



Would Jesus Use Video?

Since we started publishing Christian Video Magazine (CVMag) a few months ago, I have received many great emails. Most have simply sent a short note stating something similar to “Great Job!” Others have asked some really great questions about how they can use videos in church or on their website. However, I have received two emails that basically challenge the idea of using videos in church. They raise a good question that really deserves an answer. Although they didn’t actually ask “Did Jesus use video?” one challenged the use of video in the church, while the other asked me to defend the use of multimedia in the church.

A reader named Ron stated, “The Bible says that the church is for the edification and building up of the body of Christ, not entertainment. Preach the word, not entertain people. The church is to help build Faith in God’s people and to obey His Word and to glorify Him, not people.” My answer is that I think using video in church helps to accomplish the very things Ron states. For example, the word “edification” means “instruction or enlightenment, especially when it is morally or spiritually uplifting” (Encarta Dictionary). So what is the best way to teach? Well, Jesus stepped outside of the organized worship services held in the synagogues and did His teaching in the field and by the shore. He didn’t just quote scripture and state facts; he backed them up with stories (sort of entertaining for the day and a marked distancing from the traditional religious services the Jews were use to.) Take the 15th chapter of Luke. This chapter could be very short. Jesus could have just stood before the crowd and said, “There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one that repents than over 99 that are righteous, and there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repents, and finally know that God is excited and glad to welcome back those that have gone astray”, end of chapter. However, to make these points come alive for his listeners, he told a story about a lost sheep, a woman that misplaced some money and the fantastic and riveting story of the man who had

two sons, one that ran away and lived a life of sin, but who returned to his father and repented. I honestly think that telling these stories to crowds to make His points would be the equivalent to using a video today.

Now, I know the case can be made that some “Christian” videos might not be loved by everyone. We all have different things that move us, or touch us. However I would like to challenge Ron to visit SermonSpice.com and spend some time watching a variety of the videos they have on their site. Many tell a story that helps to illustrate a specific scripture. Other videos are dynamic presentations with the dialogue consisting of scriptural text.

I also thought seriously about Ron’s comment about “Preach the word, not entertain people.” Who makes the call if you cross that line? For example, I preached three sermons a week for around 15 years when I was a pastor. We didn’t have the opportunity to use video back in those days, but I was a real believer in using illustrations to help drive home the points of my sermon. Sometimes my illustrations might be examples from the lives of great Christians in our past. I loved to read books about Moody, Billy Sunday, etc., and would find myself telling stories about how they handled certain things in their lives, and would present it as an example of the scriptural point I was making. Sometimes I would tell real stories

from my own life, my family, and my experiences. For example, while I was a pastor, I raised two sons. Doing so, provided me much understanding about how God was my Father, and I was His child. If we are to be careful to “not entertain people” I wonder if my stories were entertaining.

I have had the opportunity to attend worship services across the nation, in a large variety of denominations and associations. I have worshipped at Willow Creek and enjoyed their use of drama to illustrate a scriptural point. And I have worshipped in churches where they still have three hymns, special music and a sermon. While attending churches that didn't use multimedia or video, many pastors used illustrations to bring their sermon alive. Some of those illustrations were humorous, some invoking emotions, and frankly, most would fall under the definition of entertaining (enjoyable to watch, read, or listen to – Encarta Dictionary.) Is Ron suggesting that we should not use videos in church because we should not present anything that is enjoyable to listen to? How does a pastor preach and present the Gospel in a way that would be purposely un-enjoyable to listen to?

I would agree with Ron that everything done via multimedia or video in churches is not edifying. A couple of years ago my wife and I moved about 30 miles across town and found ourselves checking out the churches in our area. I can remember one that was what I would call “out there”. During the service revolving spot lights and strobe lights were used, and part of a skit involved a mock SWAT team repelling down from the roof. The skit really didn't have anything to do with making a point related to the sermon, and for us seemed inappropriate. My wife and I both quickly decided that what was going on wasn't for us. However, I would warn people from condemning all use of multimedia just because they had an experience that didn't work for them. I can't even condemn what I saw, because God may just be using their style of worship to reach someone else,



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it just wasn't for us.

Another reader, Bill, wrote that, “Some say that [multimedia] Brings too much of the ‘world’ into the church?” I think it is clear that when the Bible talks about avoiding the things of this world, it means those things that are evil. Maybe it is because I am old (50's), but I remember the same argument when churches began to purchase padded pews. Some thought that this was worldly, and that in some way, to be a “good” Christian, you had to sit on a wooden pew without a pad. If that were so, let's remove the backs and have everyone set on uncomfortable stools! Or, better yet, let them stand.

During the last 50 years, churches have added air conditioning, sound systems and microphones, better lighting, and most churches slowly adapted to using accompaniment tapes for those singing special music. Was this too “entertaining” or “worldly”? Or was it to help people listen to the message of the song?

It is easy to build a case against something new. There are always a good number of people who will be against anything “new”. And, with change, it is important that we check to make sure that what we are doing is for the right reasons and not fluff or worldliness. However, I think SermonSpice, one of the leading sites for videos that can be used in worship, says it all with their name. The video is not the message, the reason, or the purpose for gathering. But rather, it can be added to a sermon as a “spice”, just as an illustration, in order to make a pastor’s point come alive.

Take this month’s cover story from WingClips, or last month’s cover story about CVLI, using video clips from popular movies must be very close to what Jesus did by telling parables related to the subjects of his day, such as fishing, farming, cooking (leaven in bread), etc. In order to help us understand that we need to forgive others since we have been forgiven of so much by God, he told a story about a man who was forgiven of a large debt, and then wasn’t willing to forgive someone for a small debt. Instead of just telling us what He wanted us to do, he told stories that people could relate to. Using clips that have Biblical applications can help us make a point using current situations.

So, would Jesus use video? I think it is a good question to ask, and I appreciated the emails from Ron and Bill. We shouldn’t just embrace the next “cool” trend in worship without examining it. However, for me, I think if Jesus was walking and talking on earth in today’s time period, I don’t think he would be wearing a robe, but would dress in clothes that would be acceptable by most. I believe if he was speaking before thousands, he would use a microphone, and if he had the chance, he would use a video clip from a popular movie, or use a prepared video to help make His point

about the Kingdom of Heaven. So, we will continue to provide the best information we can to help churches use video in worship.

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