

March-April 2014



Simply Jesus

From Alpha . . .



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2014: Worship

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Simply (and Totally) Jesus

Months ago we invited over a hundred potential writers to submit manuscripts for a BA issue given over to “Simply Jesus.” This is that.

Why “simply”? The idea was borrowed from a “Simply Jesus” event we attended in Denver last fall. Philip Yancey surmised there that “Complicatedly Jesus” would have fit just as well for the event title. Rather than reducing His person, work, and grandeur to thin broth, we’re exploring the “simplicity that is in Christ” — “the simple purity of your love for Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3, NKJV; *The Message*).

Why “Jesus”? Why not “Simply Christ” instead? For much the same reasons people don’t often address their spouse as “Hey, wife/husband” but use her/his given name. Jesus was His given name. His parents, family, and personal friends probably called Him that. As His friends, the most personal way for Christians to speak to or about Him might well be just “Jesus.”

Why “Simply Jesus”? If ever there was a time when “just Jesus” was insufficient to attract our full attention and devotion, let that time pass — here and now. When you get Jesus, you’ve got the Bible’s whole story and heaven’s whole deal: all power; all knowledge; all mercy, compassion, and forgiveness; all righteousness and justice; all grace and truth; and all God, from the Father through the Spirit. If this sounds more like bunk than Bible, let’s check the texts together.

Responses to our invitation topped expectations. Thanks to all who wrote! The wealth of material required tough choices and painful cut-backs here, but it means rich variety and wealth for you, our readers. Sub-topics in this issue range from a Lord’s Supper reflection (p. 4) to exegesis and exposition in the Gospels (pp. 8, 18) to discipleship (pp. 11, 14) and more. The excerpted “short lights” (p. 25) allow us to offer a few lines from most of our writers and make their fuller texts available online.

May the totality of this BA prompt more trust, more obedience, and more worship to Him who does all things well, calls us His friends, and links us eternally to God’s love. “Simply Jesus” — from cover to cover.

— Calvin Burrell



Ahead in May-June: Plain Church.



Lord of the Supper

How to better appreciate CoG7's annual communion service. by **Tim Steinhauser**

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Looking back on my growing-up years, I remember the Lord's Supper with fondness. It was a special and sacred time, a night like no other throughout the year. Dad came home from work early. He and Mother got all the kids bathed, dressed, and fed, and then headed to church for the evening service. We children didn't take the emblems or wash feet, but we viewed the time with reverence. Something important was happening.

As I grew older and chose to follow Christ myself, I began to question what the evening symbolizes. Is it simply a remembrance of the agony and death Christ experienced in our place, or is there more to the story? What were the disciples doing and expressing in that upper room two thousand years ago?

Meaning of Passover

The story begins, not in an upper room but along the Egyptian Nile, about three hundred miles away and two thousand years before Christ. As God prepared to deliver His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12), He instituted a service that served not only a symbolic purpose but a practical one as well: He commanded each household to select a lamb without imperfection to butcher for their evening meal. The blood from the lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorframe of each house. As the Lord executed judgment against the nation of Egypt, He would "pass over" each household with blood on the doorpost.

The Lord stated:

"So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD

throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households'" (vv. 14, 26, 27).

So what were the disciples remembering in the upper room? The same symbolic meal their ancestors had observed for as long as they could remember: the night their God struck Egypt and delivered their households. When Jesus commanded His disciples to prepare the Passover meal for them (Luke 22:7-13), this was nothing new but a familiar family tradition.

Need to remember

“When the hour had come,” Jesus settled at the table with His disciples and told them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (vv. 14-16).

As we read this part of the account of Christ, we often place our focus on the divine work of the cross but forget the fact of His humanity. Hebrews 4:15 describes Him as “tempted as we are.” Coming to the moment of His death on a cross would mark the greatest temptation a man could face, and create the greatest need for a time of remembrance of God’s power over the forces of evil. Knowing all things and what was to come in the hours to follow, Jesus expressed a deep desire – even a need – for a time to intentionally recall the Father’s plan to redeem and deliver.

Hebrews 12:2 speaks of Christ “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. . . .” This final meal with His disciples must have marked not only His preparation for the greatest temptation He would face but also a deep sense of expectancy in what was about to be accomplished. The final stage of redemption’s plan was about to unfold. “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

Different direction

Luke continues the account in verses 16 and 18 of chapter 22: “I will no longer eat it . . . [or]

drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” At this point the disciples might have begun to wonder what Christ was talking about. After all, God had commanded the yearly celebration of this feast. What

was about to happen must be coming soon.

I can imagine a new feeling of expectation beginning to grow in the disciples. This night was different from the others! Was God about to set up His earthly king-

The Desire of Jesus

“With *fervent desire* I have desired to eat this Passover with you . . .” (Luke 22:15).

A more literal translation of the Greek text has Jesus saying, “With desire I have desired to eat with you.” Twice He says the word *desire* – an emphatic form of speech that emphasizes His deep, eager longing.

This is no ordinary Passover meal; it holds tremendous significance to the Savior. Jesus is the Passover lamb. His death will purchase eternal life for those sitting at this table. In less than twenty-four hours, the real Lamb of God will be slain for the sins of the world – the turning point of history.

