

NOT OF THIS WORLD

On the Life and Ways of Jesus Christ

'Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world.''

(John 18:36)

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To Mary Catherine Szymeczek, the '*apple of
God's eye.*' (Psalm 17:8)

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1. Introduction

Jesus did not pursue success – or influence or impact – in the way of the world. He worked in an almost completely opposite way to what we consider ‘natural’.

When Jesus healed a person, he would often ask the healed person to *not* tell anyone. At other times he would only partially heal, and send the person away from the crowds, from the onlookers, to experience the rest of the healing.

When Jesus changed water to wine, he only allowed the servants to see and know what he was doing. Everyone at the wedding tasted the miracle, and in a sense it was the rich that benefitted from it, but it was the poor that were actually shown the miracle. And so they went home that night richer than the guests, more honored by God.

Jesus hid his glory from the wealthy and proud, and revealed his glory to the lowly and humble. These ‘ways’ of Christ frustrated his own brothers, his family. Once they said to him:

‘No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Show yourself to the world.’

(John 7:4)

Jesus did not act in a way to become a public figure, because he did not want to become a

public figure. That's a status and a type of power that belongs to a worldly kingdom; Jesus said, ***'My kingdom is not of this world.'*** (John 18:36)

2. The Identity of Jesus

Everything Jesus did, and how he did it, all hinges on who he was, who he is. In fact, nothing he did makes any sense, or really has any bearing, if not understood in light of his identity.

The prophet, Isaiah, six hundred years before Jesus was born, said that one day a virgin would conceive and give birth to a child, and he would be called Immanuel, which means **'God with us.'** (Isaiah 7:14) Matthew, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, said that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. (Matthew 1:23)

Isaiah also prophesied this:

'To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' (Isaiah 9:6)

Jesus came to earth as 'God with us.' We are told that he was the **'Word of God made flesh'**,¹ and also that **'God lives in Christ in bodily form.'** (Colossians 2:9)

In the same way Jesus hid his glory, he also hid his identity. He did not parade through the

¹ John 1:1,14

streets shouting, *'I am God!'* But rather, much like his mode of miracles, he said it quietly, he said it in many ways, he evidenced it when words were not enough:

'Jesus said, 'The works I do in my Father's name testify about me... Even if you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.' (John 10:38)

In Jesus' day the people understood clearly that there was only one true God, and that Jesus was making himself equal to this God. It was mysterious, deep, a new revelation. This was God as human, walking with his own creation as one of them. But also revealing his authority over creation through miracles, commanding wind and waves, walking on water, changing water to wine. For this reason Jesus appealed to us in our doubt, that if we could not hear and believe that this was the Savior here before us, we could and should look at the works he was performing.

When the disciples saw Jesus walk on water, ***'they worshipped him.'*** (Matthew 14:33)

There is a point where the words of Christ and the works of Christ come together, and in Christ we see, as the prophet said we would see, the ***'Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'*** And here we must choose to either worship, or turn away.

Jesus said, '***Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.***' (John 14:9)

3. A Sign Opposed

When Jesus was only days old, his parents took him to the temple. A man of God named Simeon was there. He prophesied over Jesus, saying:

‘This child will cause the fall and rise of many. He will be a sign that is opposed, so that the thoughts of hearts will be exposed.’
(Luke 2:34-35)

This word paints a picture of conflict. Jesus, **‘God with us’**, would be conflictual. Because of him some would rise, others would fall. He would be opposed – ultimately killed – but his life, his presence, would expose hearts.

