

Jesus Spat on His Eyes

***“My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,
declares the Lord.”***
(Isaiah 55:8)

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Cover photo by Jack Walker @jack.dw

I dedicate this book to you.

1.

‘Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’
(Mark 8:23)

The man needed a miracle. He had come to Jesus. We’re told that Jesus led him away from the people to a private space. Not in public anymore. Not a show.

After Jesus had spit on his eyes, and asked him, ***‘Do you see anything?’***, here’s what happened:

‘He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’

Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, ‘Don’t even go into the village.’ (vs. 24-26)

This picture of God’s power at work has always impressed on me. It is messy. It is a process. At first it doesn’t work, then it corrects, completes, comes through. It’s perfect in the end.

And when we peer into the process more closely we see more. We see both God, and how God works.

Jesus led this man away from the crowds. I'm sure the crowds mumbled, said Jesus took this man out of sight because Jesus could not really help him.

Jesus spat on him. A type of repulsive, testing first encounter. *Will I stay? Will I go?*

The process, the healing, was not instant. In the mire – the spit and the darkness – only blurry vision came through. *Am I stuck here? Did I do wrong? Can I trust this man?*

And then clarity. Complete healing. Peace.

And here, in the deepest experience of God's presence and power, Jesus tells the man to be secretive about it. Tell no one. Here God met you. Stay in this place, in spirit, in truth.

Alone with God here.

Only God would be – could be - so pure as to hide this feat, to keep it between himself and just one.

2.

‘Take Courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you will testify about me in Rome.’ (Acts 23:11)

This was the word of Jesus in a vision to his disciple, Paul. At this point Jesus had already gone back to heaven, and his disciples were carrying on the message about him to the world.

Now, when Paul received this vision, this word from Christ’s Spirit, Paul was in jail under guard. He had been attacked by people who did not like his teaching about Jesus, and was actually arrested to protect him from being killed.

So here in jail Paul receives encouragement from Jesus (*‘Take courage!’*) and a promise that he would get to Rome and speak. What happens over the next few chapters, however, is extraordinary. Yes, Paul gets to Rome, but let me summarize the journey...

Almost immediately after receiving this word from Jesus, Paul’s own nephew hears of a plot against Paul. He comes and tells Paul that about forty men have taken an oath to not eat or drink till they kill Paul. Paul tells his nephew to tell the commander in the jail, which then led to Paul’s protection as he was being transferred to another town.

In the other town, the Jews come and try to also trick the authorities to have Paul sent back to Jerusalem for trial, with the intention of killing him on route. Paul makes his *own* defense here, speaking up about how he has done no wrong and should simply stand trial where he was at, not be transferred. So he was not, and the plot to kill him was thwarted.

Paul is sent as a prisoner to Rome on a ship with other prisoners and passengers. A decent-sized ship, because we are told there were two hundred and seventy-six people aboard. The ship runs into a terrible storm, '**of hurricane force**', and was adrift for fourteen days. They even passed ropes underneath the ship to hold it together and had to hoist the lifeboat into the ship because it could not be made secure hanging over the side. We are told the storm was '**raging**', and that they could not see sun nor stars for '**many days**'. Here is how Paul felt:

'We finally gave up all hope of being saved.'
(Acts 27:20)

Then Paul receives another vision saying that he and all the men *would* be saved. He communicated this to the whole ship crew. But *how* would they be saved? Well, Paul said they needed to run the ship aground, into a sandbar. They did. At this point the guards of the prisoners suggested that Paul and the other prisoners be put to death, so they could not escape. The commander said no, that they could

all swim to shore. They came up on an island, Malta, and Paul was nearly bitten and killed by a viper. Three months later they set sail for Rome. They arrived.

OK, let's just consider for a moment. So Jesus promises Paul that he would go to Rome and speak. Yes, Paul got there. *But look at the journey!* Plots to kill him – not 'miraculously' thwarted, but by Paul's own shrewdness, sharing details with the commander, and speaking up on his own behalf in court. Messy! Close calls!

Paul is nearly shipwrecked and killed, even giving up hope. But he speaks life to the whole crew, and even instructs them as to what to do to be saved and reach shore. And even here someone suggests he, as a prisoner, is killed before they reach shore. On shore, nearly bitten and killed by a snake.

Paul arrives at Rome. God's promise was true. His faithfulness came through. The process? Deep, dark, at times despairing. Step by step, often by means of self-protection and self-advocating.

The sheer mess and grit of this journey of Paul's from Jerusalem to Rome, almost at every turn, does not look to me like the hand of God. It does not flow like a miracle – or the way I typically think of miracles. But God was in it, every step! Where the enemy surged up to destroy, God poured out wisdom, power, to protect.

