

Jesus, Unleashed

By Joel M. Killion

Introduction

When a veil is removed it doesn't create something that has never existed before; it simply reveals what was already there. To see Jesus more and more clearly, requires the removal of all the veils that stand between us and him. Yet, when they are withdrawn, they don't create a new Jesus, but reveal the one who was always there. What you are about to read will seem, at times, new, but remember, it's only new to you.

As you progressively move closer and closer to knowing him as he knows you, you will mature beyond the elementary principles of Christ to the more advanced, which will change you from the inside out into who you really are, and have actually always been, in him (Hebrews 5:12-6:1).

Whatever questions you have about who you are or why you're alive can be answered in one way and one way only: By *seeing* Jesus. To the degree that we see him, we are like him. To the degree that we are like him, we re-present him. Therefore, our greatest need is to have a fuller, more accurate, more intimate knowledge of who Jesus really is, deep inside, without all the mess we've accumulated from being exposed to and scripted by religious systems and man-made traditions. But, if our revelation of Jesus doesn't make us more like him, it's all for nothing, leaving us with external standards without internal transformation.

Our lack of revelation regarding who Jesus really was (and still is) has enabled us to make him whatever we want (Proverbs 29:18). And who he is to us, means everything.

Who Are We Following?

I've often wondered if Paul, the apostle, would be happy to know that the 21st century church has patterned itself more after him than Jesus. And what about Peter, James, John and Jude? What about every Christian leader in church history? What would they think? It's noble to imitate those who have followed Jesus but wouldn't it be better to imitate Jesus himself? Do we want to follow followers of Jesus or do we want to follow Jesus?

When we say we're a Christian, what are we saying? How do we define what it means? When we think of Christianity, most think of church, doctrine, religion, the Bible, Vacation Bible School, Christian television, door-to-door evangelism, etc. But Jesus was so much more than these things. And yet, after he ascended, well-meaning human hearts, motivated by religious zeal and "good ideas", started changing his legacy (True Christianity), stretching, bending and deflating his life, throughout the next 2000 years, leaving us with a brand of Christianity that is Christless, at best. I call this dead religion, a form of piety that denies the power of Jesus' authentic life. Of course, we've all been bitten and poisoned by this slippery snake; we've all believed the lies and perhaps still do. And now, by today's standards, we're all "good Christians" living the "good Christian life". But this is changing as more and more people are giving up their good Christian lives and following Christ who alone defines true Christianity.

There is a massive difference between Christianity as Jesus lived it and Christianity as it is today. No longer should we allow anyone or anything to define his life for us. No longer should we allow other so-called Christians to define the reality and beauty of what it means to be a true friend and follower of Jesus. No longer should we allow mainstream Christianity, Christian television, Vacation Bible School, Christian literature or professional ministers, as good as they may be, to explain or interpret the kind of life he meant for us.

Jesus is the only foundation worth building upon. The Book of Acts and the epistles are not the foundation of the true Christian life and cannot hold the weight of that which needs to be built upon it. The apostolic writings of the New Testament must be measured by and built on the life of Jesus as seen in the Gospels; we must see their letters and revelations through Jesus' teachings and not the other way around. His words and deeds communicate the greatest wisdom and the most powerful truths of all time. He is the mark for the prize of the High Calling (Philippians 3:14). And anything we see, hear or believe that does not agree with the essence of Jesus' life and ministry, should be examined.

Of course, there are many things about the Lord that we do not understand and that's ok. What's important is that we see Jesus who is the image of God and who alone will show us the Father. So, let us follow the advice that Martin Luther gave his students: let us flee the hidden God and run to Jesus Christ.

As Fyodor Dostoevsky once said, "If anyone proved to me that Christ was outside the truth...then I would prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth." Jesus is the only divine pattern by which every doctrine, belief or revelation should be measured and tested as we mature into his exact likeness and image; there is simply no other justifiable model for the true Christian life.

Re-thinking Jesus

How is it that the church has, in Dorothy Sayers' words, "very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah" and "certified Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies"?

We've all, in one way or another, brought the Word of God down to our level of experience, rather than raised our expectations to the level of his Word. In other words, we've lowered Jesus' idea of "normal" down to our own idea of "normal" and been left with a brand of Christianity that is in our own image, that has been restricted by our own affections.

