



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau
January 10, 2016

"Shorting Jesus" (ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS Series)
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun

We've started the year with a new sermon series called Encounters with Jesus, which Pastor Steve kicked off last week. In the series, we are going to look at many of the main encounters people had with Jesus. And through them, we will learn life lessons, faith lessons, and how maybe we should or should not respond to God. We will also learn more about the character of God.

It's great to be back. Normally after Christmas I take a short break. My kids all flew in for Christmas. But before they did, unfortunate things happened to two of them.

A burglar broke into my son Dylan's New York City apartment a few days before he flew out to be with us! The burglar stole his laptop, which Dylan just bought two months ago. (Oh the pain!) A detective said last week that they are on it, that they know who did it, and that they are closing in on the guy. But I fear that by now, the laptop's in a pawnshop in Brooklyn.

As for my other son Quinn who lives in Central Harlem, he discovered as soon as he arrived that the laptop in his backpack was cracked and damaged. It was damaged so badly that it is unusable. Not sure if that happened on the plane.

And for my daughter Noelle who came to visit from San Francisco,

she accidentally dropped a glass of tea on her laptop keyboard a few days after Christmas causing the laptop to short out. She had edited a wedding video for 16 hours for a friend, but she lost all that work. She also couldn't get to a lot of her normal work stuff that was in the laptop too. So in two weeks my three children lost their three laptops. What's the chance?

Sometimes the holiday or post-holiday season can bring tidings of great joy or no joy. Or it can bring unexpected sorrow. We know because of what I shared earlier in the service that there can also be tragedy and grief. How was your holiday season? How has the new year gone so far?

Many of us gather here on Sunday morning believing that following Jesus can make a difference in our lives, even when we lose important parts of our lives (like laptops); even when we are depressed; even when a loved one passes away.

Many of us come to church not fully sold out to Jesus. That's understandable because we are all on a journey. But as we begin a new year, it's a good time to really think through what we really think about Jesus and life in general. Do we need to recalibrate for the new year?

I just saw the movie called *The Big Short*. It's about the financial meltdown of Wall Street that happened in 2008 because of banks

and brokerage firms making bad loans for the housing market, and the Federal government basically approving those loans.

The film talked about the concept of shorting the market. To "short" a stock means betting with real money that the stock price will go down and depreciate in value. The opposite of shorting is to go "long," which most people are more familiar with. If you go "long" on a stock, you are betting that the price of that stock will go up. So in playing the stock market, you have the option of shorting a stock—if you think it is going to fall — or going long on it, if you think the stock will increase in value.

So here's the spiritual lesson: While watching the movie, it occurred to me that many, many, many people are shorting Jesus. Meaning, they think that a life fully invested and committed to Jesus will make the value of their life go down. So they short Jesus by thinking that a life in Jesus is not worth it and so they put more value on a different lifestyle. They go long on other things in life, betting or investing in a lifestyle that minimizes Jesus or excludes Him because they think they will have bigger gains in life.

In essence, they are not betting with money but with their souls and their families' souls that a life minimizing or avoiding Jesus is better than being all in for Him and going long on Him.

These people believe that it is far better to invest in things (like their finances, education, career, beauty, health or even just taking care of their family) than to follow Jesus.

Now don't get me wrong – there is nothing inherently wrong with money, education, health, a job, or taking care of family. But if those areas are not centered on the Lord, we might be really going long on those things and going short on Jesus.

Those who are shorting Jesus are betting that if you live a life of service to others, if you live a life of following Jesus in all areas of life – money, recreation, sex, parenting, investing, volunteering, everything – it's not worth it. They believe that choosing your own way to live is better than letting Jesus tell you how to live.

When we don't make time for Jesus, when we don't talk or pray to Him, maybe it's not because of apathy or ignorance or laziness. Maybe it's because in our heart of hearts, we don't think He is good for us in the long run.

Relating this to church – we have to be careful that we don't make our programs or our ways of worship our false gods. The mission has to be bigger than our models of how we have done things.

The church is one of the few organizations that exists for people who are not part of the organization, meaning those who don't come to church. Our church should continually be thinking of ways, strategizing to reach those who are not here or those who don't have a relationship with Jesus.

