides us space.

He empowers our race.

And He promises us a place.

This is His perfect love that casts out all fear.

Will you walk in it? And will you offer these things to others? Because, if you do, others will definitely see something different about you.

Jesus does make a difference. He absolutely changes our relationship with God and our relationship with others.