

This morning we continue our series we began last week, where we are using pop music songs from the last few decades as the main illustration of the morning’s Bible passage. While the Bible and the church are the first two sources of spiritual encouragement for disciples of Jesus, Spiritual encouragement can come from other places as well. Sometimes they are even surprising places where God uses something to remind us of a scriptural truth, or they become an opening to a conversation with someone about matters of faith, Jesus, the Bible, and so forth. I chatted with a gal at my son’s school this last Monday and she said, “I heard you preached on Pearl Jam yesterday.” I didn’t correct her to say I preached on the resurrection but used a Pearl Jam song as the primary illustration...but she was seriously intrigued. So this series is also an opportunity to invite a friend to church to experience something they might not expect.

This merging of the secular and the holy is not uncommon at all. In fact, Jesus did it when he became human – holy God and unholy flesh at the same time. Or, there’s a family in our church who near the top their Christmas tree they always spell out “Jesus” with five ornaments. That’s holy. But a Christmas tree really has nothing to do with Jesus. In fact, before whole trees were brought indoors by German Christians in the 1500’s, evergreen branches were used for centuries before, in homes in different parts of the world, around the winter solstice for different pagan religious purposes. But what a way to be reminded what Christmas is really about, and it’s an opportunity to talk about faith with others who come over, by emphasizing the reason for the season with his name spelled out like that.



And, if you look even closer, you’ll see that just below the name of Jesus is an Elvis ornament! Talk about merging culture with the Christian faith, and a conversation starter! I love this! So, our faith and the real world are frequently intertwined, and sometimes in ways that surprise us, and yet can encourage us in our faith, or give us opportunities to talk about our faith with others. That’s what this series is about.

In 1971 one of the greatest Rock ‘n’ Roll albums of all-time was released by a British band called, The Who. The album was simply titled, “Who’s Next,” and no classic rock music collection is complete without this album. In 2023, Rolling Stone Magazine ranked it #77 in their top 500 albums of all time. The final song is called, “Won’t Get Fooled Again.” It clocks in at 8:32, a very long song by pop music standards. A shortened version was released as a single, and it reached #15 on the Billboard charts. The song was ranked #295 on Rolling Stone Magazine’s 2024 list of the 500 greatest songs of all-time, though in earlier lists the song ranked as high as #131.

Lyrically, “Won’t Get Fooled Again” is a song that’s a little slippery and hard to discern exactly what it always means. Even Pete Townshend, the lead guitarist for the band and the primary writer of the song admits this when he says, **“It’s really a weird song. The first verse is a revolution song and the second [sounds] like somebody getting tired of it” (Pete Townshend).** My theory: Maybe once he got past the 4-minute mark of the song, he got tired of writing it, and so that’s reflected in the lyrics? I don’t know.

Anyway, like most pop songs, the chorus – which is the part of the song that’s usually repeated a few times – it’s the part that carries the weight of the message of the song; it gives the direction and overall meaning of the song. And the last lines of the chorus in this song are the ones that especially receive the emphasis in the performance of the song. The last two lines are:
**Then I’ll get on my knees and pray:
 We don’t get fooled again**

That line is like a mission statement for parents. Nothing will bring you to your knees in prayer more than raising kids, and kids love to try and fool their parents. ...at least, that’s what I’ve been told. 😊

So, at over 8 minutes, it’s a long song, but here are the words of the song’s first couple verses and the chorus, and then we’ll watch a performance of the first few minutes of the song:

**We’ll be fighting in the streets, With our children at our feet
 And the morals that they worship will be gone**

(Bone to pick here: We don't worship morals, but the point is still made that the morals we value are slipping, and it's a rather prophetic line)
And the men who spurred us on, Sit in judgement of all wrong
They decide and the shotgun sings the song

I'll tip my hat to the new constitution, Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play, Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray: We don't get fooled again!

The change, it had to come, We knew it all along
We were liberated from the fold, that's all
 And now the "tired of revolution" shift comes:
And the world looks just the same, And history ain't changed
'Cause the banners, they are flown in the next war

I'll tip my hat to the new constitution, Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play, Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray: We don't get fooled again!

So, I want to share with you the first three minutes or so of a performance of the song that they gave as part of the Concert for New York City less than six weeks after the events of 9/11. It was a benefit concert put on by a bunch of different musicians for the firefighters, police officers, rescue workers, and their families, who risked their lives, and of course some perished. The Who played three songs, including the appropriately titled, "Won't Get Fooled Again." If you aren't familiar with the song, I'll just let you know it's a pretty rocking tune with heavy drums and loud guitar, especially live...and I think we should crank this up to 11 today. (Video is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aruDK5EmA18>. In church we watched from about 17:30 to 21:00 though the song continues several minutes more.)

By the way, the two most rocking songs have kicked off this series, and we'll mellow things out the rest of the way: Steve Miller Band next week, then on Mother's Day a gorgeous ballad from the Eagles, and then the Rolling

Stones. So, back to the song we just heard: if you take the title of the song and those last two lines of the chorus as containing the essential message of the song, then there's a clear resolve for the future, a hope for staying on a good course, and a proclamation that we need to stay true to the calling that's on our lives. No distractions, no deceptions...no getting fooled into something that falls short of how we're supposed to live and be in this world. In fact, Pete Townshend later said of this song, “[It’s] **Meant to let [people] know that what lay in the center of my life was not for sale, and could not be co-opted into any obvious cause**” (Pete Townshend). That preaches.