This event will be celebrated for billions of years – for all eternity. But tonight Jesus is with friends. It is the Last Supper – the last time He will eat with His disciples for thousands of years.

“With desire I have desired to eat with you.” This isn’t just any desire. It is a longing of Jesus’ heart and soul, the intensity of which we barely comprehend. In *The Message* Jesus says, “You’ve no idea how much I have looked forward to eating this Passover. . . .”

It is a special moment for Jesus, in many ways the highlight of His walk on earth. Jesus came here to make friends for eternity, to win people by His goodness and love. These Twelve are the firstfruits of an amazing movement that will spread to every corner of the Roman Empire within a century. But tonight is a moment Jesus wishes to treasure.

How can it be that the Son of God, Creator of all, craves to spend time with His human friends? Because He loves these men! Despite their weaknesses, despite the fact they would all soon abandon Him and run off in the darkness, He still loves them.

We cannot fully appreciate the immensity of Jesus’ love toward the disciples. We see the height and depth of God’s *agape* in a glass darkly. Oh, how Jesus loves you, despite your weaknesses and failures. Longing for communion with you, He stands at the door and knocks. Will you open the door to fellowship with Him?

– Dirk Anderson
Jacksonville, FL

Washing Feet

Don't you just love John's Gospel? John alone tells us the special event Jesus shared with His disciples at the Last Supper (13:1ff). To show His love for them and to set an example for us, Jesus poured water into a basin, washed His disciples' feet, and dried them with a towel.

Jesus washed the feet of all His disciples, including John, whom He loved and who would take Jesus' mother, Mary, into his own home after the crucifixion; Peter, who promised to lay down his life for Jesus but would disown Him three times before the rooster crowed; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him. Jesus knew the details of what the next twenty-four hours held in store, but He treated each one of His disciples with the same great love.

His statement resounds through the ages: "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (v. 17, NIV). Each time we take part in this service, may God give us the grace to see those around us through His eyes of love.

— Sandy Lawson
Cottage Grove, MN

dom as the prophecies foretold?

In verse 19 Jesus moved further from the carefully scripted traditions of the evening. As He took the bread and broke it, He told His disciples, "This is My body which is given for you." Not a loaf perfect and golden, but broken in pieces. Not a thing of beauty to stand in line and receive but destroyed in order to nourish all.

Imagine the thoughts of the disciples now! Then Christ finished with "Do this in remembrance of Me." I can hear the disciples saying, "Wait! We can't! What about God delivering His people? What about Egypt and Pharaoh being struck down? We've been taught this story our whole lives! Doing this in remembrance of You doesn't even make sense."

A bigger work

And it didn't make sense. Not until the time had passed. Not until Christ had been taken, slaughtered, lifted up, and as Colossians 2:13-15 tells us, had "forgiven you all trespasses . . . wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us . . . taken it out of the way . . . nailed it to a cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

The word *spectacle* had a deep meaning for those who heard it. It was used to describe what happened to an opposing general when defeated by the Romans. He would be taken, beaten, stripped naked, and then paraded through the streets amid a crowd as they celebrated the victory. It was the very picture of

powerlessness. Christ in essence told His disciples, "This is what I'm doing to the power of sin in your lives. You thought Egypt was a God-sized task. I'll do a bigger work still!"

As the disciples gathered the next year in the Passover tradition, the meal had begun to take on a much different focus: "Do this in remembrance of Me. Do this in celebration of the night I did what the Father has been doing all along for His people. Eat, drink, and remember how I struck the power of sin, released the hold of death over your lives, and set your households free to walk in new life."

Invitation

At this sacred occasion, the Lord of the supper invites us to join with Him. Not with trepidation but with joyful recognition that He walked, lived, and died as one of us so that we can experience living and eternal fellowship with Him.

The heart of the story hasn't changed since it began in Egypt. It has continued in greater and more beautiful ways as Jesus Christ himself invites us to join Him in celebrating the day He conquered evil forever and we were given freedom. "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?'" . . . let's tell them. **BA**

Tim and Debbie Steinhauer, and their son Donny, live in Missouri, where they pastor the Stanberry Church of God.



Questions & Answers

Although CoG7 doctrine supports Christ's deity, some of us aren't fully convinced. Is Jesus really God?

The teaching of Christ's deity, adopted officially in 1994 and reaffirmed often since, continues to attract interest and discussion in the Church. Rightly handled, this discussion encourages growth in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

Here's why we believe that Christ the only begotten Son is, with His Father, inherent and integral to our concept of the one true God:

- Because Jesus is given, or takes to Himself, the names of God, such as I Am, LORD, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, and Immanuel (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; John 8:58; Phil. 2:11).
- Because Jesus is the Truth: He perfectly speaks the very words of God more than any other prophet, including Moses (John 8:26; 12:49; 14:6, 10, 24; 17:8; Deut. 18:15-18; Heb. 1:1, 2).
- Because Jesus does mighty works that only God can do: He creates, sustains, and controls the universe; forgives sins; saves the world; hears and answers prayer (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Mark 2:5-12; 4:41; Acts 7:59).
- Because Jesus receives the worship and service that is due to God alone (Matt. 4:10; 8:2; 14:33; 28:9; John 9:38; Luke 24:52; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:8).
- Because Jesus fully exhibits God's attributes: omniscience, omnipotence, holiness, love, and more (Luke 5:22; 6:8; 9:47; John 2:25; Matt. 28:18; Heb. 4:15b; 1 Peter 2:22; John 13:1; 15:9, 13).

