

Much to my wife's chagrin, I love rock and roll music. Not the soft stuff – but real rock, like The Who – who I think is the greatest rock and roll band, Yes, a close second, Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin, to name a few. Whenever I listen to one of them she says how can I listen to such horrible music – but that is only her opinion. She likes singers like Andy Williams, Perry Como and Engleberdt Humperdinck, so we won't go there.

However, whatever the genre, most popular music is about love – looking for love, losing a love, longing for love. In fact a song that was popular back in the 70's was "I've been looking for love in all the wrong places."

To paraphrase that song, people are looking for love in all the wrong places – they are looking for peace, contentment, acceptance and purpose – in all the wrong places. They are looking for it in money, sex, power and other temporary things.

Turn with me to our Gospel lesson from today to St. Matthew 11:2-10. The nation of Israel, which at this time was under Roman rule, was looking for the long-promised Messiah. The Prophets had spoke and written of him and the faithful believers were waiting for him.

One of the things that was promised about the coming Messiah, was that someone would come before him heralding his coming. This someone was John the Baptizer, who preached a Baptism of Repentance because the Messiah was coming soon.

In the providence of God, John was throne into prison, and it was while there that he sent his disciples to Jesus to inquire if he was the one or should they look for another. This is what we read in our Gospel lesson this morning. And we read our Savior's response – St. Matthew 11:4-6 (READ).

Jesus is essentially telling the disciples of John that they don't need to look any further – that he indeed is the one – the one who was promised. He said, just look at what he does – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the gospel is preached to them.

Throughout Jewish history the various servants of God such as Moses, Joshua, Prophets such as Daniel, Elijah and Elisha had performed miracles – that is wondrous and miraculous signs – things that were not in the normal realm of things. We remember Moses before Pharaoh and the 12 plagues ... the parting for the Red Sea and the water from the rock. We remember Joshua and walls of Jericho. We remember Daniel and his interpretation of dreams. And there were other signs in the Old Testament.

We also know that the Apostles were able to perform miracles, but this was specifically for the purpose of authenticating the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – that he was the one and only Messiah.

But none of the prophets or Apostles did the amount of things that Jesus did and with the same scope that he did. In a nutshell, there has been no one like Jesus, either before or after.

To my knowledge, none of the founders of the other religions – both major, like Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhism, Hinduism or Mormonism and minor ones have had a person on the order of the Lord Jesus Christ who did miracles and signs in order to authenticate his or her message. Jesus is in a word, unique – one of a kind. There has never been or will be anyone, other than Jesus, who would or could prove who they were by what they did.

And that is exactly what Jesus tells the disciples of John – St. Matthew 11:4-6 (READ AGAIN). Jesus is telling them – You do not need to look any further, I am the one. Jesus is telling them that he is the one and only – the long-promised Messiah.

We have looked before at the effects that true Christianity has had on the world. A world without Christianity is a nasty place. We have also considered the worldly evidences of Christianity – the arts, the music, the buildings, the books and so forth as the proof of Christianity. The world and our lives would be a much poorer place without Christianity and the effects of Christians on the world.

Consider the season that we are in – the Advent and Christmas Season, at least here in the US and the countries that celebrate Christmas. Now, I am not counting all the commercialism that is involved in the season – although that is, hopefully, a positive things for retailers and stores.

Think about the music – we hear it everywhere – much of it proclaiming the Gospel message. Think about the beautiful lights that you see at night as we drive around. And remember, that Jesus is the light of the world. Think about the attitudes of people. There seems to be gentler, giving spirit among people. People are collecting toys for tots and other charities. These would not be there without the seasons of Advent and Christmas.

But I would like us think about another effect of the coming of Christ – the Messiah — and that is the untold number of lives that have been changed because of Christ.

Of course, at the beginning there were the original Apostles. Here we had 11, and then Matthais who replaced Judas, who went from those who were hiding for their lives after the crucifixion, to those who went to all the known world proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah – the Savior of all who believe in him. All, with the exception of John, being put to death for their faith and trust in Christ.

Then there was Paul. He went from Saul who persecuted the Christians, arresting them and having some put to death, to one who brought Christianity to the Gentiles – suffering greatly for Christ, and eventually giving his life also for Christ.

But there is also the every day Christian. Last week Lilah and I went to banquet sponsored by OMF, a missionary organization started by Hudson Taylor in China, with work now in Asia. Lilah's parents were with it's precursor, the China Inland Mission.

One of speakers – a Chinese couple, told us about the missionaries who were martyred during the Boxer rebellion in China in 1900. 179 missionaries, including 26 children were killed because of their faith in Christ. Their faith in Christ as Savior was the only reason that they were murdered. They were singled out as Christians, and martyred because of their faith in Christ.

And through the years countless Christians have been martyred because of their faith. It is happening today in India, Pakistan, Iraq and many other countries around the world. In those countries, if you are a Christian, you are a marked person – and sometimes they pay for their faith with their lives.