A life in Christ has eternal consequences and really makes this life here on earth so much better – more joyful, peaceful, purposeful,

loving. Are we willing to share that good news with others in a way they might understand?

To make this possible, it may mean changing the way we like to worship or do ministry in order to welcome others of other generations or lifestyles.

The interesting thing is that when Jesus calls us to follow Him, He wants us to be all-in. Our money, our time, our possessions—all in for Him. Part of this sermon is about – what is preventing us from going all in with Jesus? What is pushing us to short Jesus and not go long on Him? These questions are the backdrop for the Scripture passage for the morning:

John 1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

John 1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him about whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

John 1:46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

John 1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, He said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

John 1:48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

John 1:49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 1:50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw

you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

John 1:51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Let's look at this passage verse by verse and seek the meaning of each individual verse.

John 1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me."

Jesus was known as a rabbi, a Hebrew teacher of the Law and morality. In the Jewish culture to follow a rabbi is a big deal. It's a great privilege.

And just so we understand, when a rabbi chooses someone, it is life changing. Only the best students in secondary school are chosen. Many young Jewish boys and their families want a rabbi to choose them. It raises the esteem of the entire family that their child was chosen. It's like your child getting picked by a very good school.

If a rabbi is approached by a family to have a child mentored by him, the rabbi may say no, and that the child should just "ply his trade," meaning he should go get a job and stick to that job because he's not fit to come and sit under the rabbi's teaching and learn the Torah, the Scriptures.

When students were chosen, they would be called "talmudim," meaning "disciples," in Hebrew. These special students would travel with the rabbi for long periods of time.

Talmudim are much different than just what we would call students. Students in the USA today might want to learn something for a grade or for a test or to please their teacher.

But a talmuldi – which is singular for talmudim— would want to BE LIKE his teacher. He would like to become his rabbi in every way – thinking, acting, behaving, and teaching like him. They were passionately devoted to their rabbi. They wanted to be like him. It was a very intense personal relationship with the rabbi. And that’s why only the best of the best were chosen.

So when Jesus chose Philip and said to him “Follow Me,” it was huge. When Jesus tells us to follow Him, that is huge. He is saying not only learn from me but also BE LIKE ME. That’s the model for all of us. To follow Jesus is to try to be like Him, and not just learn about Him.

If you ever wondered why those men Jesus called immediately dropped what they were doing when Jesus called them, it was because to be chosen by a rabbi was a huge honor in the community. Their parents would approve. They and their sons were all in to follow this rabbi.

Know that back in first century these were teenagers or at most really young adults. Don’t think the first disciples were all 50-year old men. No, they were in their teens or early twenties probably. Jesus built His movement on the backs of young adults who were all-in, sold out for Him.

John 1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

Bethsaida was a small fishing village of only about 600 people back in the first century. It was not a big city like Jerusalem, and not particularly impressive.

God calls some of us out of unknown places. Never think that your background disqualifies you from

being called by Jesus.

A curious thing happens in the next verses of our passage. It’s not that Jesus disqualifies Philip or Nathanael, but NATHANAEL disqualifies Jesus.

John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

John 1:46 Nathanael said to Him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to Him, “Come and see.”

What was Nazareth like that Nathanael would say this?

Nazareth was located in Galilee way up north of Jerusalem. It was to the west of the urban city of Decapolis, ten larger Greek cities. But Nazareth was not a quaint little town. It had about 500 people at the most. Scholars say it was filled with filth and plagued with what one commentator called “first-century hillbillies.”

So Nathanael voiced a prejudice, bigotry about Jesus’s background. Question: Do we have a prejudice against Jesus or what it would mean to follow Him?

Often our doubts or prejudices against Jesus are that He doesn’t think like us. His teachings on what we do with our time, resources and gifts are threatening our lifestyle. Have you ever thought of this?

For many Christians we try to mold Jesus into looking like ourselves so we won’t have a problem with Him. We mold Jesus to be one we can follow, who will like the same worship music as we, maybe have the same humor as we, have the same spending habits as we, maybe even vote like we.