The Bible's view of the Lord Jesus is lofty. It refers to Him as "God" in nine texts: Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 1:23; John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; 1 Timothy 3:16; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; and 1 John 5:20.

What we've said so far may be seen as mere proof-texting. The truth can be further confirmed by study of key Christological passages:

- Matthew 11:27, linked with John 5:18, 19; 10:30: Jesus is equal to and one with His Father, in that each alone knows the other fully.
- John 1:1-3, 14: The Word that was with God and was God in the beginning became flesh: Jesus the Christ. The only begotten of the Father was full of God's glorious grace and truth.
- Philippians 2:5-11: Jesus fully shared the divine image and glory of His Father before becoming man, as He confirms in John 17:5. Every tongue should confess Jesus Christ as **Lord** — a title reserved for God alone (Isa. 45:23).
- Colossians 1:13-23: Christ is exalted to highest heaven, preeminent by God's good pleasure. Deity fully dwells in Him bodily (2:9).
- Hebrews 1: Jesus Christ, the brightness of God's glory and express image of His person (v. 3), is no mere angel. Rather, He, as God, receives worship from all God's angels (vv. 4-14).
- Revelation 1:8, 11, 17, 18; 17:14; 19:16: The glorified Christ describes Himself in terms reserved for God himself: Alpha and Omega; Beginning and End; First and Last; the one who was, is, and is to come; King of Kings and Lord of Lords (compare Isa. 44:6; 1 Tim. 6:13-16).

Based on the written Word, we may be confident that the Living Word was both God and man, thus able to mediate and reconcile the two.

— Elder Calvin Burrell



His Transfiguration

Moses, Elijah, and Jesus together on a mountain. Why? by **Brian Franks**

www.designpics.com

Jesus was the victim of mistaken identity – an honest mistake made with good intentions. The guilty were people of Jesus’ day, most of whom thought God’s Messiah would live differently than Jesus did. The Messiah was “supposed” to come as king and destroy all His/their enemies, but Jesus told them to pay taxes and get along with others. They didn’t accept Jesus because He didn’t fit the identity they had made for Him.

Jesus also kept His identity largely a secret during His ministry.* On rare occasions He allowed the titles *Messiah* or *Son of God* but typically preferred the ubiquitous *Son of*

Man that would elicit little fervor or clarity. This mistaken identity is important because it makes any occurrences when Jesus *did* reveal His identity stand out that much more. None of the identity revelations in the Gospels is more stunning and clear than the Transfiguration.

Divine definition

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record this event in roughly the same context, one that accents its importance. Mark spends his first eight chapters building to the Transfiguration in chapter 9.* Everything before is an action-packed sequence of

miracles, healings, exorcisms, and teachings. Everything after is the journey to the cross. All the while, none of the people are really sure who Jesus is – but they have ideas.

Just before the Transfiguration, in all three Gospels, is Peter’s “great confession” of the Christ (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-20). In that episode, Jesus asks His disciples to do what no one in the first three Gospels (except demons) had done for sure (e.g., Mark 1:24; 5:7): pinpoint Jesus’ identity. Even John the Baptist himself was later unsure of who Jesus was (John 1:29; cf. Matthew 11:2, 3). The disciples offer some ideas, and Jesus responds by narrowing the question down to who *they*

*As expressed by Craig L. Blomberg in *Jesus and the Gospels*.

say He is (Matthew 16:15). Peter, by God's grace, correctly identifies Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus responds that this is correct, that He will be killed and then resurrected the third day (v. 21).

Hold that point for a second. The Christ (Hebrew: Messiah) was expected to win battles and establish a kingdom, not die! So Peter rebukes Jesus (v. 22) — another occurrence of mistaken identity. Jesus responds in kind: "Get behind me, Satan! . . . you do not have in mind the things of God" (v. 23, NIV). In other words, "Peter, you might know My title, but you have no idea what it means." Ultimately God, not men, defines *Messiah*. Jesus then says that some standing with Him would see the glory of His coming kingdom before they died (Matthew 16:28; Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).

Transfigured!

Six days later, Jesus brings three of those men with Him up a mountain to pray. Peter, James, and John fall asleep and waken to see Jesus resplendent in all His heavenly glory and Moses and Elijah with Him (Luke 9:31, 32). When Moses and Elijah leave, Peter suggests building three shelters, hoping to perpetuate the event (v. 33), compatible with the mistaken Messianic expectation of the day.

Before Peter can enumerate his plan, a cloud covers the mountaintop, and the Father's voice gives rare clarity to Jesus' identity: "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (v. 35).

The disciples fall in fear, and the scene concludes. Just the incarnate version of Christ remains,

telling them not to fear nor tell anyone what they have seen until He would be resurrected (Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9).

