

“Hollywood Holiness”

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4 Then Jesus told them, “A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family.” 5 And because of their unbelief, he couldn’t do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

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7 And He called His twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority to cast out evil spirits. 8 He told them to take nothing for their journey except a walking stick—no food, no traveler’s bag, no money. 9 He allowed them to wear sandals but not to take a change of clothes.

10 “Wherever you go,” He said, “stay in the same house until you leave town. 11 But if any place refuses to welcome you or listen to you, shake its dust from your feet as you leave to show that you have abandoned those people to their fate.”

12 So the disciples went out, telling everyone they met to repent of their sins and turn to God. 13 And they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil.

Thousand Foot Crutch, Stellar Kart, Skillet, Switchfoot, Reliant K, Five Iron Frenzy, MxPx or the Newsboys. They are all Christian rock bands. This is not grandma's music. It's not John Wesley, Fanny Crosby or Bill Gaither. You won't hear anything resembling it in the elevator, frozen foods section of the grocery store or in many churches for that matter. These artists will give you Jesus punk, techno-dance, alternative rock, blue-eyed soul, retro-swing and more from edgy labels such as Tooth & Nail and 5 Minute Walk. Prepare your rigid, righteous self to be rattled with a rock riff that's hard, holy and hair-raising.

These artists are all part of the contemporary Christian music world, a growing chunk of a nearly 1 billion dollar-per-year industry. Although a generation ago it was easy to separate the Christian sheep from the secular goats, today the tunes of groups such as dc Talk and Insyderz all have a sound that would mix right into any Top 40 play list. **(NOTE 1)**

In the early 2000’s, Sixpence None the Richer's critically acclaimed "Kiss Me" was deemed ineligible by the Gospel Music Association's Dove Awards because of

controversial new content criteria instituted in 1998. In spite of the band's long history in Christian music, the romantic song (which became a solid-gold hit thanks to VH1, MTV and television shows like Dawson's Creek and movies like She's All That) generated a furious debate in the Gospel Music Association as to what Christian music is and what it is not. Check out some of the lyrics:

Oh, kiss me beneath the milky twilight. Lead me out on the moonlit floor.
Lift your open hand. Strike up the band and make the fireflies dance.
Silver moon's sparkling. So kiss me. **[NOTE 2]**

What do you think? It doesn't sound Biblical or Christian to me. Is a song "Christian" if it is secular in words but done by a Christians artist?

Yet, the debate is not limited to Christian artists in Nashville or Hollywood. All of us face the disturbing dilemma of how to behave with one foot in the sacred and the other in the secular. How does one live in the world, without being "of" the world, as the Bible calls us to?

This was clearly on the mind of Jesus when he told his disciples to hit the road. He is careful not only to authorize their transition from the sacred circle of spiritual fellowship to the profane world of ungodly worldliness, but to provide a user friendly list of instructions for ministering as they go.

Entertainment artists are finding that it's not easy. Sixpence is clearly a faith-based group, having taken its distinctive name from a passage in C.S. Lewis' classic Mere Christianity, a line that reminds us that every power we have is really a gift from God. After explaining that we cannot give God anything that is not in a sense His own already, Lewis tells this story: "It is like a small child going to his father and saying, 'Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.' Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child's present." But he is sixpence none the richer. Sixpence None the Richer knows that all of its powers are really a gift from God.

Some are suspicious that these artists and writers are simply riding a Jesus wave to material success. The Christian thrillers in the Left Behind series – 12 books have achieved blockbuster success, selling more than a million copies each, way up in the publishing stratosphere usually occupied only by John Grisham and Tom Clancy. A Trilogy of movies was made based on the book series.

In 2000 A virtually unknown company called Providence Entertainment cracked the box-office top 10 with a movie called The Omega Code, an end-of-the-world thriller starring Casper Van Dien and Michael York. The \$8 million flick grossed over 11 million dollars in just a couple of months.

We're also seeing computer games like The War in Heaven, a Christian action game that has players either acting angelic and fighting evil up to heaven, or sprouting horns and going straight to hell. Added to the mix is Saints of Virtue, in which players travel within the human heart and battle "the personified tendencies of the flesh." Are these video games violent? Of course! But, say its defenders, it is gore that acknowledges the existence of God!

Christian music sales in 1999 reached almost 50 million units, an increase of 11.5 percent over 1998's sales. Christian retailers accounted for 57.5 percent of the 1999 sales, while mainstream retail stores accounted for 42.5 percent. Contemporary Christian and gospel music are the music industry's fifth-largest-selling genre, selling more than twice as many albums as the Latin genre and also selling more than classical, jazz and New Age genres combined. -Christian Century, February 23, 2000, 204. As of 2024 Contemporary Christian Music is one of the fastest growing genres. Number of streams is up 60% in the last five years.

Today's text tells us that Jesus was rejected at Nazareth - but now he's found a new home in Hollywood! He has moved from bad reviews in his small hometown to multimillion-dollar deals in the big city, becoming a multimedia magnate through books, music, film and video games. Hollywood is embracing Christian themes more and more. They even got "The Chosen" seasons 4 and 5 on the big public screen. People older than 50 remember when there were no Christian movies allowed on public screens. Hollywood wouldn't even consider it. But now there are two or three movies a year coming out that are very Christian!