Jesus was so meek that he often would not impose his full identity on people, or on a situation. Sometimes he even told his disciples to *not* tell people who he was.² He would display power behind the scenes to those who had no power, who sought no power. And yet, his identity was unyielding, harder than flint. We see this in Simeon’s prophecy, we also hear this in Jesus’ own words:

‘Anyone who comes against me, the chief cornerstone, will be cut to pieces. And anyone on whom this stone falls will be crushed.’ (Luke 20:17-18)

² Matthew 16:20

Children felt confident to come to Jesus. They pressed up to him, and disciples tried to push them away. But Jesus famously said, ***‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them! The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as them.’*** (Matthew 19:14)

Something about Jesus drew children to him. They trusted him. The most innocent of souls were drawn to Jesus. He said his own kingdom belonged to the childlike. And yet, this same man would make a whip out of cords and go through the church lobby cracking it at people and kicking over tables of people trying to sell things.³ He was full of zeal and fire, and some said of him that he was ***‘demon-possessed and raving mad.’*** (John 10:20)

God of heaven is not someone we can make up, or paint in our own image. We were made in *his* image, not he in ours. (Genesis 1:27) If we want to know the true God, we need him to reveal himself. We need him to speak. And we listen, and we learn.

Jesus was meek, but he was zealous and sometimes scary. He showed his power against the wind, waves and demons, but he also said that every man, woman and child would stand

³ Matthew 21:12-17

before his judgment seat one day.⁴ We, too, are his creation, and he has authority over our existence in the same way he has authority over the wind. We are warned:

‘Seek the Lord while he may be found.’
(Isaiah 55:6)

And again,

‘Remember your Creator before your flesh returns to dust, and your spirit returns to God who gave it.’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

⁴ Matthew 25:31-32; 2 Corinthians 5:10

4. Not as the World Gives

Before Jesus came to earth, the kingdom of Israel looked a lot like the kingdom of any other surrounding nation. Well, in the case of Israel it was not going too well in that Rome had taken them over, were occupying their land. But the rise and fall of kings, including the kings of Israel, was all in the same system as that of the world. Might was right. Armies fought, slaughtered, took land, lost land, took people, lost people.

So when Jesus came to earth, came to his people, as '**God with us**', as the promised Savior of the world, they were expecting a warrior. They were expecting a revolt. They wanted honor like that of past kings, and spoils like that of a victor. They wanted revenge, blood, wealth and glory.

But a spiritual line had been drawn. This same God was no longer going to 'honor' his people like that of the world. He was no longer going to give peace, as the world gives peace. A new deal had been done, a new covenant from heaven.

The people could not understand who Jesus was nor what he was offering. They needed a warrior king, and he was talking about turning the other cheek. They needed their enemies cast out of their land, and he spoke about praying blessing

on them. They cried out for release from captivity, and he spoke about forgiveness and release from sin.

When he was born it was said, ***'His name will be Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'*** (Matthew 1:21)

This Savior God was speaking now about saving souls, and their eternal inheritance in heaven. But they, much like us, were consumed with saving their own mortal lives and amassing wealth here and now. Jesus turned their world upside down. Jesus turns our world upside down. And when we encounter him, and he exposes our hearts, do we rise? Do we fall?

The honor Jesus now offered people was the honor of getting right with God, having sins forgiven, having a ***'new heart and a new spirit.'***⁵ Jesus offered status that outstripped the here and now. He offered rewards in heaven, and life after death. Do you want reward now that will perish when you perish, or do you want reward later where ***'moth and rust cannot destroy, and thieves cannot break in and steal?'*** (Matthew 6:20)

Jesus pressed us with words that dripped blood, that followed his steps. He said, ***'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but***

⁵ Ezekiel 36:26

whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. (Mark 8:36)

So yes, Jesus offered honor, but not as the world gives. He offered wealth and great reward, but not as the world gives. And even now, to you, to me, he offers peace, but not as the world gives.

‘Jesus said, ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.’ (John 14:27)

5. Derelict Churches

I remember seeing an old, stone church in Europe that had been converted into a modern insurance company. My heart sank. It felt like losing ground in a battle. However, I have since come to understand things differently. The bigger picture. A timeless picture. And a different dimension.

You see, although Jesus came to earth and gives us the mission of bringing heaven to earth, he is also preparing a whole new universe and population for the rest of eternity. So two things are really going on. Let's look at them a little closer...