Consider the strong witness to Jesus' identity within this sequence. It begins with the question of who Jesus is and Peter's correct answer, although he doesn't grasp the meaning of *Messiah*. The witness continues to Jesus' correction that it means He will die at the hands of the religious leaders, a proclamation He repeats after the event as well (Matthew 17:22, 23; Mark 9:12, 13). The Transfiguration itself is even more packed: Moses and Elijah are two rare persons who have had direct experiences with God on mountaintops. If anyone might attest to the identity of God the Father or Jesus Christ, they would. Now it would be Peter's, James', and John's privilege to do the same.

Finally, we come to the most important witness: that of God the Father saying Jesus is His be-

loved Son (see also John 5:31-47; 2 Peter 1:16-18).

In all this we have the Synoptic Gospels' clearest picture of who Jesus is and what His mission will be: He is not Elijah or the prophet; He is the Christ of God, heard in Peter's confession. He is the suffering servant of Isaiah, heard in His own prediction of death. He is the Son of Man from Daniel 7:13, by His own witness. He is the very Son of God, according to the Father's personal testimony heard by Peter, James, and John. He is greater than Moses and Elijah, whose work was only a type of Christ's mediation, covenant, miracles, prophecy, and reconciliation. This passage dramatically demonstrates who Jesus really is versus who He was/is often thought to be.

Identity crisis

We might not be dazzled by any of this as some great revelation. Hindsight is 20/20. But for

His Completeness

"Who do you say that I am?" You, my Lord, are simply Jesus. In you I live, move, and have my being. I rest in You.

Some people call this extreme. How can it not be when I consider Your extreme love for me? You came to toil and suffer, to give me hope and peace the world can never give.

When I meditate on Your spotless life, I am drawn to You with hands outstretched like a child hoping to be lifted. When I ponder Your words, I am healed body, soul, and spirit, energized with Your breath of life and infused with a desire and power to live in holy service to You.

You are no pie-in-the-sky God but my ever-present, here-and-now, moment-by-moment God. You are love reaching with nail-pierced hands to all who call on You for forgiveness.

— Joann Cress
Muldrow, OK

people of that day, the identity of Jesus of Nazareth was an enigma, mired in mistaken identity of their own devising.

And history often repeats itself. Are we, too, guilty of mistaking Jesus' identity? Like people of Jesus' day, do we set our own expectations for who Jesus is and what He will do, rather than let Him reveal Himself to us?

Those people based their conclusions at least in part on God's Word, yet they ended up with the wrong picture of Messiah and of God. Like them, do we expect that Jesus will just destroy all enemies (i.e., our problems) and give us quick prosperity, without changing anything about us? Do we come to Jesus for the promise of a quick fix or a perfect life — without pain? We may find instead that Christ will lead us on a journey that includes the painful forfeit of many things we thought were just fine by *our* God concept, but that cannot stand when we encounter the one true God.

Thankfully, Jesus is willing to reveal His true identity and plan for our lives. God desires to build us up to maturity, to set all things right in His time, to correct the misunderstandings we harbor, to grant us eternity in His perfection. All this is possible by the identity and work of Jesus Christ, revealed that day on the Mount of Transfiguration. **BA**

Brian and Jessica Franks and their family live in Walla Walla, WA, where Brian serves as pastor.



His Humanity

In addition to being Lord and Savior, I appreciate that Jesus came as a baby like the rest of us. He was born to a woman the neighbors may have talked about and whose parents may have been angry with her for getting pregnant.

Like us, when Jesus was hungry or wet, He cried. He was potty trained, taught to walk, and put up with His parents' rules. Did He always feel they were fair?

Raised by His stepfather, Jesus got "lost" in Jerusalem at age twelve, leaving His parents to hunt for Him for three days. He learned a trade, then struck out to follow His dreams as a homeless healer and teacher. Some people worshipped Him; some thought Him crazy; others wanted to kill Him. As His fame grew, so did their fervor.

Jesus was hunted, ridiculed, arrested, tried, convicted, and brutally put to death. On the third day He rose from the dead, becoming our path to salvation. Jesus fulfilled His intended purpose. But with God, there is always more.

Though Jesus sits at the Father's right hand as Lord and Savior today, He might have once sat through the whispers and twittering of gossipy village folks who questioned His conception: "He's not really Joseph's boy, you know. Joseph is a saint, taking on the care of someone else's kid."

Jesus experienced the challenges of youth, learned arithmetic and conjugating verbs. He likely got into trouble with His parents, who didn't understand Him (Luke 2:50). Other relatives ridiculed Him (Mark 3:21). Learning carpentry, Jesus experienced the pain of missing the nail and hitting the thumb. He knew what hunger and weariness feel like (Matthew 4:1-9; Mark 6:31). He experienced the good, the bad, and the really ugly stuff of life on earth.

Amazing. There is nothing we experience that Jesus doesn't understand. Whether we're famous or unknown, backstabbed at work, looked down on by peers, struggling through studies, or called crazy for following our dreams, Jesus has been there.

No, this isn't amazing. It's the plan of our heavenly Father — His salvation plan and road map to get to our destination. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Thank You, Jesus!

