

## **Series Slide**

Phoebe Bridgers is a 28 year old singer, songwriter, guitarist and record producer.

She is an extremely popular indie artist- now with a mainstream following of over 6.5 million monthly listeners.

Her 2020 album “Punisher” brought her 4 grammy nominations- including Best New Artist.

There is a song on that album called “Chinese Satellite”. The song is written from the perspective of a person who has lost a loved one to death, and about the longing she has to see this loved one- even though she doesn’t believe there is a god or any sort of afterlife.

Here’s the first chorus:

**“Took a tour to see the stars**

**But they weren’t out tonight**

**So I wished hard on a Chinese Satellite**

**I want to believe**

**Instead, I look at the sky and I feel nothing**

**You know I hate to be alone**

**I want to be wrong”**

Here’s what Phoebe said about this song- in her own words:

**I have no faith — and that’s what it’s about. My friend Harry put it in the best way ever once. He was like, “Man, sometimes I just wish I could make the Jesus leap.” But I can’t do it. I mean, I definitely have weird beliefs that come from nothing. I wasn’t raised religious. I do yoga and stuff. I think breathing is important. But that’s pretty much as far as it goes. I like to believe that ghosts and aliens exist, but I kind of doubt it. I love science — I think science is like the closest thing to that that you’ll get. If I’m being honest, this song is about turning 11 and not getting a letter from Hogwarts, just realizing that nobody’s going to save me from my life, nobody’s going to wake me up and be like, “Hey, just kidding. Actually, it’s really a lot more special than this, and you’re special.” No, I’m going to be the way that I am forever. I mean, secretly, I am still waiting on**

that letter, which is also that part of the song, that I want someone to shake me awake in the middle of the night and be like, “Come with me. It’s actually totally different than you ever thought.” That’d be sweet.

Whether Phoebe Bridgers is aware of this or not- she just gave a perfect example of one of the most prevalent philosophical ideas of present-day Americans. **“We’re all just Buffered Selves living in the Age of Authenticity”.**

Don’t worry- I’m going to explain that.

**Title Slide: “Chinese Satellite: How (Not) to Suppress Transcendence”- Mark 1:9-15**

We’re spending 4 sermons learning some of the most prevalent ways of thinking in 21st century America- and how they do or don’t jibe with what the Bible says about who we are as humans...and what it means to think like Jesus- or as the Apostle Paul puts it- to “Have the Mind of Christ”.

So lets go today- to Jesus himself from the gospel of Mark.

**Mark 1:9-18**

**9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. 10 As soon as he came up out of the water, he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased.”**

**12 Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.**

**14 After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God: 15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news! ”**

**16 As he passed alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon’s brother, casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. 17 “Follow me,”**

**Jesus told them, “and I will make you fish for people.” 18 Immediately they left their nets and followed him**

**1) We keep ourselves buffered from transcendence because we’re afraid of vulnerability.**

In “Chinese Satellite”- Phoebe Bridgers sings that she wished upon a Chinese Satellite. In other words, she deeply wanted to believe in a loving God that would reunite us with our loved ones when we die...but instead of stars created by a God- she only found a space junk created by humans.

This is a basic idea of the buffered self. We have buffered ourselves from transcendence. Like Phoebe Bridgers said, “I wish I could make the Jesus leap...but I can’t do it. I think Science is the closest you’ll get.”

So here’s the big question. Why did the majority of every human being for thousands and thousands of years accept the notion of the existence of some kind of transcendent god- in fact- the vast majority of the 21st century global south still does...so what is it about 21st century westerners?

Well- just think through your week. Where did your groceries come from? Probably a grocery store. How did you get to work and back? Probably one of your 2 cars. The fact is- we have very little dependence on anyone outside of us. At least that we ever pick our heads up and recognize. We just tend to believe without ever thinking- that all of what we need will be there when we need it, And if its not- we’ll figure out a way to use our money to buy it.

This has led our world to disenchantment. Everything is predictable. The spiritual realm has absolutely nothing to do with our day to day lives- thats what it means to be disenchanted. All there is what we see nothing is enchanted. Even those of us who call ourselves Christians and say we believe in God tend to live like we don’t. Because we don’t really have a need for God. We are self-sufficient.

Ask yourself this question. Other than teaching doctrine to your kids...or doing things like praying for meals or just sort of knowing the “right” theological answers to big questions- do you actively live your life any differently than someone who doesn’t believe in God?

That is the buffered self.