If we are honest – we look at these people and their lives were changed because of Christ AND they were willing to die for him.

Last week we heard from the Jerdans. They have spent 37 years in a foreign country proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never heard it. Why would they leave the comfort and relative security of the US to go to a country where what they had to say would not be wanted and in most cases, not accepted? It was to tell unbelievers the one and only Gospel of Jesus Christ.

My brother spent 17 years in Italy proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He often did his evangelism in front of the Cathedral in Milan – where you could count the people going in on a Sunday Morning. This Cathedral – the fourth largest in the world, took 5 centuries – 500 years to complete. And yet, it is empty on Sunday mornings.

Italy is considered a Catholic nation – but the average Italian goes to church 3 times in their lives – to be baptized, married and buried. They need the Gospel of Jesus Christ – that he is the Messiah who came, lived, was crucified, buried and rose again for this sins of those who would believe in him.

We have heard from Judy King, our missionary in Brazil, who has gone through countless troubles to bring the Gospel to the Apurina Indians – who never had a Gospel witness. Her Christmas letter is in your bulletins – from one who often lives in the jungle and has gotten Malaria countless times, along with Hansen's disease, otherwise known as leprosy – why – all to bring the Gospel to those who have never heard it.

And then a couple of months ago we heard from the Buckman's – again, serving in Brazil, bring the Gospel to those who have never heard it – and now training others to go out in the name of Christ. Again, another letter that is in you church bulletins that you received this morning.

Why? Because of the one who has come – Jesus the Messiah – the only way of salvation.

People always say that they want proof that Christianity is the way to God. In my mind the proof is out there. The proof is the things that I have mentioned – art, music, books, buildings – but most importantly in changed lives – lives that because of the of the Holy Spirit came to faith in Christ and were willing to do anything including die for him.

I already mentioned the Apostles. Hudson Taylor buried two wives in China. Lilah and her family were put under house arrest in China because they were Christians. You can read Foxe's Book of Martyrs to get an idea of those who died for the faith. Thomas Cramner, the author of our Book of Common Prayer was burned at the stake because of his faith in Christ alone. I could go on for hours, possibly days reciting those who died for their faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.

Just yesterday I received this in an email – again, talking about a life changed by Christ:

Back in the 50's there was a well known radio host/comedian/song writer in Hollywood named Stuart Hamblen who was noted for his drinking, womanizing, partying, etc.

One of his bigger hits at the time was "I won't go hunting with you Jake, but I'll go chasing women."

One day, along came a young preacher holding a tent revival. Hamblen had him on his radio show presumably to poke fun at him. In order to gather more material for his show, Hamblen showed up at one of the revival meetings.

Early in the service the preacher announced, "There is one man in this audience who is a big fake." There were probably others who thought the same thing, but Hamblen was convinced that he was the one the preacher was talking about (some would call that conviction) but he was having none of that.

Still the words continued to haunt him until a couple of nights later he showed up drunk at the preacher's hotel door around 2AM demanding that the preacher pray for him! But the preacher refused, saying, "This is between you and God and I'm not going to get in the middle of it." But he did invite Stuart in and they talked until about 5 AM at which point Stuart dropped to his knees and with tears, cried out to God.

But that is not the end of the story. Stuart quit drinking, quit chasing women, quit everything that was 'fun.'

Soon he began to lose favor with the Hollywood crowd. He was ultimately fired by the radio station when he refused to accept a beer company as a sponsor. Hard times were upon him. He tried writing a couple of "Christian" songs but the only one that had much success was "This Old House", written for his friend Rosemary Clooney.

As he continued to struggle, a long time friend named John took him aside and told him, "All your troubles started when you 'got religion,' was it worth it all?" Stuart answered simply, "Yes."

Then his friend asked, "You liked your booze so much, don't you ever miss it?" His answer was, "No." John then said, "I don't understand how you could give it up so easily..."

And Stuart's response was, "It's no big secret. All things are possible with God." To this John said, "That's a catchy phrase. You should write a song about it."

And as they say, "The rest is history." The song Carl Stuart Hamblen wrote was "It Is No Secret."

*"It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you. With arms wide open, He'll welcome you. It is no secret, what God can do..."*

By the way... the friend was John Wayne. And the young preacher who refused to pray for Stuart Hamblen? ... That was Billy Graham.

And lastly – what about all of you? Why aren't you home in bed or at the grocery store or the mall? Why do you give your hard earned money to support the church? Why do you help out on Sunday morning?

The point of it all is in answer to the question that John had: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" The long-promised Messiah has indeed come. He was born in the little town of Bethlehem – he lived, died and rose from the dead for the sins of those who believe in him. And this is what Advent and Christmas is all about.

This Advent and Christmas season we celebrate the birth of the one who has come and is coming again. May his Spirit have the same effect on our lives as it did on the Apostles and the multitude of Christians who have served the Lord Jesus Christ, and in many cases have given their lives for him.