

Jesus Or Something Else

By: Jim Hohnberger

It amazes me how many years I spent studying God's Word every day without finding Jesus! Oh, I found truth, but I did not find Jesus. John 14:6 says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus is the only Way. When we have a problem with even a little thing, He is the only Way. There is no salvation in any other way—none whatsoever.

"Not only am I the way, but I am the truth," Jesus says. We have held onto *a* truth, but we have not found *the* Truth. We can have a lot of truths, but He is the Truth to which all the other truths point. For years I tried to satisfy myself with individual truths rather than with *the* Truth.

Christ also says in John 10:9: "I am the door"—in other words, you must come through Me. When we try to come into the Kingdom through other ways, we can look pretty good and fool a lot of people, but it doesn't work to really change me on the inside. Jesus is the Door. He is the only Way. Everyday I must enter in through that Door. That's the Gospel. That isn't good news; that is utterly fantastic news! It means I don't have to keep living the lie of pretended Christianity. I can have salvation for myself, through Him, but only through him. In John 6:51, Jesus told us: "I am the living bread." Only He can sustain me. We can be sustained with nothing else. He is the vitality of

life. He is the Gospel.

John 15:5 "For without me ye can do [absolutely] nothing." He longs for us to experience life as He lived it. Jesus was and is the living expression of true love. 1 John 4:8 explains, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God for God is love." This standard is not the puny, self-serving love, which for years was all I understood. This is a love way beyond human generation. It's a love for others that extends so far beyond our frail understandings that it challenges me to this very day.

Why do I share these texts? Because maybe you, just like me, have spent years making the gospel something other than a daily, hourly, living experience in Jesus Christ.

The gospel isn't your church attendance, isn't even your church membership. It isn't dietary reforms, isn't dress reform, isn't educational reform or home schooling. The gospel isn't about living in the country and it is most certainly not about our understanding of the truth. Neither is the gospel about our faithfulness in giving Bible studies, our knowledge of prophecy, or our evangelistic efforts, not even defending the truth.

All of these things, all of which are right in and of themselves, can and do be-

come a substitute for the indwelling Christ in the human heart and that, friends, is why we are still here, why we haven't gone to heaven, and why we have such problems with others in spite of our great knowledge of spiritual things. We have become just like the Jewish nation of old. Its leaders and its people had all the externals and they made these externals their gospel. What did they really have? Nothing.

Ellen G. White in *The Desire of Ages*, 477-478, says it this way: "Christ is the Door to the fold of God. Through this Door all His children, from the earliest times, have found entrance. ... Many have come presenting other objects for the faith of the world; ceremonies and systems have been devised by which men hope to receive justification and peace with God, and thus find entrance to His fold. But the only Door is Christ, and all who have interposed something to take the place of Christ, all who have tried to enter the fold in some other way, are thieves and robbers."

Have we interposed something in the place of Christ? I believe we have. It is clear in the first few minutes we speak to someone else. Where does the conversation go? Health practices? Our understanding of truth? Home school? Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. If anything other than Christ dominates our speech, it has probably become a substitute for a living connection with God Himself and that, my friends, is idolatry.

Jesus Himself said to the Jews, who were proud of their knowledge, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye *think* ye have eternal life." John 5:39. Were they searching the Scriptures for a living experience in Christ? No way! They were searching the Scriptures for a knowledge of how to debate, carry on a discussion, but not a living experience. They were satisfied with only the rays of light—rather than seeking for the sun itself. What was the result? Jesus declared: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Verse 40. What is Christ

saying to you and me, today? "*You may have something; you may have found some truths; you may have found some reforms; you may be involved in outreach; however, if you do not have Me, you do not have life. You, my precious child, whom I love and long for, are dead.*"

Christ is the Power to live out the life to which the Scriptures point us. For years I tried to live the life without a vital connection with the Power. My religion was made up of my reforms, my knowledge, my doctrines, and my church membership. Yet it all amounted to no saving good. 2 Timothy 3:5 says it this way: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." We have to honestly ask ourselves if this is true of us. The Power is found in a daily, hourly, moment-by-moment abiding experience in Jesus Christ.

The Desire of Ages, 310, says: "Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world." You see the very truths that I hold can actually become a curse to me and to the world. They can make me haughty and self-confident. At best, they can make me a foolish virgin.

When I first fell in love with these Scriptures, they were like a lamp unto my feet. I read them every day. I soaked in the truths. I said, "Why didn't anybody ever share this with me?" Then I went to my mother, a very devout Roman Catholic, and said, "Mother, did you know that we are worshipping on the wrong day? Did you know that we shouldn't baptize infants? Did you know that we shouldn't eat unclean meats? Did you know that we don't need to confess our sins to a priest? Did you know...?"

Did my mother say, "Praise God! My son has found the truth!?" No. I had found the truth, but I was wielding it in the flesh.