When my own journey gets scrappy, messy, I often think or feel that God cannot be in this with me, or that I am not walking the path I should. But this account of Paul says otherwise. And honestly, the very life and journey of Jesus says otherwise. And still further, the life and experiences of the prophets say otherwise.

We think walking with God should look and feel a certain way, usually smooth and easy-flowing. But Christ's life was not like that. So why do I think easy-flowing is the stamp, the mark of 'God with me'?

I suppose the point I am trying to make here, and learn here, is that hard times in your life and path do not mean that God is against you. Hard times do not mean that you are not on a true path, or do not have a faith that honors God. The very best of men and women throughout history, those of deepest faith and faithfulness to God, banked their full reward in heaven, not here:

'There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated — the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in

***holes in the ground. These were all
commended for their faith.'***

(Hebrews 11:35-39)

3.

‘Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.’ (1 Peter 2:10)

When we believe in Jesus, and follow Jesus, everything changes. We now have a new identity – *‘people of God’*. We also have a new life and new purpose, and that is to build the kingdom of God.

Think about how much effort we put into building the kingdom of *this* world. We work all week long to pay bills for here and now, eat food here and now, buy shelter, clothes and medicine for our bodies here and now. Even the ‘insurance’ we buy – *car, health, life* - is only for life here on earth. This is the kingdom of the world. We sweat and labor to build it all day long, all life long.

Then we see Jesus. We recognize that *he* is Lord of life. We see that he is God, and the King of life after death, and even life before life. He reigns over the eternal. And we are now his people. He has a kingdom that is of the heart, and goes beyond the grave. His kingdom is ultimately wherever he is King – here on earth, under the earth, and forevermore. And he gave us a new kingdom to build – the kingdom of God.

‘Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.’
(2 Corinthians 10:15)

There are many aspects to this reality. But I really just want to highlight one here: In Christ you have become different to people who are not in Christ.

You have the Spirit of God inside you.¹ You see and recognize Jesus as the King of the world, Lord of life, Spirit of Truth. This vision you have of Christ is a miracle, and brands you. You see something that cannot be seen or known by efforts of man, or vision of man. Your eyes have been opened.

‘God who made light... made his light shine in your heart to give you knowledge of God in Christ.’ (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God.

You know the King. By walking with Jesus in Spirit and truth, you live your true destiny, and you share his light. You actually *are* light, according to Jesus. (Matthew 5:14)

¹ Ephesians 1:13 – *‘When you believed, you were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.’*

And you can live your life now with this purpose, this prayer on your lips, ***'Father, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'*** (Matthew 6:9-13)

You can live to bring God's kingdom here, to build it here in people's lives, until you are taken there. It is the only kingdom that will stand when all things eventually decay, when all things are shaken.²

'We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.' (Hebrews 12:28)

² Other short books on this topic of purpose and identity in Jesus: *Purpose, Outlet, Your Ministry, My Identity in Christ.*
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4.

'Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.' (Psalm 17:8)

You are part of a 'people', a kingdom. That is comforting. That is family. But you are also an individual within this kingdom. You are a unique son or daughter of God. He has given you your own heart, soul and character. He has also given you your own insight, discernment, perspective and spiritual gifts.

You are not just a family member, in the family of God. You are unique!

There is a story in the Bible where a king consulted four hundred prophets about whether he should go to war. All of them said, 'Go!' But there was one prophet he had not yet asked, and didn't want to ask, but felt he should: Michaiah.

The king sent for Michaiah. On the way the king's messengers tried to pressure Michaiah to agree with what the other prophets were saying, and to please the king with a word of support. Michaiah said to them:

'As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.' (1 Kings 22:14)

Michaiah had a different word for the king, and it turned out to be the only true word spoken. So

we have four hundred and one prophets, but only one was listening to the Lord and spoke the truth.

You may be part of a family of God. But this does not mean that all family members – true sons and daughters - are healthy in their relationship with God. It is important that you recognize you are part of a spiritual family, but that you also exercise your unique, set-apart relationship with your Father. Discern. Listen. Spend time alone with your Father.

Another event in the Bible really stands out to me. Paul was an apostle – in other words, a disciple of Jesus with particular responsibility to preach and teach. We are told that Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with some other apostles that were, in a sense, senior to him. Senior in that they had served in this capacity for more time, and had actually spent physical time (years) with Jesus himself, namely Peter and James and others.

We know Paul held them in high esteem as he said he wanted to meet with them, and share with them about his ministry, making sure he was on track, or as he puts it, ***'had not been running his race in vain.'*** (Galatians 2:2)

However, after meeting with them, and receiving their approval, their support, something interesting happened.