For us Christians who hold Jesus Christ and his Word at the center of our lives, we would do well to agree with him. We don't want Scripture or our faith getting co-opted into any cause. The cause we stand for, the cause we believe in, the cause we live and die for, is Jesus, period. But unfortunately, Christians sometimes get their faith co-opted into other causes: wealth, politics, sex, power, hobbies, and more. When that happens, Jesus gets used for some other purpose than the purposes he establishes, or he is being completely set aside. (Different than some other thing be co-opted into the cause of Christ.) This happens today, and it happened nearly 2,000 years ago, (“The world looks just the same, and history ain't changed” as the song says) and the Apostle Paul addresses this “setting aside of Jesus” in his letter to the church in Galatia.

Galatians is a letter that is easy to read with a tone of frustration and even anger because of the strong language Paul uses. But what he's really doing is giving them a pastoral care letter, because the ultimate aim of all pastoral care is to help people stay on track with Jesus. And Paul has heard that they were straying from the gospel message they initially heard and believed; they're reverting back to religion based in works, rather than trusting Jesus and his provision. Their faith was being “co-opted into causes” other than that of Jesus Christ. Listen to this from **Galatians 1:6-7**.

After his initial greetings and formalities, these are his first words to them! He doesn't take long to get to the point of the letter, does he? There's clearly some false teaching that's found its way into the Christian community in

Galatia, it's derailing their faith, and word has gotten to Paul about it. A little later this is what he has to say in **Galatians 3:1-5...**

The people of the church in Galatia...and maybe not all of them, but a significant enough number that Paul felt compelled to send this letter to them...**The people there needed a gentle, loving, pastoral kick in the seat of the pants to get them back on the right track of faith in Jesus Christ.** He's trying to protect them from wandering off from Jesus, or wandering further off than they already have. Our hearts and minds of faith must be guarded. We want to stay locked in to Jesus and where he's leading us. The moment anyone says of their Christian faith, "I've got this"...or "I've arrived, I can kick back and take it easy," or "This 'Jesus thing' will be a great way to accomplish _____" then, we're being fooled. Our faith is being co-opted by pride or selfishness or another religion or something else. **Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).** Let's keep our paths lighted by the word of God, and our hearts and minds filled with the grace and love of Jesus Christ.

And so, as The Who sang, so Paul also says: "Don't get fooled again...Don't trade God's word, God's grace, God's truth, God's son, God's spirit for anything else, because anything else is fraudulent." And hopefully the people of Galatia knew their Biblical Proverbs. Proverbs 12:15 says, **"The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice" (Proverbs 12:15).** Paul was giving them some good advice, and trying to steer them away from being foolish – though, it *is* how he addresses them, "You foolish Galatians!" We would do well to listen to his advice ourselves.

The hard part is that receiving advice takes humility. We don't always want to hear the advice or input of others. But as hard as that can be, being foolish is worse, in the long run. No one wants to be like the guy who went to the doctor with both of his ears badly burned. The doctor asked, "What happened?" The guy said that as he was ironing his shirt, someone called and he picked up the iron instead of the phone, and stuck it to his ear. The doctor said, "Well, what about the other ear?" And the guy said, "That jerk called me back." 😂 No one wants to get burned like that – be it literally or figuratively – and play the part of the fool. And so, Paul is frustrated that

they're being fooled into trading faith for works. This are setting aside this gift of grace they have received, and going after a false faith instead.

And you know, Paul wasn't the only one to say these kinds of things. Jesus did, too. In Matthew 7:6, towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, **“Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).** In other words, protect what is precious. Don't let it go. Don't treat it cavalierly. Don't be foolish with what God has given you, or it could lead to your own ruin. And the most precious thing we have is our faith in Jesus Christ. We don't want to be foolish with our faith and with what Jesus has given us; it's a gift of love and grace. Which, by the way, this is not an invitation to hide our faith. Let's not misunderstand Jesus here. We *are* called to live by faith and take risks for Jesus and his cause. But we don't want Jesus to be co-opted by something else. That is foolish.

And so, for all of us who have put our trust in Jesus Christ, we have something precious that God has given us and we can care for and nurture it as we flourish for him. You have a precious faith, because Jesus is precious. Let's not exchange what God has given us in the Spirit for something made of human flesh as the Galatians did. **Let's examine our lives and ask genuinely: Am I being foolish?** Is there something or somebody other than Jesus that I'm giving greater priority to in my life...or in the life of my family or others whom I influence over and care for? For instance, for those of you who are parents of younger kids: God has entrusted us with children (and grandchildren) in our families who need to hear about Jesus Christ regularly, and be discipled...be trained and equipped in the faith. How's that going? There are teens here who need the Word of God planted in them and opportunities to serve so that their faith would bear much fruit. There are adults here who are further along the path of discipleship who can be fruit-bearers in leadership roles in the church, modeling discipleship to Jesus and helping others to grow in faith in Jesus.

Let's not be fooled into thinking anything else is worth building our lives on, be it: careers, politics, money, power, sports, or anything else. Some are fun, or good, or needed in life. But they aren't sacred pearls like Jesus is. They

aren't our primary identity, they are a terrible foundation for life, and they can't replace what Jesus has done for us on the cross and through the empty tomb. That's the sacred thing we want to protect and stay centered on. Let's not be fools about that! To paraphrase Paul, let's not exchange what God has given us through his Spirit for something we concoct out of the flesh. Rather: **Let's be wise: protecting the pearl of faith that each of us has, living into that faith daily, and bringing others along the path toward Jesus with us, in order to flourish for Jesus.**

And maybe, if we need a little extra kick in the seat of the pants, or if a musical tune simply helps us to remember not to trade what's at the center of our lives for anything else (worship music is best for that, of course)...but maybe put on "Won't Get Fooled Again", crank it to "eleven" and "get on our knees and pray" as the chorus says. Because there's no better place to start than in prayer to ensure we don't get fooled, and instead stay centered on Jesus and live for him. So, let's do that now...Amen.