So that buffering from the transcendent- from the spiritual world. That ends up translating to a resistance to vulnerability all the way around. In other words- we don't really believe we are vulnerable to drought, illness, disease, or danger of any kind- because we are such self-sufficient- non dependent creatures- we all end up as autonomous individuals living in this little bubble. Which means we tend not see how we need other people either. So we limit our vulnerability to other people hurting us- and that means we lose all meaning outside of ourselves...which means- any meaning for our lives that we want- we just have to make up or look deep inside of ourselves to find to see how we feel.

Which leads to what we talked about a couple of weeks ago- expressive or competitive individualism...just sort of showing the world or proving to the world that we matter and the meaning and purpose we have created for ourselves is worthwhile and should be honored and celebrated.

Which is why the philosopher Charles Taylor- calls this the "Age of Authenticity". Because our highest value as buffered selves living as if there is no spiritual reality- is just showing the world our Authentic selves.

Give me 5 minutes on any social media platform and I can show you this popping up all over the place in your timeline.

So here's the question- do we find humans in a better mental and emotional state today in 21st America- than we did say- 500 years ago?

I would offer to you the answer to that is no. We don't.

Because we are so cut off from the spiritual- from our need for meaning and transcendence- we all live with this nagging sense that we are missing something. We want something more to be there- but we are too afraid of the vulnerability of losing our sense of control. The ability to control what our lives mean. The ability to control our own little worlds.

So- back to Chinese Satellite and Phoebe Bridgers- we all have this nagging longing for something transcendent- but we just can't "make the Jesus leap".

We all want that letter from Hogwarts (which is something that happens in Harry Potters world..he was living in this depressing disenchanted existence- and then he got his invitation to attend Hogwarts School of Wizarding- and a whole new spiritual world- something bigger than him and beyond him completely changed his view about the world).

I mean Phoebe Bridgers sings- “I want to be wrong”. I don't want to be alone in my little bubble of self-sufficiency.

She says

**I mean, secretly, I am still waiting on that letter, which is also that part of the song, that I want someone to shake me awake in the middle of the night and be like, “Come with me. It’s actually totally different than you ever thought.” That’d be sweet.**

Notice what Phoebe Bridgers longs for. Someone outside of her to blow the lid off her buffered life- with an invitation. “Come with me. It's actually totally different than you've ever thought!

Now- look what Jesus says in this passage we in Mark's Gospel.

**v 17**

It's the invitation to transcendence. Follow me. You are not just fishermen. There is a world bigger than you- a kingdom bigger than the one you think you are in. Follow me and I'll show you. Follow me and I will re-orient you to the spiritual reality. Follow me and I will give you a purpose that draws other people into that same transcendent reality.

But it's going to take vulnerability. You are going to lose something. You will have to walk away from the familiar- Drop your nets!

Their fishing jobs would have been their security blankets for the future. Jesus is saying - “if you want to join me in something bigger than you- the Kingdom of God- you are going to have to make yourself vulnerable and dependent. Instead of buffered and dependent.”

That's the problem we all have- that we share with Phoebe Bridgers.

We don't want to look like a fool. We don't want to be tricked. We don't want to rely on God. We don't want to trust and have faith...even though- deep down we DO. We can't make that Jesus leap. Because it's too scary....too vulnerable. It opens up the door for disappointment.

But what's strange- Phoebe seems pretty disappointed by her life buffered from transcendence anyway. And that's the paradox.

Which is why Jesus says things like this a couple of chapters later

**Mark 8:34-36**

**34 Calling the crowd along with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it. 36 For what does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life?”**

This IS a letter from Hogwarts.

to follow Jesus is a call to vulnerability. To letting go. to losing control of your own life. its letting go of creating your own meaning. Its letting go of the lie of self sufficiency. That you can provide all you need for yourself. Its being called up into a higher purpose- living with Jesus as Lord- and announcing this to the world with joy by the way you live by faith in him.

But don't you see. Its dangerous. And it doesn't come from expressing your authentic self- but crucifying your authentic self. Jesus said “The Kingdom of God is at hand”. The “something more” you've always hoped for is here- and its going to break into this world more and more. But to access it- you have to drop the nets of your buffered life- take Jesus at his word...and let the buffered self die.

### **Back to 1)**

But thats exactly what scares us the most.

We want to be authentic. To show people who we “really are”.

Like Phoebe Bridgers in this song. I'm really this person who has this inner longing for transcendence. Listen to me. Appreciate me. But DON'T try to change me.