What does Jesus think of these Hollywood movies? **[NOTE 3]**

Hard to say. You may have heard that a group of us got together on Tuesday nights after Jamie was done doing the Bible Study on the gospels and have been watching "The Chosen". I have watched critically and found very little that they do or include that is against the Bible. Where the Bible is silent they add in things to enhance the plot or story, but they are careful to stick close to cultural and character possibilities. The Chosen is definitely not giving in or crossing over to the secular except to be shown on the big screen in public theaters. Aside from the Chosen we are seeing actors and singers crossing over into secular genres to make more money. But what record company president Greg Ham tells his artists who are thinking of crossing over into the secular market rings true for all of us: "Don't cross over unless you plan to take the cross over." Good advice!

When we step into the world, we better have the gospel with us. It is not a question of IF we are going to cross over; we do it all the time. We leave our homes, where we can set the spiritual and moral tone, and cross over into the workplace where the ambiance is determined by others. We live a substantial part of our lives on the streets, in office buildings, schools, shops, grocery stores, restaurants and the like. We confront people who curse and harass, who cheat and abuse, who lie and steal, who live to work and work to live, who chase the gods of materialism, sex and pleasure, who are nonplussed by the very notion of living a Christian lifestyle. We crossed over at the Neighborhood Cookout. Glenn's Mom got to meet Christians who weren't "crazy!"

No one said it would be easy. Not Jesus. He prepared his disciples to live in a culture of hostility. When Sixpence's "Kiss Me" surfaced on the pop charts, they got hundreds of letters from fans, accusing them of selling out. Yet their lead singer did give an articulate presentation of the gospel on the Letterman show. And then there's Creed, the band whose album went double platinum in the early 2000's. They were widely

considered a Christian band, and they get a lot of faith-related questions on their Web site, but they refused to identify themselves as a "Christian" band. They are Christians who happen to be musicians. But when they cross over, they carry the cross over.

It's clear that Jesus wants his disciples to get to work, and this means taking the gospel to work with them. The message of Christ is not always going to be popular, so postmodern apostles need to be prepared for rejection - ready to shake off the dust that is on their feet as they beat a path out the door. Whether we carry a cross in books, music, film or media ... or food service, clerical work, computer programming or manufacturing ... we are challenged to have it with us, and not at home in spiritual storage.

Granted, religion itself is great theater. Notes Samuel Wells, an English priest: "Moses goes up on the mountain, and the clouds close underneath him like curtains. He brings down the commandments, and the children of Israel are unimpressed. Solomon builds a huge temple. Inside, behind a great curtain, is the Holy of Holies, where the high priest, like Moses before him, communes with the Lord." [NOTE 4]

But Jesus is not interested in this brand of Hollywood holiness, so he radically redefines the theater. His venue is not a theater of spectacle or display. In the drama of holy life, the stage is a locked room where the actor is the disciple and the audience is God, where the disciple meets God one on one in meditation and prayer. These disciples of our text don't hit the road to walk the talk until they've spent time with Jesus talking the walk.

We will be no good on the cultural stage until we've learned our lines and practiced our music in the locked room. The whole thing is divine theater, a context in which God has appointed us, as Jesus appointed the disciples, to be artists, re-visioning and enacting the gospel before a watching world. [NOTE 5]

An example of something crossing over and clearly taking the cross over with them is a surfer movie released in the year 2000. The formula for surf flicks is about as predictable as a sunrise: surfing, vulgarity and girls-a-go-go. Changed, add the gospel, a new surfing movie arrives in Orange County for a one-night showing Friday, offers some of the same standard stuff: barrel rides and wipeouts, aerials and cutbacks, floaters and 360s.

But the film leaves out the four-letter words and women in G-strings that are commonplace in the straight-to-video documentaries popular with hard-core surfers. It puts in a dose of faith instead.

Intercut between spectacular surfing footage are Christian testimonies from the professional surfers on the screen. Eight of the world's best - Tom Curren, Tita Tavares and C.T. Taylor among them - tell how Jesus changed their lives.

"I did feel that tug on my heart, like this is right ... God is real," Taylor says in the film. "I just really felt his truth. So I gave my life to him I see how God's never, like, taken his hand off me. Like, he's always been there."

The movie, which is shown for free, has already played to packed theaters in Hawaii and other parts of California, including Point Loma Nazarene University in San

Diego County, where 1,500 attended a showing.

"At first, our hope was to reach mostly surfers and the surf industry," said Bryan Jennings, 25, the film's co-director and co-producer. "But at the premieres, we're getting even better feedback from people who don't surf - the moms and wives and kids." -William

Lobdell, "Free Surf Flick Features Christ as Life's Crest," The Los Angeles Times, February 19, 2000.

The challenge for Christian "artists" is to be at one and the same time both the artist mediating the gospel and the art itself. This is precisely what the apostle Paul argues when he says that "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10, NRSV). We are God's art. We are God's artists. Our public is waiting. So what are you going to do about it? What can you do today and this next week to be better at being God's art, His artist, an example to the people who see you and the way you live??

Sermon Notes for Hollywood Holiness based on Mark 6:1-13
Given at Doster Community Church September 7, 2025

- I. What do you think about Christian punk rock or hard rock? What about Christian Rap? Are these bands sell outs? John 15:19 "the world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world."
- II. How do we behave with one foot in the sacred and the other in the secular? Look at Jesus' instructions to the disciples whom He is sending out into the world.
- III. "Don't cross over unless you plan to take the cross over." (Greg Ham)
When we step into the world we better have the gospel with us. We "cross over" every day! Do you always take the cross over?
- IV. Jesus isn't interested in Hollywood Holiness. Jesus redefines the theater. In the drama of a holy life, one set apart for God, the stage is a room where the disciple is the actor and the audience is God. You can't walk the talk until you have spent time with Jesus talking the walk.
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