First, let's talk about the here and now. Let's talk about God in the person of Jesus Christ, stepping down from heaven to save earth, and redeem earth. That is, so to speak, our reality now, our mission now, and chapter one. We're in it! And here is what it looks like...

Jesus came to earth – the earth he created and owns – with the mission of taking it back, restoring it, saving souls, defeating death. He has done that. He said while hanging on the cross, **'It is finished.'** (John 19:30) And while we find ourselves passing through this stage of the journey, Jesus gave us a mission: To pray and work to bring heaven to earth. He taught us to pray, **'Your kingdom come, your will be done,**

on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matthew 6:9-13)
Jesus loves people, he loves creation, and he wants it back. His gospel and name and power and light are moving steadily across the nations, across history, and pushing darkness out. Jesus himself said: ***'The gates of hell will not stop the advance of my kingdom.'*** (Matthew 16:18)

We were also told by the prophet Isaiah that the kingdom of Jesus would never stop increasing. (Isaiah 9:7) We were told by the prophet Habakkuk that the ***'knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.'*** (Habakkuk 2:14) We are seeing this happen, we are living this. And by God's grace – as we share Jesus with others – we are part of this. This is our experience of God's salvation here and now, our taste of his Spirit, our friendship with Jesus Christ.

Now let's talk about chapter two of what God is doing, what he promises, and what lay ahead for every one of us...

If you are alive, you will soon be dead. Hate to say it, but it's true. You and I are on a timeline to the finish line. For the Christian, this is very good news! As Paul said, ***'I would prefer to die and be with Christ!'***⁶ As a follower of Jesus, chapter two is divine, complete, perfect peace for the rest of eternity.

⁶ Philippians 1:23

Jesus said to his disciples when he was near the end of his ministry, ***'I am going to prepare a place for you. And when I have prepared it, I will come and take you there.'*** (John 14:1-3) Jesus was speaking of heaven itself. When we die we go straight there. For this reason Jesus said to the man who was dying on a cross beside him, ***'Today you will be with me in paradise.'*** (Luke 23:43) Also for this reason we see people who have died in the past – like Moses and Elijah – appear with Christ as alive even now. (Matthew 17:3) The Bible does speak of a great resurrection of all those who have died at the end times,⁷ but we are also shown time and time again that the moment a believer dies, they pass into heaven itself – the great, eternal and final 'chapter two' of God's salvation.

'There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' (Revelation 21:4)

Now let me focus back in on the 'derelict churches' issue...

Jesus described himself as a 'door' to salvation. He put it this way: ***'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved. They will go in and come out and find new life.'*** (John 10:9) Even when Jesus was here on the earth, displaying his miracles to people,

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

speaking his words to people, not everyone believed. In fact, Jesus himself said it would be the minority, the **'few'**, who take his narrow road, and that most would take the **'broad road that leads to destruction.'**⁸ So even where the full light of God is displayed, where Jesus is experienced, this does not mean Jesus is accepted there.

So the mission here on earth is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, so that people hear of Christ, and have the opportunity to receive him.⁹ If Jesus is believed, is received, then we hope and pray that we will see changes in that person, that home, that community. Maybe even a church will be built and be used for a time. This is seeing God's kingdom come, his will done, on earth as it is in heaven. However, even as we build God's kingdom here, we fix our eyes on his kingdom *there*.