We've settled for another Jesus and another Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:2-4; Galatians 1:6-9). We've all mixed-n-matched our personal religious beliefs, ideals and preferences, which vary like the stars, and stirred them together to produce a patchwork, "Designer Jesus". And now, you can have your Jesus and I can have mine and it doesn't matter if our versions of him contradict each other; it's all relative, right?

But what would Jesus think if he appeared on this planet today, in human form, and saw what we've turned him into? If he came face to face with our version of him, would he approve? And,

in the end, would our “new and improved” Jesus not say more about us than about him?

When we read the Gospels we don't read them as they actually are but as we are, interpreting things through our own culture and experiences. We have our own maps, models, rulers and scales and he doesn't fit any of them. And so often, because we dislike (fear) anything different, we unwittingly abandon or dilute him to feel better about what we don't know or can't explain. Then we follow him as far as we understand, subjecting him to our mainstream wisdom which often masquerades as “Gospel Truth.” But who are we to restrict him to what we think or understand?

When the enemy comes in, the Lord always raises up a standard, like a flood, against him. But unfortunately, the Lord often does so alone because very few “believers” are willing to truly let him live through them, as he really is, despite their beliefs about him. If your faith is in him but your view of him is limited, your faith will be limited as well. If you want to work the works of God, to do his will, you must believe in the one he sent, not the one you think you know (John 6:28-29). Only then will his standard be raised again the enemy.

It's time to start from scratch, from the ground up. It's time to renew our minds. Many of our traditional views of Jesus make us old wineskins that cannot be used by him until our minds are transformed.

So, as you read this book, keep the following points in mind:

- True Christians resemble Jesus, not other Christians or a pastor or a church or a ministry or anything else but Jesus. He alone is to be our “magnificent obsession”.
- What we believe about Jesus will influence the way we live in every way, depending on how we see him and what we think about him. Our paradigms about him will also affect how we relate to him and the Godhead, how we worship, how we interact with one another and the Kingdom, how we see ourselves, how we believe, what we believe and will ultimately determine our potential in life, both in this world and the world to come.
- Jesus is not some distant, historical, glow-in-the-dark bronze figure that we cannot relate to. If you have given your life entirely to him, then you are one with him (1 Corinthians 6:17; Hebrews 2:11-13). If you are reborn in Christ then you are a child of the Father and Jesus is your eldest brother (John 1:12-13; Acts 17:28-29; Hebrews 2:10). If your life is his, then this is who you are. You are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). As the offspring of God, your spiritual identity is more real than who you are naturally. Jesus is more your brother than any natural sibling you may have. And God is more your father and mother than your natural parents or any parental figure you've ever had. This is your heritage, your birthright, despite what you think or feel. And only those who believe, will follow his example and succeed him by doing what he did and more (John 14:12).
- Jesus' life must be the watermark by which we define love, faith, humility, kindness, devotion, and every other virtue. Otherwise, we will find ourselves becoming anything but a true Christian.

Each chapter in this book focuses on some of the many parts of Jesus' life that have caught my attention over the last few years. Needless to say, no other study has so transformed my thinking

and my life like this one. Every time I see him, I somehow know and see my true self – who I really am – more and more clearly. Why? Because we came from our Father, which, as a revelation by itself, blows me away every time I think about it. And everything I see and hear is filtered through this ever-expanding awareness of who he is, and who I am because of him, and drives me beyond the limitations of my predecessors to experience what has been considered impossible by my contemporaries. Something about Jesus brings out the pioneer in me and everyone who gives him their full, undivided attention. Of course, this is all a process, but now more than ever before, I feel safe and secure in the simplicity of devotion to him and him alone. All the bunny-trails, party-lines and doctrinal fads no longer appeal to me; somehow, they all seem so silly and trite compared to him.

What you are about to read will rock you and may offend you. But please, before you pass judgment, before you put it away, press through your negative reactions and keep reading. If you give it a full and open-minded hearing, it may surprise you. The choice is yours.

As you read on, be prayerful. Ask Jesus to show you who he is, through his eyes. Ask him to reduce you to pure and simple devotion to him. And as you return to the Gospels – studying them for your own sake - with a passion to know him better, the fog will lift and his sunshine will break through. And as you press on, remember, a search for Jesus is invariably one's own search.