We want people to notice us...and then weirdly- leave us alone. Don't rock my boat. Don't tell me to be different.

**The Authentic self- “This is me; you must accept me as I am”**

**The Vulnerable self- “This is me; take me and transform me.”**

Remember a couple of weeks ago- that passage in Romans 12

**Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.**

**2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.**

Notice- in view of the mercies of God- that itself is vulnerability. I am not self-sufficient. I need God. Not only is every good gift from him (including all the things I buy from the grocery store that it can seem that I have earned and am entitled to)- but also I need his mercy because I have a higher transcendent calling to show the world who God is- what he is like- how he loves- and I have buffered myself from him. I have sinned. I have made this world about me. Which means we need God's forgiveness. His mercy to transform us.

And look- God is asking us to express our authentic selves...he says present your bodies as a living sacrifice. Live not for yourself- but for God. Drop your nets and I will make you fishers of men.

Or as Jesus preached "REPENT! Change! Turn around! Stop going the way you are going and follow me! Because I'm offering you a way into the enchanted- something more enchanted than a letter to hogwarts- The kingdom of God!

And look- we love "don't be conformed to this age"- but we translate that as "Be your authentic self. Don't let anybody else tell you who you are. Baby you're a firework. Your true colors are beautiful. Show the world who you are.

But then- we get hit with this "have your mind renewed". Change. Repent. Turn around.

**Back to 1)**

Not to beat a dead Hogwarts...but this requires vulnerability.

Honestly- its a vulnerability we rarely encounter. Like when a loved one dies. At the birth of a child. or these few sort of transcendent moment that break through our buffered lives and whisper like a little baby Switchfoot in our ear "You were made to live for so much more".

Transition: Now let me show you how...by showing you the Mind of Christ.

**2) When know God as a loving Father, you know he won't leave you homeless- and that changes the way you in a broken world.**

Listen to the final lyrics in "Chinese Satellite"

**Sometimes, when I can't sleep**

**It's just a matter of time before I'm hearing things**

**Swore I could feel you through the walls**

**But that's impossible**

**I want to believe**

**That if I go outside I'll see a tractor beam**

**Coming to take me to where I'm from**

**I want to go home**

There is this nagging sense for Phoebe Bridgers that there is a relationship of love that transcends death. But her buffered self just can't live beyond what she sees and what science tells her. Yet there is that desire. I want to believe.

She wants to believe that like an alien spaceship- a tractor beam will pull her up to the heavens- and she'll finally find the love she was made for.

Isn't that what home is supposed to be.

Home is where love is transcendent. Bigger than us. Unconditional.

Home is where we find family that doesn't put us on trial, but says- this is where you belong.

It's remarkable to me that in all of the supposed advancement of our scientific age- our age of the buffered self- that our families are more broken and wrecked than ever before. In fact- it is a self-perpetuating problem. I mean- if I'm supposed to be my authentic self- and not be vulnerable to you changing me. If I'm not supposed to crucify my desires to live for something transcendent...well- when my authentic self needs to leave my family to be true to my love for someone who I'm not married to... well then I'm sorry about the pain and fall out for my kids- But I've got to go be me!

It's interesting though- Why does Phoebe Bridgers think she needs to suppress this desire- to be connected to the transcendent. She WANTS to believe. What makes that NOT a part of her transcendent self. Why should she crucify her desire for a transcendent home...but trust her desire to be bi-sexual (which she is).



How do you know what desires to crucify- and what desires are your authentic self?

The buffered self can never answer this question.

But Jesus can. And did. And will again and again for you.

### **Mark 1:10-11**

Look at the transcendent. Look at the tractor beam. At Jesus' baptism, the heavens open up, the Spirit of God is palpable and present...and all those around hear this clear message from the Heavenly Father- "This is my beloved So, with you I am well pleased."

Whether or not you watched the Original Fresh Prince of Bel-Air when it first aired or not- you very well may have seen this powerful scene on social media- as it has often made its rounds- especially on Father's Day.

Will, the main character, is estranged from his dad. and in an episode- his dad shows up. And Will is stoked. He is finally getting the attention he has always craved from his Father. But his Father ends up making a bunch of promises and leaving Will...again.

And in this incredibly moving scene...Will tries to be cool...but then he gets really angry...and then- he breaks. And he falls into his Uncle Phil's arms weeping saying "Why don't he want me?"