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

And again,

'For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.' (Hebrews 13:14)

⁸ Matthew 7:13-14

⁹ Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47

There will be towns and cities that at a certain point in history have many Christians in them, and so will have many things built and invested in that supported the gospel message. But history here on earth will change, and some of these same towns and cities will lose people of faith, a legacy of faith, and church buildings will become businesses. Has God lost ground here? No! Because the ground God is taking is that of souls, not of the earth or buildings or politics. The earth is his platform, his space, to make his name known to people. And when time is up, all the souls from throughout all the ages will come together and form the new and eternal population of heaven itself. The rest will be no more. And earth will be completely restructured, but not until first razed to the ground by fire. (2 Peter 3:10)

So a derelict church means something different to me now. It means that for a season this building was used by God to make his gospel known to the souls of that season. But now God is using other means to make his gospel known to people in this place. The building, the church, was a tool for a season. New tools are needed now. We must remember, however, that church buildings do not share the gospel; you and I share the gospel. And we don't need church buildings to do that.

'Jesus said, 'The time has come when people will neither worship God in this or that place,

or in this or that location. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24)

Let's summarize: Chapter one of God's salvation is Jesus here on earth, in our hearts and in our lives. Chapter two of God's salvation is heaven itself, all the saved souls together, and a new, perfect and eternal city.

6. Wisdom

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' (Proverbs 1:7)

Wisdom is not an equation; it is spirit. It's not a Chinese proverb that we pull out and apply. It's not even a Biblical Proverb that we pull out and apply. When you need wisdom in a given situation, that situation – that moment, those factors and people – has never existed before, never will again. So how do you know what is wise to do in that moment? You need a word, a tone, a decision, an insight, that is unique to this situation.

Jesus had one message, one call. It was to come to God, to come to himself, turning away from sin and believing in him for salvation: ***'My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.'*** (John 6:40)

Jesus had one end goal with every soul. But his actual words, actions, moments with individuals were different every time. If he had just one goal, one message, why was this not the only thing he was saying to people? Why so many different messages, so to speak, with the one goal? Why so many different moments with people, if the same outcome, the one and only gospel, was the call?

There are not different religions that lead to the truth, but there are different roads that lead to Christ. In fact, there is a different road for every individual. For this reason we love to hear personal testimonies of coming to know Jesus. There is a different one for every person in the room.

Jesus told the rich ruler to sell everything he had and follow him. But Jesus told the man who actually *asked* to follow him, to rather go back to his own village and begin to share. Jesus healed a man without revealing his identity; then later, met him again, revealed his identity, and commanded this man to stop sinning. To another man, Jesus said he forgave his sins before there was any confession of sin. Jesus healed people without them asking, and others he made them ask first. Jesus said some people were close to the Kingdom, and left the conversation there. To others he challenged them, made them almost beg and force through, like the Canaanite woman.¹⁰

The goal, the call, to each one of us is to come to Jesus in sincere faith, true repentance of sin. And yet, Jesus is speaking and whispering words and healing and tests and rest to just you, day in, day out. You are unique, and his Spirit to you is personal.

¹⁰ Mark 10:17-22; Mark 5:18-20; John 5:1-14; Luke 5:20-24; Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 15:21-28

‘Jesus said, ‘Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.’ (Revelation 3:19-20)

This is a personal invitation, ***‘If anyone hears...’*** If you hear, and you open the door to Christ, he will come in and dine with just you.

Jesus said of his own life here on earth, his own mission, that he navigated by listening to the guidance of the Spirit.

‘Jesus said, ‘I can do nothing by myself. I can only do what I see the Father doing. Whatever the Father does I also do.’ (John 5:19)

This is how Jesus knew to heal one but not everyone. This is how he knew to call it a day. This is how he knew to speak, not speak, to stand and confront, or to duck and dive.¹¹

‘He is kept in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on the Lord.’ (Isaiah 26:3)

Jesus moved in the Spirit. He calls us to move in his Spirit. There is freedom and peace here, there is living wisdom and guidance here.

¹¹ John 10:39; Luke 11:37-54

'If any of you need wisdom, ask God. He gives generously.' (James 1:5)

7. Walking by the Spirit

The king of Israel, Ahab, was considering going to war. He asked all his prophets – about four hundred of them – for counsel. They all said, **‘Do it, you will have victory!’** But there was one prophet the king was yet to consult: Micaiah. The king said of this prophet, **‘I hate him, because he never prophesies anything good about me.’** However, he did send for him. We’ll pick up the story here...

