

March 9, 2016

Hebrews 10:32-33

“Blending In”

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Adults: does everyone at your job, or in your neighborhood, know that you're a Christian? Does anyone at your job, or in your neighborhood, know that you're a follower of Jesus?

Confirmation students: does everyone at your school know that you're a Christian? Does anyone at your school know that you're a follower of Jesus?

Many of us are Christians who believe in Jesus, love Jesus, worship Jesus when we're here in church ... but out there we just blend in with everybody else. Is that you? Do people out there even know that you're a Christian? Or are you really good at blending in?

I want to talk to you tonight about the danger of blending in too much. We read in our Scripture lesson tonight about the Hebrew Christians who suffered persecution for their faith. Here in our American society, it's pretty easy for us to come to church, go to confirmation class, and say our prayers at night – and then, 95% of the time, act just like everybody else. We all like to fit in at school or at work, and be accepted. No one wants to be a social reject, or have people talking about us. So we blend in. Most of us are really good at blending in with our culture, and going with the flow.

But blending in like that can be a dangerous thing for a Christian. Because sometimes we end up being a Christian in name only. Are we living to please the world, or living to please God? Are we more concerned with what the people around us think of us, or more concerned with what God

thinks of us? Does the culture around us shape our values and determine our priorities, or does the Word of God?

Jesus calls us to follow him in faith, to believe in his sacrifice on the cross, and to trust in the salvation he gives us for free.

But Jesus is also challenging Christians like us to follow him in our day-to-day living. He wants us to imitate him with our words, our actions, our choices and decisions. He gives us his Spirit to empower our Christian living, and he promises to walk with us every moment of every day, and to help us to live in a whole new way.

I don't think Jesus doesn't want us to be religious extremists, and to act like Christian freaks out there. But I definitely think he wants you and me to recognize the danger of blending in too much.

I met some people a few months ago who are facing a different kind of danger. They just became Christians, and suddenly they're not blending in to their society at all. They're facing the danger of persecution, abuse, mockery, just for believing in Jesus.

I met these people back in October. I was in India, touring several Christian mission churches. On a Sunday morning, I had the privilege of participating in a baptism service for 12 brand-new Christians.

Now, to be baptized as a Christian in India is a huge, risky step. The vast majority of the population in India practices the Hindu religion. The whole Indian culture has been centered on Hinduism for thousands of years. Recently, Christianity has been growing in India, and God has been bringing over a million people a year to faith in Jesus Christ in that land. But, as the Christian church grows, so does the backlash against Christians. There's a growing resentment

against Christians. Many Christians in India are facing intense persecution. Often they are cast out of their families. They lose jobs, and become a disgrace in their communities. Acts of violence against Christians are increasing rapidly in India these days. So when a Hindu in India becomes a Christian, that person is suddenly way out of sync with the whole culture. There's no more blending in. Instead, there's a conscious decision, a clear recognition that, as followers of Jesus, they're going to have to stand up against their culture in many ways.

For that Sunday morning baptism service, I traveled with three other American pastors to visit a tiny little church, in a remote village. When the service was about to start, the Indian pastor, Pastor Solomon, motioned for the four of us to follow him. We walked out of the church door, went through an alley, and ended up on the main street of that village. There, standing in a little group, all wearing white clothes, were the 12 people who were going to be baptized.

I was wondering what was going on, and why they were outside on the street. But then it dawned on me. These people were going against their whole village by being baptized. So they were taking a bold public stand, for all to see. By standing in that street, they were saying, "I am following Jesus now. Do what you want to me. Think what you want of me. But I am following Jesus."

We came up to this group, standing there bravely. Pastor Solomon gestured to them, and then he pointed at me. "Pray," he said. So I prayed, as loud and as strong as I could. I prayed that God's Holy Spirit would make their faith strong. I prayed that the Spirit would bind each one of them to Jesus Christ and his love. I prayed that they would rejoice in the forgiveness of their sins. And I prayed that they would walk with Jesus every day, and that they would live with boldness and courage.

I finished my prayer, and we all marched through the alley and into the church. We baptized those twelve brave, faithful souls during the service. I prayed for them out in the street that day, and I'm praying for them still. Because I know it's hard for them to follow Jesus where they live.

The truth is, I think it's getting harder and harder for Christians like us to really follow Jesus where we live. We're not suffering for our faith here in America; but maybe we need to stand up to our American culture more than we do. Maybe we need to stop following our society so much, and following Jesus more.

I'll admit it, it's easier for me to just blend in and to live like everybody else in my neighborhood. It's probably easier for you, too, when you're hanging out with your friends, when you're at school or in your workplace, to fit in, to be cool, to just act like everybody else does.

Tonight, let's all recognize the danger of blending in too much. Let's honor Christ with our lives, instead of letting our culture dictate the kind of people we're going to be. Let's walk with Jesus, listen to his voice, and be guided each day by his Word – rather than going with the flow, and acting and reacting just like everybody else.

I'm going to ask you to do something a little bit different tonight. The Indian baptism service began out in the street. Let's end our service by going out these doors together. We're not going to stand in the middle of Rogers Road; but let's stand together in the middle of the circle out there. And I want to pray with you out loud, in public, just like I did for those 12 brand-new Christians. Because you have to live your life in public. You have to live out your faith in the real world every day.

So let's skip our final hymn tonight. Bring your offering envelope and your prayer request cards, grab your stuff, and let's all go out to the circle together. We'll finish our service outside tonight. You can give your offering and prayer requests at the door on the way out. Here we go!