When we make Jesus into someone like ourselves, we don’t need to change or grow because we have made Him to think and act like us. For many, we might have a “Nazareth prejudice.” And if there is something about Jesus we don’t like, then we change Jesus, rather than we change.

What is the “Nazareth” in our mind about Jesus that deems Him irrelevant or that might be preventing us to be more intimate with Him, prevent us from going all in? Can we name it and then determine if that is really true? It’s important to do this as we begin 2016. Jesus is saying to us, “Follow Me.” I’m saying, let us not short Him, but go long on Him.

My son Dylan works in Manhattan in the wealth management field. He said, “Shorting is considered extremely risky. If you go long on a stock at \$100 and it goes to \$0, then you’ve lost \$100. But if you short a stock at \$100, then it can go up to \$200, \$2,000, or \$2 million. [And you have to pay the difference]. There is unlimited risk of loss when you short.

“In the case of Jesus, you are shorting someone who is one of the most influential humans who has ever lived AND claimed to be God. And IF He’s actually right and He is whom He claimed to be, then you are shorting a stock that will never stop rising and your personal loss will be of catastrophic proportions as a result.

“IF He is God and everything Jesus said is true, then by not following His ways, you are betting against the very creator of the universe.

“The gospel is this: All of humanity—everyone who has ever lived, died, and lives today, whether atheist, agnostic, or even devout Christian—is shorting Jesus in the depths of their hearts.

It's not possible for us to truly give Him everything and trust Him completely. If that were so, we would all be living radically different lives. It's not possible for us to ever completely silence the serpent's whisper in our ears.

"Every time a prophet came to the Israelites, they would always eventually turn away and could never fully trust God. Finally God Himself came to earth in the form of a man and yet still humanity lacked so much trust as to not only ignore His teachings, but also torture Him and kill Him on a cross. And when on the 3rd day He rose again to prove He was who He said He was and that everything He had ever spoken was true."

"Humanity realized it had accidentally shorted the one thing that could and should not be shorted. The blood of Jesus was on humanity's hands and all of heaven's wrath could have justly fallen down upon earth as retribution for the murder of God's beloved only Son. Yet in the greatest act of love in the history of the universe, the Creator takes those catastrophic losses from shorting Jesus and puts it on Himself as if humanity was long on Jesus the entire time.

"All the profits are transferred to our names—all of Jesus' righteousness and sonship and love is given to us, if only we do this: trust Him. Trust that a widow's mite invested in Him is far greater than \$1,000,000 at a bank in our own names where moth and vermin destroy and thieves break in and steal (things like laptops). Because even a penny in heaven's bank compounds eternally while even the dreams and hopes of this world never truly last."

That is what my son Dylan thinks, from one who works on Wall Street.

But back to our passage, notice how Philip gives the best response to Nathanael when someone has a prejudice against Jesus. He just says, "Come and see." Because what good can come out of Nazareth? Spoiler alert—oh just God.

Sometimes the best thing we can say to a friend, a relative, or a colleague who is doubtful about Jesus or His church is to just come and see. Don't argue with people; just tell them come and see Jesus in action. Come to the Alpha Course. Come to a worship or healing service. Come and see Jesus miraculously respond. Besides, you cannot really know Jesus unless you come and see with others, like being in a small group. You need to discuss Jesus with others to help us with our blind spots.

I remember a member named Bob who came to one of our healing services. He deeply mistrusted healing services. He was cynical about God and healing. And he had good reason, a good "Nazareth" reason.

When his 4-year old child was ill, he and his wife took her to a so-called Christian faith healer. The healer, who was also a pastor, prayed for his daughter, but she was not immediately healed. And the so-called faith healer told Bob and his wife that the reason the daughter wasn't healed was that she lacked faith. That incensed Bob, and he asked how he could say that when she's but a child. And then the pastor said to him, "If not her, then it must be because of the lack of faith of her parents."

That made Bob really angry. He remembered that for decades. His wife later died, and he remarried and they both came to our church.