‘So the king of Israel said, “Bring Micaiah at once.”

All the other prophets were prophesying the same thing. “Attack and be victorious, for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.”

The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, “Look, the other prophets without exception are predicting success for the king. Let your word agree with theirs, and speak favorably.”

But Micaiah said, “As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me.”

When he arrived, the king asked him, “Micaiah, shall we go to war against Ramoth Gilead, or not?”

“Attack and be victorious,” he answered, “for the Lord will give it into the king’s hand.”

The king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?” (1 Kings 22)

Micaiah began by being sarcastic, telling the king what he wanted to hear. The king asked for his true word. So Micaiah told Ahab that if he went to war, he would be going to his death. One of the false prophets standing nearby slapped Micaiah in the face for saying this. The king also was angry at Micaiah and had him thrown in prison. Yes, you guessed it. King Ahab went to war with his men, and he was killed that same day.

It is really important to note that throughout the Bible, the true prophets were rejected by the religious leaders of the day, the other 'prophets', and the people. Almost always. And yet, it is the writings and the prophecies of the true prophets that we read and share now, and that we esteem. However, note: The Pharisees – the hypocritical religious teachers of Jesus' time – also revered the true prophets in history. But Jesus said they did this only after killing them. They're dead, they're gone, they cannot call out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees anymore, so now it is safe to quote them – and twist their words into whatever we want.¹²

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, had to rebuke the other apostles – Peter and even James, the brother of Jesus. Just because they were apostles did not get them a pass on walking with the Spirit, or staying true to the gospel.

¹² Matthew 23:29-33; Luke 12:1

(Galatians 2:11-14) Paul was one of them, but his bond to them was only secondary to his bond to Jesus Christ, to God the Father.

You may be a Christian and a member of a church. But this 'loyalty' is a distant second (and I mean, so distant you can't see it on the horizon), to your loyalty to Jesus Christ. In the same way Micaiah had to stand up to the other prophets, and Paul had to stand up to Peter, so too, you may be called to stand up to others that you discern are drifting from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus called every individual that he created, to follow him. Not to join this or that denomination, or to become a member of this or that church, or to go to seminary or learn Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, or to chase down this or that spiritual gift, or to vote for a particular political party... Jesus looks every man, woman and child in the eyes – eyes he has created – and says, '**Come to me.**' (Matthew 11:28) Jesus says, '**I am the door.**' (John 10:9)

It is critical to understand this. And Jesus promised no 'status' that people could depend on in making this decision, in walking with him and by the Spirit. Look at what he told Nicodemus, a religious leader of the day, who wanted something concrete, something set and steady, to determine whether or not to follow Jesus:

‘Jesus said to him, “You must be born of the spirit... 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 3:6-8)

If you find the treasure that is Jesus, that is **‘God with us’**, it is worth everything. It is worth sacrifices you make to be with Christ and his people, and it is worth sacrifices you make to be with Christ and stand up to his people – as did Micaiah, as did Paul, and many others throughout history, and many others now across the globe.

Do you follow Christ, or do you follow local church leaders?

Jesus said to his followers and to the crowd:

‘Insofar as religious teachers are telling you what the Bible actually teaches, listen and obey. But don’t do as they do. They talk the talk, but they don’t walk the walk. They do everything for show. They love honor, esteem and respect, and they love to be called ‘Teacher’. But don’t call them teacher, because you have only one teacher, the Savior.’ (Matthew 23:1-12)

I’m not talking here about the general call of Scripture to submit to leaders and make their work easy. That is the natural stuff, the easy

stuff. We all know that.¹³ I'm talking about the teaching and call to hold Christ and his Spirit in your spirit, higher in authority than religious leaders. And have the courage to confront, if prompted by the Spirit, or at least to turn and walk, if led by the Spirit. If a shepherd is good, follow. If he is not, discern and leave the flock. There are bad shepherds out there, just as there were bad prophets, and misled apostles. For this reason you and I are called to discern even prophecy. Not to take it as a package deal, but to know and understand that everything coming through the vessels of people runs the risk of being contaminated. So Paul says to us lay people:

'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

¹³ 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7

8. The Zero-Obligation Miracle

In this life there is nothing for nothing. I'm talking about the general flow. There are some exceptions here and there, mostly in young kids. But the overwhelming force in and through people is self-serving, never forgets a debt, not in word or deed.

