

American Idol

by David Servant

The sermon highlights the differences between American Jesus and Bible Jesus, warning against the idolatry of worshipping a watered-down version of Jesus.

Scripture: Matthew 6:19, Matthew 7:21, Matthew 24:44, Luke 13:3, Luke 18:8, John 8:31, 1 John 2:3

Topics: "False Idolatry", "Discipleship"

Description

David Servant preaches about the dangers of creating a version of Jesus that aligns with our preferences rather than the Jesus revealed in Scripture. He contrasts 'American Jesus' with 'Bible Jesus,' highlighting how American Jesus emphasizes grace without transformation, eternal security without obedience, and prosperity without sacrificial giving. The core difference lies in how Bible Jesus calls for repentance, discipleship, and passionate devotion, while American Jesus offers a diluted version of faith that lacks true commitment and obedience.

Transcript

Imagine a person taking a block of wood and carving it to look like a bearded man in a robe. At the bottom of his wooden figurine, he carves the name "Jesus." Finally, each day he bows before it in worship. Does that make him a Christian?

No, that makes him an idolater. He is worshipping something that he has named Jesus but who is not Jesus at all. His wooden god is a grave insult to Jesus.

In a similar fashion, modern American Christendom has created many versions of Jesus that hardly resemble the Jesus who is revealed in Scripture. Having created a god to their own liking, those who worship "American Jesus" are no less idolatrous and no more Christian than the woodcarver I've just described.

What are the differences between American Jesus and Bible Jesus? American Jesus comes in many varieties, but let's compare a few of the attributes of the most popular versions with Bible Jesus.

Bible Jesus said that only those who do the will of His Father, keeping His commandments, will enter the kingdom of heaven. All others will be cast into hell, even those who called Him their Lord (see Matt. 7:13-27). Bible Jesus warned that the hateful, the lustful, the unforgiving, the selfish and greedy would not be saved (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-30; 6:14-15, 19-24; 25:31-46).

By contrast, American Jesus doesn't stress holiness nearly so much. He certainly never says that obedience is essential for one to gain eternal life. Those who believe that are legalists, he says. He is always stressing God's grace, but it is a grace that overlooks and forgives yet doesn't transform. American Jesus believes that faith without works can save and that there is an entire class of heaven-bound believers called "carnal Christians" who are indistinguishable from unsaved people.

Using unmistakable terms, Bible Jesus warned His closest disciples of the possibility of their not being ready for His return if they returned to sin. He warned those closest disciples that they would be cast into hell if they weren't ready when He returned (Matt. 24:32-51; 25:1-30).

American Jesus, on the other hand, believes that once you are saved you will always be saved. You are guaranteed a place in heaven regardless of how you live your life. He often tells his audiences that he died for all their sins, past, present and future, and so there is no sin that they can commit for which he didn't die. So they are quite safe in his grace. (No one ever seems to ask if that means that everyone will be saved in the end, since Jesus died for everyone's sins, past, present and future.)

Bible Jesus, not knowing the time of His return, told His followers that they might well need to run for the hills because of the great tribulation which would arise at the time that the antichrist would enter the Jerusalem temple. Some of them would be martyred. He promised that after cataclysmic events, He would "send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other" (Matt. 24:3-36).

American Jesus promises that all his own will be taken up to heaven before any tribulation begins, because surely God would not allow the people he loves to be so persecuted. (Those who believe in American Jesus often have little idea of how much persecution is being endured around the world by those who believe in Bible Jesus. Neither do they care.) American Jesus will return twice, and His second return will follow His first return by seven years. He forgot to tell his disciples about this.

Bible Jesus commanded His followers to sell their possessions, give to charity, and lay up treasures in heaven. He commanded them not to lay up treasures on earth. He said that those who do are full of darkness (see Matt. 6:19-24; Luke 12:33). Even those who scrupulously tithe, like the scribes and Pharisees, could be lovers of money (see Luke 11:42; 16:14; 18:12).

American Jesus often tells his followers just the opposite. He wants to give them more treasures to lay up on earth and make them even richer than they already are. He promises prosperity for just 10% of their income. Interestingly, according to pollster George Barna, no more than 8% of the people who believe in American Jesus actually do give at least 10% of their income to his cause.

Bible Jesus taught His disciples to pray that His Father's name would be hallowed, that His kingdom would come and His will would be perfectly done on earth. He taught them to make request for their daily bread and for deliverance from evil (see Matt. 6:9-13).

American Jesus teaches his disciples to pray the prayer of Jabez and to claim their covenant rights to gain more wealth.

Bible Jesus told everyone to repent, and warned them if they didn't they would perish. He declared that repentance was a requirement for forgiveness (see Matt. 4:17; Luke 5:32, 13:3-5; 24:47).

American Jesus rarely mentions repentance. He most often just asks people to accept him as savior.

Bible Jesus often spoke about hell and warned of its terrors (see Matt. 5:2, 29-30; 8:12; 10:28; 13:41-42, 49-50; 18:9; 22:13; 23:33; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28).

American Jesus doesn't want to scare anyone by mentioning hell, as it might offend people who are going to hell, and that hinders church growth.

Bible Jesus told His ministers that their goal was to make disciples who would obey all of His commandments (see Matt. 28:19-20).

American Jesus tells his ministers that their goal is to gather the largest possible crowds on Sunday mornings.

Bible Jesus promised freedom from sin to those who would become His true disciples and abide in His Word (see John 8:31-36).

American Jesus makes no such promises. Sinners and addicts must wait until heaven for any hope of freedom. American Jesus does offer psychological counseling and support groups.

Bible Jesus believed that being a believer in Him and being His disciple were synonymous. He called everyone to take the first step in a relationship with Him by becoming His committed disciple (see Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 14:25-35; John 8:30-31).

American Jesus believes one can be a heaven-bound believer even if he never becomes a disciple, which is an optional step for believers who really want to commit themselves to him.

Bible Jesus calls for passionate devotion. He declared that we are not worthy of Him if we love our parents or our children more than Him. We can't come after Him unless we deny ourselves and take up our cross (see Matt. 10:37-38; 16:24).

American Jesus doesn't mind taking second place to more exciting things like football, NASCAR and WWF.

The chief difference between Bible Jesus and American Jesus is this: Bible Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, almighty Son of God, and soon-coming Judge of all, whereas American Jesus is only savior and friend. The chief difference between those who believe in Bible Jesus and those who believe in American Jesus is this: Those who believe in Bible Jesus obey His commandments and love the brethren (see 1 John 2:3-6; 3:9-10, 14), while those who believe in American Jesus possess a thin veneer of holiness and don't care about the brethren. In fact, they often hate and criticize Jesus' true followers, calling them "unbalanced fanatics" or "legalists" or "holier-than-thous" (see 1 John 2:9, 11, 19; 3:14; 4:20).

But here is the most sobering fact: People are saved, not when they believe that salvation is by faith, but when they believe in a person, a divine person named Jesus Christ (see John 3:16). That being so, it ought to concern us when so many people who claim to be Christians believe in a Jesus who is so vastly different from Bible Jesus. People who believe in American Jesus actually don't believe in Jesus at all. American Jesus is an American idol.

When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?--Jesus (Luke 18:8).

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