One day his wife said she wanted to go to our healing service. Highly reluctant, he went for the sake of his wife. During that healing

service, I did a mass healing prayer like I always do, which is just like the one I did at our Christmas Eve service recently. I normally ask people during prayer to place a hand on or near the place that needs physical healing. Bob put his hand on his knee that had hurt for years.

And during that prayer Bob's knee got healed, immediately. He was so stunned that he made an appointment to tell me the story that I just told you this morning. The healing radically changed his faith in Jesus.

Unfortunately, Bob had a disease later on. I visited him at Tripler hospital where his faith got stronger than ever even in the face of death. He had a smile on his face and fully trusted this rabbi named Jesus, the Son of God, who came from Nazareth.

Bob had deep cynicism, doubt, skepticism about Jesus, but his wife who took him to the healing service anyway. She was basically saying, "Okay, I know your doubts, but just come and see anyway. Come and see."

Our story of Philip and Nathanael gets better. Let's get back to the story.

John 1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, He said of Him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

John 1:48 Nathanael asked Him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

What those verses mean is that Jesus really knows everything about us even before we say it. He supernaturally knows our beginning, middle, and end. After all, He is God – fully human but also fully God. If you want to know what God is like, read the gospels. God is like Jesus.

In fact, He is Jesus. So why don't we trust Him?

You see, we may think that Jesus is not that great, but Jesus knows our doubts and He really sees us as we are. Did you notice that Jesus didn't say, "Hey you, Nathanael, I heard what you said! You were talking dirty about my hometown Nazareth. Who do you think you are, you puny human. What comes out of Nazareth? Me, the main man, the Messiah, the big deal. You are such a jerk for thinking ill of Me."

No, Jesus didn't say that. In essence He said something we would never have guessed. He said, "Nathanael, you are a man without any guile. You are a man in whom there is no deceit. You are a man who calls things as they are. And I like that about you."

Jesus responds not defensively but with an affirmation! He was also calling Nathanael to a higher sense of living. "You may talk stink about My town but, Nathanael, you speak honestly and I like that. It came not from lying or deceit or being mean. You were just being honest. I like that in a man."

To flash back to my story about Bob, Bob was like a man without deceit. His not believing in healing was understandable. His having doubts about a healing service made sense. I would never say he was by nature a cynical man. He just called it like it is. He was let down by a false-faith hearer and he, therefore, had reasonable doubts and was skeptical.

But here comes the best part when we truly follow and trust Jesus. Here's Nathanael's response to Jesus:

John 1:49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 1:50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

John 1:51 And He said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

The son of Man is Jesus' favorite name for Himself as I think He likes to remind us that He is fully God but He is fully human and knows our pain and temptations and issues.

When you truly give your whole life to Christ, when you truly dedicate your life to Him and try to have every area of your life soaked by Him, you will see even greater things than what you have so far seen. Greater miracles. Greater answered prayers. Greater peace and strength in the midst of stress and anxiety.

It's best not to kind of put your toe in the water. It's best to go all out. Name your fears. Name your doubts. Name your Nazareths, but then take the leap of faith and go all in with Jesus. In the end it is always good to have an encounter with Jesus.

I close with this powerful thought. When Jesus calls us like He did Philip and Nathanael, He is saying like a Rabbi of old: "I chose you because I believe that you can be like Me."

That's powerful. Yes, we can be healers like Jesus. We can be agents of social justice and do good now. We can forgive others like Jesus and receive forgiveness. It's not about waiting until we die and go to heaven. No, we can be people who can live morally and honorably and with peace and joy and confidence right now.

We can be Christ-like now by feeding the sick, helping the hurting, clothing the spiritual and physical

immigrants in life, standing up for justice, and being agents of forgiveness.

For those who have been kind of half-and-half on Jesus, I would say it is time to stop shorting Jesus. Have faith in Him and go long on Jesus. There is nothing else worth betting your life on because I guarantee that in the end those other things will let you down.

And for those of you are not sure about Jesus and are seekers but not all out followers. I would just say to you—come and see. Come and see if it is true. Test Jesus out. Put Him to the test. See if He is reliable. But don't do it half way because Jesus is truly God. Amen.