Listen- I know some of you can feel that way about God. And that typically happens when inside of our little buffered world- that our self-sufficiency doesn't add up to the success and nice life we thought it would. And if there isn't more...if there isn't something bigger than our lives right here, right now- you have reason to be upset.

But that is not what God promised. There is more. And he is going to deliver.

He will deliver to you exactly what he did to Jesus. He wants you to hear him as your father- "You are my beloved child with whom I'm well pleased."

In Harry Potter- this is what Harry longs for. A parental connection. To know his parents loved him. Hogwarts is the first step of that truth opening up to Harry. its the beginning of his own home going.

This statement from the Heavenly Father over Jesus- God the son- is a statement about HOME. Its a reminder of transcendent identity. You are a stranger in this world. You will be abandoned and rejected- but in all of it- don't buffer yourself from my love. Live in my presence. Live in the announcement of my love. I love you. I'm pleased with you. I'm proud of you.

This longing breaks into every second of our existence. Show me a person who is SURE- POSITIVE of the unconditional love- and I'll show you someone who cannot be broken- no matter what the world throws at them.

Show me someone confident in their identity as a beloved child of God- and I'll show you a non-anxious presence in the middle of all of life's poop storms.

### **v 12-13**

And non-coincidentally- Jesus is directly sent by the Holy Spirit into a demonic poop storm.

The wilderness is- well- wild. Out of control. It is the exact opposite of the buffered self. In the wilderness- there are no illusions of self-sufficiency. Jesus has no food. No water. And- he recognizes the evil spiritual force coming against him. His adversary, Satan- is there to tempt him.

Mark doesn't write it down, but do you know what all the temptations were? They were the temptations of the buffered self.

Turn this stone into bread. In other words- the here and now is all there is. you have No transcendent mission or purpose. So provide for yourself. No one else is going to do it.

Then- Jump off the temple to prove your authentic self. Show everybody who you really are!

Then- I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world. Everything can be yours if you just ignore the voice, the calling, the purpose, the love of your father- and worship me.

But Jesus could see- past the lies. He never let that voice of his Father- "You are my beloved son. I'm proud of you" he never let it leave his mind. He was not conformed by the spirit of the age...instead- he was transformed by the word of his Father.

### **v 14-15**

Jesus who was authentically God- instead of merely letting out all of his power- all of his majesty- all of his glory out on us- limited himself. He became one of us. He came into our suffering. Jesus is the transcendent God descending into our immanent world. And not only that. he allowed himself to be betrayed- to be arrested for the crime of... well- telling people he is the transcendent God. They crucified him for saying what his Father said about him- That he is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased. He was killed for telling the truth about transcendence. That the Kingdom of God had come near. That was the good news!

### **Matthew 27:50-51**

And after he was arrested, he was crucified. And upon his death- the curtain of the temple was torn in two- from top to bottom- the transcendent down to the immanent. The curtain represented the idea that God was eternally separated from humanity. That he was only a threat- not a Father.

When that curtain tore upon Jesus' death- it was saying- "Come Home- everything you've wanted God to be- is actually true." it was the tractor Beam

### **Matthew 27:54**

And look who was drawn in. The very Centurion that heard Jesus cry his last breath- confesses- agrees with the voice of the Father- "Surely this man is the Son of God."

Which for a Roman Centurion is not merely a theological statement. this is what they called the Caesar. The Son of God. This is also a confession that Jesus is Lord. Not Caesar.

### **Back to 2)**

When we confess that the transcendent God is our father- that amongst all the drought, the temptation, the humility of our lives- that we Know the Father loves us- that he wants us. And that he made a way for us to come home to him...that his resurrection is a preview of our own resurrection and home going- the same thing that is true about Jesus, becomes true about us.

And Jesus doesn't leave us to figure out which desires we should follow and which ones we should crucify- because he says "Come follow me". For a Rabbi- this meant follow my teaching. Listen to what I say- and do it.

And in the Scripture- we have that. We have the ancient, beautiful transcendent wisdom of God. We have the Mind of Christ.

Because Jesus died for us- we have God's forgiveness, his teaching, and his invitation to come home to him as the Father that calls us his beloved children.

Because of Jesus we know our buffered selves were wrong. We are not alone. And everything Phoebe Bridgers wants to be true- is. Look to Jesus. He is a tractor beam saying "Come Follow me. Come Home. Come with me. Its actually different than you ever thought." And yes Phoebe Bridgers.

It is Sweet.