Paul was at an event with these leaders, the same ones, Peter and James. Paul noticed something he felt was out of line spiritually. They were acting in a way that made one group of believers look superior to the others. Paul put it this way: ***'They were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.'*** (Galatians 2:14)

So Paul speaks up and rebukes Peter publicly for this.

All I really want to note here is this: Just because you think someone is higher-ranked than you spiritually, or as a Christian, does *not* mean that (a) They are perfect; and (b) You should always follow their lead.

God might even give you such clarity and prompting as to challenge *them*, to gently, humbly raise a concern you have. He may not. But the point here is that you are an individual before God. You are a son or daughter in your own right, and whether other family members are doing this or doing that, well, you have a call and responsibility to also discern for yourself. You have a call to know the Word, to spend time with the Spirit, and listen to the prompting of God directly.

You were created uniquely. You are an original. You have the Spirit of God in you. And as a member of God's family, you have a unique relationship with your Father.

5.

'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you deep and hidden things that you do not know.' (Jeremiah 3:33)

When you pass through the door of Jesus Christ, in faith and repentance, you become one of his own. A son. A daughter. You are in a family, in a new kingdom.

Your relationship with your Father, your Creator, is true. It is real. It is deep. You are a child of God, and have rights to be in his courts, in his throne room. You have his ear.³

One time a woman with a sick child came to Jesus. She wanted him to heal her daughter. At this time Jesus was really only working with the Jewish people, his ministry had not spread out beyond that group. But this woman was from a group of people that were not esteemed by the Jews. The Jews looked down on them. So when this woman came to Jesus when he was with his disciples, Jesus did something, said something, that was testing to everyone. He said to the woman:

'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' (Matthew 15:26)

³ ***'To all who received him... he gave the right to become children of God.'*** (John 1:12)

This statement is shocking, offensive. It looks like Jesus is saying to her that this woman and her daughter and her people are lesser than the Jews, and makes the comparison of dogs to children.

But Jesus has no favorites. God has no favorites. He is clear about this from Genesis to Revelation.⁴ So what did Jesus *really* mean here? What was the *test*?

I think the test was to his own disciples, not to the woman. The woman was not shocked by this comparison, it was probably the common view of the day. She probably heard it more generically than personally. Look at what was going on here, first the attitude and words of the disciples towards her:

‘The disciples said to Jesus, ‘Send her away!’ (vs.23)

Now look at how the woman responded to this hostile environment, and to what Jesus had said. She *contradicted* Jesus! Yes, that’s correct! He had said, ***‘It is not right to...’*** And she said:

‘Yes it is, Lord! Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.’ (vs.27)

Jesus responded: ***‘Woman, you have great faith Your request is granted.’ (vs.28)***

⁴ Matthew 18:14; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4

Jesus admired this woman's contradiction of what he said. He admired that she had more faith in his **'unfailing love'**, than even his disciples had. None of his disciples had interceded for her, asked Jesus to have mercy on her. None! But she stepped up to Jesus and asked for his love directly.

She believed that Christ, God in the flesh, would not be bound by the perceptions of people, i.e. some 'children' and others 'dogs'. No, rather, she pressed in with faith, pressed past even the rejection of Jesus' own disciples. And this honored Jesus. She was right to do it. This was **'great faith'** and Jesus blessed her.

'The Lord delights in those who trust in his unfailing love.' (Psalm 147:11)

6.

With God you can fight for yourself. You can press in and ask for more. We just saw that with the story of the woman and her daughter.

We can 'wrestle' with God, for understanding, for breakthrough, for favor. A man named Jacob in the Bible wrestled with God. It was an actual, physical struggle with a man, but it was, in fact, an angel of the Lord, or rather, God himself.

Jacob's life was in danger from his brother, Esau. The reason Jacob's life was in danger was because many years before Jacob had deceived his brother out of his inheritance. Jacob had brought this hostility on himself.

The night before the actual encounter, when Jacob knew his brother and his brother's band of people (four hundred) were approaching his camp, Jacob met with God, or rather God came and revealed himself to Jacob, and we are told that Jacob wrestled with God all night. As daybreak approached, the 'man' – the angel of God – told Jacob to let go of him. But Jacob said this:

'I will not let you go until you bless me.'
(Genesis 32:26)

At this point two things happen that are extraordinary:

1. The 'man', God, *does* bless Jacob and he says: **'You have sturggled with God, and overcome.'** (vs.28)

2. Jacob was left with an injured hip, deliberately done by God during the struggle. (vs.31)

Can we wrestle with God and overcome? And in doing so, honor God? Can we contradict something Jesus says, and actually be right and commended by Jesus for doing so? Can we walk away from a spiritual struggle with an injury – an injury inflicted by God - but the struggle was actually a spiritual victory, and the injury was not a punishment?