— Patricia Voyce
Des Moines, IA

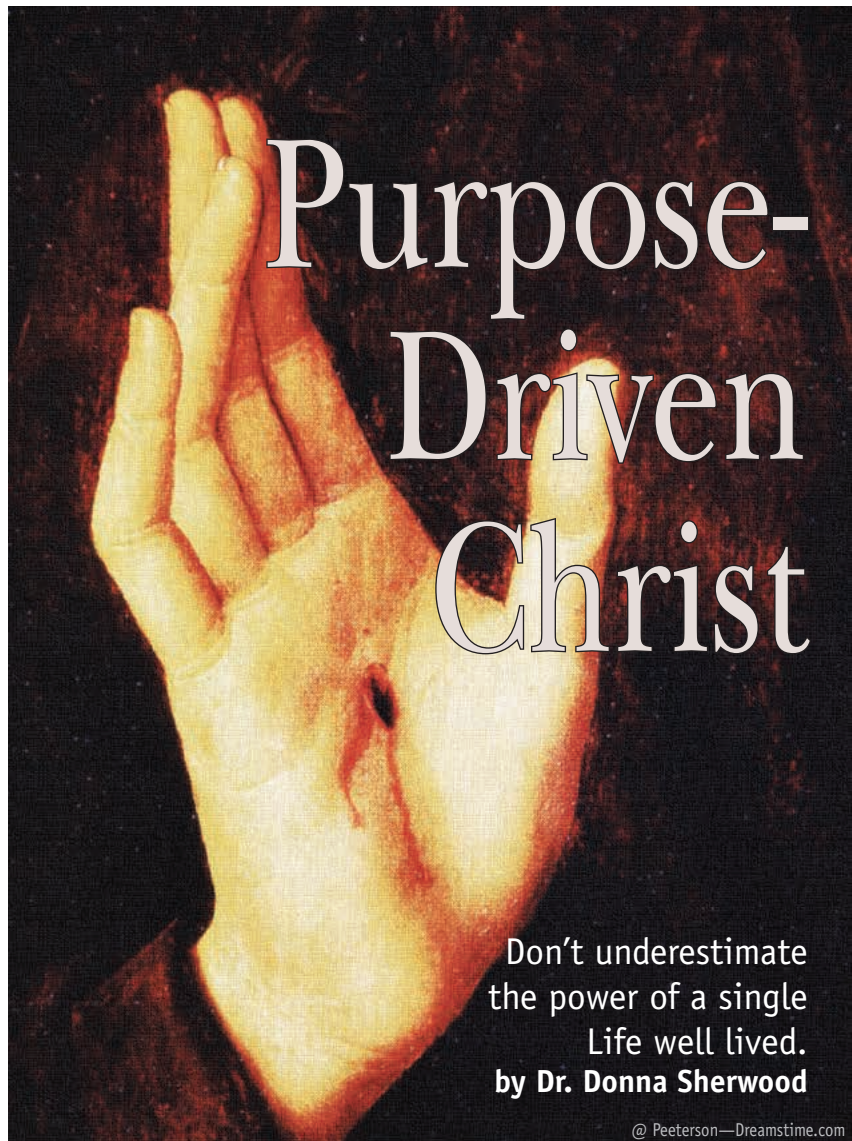
Jesus was not born with a silver spoon in His mouth. Had He been, many would have found a Christ of the upper class raised in an opulent palace and a wealthy neighborhood hard to relate to – even intimidating. Imagine if Jesus could not relate to being of humble beginnings, homeless, weeping, rejected, lied about, misunderstood, betrayed, suffering, and dying.

Jesus' genealogy was not pedigree. Ruth, a Moabite heathen (banned from the congregation of God to the tenth generation), and Rahab, a prostitute, were among His ancestry. Jesus' conception and birth were shrouded in mystery, speculation, and downright scandal. He was born to parents of humble means, laid in a stable, then relocated to Nazareth, a small, isolated village in Galilee known for little good (John 1:46).

For His inauguration parade, Jesus rode on a colt and was welcomed by people waving palm branches (12:12-15). In His death, He was scourged, mocked, and sandwiched between thieves on a cruel cross, then buried in a borrowed tomb (Matthew 27:59-61). How ordinary – no, less than ordinary!

Yet God in His omniscience positioned His Son in just the right place, where He could be touched with the feelings of people's infirmities and provide an exemplary life of total surrender to God. People from every stratum of society can relate to Him.

How did Jesus transform His humble beginning and status to become the world-changer?



Christ's 'fixity'

For starters, He radically obeyed His Father and resolutely committed Himself to honor the purpose for which He came. Jesus was born with a burden of responsibility on His shoulders – no silver spoon anywhere. Though destined to be heaven's king, He would first become the sacrificial lamb identified from the foundation of the world (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Revelation 13:8).

Jesus embraced the purpose for His coming: to preach good tidings to the poor, heal the bro-

kenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, open prison doors of the bound, and console those who mourn in Zion (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:17, 18). Such purpose-driven living is one characteristic of greatness.

Jesus had what someone called "fixity of purpose." At no point did He try to establish His own agenda but rather dedicated Himself to glorify His Father in all things. Everything else was treated as a distraction. Once when His disciples wanted Him to eat, He told them that His

“meat” was to do the will of His Father (John 4:34). His mindset, His vocation, was His Father’s agenda.

Jesus did His Father’s will with a sense of urgency and spirit of excellence. He was typically moved with compassion and ministered to destitute people: the leprous, mute, blind, lame, paralyzed, hemorrhaging, demon-possessed, sin-diseased, widowed, ostracized, hungry, and poor. Jesus was consumed with establishing His Father’s kingdom and meeting the needs of those around Him.