So it is today. We have precious and present truth, but we preach it in the flesh—rather than in the spirit. Romans 1:18 says

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it so well: We “hold the truth in unrighteousness.” That is what happened to me. I was Bible-thumping my family on their heads. I didn’t have a living experience in Jesus. I didn’t know why they wouldn’t accept the truth. I went back to my church family and said, “I am being persecuted for the truth’s sake.” Was I really? No, I don’t think so. I was simply receiving the proper results for my rudeness and inconsideration of others. This kind of religion will never finish the work. It will do *a* work, but it will never *finish* the work.

“Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.” Romans 2:17-24. To preach the truth and say that I possess the truth and then not live it is blasphemy. Woe is me!

I must be honest with you and we must be honest with ourselves. If your Christianity doesn’t work at home, don’t export it. Stop exporting and start importing. Bring it in. If you haven’t taken care of the beast in your own heart through the grace of Jesus Christ, quit telling everyone about the beast power of the end times and by the grace of God, clean up the beast within first.

But if your religion works, then what? Take it to the world! Revelation 14:6 says to take the everlasting gospel “to every nation,

and kindred, and tongue, and people—if it works. The problem is that there is no great evidence in the Christian church that it is working. There are scores of wounded, in our own camps, in all divisions and factions. Our marriages and families are being broken up almost as fast as the world’s. We have driven our youth away from us, because of our hypocrisy. The majority in our ranks are hurting—wounded, and floundering. Yet we have not learned to bring them to the Shepherd that they might be healed. We are all guilty of criminal neglect: “The

diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost.” Ezekiel 34:4.

If we in our own homes have not found how to live the gospel, what do we have to share with our neighbors? Absolutely nothing. What do we have to share with the world? Nothing. If I cannot get along with my own

spouse, if fighting and bickering and arguing is the weekly routine, what do I have to share with others that will change them?

For example, one family that was counseling with me said, “We are conducting twelve Bible studies.”

“Praise God!” I exclaimed. Then I looked at that husband and asked, “How do you treat your wife at home?” The husband hung his head.

I turned to the wife, “How does he treat you at home?”

“Well,” she said, “not very good.”

Then I asked, “What are you giving to those twelve Bible study contacts? Are you giving them the gospel? Or are you giving them something else?”

We need to start asking ourselves these serious questions. What do I have to share with others that will change them? If my own children don’t mind, if they argue and fight constantly, if they don’t know how to surrender their wills or how to go to Jesus to keep them, then does my religion have

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any saving value to offer anyone? No, not at all.

A wise author wrote: "Our religion will be of but little worth to our fellow men if it is only theoretical and not practical." Practical means that it works; it changes my life. It means that when irritations arise in my life, when frustrations come in, when appetite and passion clamor, or inclination and impulse want to grab hold of me, it works. It means that I turn to Jesus and say: "Lord save me," and I surrender the craving to Him; I depend upon Him; I work with Him. It means that feelings and emotions do not rule me any longer. Irritations and passions don't rule me. If it doesn't work, it isn't practical.

We are told in Luke 14:33: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." It is a willingness to let God have me every moment of every hour of every day. All that is required on our part is a complete surrender of our thoughts, our purposes, and our will—all that we have and are—to God to be used as He may direct. That is true Christianity! Everything else is ordinary religion. Complete, continuous surrender, absolute dependency, entire subordination, a cultivated mistrustfulness of ourselves and our wisdom—that is the gospel and nothing less.

The day I wrote this message, I woke up early and spent time with God in prayer and study. About two o'clock that afternoon, I walked into our kitchen and saw my oldest son, Matthew, scrubbing very dirty garden potatoes for lunch. I walked past him to the wood cook stove to warm myself. The impression came to me, "Jim, help your son scrub the potatoes."

"What?" I thought, "Scrub the potatoes! You've got to be kidding me, Lord. I don't want to scrub the potatoes."

In this situation, what is the difference between ordinary religion and true Christianity? I stubbornly wrestled in my mind for several minutes. Finally the thought came to me, "Jim, what is your decision?"

What is your decision, brothers and sisters? Will you scrub the potatoes? Gala-

tians 5:24 says: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Just because I am Christ's does not mean that my flesh doesn't clamor for the control anymore. It means that I have the Power outside of myself that can subdue that flesh, if I allow Him to do so.

I pleaded, "But why, Lord? Why is it necessary for me, Jim Hohnberger, a preacher in the pulpit, to scrub the potatoes? Isn't that demeaning?"

A text flashed into my mind, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Matthew 20:27-28. The true sign of someone who has found an abiding experience in Jesus Christ is that he is in the world to serve God and man.

We lose nothing by giving all to God—nothing but sin and selfishness. The gospel then is not merely the possession of pure doctrines, church membership, reforms, and outreach, but it is a living, daily experience in the Person Jesus Christ, in which we have the mind of Christ and are emptied of self. We live to serve God and man—always doing God's will, however crucifying to self. Finding this living experience is salvation and the only thing that truly matters. May we find that experience in *Jesus*—not *something else*.

Power for Living



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