These are deep waters. But I want to be in the deep waters with God. And I want to walk on water with God.

'Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls. All your waves and breakers have swept over me!' (Psalm 42:7)

7.

With God you can fight for others.

In Genesis 18-19 we see Abraham negotiating with God. He is asking God to not destroy a wicked city if there are even ten 'righteous' people in it. God agrees to this. Interestingly, however, after a dark night in that town, only four people escape, and one is lost in the escape, so only three ultimately get out. The town is burnt to the ground by God for its wickedness.

Even the saving of the three, however, was as a result of Abraham's pleading with God. We are told that it was on account of God **'remembering Abraham'** that those three got out. (Genesis 19:29)

It honors God that we have mercy, show mercy, and even advocate with him for saving others. God calls us to *'stand in the gap'*:

'I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one.'
(Ezekiel 22:30)

This verse gives us insight to God's heart. He is looking to his own creation to have mercy on his own creation; to stand before God and advocate for each other. It moves a parent's heart when one sibling advocates for another sibling, asking

the parent to show mercy, give another chance. The dynamics here are the same. Although God sees a people that need and deserve punishment, he also looks to see if there are any other people that might stand up for them.

There is a tension of truth here, a tension of spirit. God is holy. He *does* want people to **'grieve evil'**. (Ezekiel 9:4) He rewards and saves people who grieve evil. But he also wants a heart of mercy to compel people in their love for one another.

God wants us to be like *him*. He wants us to be holy, but also to be merciful. He wants us to heed his Spirit for the timing, for the lead.

'Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'
(John 1:17)

Grace and truth. Truth and grace. Only the Spirit of God in us can lead and 'blow' us in the right Spirit, in the right moment. There is a time to **'not forgive'** sin, i.e. to not let it slide or evade consequences. (John 20:23)⁵ And there is a time to let something go completely, to extend hand and heart and say, **'Go in peace.'** (Luke 7:50)

God wants us to be people filled with his Spirit, pursuing both justice and mercy, as he does, as Christ did. To heed the lead of the Spirit of God, we need to walk close with his Spirit.

⁵ And see Matthew 16:19

'The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' (John 3:8)

8.

‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.’ (Isaiah 1:18)

Jesus passed through fire to get to us. To get to me. To get to you.

There is a powerful account in Scripture about Jesus just after he rose from the dead. We are told that he appeared walking alongside two men, on a long and dusty road. The men were sad because of the death of Jesus, and were discussing that very thing:

‘As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself came up and walked alongside them; but they were kept from recognizing him.’ (Luke 24:15-16)

We are told that one of the men was named Cleopas, but we don't know the name of the other.

Jesus had not yet even appeared to his twelve disciples. He had not appeared to politicians, celebrities, or important people in the town. And yet he appeared to these two men, and spent hours with them, walking, talking, explaining things, and then he sat down to eat with them. It was at this moment these men realized who it was:

‘Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, ‘Were our hearts not burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’ (vs.31-32)

The biggest event in the history of mankind had just taken place: *God as a man, died and came alive again and walked out of the grave.* This same God, Jesus Christ, then appears to two broken-hearted men, one of whom we still have no name for, and spends hours and hours with *just* them. He comforts them. He enlightens them. He sits to eat with them.

Jesus had taught the crowds, ***‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth!’*** Jesus had told his own disciples: ***‘Do not despise children, for their angels in heaven look on the face of their Father in heaven.’*** And when Jesus – ***‘God with us’*** – had been born, the host of heavenly angels appeared to the lowest of society, the shepherds in the field. They announced the good news to *them*. They sang to *them* from heaven!⁶

This is our God. He never forgets the lowly. In fact, he prizes them. He grants them extra measures of faith and of inheritance to come. Jesus made this clear.⁷ Even when the world is rocked by a deep spiritual truth and event, God

⁶ Matthew 5:5, 18:10, 1:23, Luke 2:8-14

⁷ James 2:5, Matthew 20:16

appears to the lonely and walks with them; he won't disappear until they are comforted.

We can – and must – press into our relationship with God in Christ. He honors this honest relationship, this true love. We have seen this.

But we must not forget, that we love like this because he loved us *first* like this.

'We love him because he first loved us.'

(1 John 4:19)

He descended from heaven to reach us here. He pressed in on us when we spat on him, reviled him, even crucified him. He whispered, ***'Forgive them, Father, they know not what they do.'***

(Luke 23:34)

Thank you for taking time to read this book. I hope it was an encouragement to you!

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