Secrets to devotion

How did Jesus remain so steadfast in devoting Himself to pleasing His Father? First, He was

confident of His identity and of God’s infinite power.

Second, Jesus remained connected to His Source by regular talk-time with the Father, study of Scripture, and solitude. After ministering to people’s incessant needs, Jesus would often leave the crowds for a “top off” of divine strength from His Father.

Third, though Jesus knew His position with the Father, He voluntarily laid that glory aside to redeem humanity (Philippians 2:6, 7). Jesus “humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (v. 8).

Fourth, Jesus rejected the Enemy’s enticements of premature “victories” and overcame by the invincible power of God’s

Word. With every temptation, Jesus stated the truth written. He refused to forfeit His destiny to satisfy momentary hunger, and rejected the chance to abuse His power.

Jesus’ influence

How does Jesus’ remarkable life inspire and challenge us?

It renders our excuses both pointless and powerless. We have been given power to become the sons and daughters of the Most High God through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead (John 1:12; Colossians 2:9). When we consider that in times past we were trapped in the mire of sin and now are part of the family of God, joint-heirs with Jesus, and beneficiaries of eternal life, we realize the miracle that has happened. We were born again to be overcomers through the influence of the Holy Spirit invested in us, so we do not have to be defeated by sin.

So the question is, what will we do with this priceless gift? We should do as Jesus did: Focus on the will of the Father and remain steadfast in pursuing His best; fix our gaze on God, obey Him, and complete our purpose. This will transform our “ordinary” and make it extraordinary — vessels surrendered to the glory of God!

BA

Living by the Jesus Model

- Walk in the Spirit by practicing a lifestyle of thanksgiving and trust. Decide to obey God despite the possible pain and temporary lack in your life. Your greatness is often disguised in suffering and sacrifice.
- Embrace your God-given identity and ask Him to reveal your purpose. Commit yourself to executing this assignment and using your distinct set of gifts to enlarge the kingdom of God. Find out what you were born to do and do it!
- Leverage your time — a priceless resource — in God’s service. Minimize distractions by reinvesting the excessive time you engage in social media, watching television, surfing the Internet, idle conversation, and other sometimes pointless activities.

Everything Jesus did aligned with His divine purpose and assignment. He knew no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. He operated from a place of congruence: Everything He did was creating a laser beam effect of enlarging His Father’s kingdom. Be selective in what you make a commitment to do.

Jesus did not live in isolation, and neither should you. Ask God for godly friends, ministry opportunities, and strong family ties. Do not take your relationships for granted. Practice the fruit of the Spirit to nurture the people you’re blessed with.

— *Dr. Donna Sherwood*

Dr. Donna Sherwood, formerly from Jamaica, now lives in London, England, and attends the Hackney branch of CoG7.





Beautiful Feet

Why so? “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger bringing good news, breaking the news that all’s well, proclaiming good times, announcing salvation . . .” (Isaiah 52:7, *The Message*).

The feet of Jesus. Humble feet. Covered with dusty sandals, but beautiful. They bring good news to a hopeless world. Those feet carry grace, forgiveness, and hope to lost sheep. Quick to run to those in need. Never weary of doing good. Walking in duty’s path, over land and water. Beautiful feet. The feet of Jesus. They could not be stopped until they were nailed to the cross.

Ugly feet — those of the Pharisee. They looked good on the outside. Feet zealous to march to the letter of the law, to fast twice a week, to walk to the temple and see the treasure chest where tithes were publicly deposited. Feet that stood long on the busy street corner, praying. Feet washed until they were sparkling clean — ceremonially — and careful not to walk far on the Sabbath.

Their spotless exterior hid an inside disease. Feet that kicked those who were down, that trampled the poor and helpless, that walked around the injured by the road. Feet that jumped at the words “Crucify Him!” and rushed to kill an innocent Man — the one with beautiful feet.

After three days those beautiful feet walked again. Up they ascended until they stepped into heaven. Then other feet became beautiful as the ascended One walked on — through others. Twelve pairs of feet soon became one hundred twenty feet, which soon became one thousand, which soon became ten thousand. Then a million

beautiful feet kept walking until they became a “countless multitude.”

Someday the footsteps of Jesus will mark the path of every nation, every tongue, every people, every town, every family and outpost on earth. Then the same feet that were nailed to the cross will walk the earth again.

Beautiful feet. The feet of Jesus.