If you add an agenda to the 'give', there is almost a cruel contract at work just beneath the surface. And if there is a betrayal of any kind, this often reveals that our kindness towards a person was not actually free of charge, free of obligation. *'I was always nice to that guy even when he... And now I heard he said...'* We instinctively have an inventory of what we gave them, what we paid them, and what they owe us. Nothing for nothing.

Now, when we consider Jesus and why he came to earth, we see something extraordinary. Literally extra-ordinary, i.e. out of the ordinary, not of this world.

Jesus did have a very serious, very clear agenda. He wanted something from us. He came asking, even requiring people to turn away from their sin and acknowledge him as Lord, as King, as God. One time he explicitly said, ***'I will do this miracle so that you know I have the power to forgive sin.'*** (Luke 5:24) He did miracles to prove – and ask allegiance to – who

he was, who he is: Lord and Savior of the world. However, Jesus was meek. He wanted to show evidence to people, and even woo the hearts of people, but not obligate them. True relationship, true faith in God, is a heart's response, a choice. Jesus wanted to show himself to the world, but not obligate the world. This is not of the world!

Jesus did a miracle and fed thousands of people using just a couple loaves and fishes. He prayed and multiplied the food – created food – to feed people. The very next day some of this same crowd came to Jesus and were trying to manipulate him into doing this same miracle. Their hearts were off. They had seen the power of God, but just wanted more food from him. Jesus said to them:

'You are looking for me not because you saw the signs I performed, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.' (John 6:26)

At this point Jesus does not create more food, but rather goes on to teach them the real, the ultimate point of his miracle: ***'I am the bread of life.'*** And he ramps it up further, pressing these listeners beyond their comfort zone, speaking with almost cannibalistic imagery: ***'Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you.'*** (vs.53) Look what happened: ***'Many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.'*** (vs.66)

So Jesus, with a clear purpose to his power – i.e. getting people to see and believe in him – did not use his power to push people over the edge with obligation. It would have been so easy to negotiate a little: *'I will feed you this day, fill your bellies and that of your families, but I need your loyalty over the coming days! I need you to believe and follow me!'*

Jesus healed many sick people. He could have easily put a little spin on it each time, a small call to stick by him, stand up for him. There were also very influential people in town, like Herod and Pilate, and just one display of power, especially on a personal level (healing a daughter, or giving a vision) could have secured their support, their 'faith', their following. Easy!

But no. Jesus poured out power, healing, provision, forgiveness, in such a way that this same people could still find reasons to turn away, turn a blind eye, reject and crucify.

Only God could give so much and yet leave zero obligation on the soul of a man, of a nation, of a world.

Now, we must note that *'no-obligation'* is not exactly the full picture. Jesus avoided putting pressure on us, because there is *already* pressure on us. Look at this very famous verse, which you may know; but then look at the two verses that follow right after it:

'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.' (John 3:16-18)

Jesus came to save, because we are lost. We are lost already. We are condemned already. He said himself, ***'I have come to seek and save the lost.'*** (Luke 19:10)

Jesus did zero-obligation miracles, and gave love freely. He did not cash in on these kindnesses, in the same way he does not cash in on these kindnesses to you and me today. And yet, we are told, we are warned, that creation itself – the miracle of life, love, conscience, hope – obligates everyone to acknowledge God, seek God, follow God.