— Dirk Anderson
Jacksonville, FL

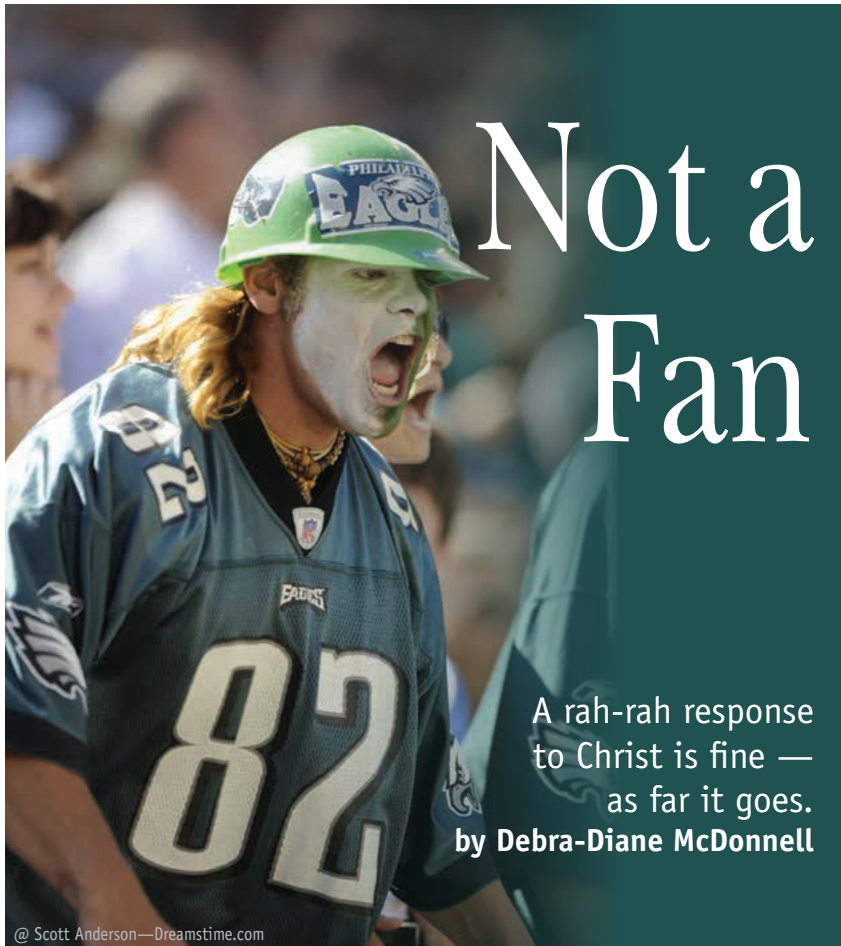
Perfect Example

We often hear that Jesus Christ was meek and mild, though this doesn’t completely match His portrayal in the Bible. He certainly was in full control of Himself in all circumstances, only rarely expressing “righteous anger.” In that last meal with His twelve disciples, He demonstrated perfect humility.

Probe His life, however rigorously, and nothing can mar this view of Jesus. He wasn’t covetous, nor did He amass a fortune. He never killed anyone or authorized His followers to use violence. He wasn’t jailed for criminal acts but on a trumped-up charge. When He died, Jesus’ disciples didn’t take to the streets to rape and rob and kill and torture, though some who took His name later did.

In all history every other leader is but a pygmy in comparison. Only Jesus was the perfectly developed person, a shining example of consistency, compassion, and true forgiveness. His is a life to emulate, whether or not you are a Christian.

— James McBride
Lincolnshire, England



Not a Fan

A rah-rah response to Christ is fine — as far it goes.
by Debra-Diane McDonnell

@ Scott Anderson—Dreamstime.com

I'm not really a fan of Jesus. After reading the book *Not a Fan* by Kyle Idleman, I don't want to be one either. I mean, who needs all that hoopla?

If you're a Denver Broncos fanatic, for example, you are likely a fan of Peyton Manning. You know where and when he was born, where he went to college, what teams he's played for, and how many touchdowns he's thrown. You follow him and news about him.

So why not be a fan of Jesus like that? You know His miracles, His great speeches (like the Sermon on the Mount), where He was born, and where He died. You can rattle off His promises and parables. You are a true fan of Jesus!

But the question for all of us is, are we *followers* of Jesus? If He said to us, "Follow Me," would we get up, walk off with Him, and not give a backward glance? When Jesus said those powerful words to Matthew and Peter, they both got up and left with Him. Others had to think about it. One said, "Sure, I'll be along as soon as I've buried my father." When Jesus told a wealthy man he had to give up his stuff before he followed, he walked away, sad.

This man learned that following Jesus is not easy. You won't get to stay at the Ritz with an ocean view room and room service. Jesus' followers were not always received kindly.

Denying self

Idleman's book helped me realize that lots of people already consider themselves Jesus' followers — as long as commitment doesn't inconvenience them much. The thinking goes like this: *Oh, I'll follow Jesus . . . as long as I don't have to miss Sunday football. I'll follow Jesus . . . as long as I don't have to make personal sacrifices.* That's like a guy going to the gym to get in shape and standing outside the door to finish a hot fudge sundae first!

Jesus says in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself. . . ." Mr. Hot Fudge Sundae wants to get in shape, but he doesn't want to deny himself. The wealthy man could not follow Jesus without giving up all his possessions, thus denying himself.

Truth is, we can't negotiate how to follow Jesus. We can't say we'll follow Him but refuse to forgive people who hurt us, or refuse to save sex until marriage. Instead of trusting Jesus, we check what Oprah says about relationships.

Surrender

A wonderful hymn says, "I surrender all." But some people say, "I surrender *some*. I'll follow Jesus, but I still want control of my finances. I'll follow Him, but I'm not giving up my pride . . . or my plans either. He's welcome to come along in the co-pilot's seat, but I'll do what I want."

When Jesus rides to work with us, do we turn to Him and say, "Wait here. I'll see you a little after five." We don't want to let Him in all the way. But how can we be followers if we don't want to go where Jesus goes?