'What may be known about God is plain to people, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.' (Romans 1:19-20)

'God created all people to seek him, reach out for him and find him.' (Acts 17:27)

Jesus did not obligate people with his kindness. Not because he had no call on their lives, or mission in his generosity, but rather because people are already obligated deeply, desperately, and no further proof is needed.

'Seek the Lord while he may be found.'
(Isaiah 55:6)

'Remember your Creator before your flesh returns to dust, and your spirit returns to God who gave it.' (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

9. To Be Pitied

‘When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.’ (Matthew 9:36)

Jesus has pity on you. It is important to know this. He knows how hard life is. He sees and knows how hard you work, your effort to stay positive and see the good in people, the good in life. He knows the toil, and he feels compassion for you.

Yes, he sees your sin, and there are consequences for sin. But this does not take away from his love for you, his desire to be with you, heal, protect, restore, and pour out joy on you, and heaven before you.

Do you want this compassion? This deep understanding and pity even in your sin and regret? Jesus will weep with you, as he did with Martha and Mary and over the whole city.¹⁴ He will be with you. But this kindness of Christ cost him dearly. He spilt blood to pay for sin and sorrow. Jesus paid for it, feels your regret, your shame, and has compassion on you. He wants to forgive you and lift your chin, lift your eyes, to a new road, a new life.

¹⁴ John 11:35; Luke 19:41-42

However, it is important to **'count the cost'**¹⁵ of this kindness of God, this compassion of Christ. It cost him his life, and he asks your life in exchange. He wants you to turn away from your sin and follow him.

'Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?' (Romans 2:4)

The kindness and pity of Christ towards you, towards me, in our sorrow, our regret, is to lead us to repentance. The heart of Jesus will break with ours, but only if ours breaks. Am I broken-hearted by my sin?

Once Jesus told this parable:

'Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a religious leader and the other a known cheat and thief. The religious man stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this thief here...'

But the thief stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁵ Luke 14:28-43

Jesus said, 'I tell you that this man, the thief, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

(Luke 18:9-14)

Jesus does pity us in our sorrow. He cares and comes to us. He sits with us. However, his compassion is a call. It is an invitation to be humble and honest about our sin, and to ask forgiveness. His kindness is a call to repentance, to walk away from our sin and our sinful lifestyle. He pities us, and comes to rescue us, and take us through a new door of life, to new pastures.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who comes through me will be saved. They will go in and come out and find new life.'

(John 10:9)

10. False Motives or True

‘But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.’ (Philippians 1:18)

The apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote this. And he said that some people were speaking the gospel message in order to make more trouble for him; basically, to keep the report circulating that upset authorities, so they would take it out on Paul in prison.

However, Paul knew the power of the gospel message. He knew that even if it was passed on with false motives, the message itself – the name of Jesus and his offer of forgiveness and life – would not be compromised.

Have you ever heard someone gossiping about someone, and they report in a disparaging, undermining way, something that the person did? But you think to yourself, *‘That is actually a great thing they did, and was quite courageous!’*?

In the same way, Paul is saying that the message of Jesus carries its own authority. If someone reports it correctly, no matter what spin they hope to put on it, power will go forth. This does not mean everyone will accept it, but it does mean that the gospel keeps advancing.

And as we have already considered, the name and person of Jesus **'exposes the thoughts of many hearts.'** (Luke 2:34-35) And again, **'Anyone who comes against Jesus as the chief cornerstone will be cut to pieces.'** (Luke 20:17-18)

I have personally heard testimonies from people saying they had mocked Christ, but then woke up at night thinking about what they said, and deep conviction came over their spirit that the one they mocked was in fact true.

This is a unique spiritual force of Jesus, not of this world. And it is for this reason that the gospel message of Christ – his true identity, and his true promises – simply need to be shared, not proven or argued or forced or enforced. The gospel message is the power of God. The power of God is the gospel message. We simply need to stand with Christ and testify: He is the One.

'I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.' (Romans 1:16)

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