Personal Savior

The main difference between a fan and a follower is that a fan knows all *about* the person but doesn't *know* the person. They've never met, never exchanged e-mail addresses, never spoken on the phone. A follower, however, has that one-on-one faith-link we call a personal relationship.

Knowing Jesus is the most intimate relationship we'll ever have. He knows everything about us; He did before we were born. He knows all of our lives, what has been and what is still to come.

You can know *Him* also, up close and personal. Jesus will be there when you call. He's never too busy. He will never forsake you. He *died* for you to have eternal life with Him in His kingdom! Who else would do that?

Give it all up to Jesus. He already knows those secrets. He waits for you to trust Him with them and make Him the number-one priority in your life. Any "riches" you give up will be replaced by Him beyond your wildest imagination.

Don't be a fan; be a true follower of Christ and *know* Him. Once you see the difference, you can make the change.

I know who I am in Jesus — definitely *not* just a fan. **BA**

Debra-Diane McDonnell is a volunteer chaplain from Bend, OR. Studying for a degree in religion, she often attends CoG7 in Redmond, OR.



Jesus Freaks

I've seen a wide variety of reactions to being labeled a Jesus freak. To some, it's a badge of honor, while to others it's an insult. What is it to you?

Jesus freak was coined in the '60s and '70s for hippies who were converting to Christian faith but finding it difficult to live out their convictions in established churches. Most became restorationists, attempting to mimic the first century church through strong belief in miracles, healing, prayer, etc.

There are several definitions of *freak*. One is a person who is "markedly unusual or abnormal." Another is "a person who is obsessed with something" (*Merriam-Webster Online*). Jesus freaks were definitely obsessed. Many quit their jobs, dropped out of society, and lived in communes.

Jesus too was obsessed — with God! Mark 3 paints a portrait of this passion. Jesus was rejected in the synagogue (vv. 1-6), thronged at the seashore (vv. 7-12), joined by the Twelve on a mountain (vv. 13-19), and again thronged in a house without space even to eat (vv. 19, 20). He spoke of invisible realms and beings (vv. 22-30). Close friends thought He'd lost His mind (v. 21), and His enemies believed He was demon-possessed (vv. 22, 30). The chapter ends with Jesus' family coming — probably to rescue Him from Himself (vv. 31-35).

Opposites of *freak* are "average, normal, par, standard," according to *Webster*. What does normal Christianity look like? A recent Gallup Poll (*gallup.com*) reveals nine out of ten Americans say they believe in God. But only 58 percent say their faith is very important, 44 percent seldom or never attend church, and 53 percent don't describe themselves as "born again."

Christians are a "peculiar" people (1 Peter 2:9, KJV). Newer versions use words like *chosen out* and *set apart* instead. Either way, we are called and culled out to be counter-cultural, a race within a race, set apart for God. We aren't the same as non-believers, and we shouldn't strive to be.

This doesn't mean we are anti-culture. Like Jesus, we are to be *on the side of* humanity, ambassadors and co-laborers with Christ, helping others reconcile with the God who spared no expense to redeem them.

To do so is abnormal. It requires believing in an invisible realm and being thought illogical, even crazy. Being a Jesus freak.

— Bob Fogarty
Lee's Summit, MO

Simply

For I determined not to know
Jesus Christ and Him crucified

God our
Father

The Father highly exalts His only begotten Son
(Philippians 2:9)

Jesus flawlessly reveals the Invisible One
(John 1:18; 12:45; 14:9)

His Centrality

The Christ story recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is central to the Bible's message. What comes before is prelude. What comes after is postlude. Jesus is the main event.

Jesus is mediator between God and man. Not half-God and half-man, He is the God-man in the middle. Just as truly as He was divine, Jesus was also one of us.

As the only member of the Godhead to be seen, heard, and touched on earth, Christ fascinates us and fulfills our deepest desires! He feels our hurts, our frailty, and celebrates our every joy.

As all spokes of a wheel meet at the hub, so do all pieces of our faith join in Him.

God's
Church

He is the body's Savior and Head
(Ephesians 5:23ff)

The church's focus is fixed on Him
(Philippians 2:10, 11)



God's

Our lives filled up with light as we saw a
all bright and beautiful (2 Co

y Jesus

anything among you except
ified (1 Corinthians 2:2).



s Son

and understood God in the face of Christ,
 Corinthians 4:6, *The Message*).

God's
Word

Scripture is our authority on God's Son
(2 Timothy 3:15)

Jesus is the theme of all the Bible
(Luke 24:27; John 5:39)

Worship Him?

A leper did. A man born blind did. Women
returning from the tomb did
(Matthew 8:2; 28:9; John 9:38).

Angels and millions of elders and other creatures
seen in vision around heaven's throne do
(Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:8-14).

Every knee should bow, every tongue should
confess, all humanity should worship Him as Lord to
the glory of God (Philippians 2:9-11).

**"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to
receive power and riches and wisdom
and strength and honor and glory
and blessing!"** (Revelation 5:12).

"Amen!" (v. 14).

The Father sends the Spirit through Christ
(John 14:26; 15:26)

The Spirit spotlights Jesus, not Himself
(John 15:26b; 16:14)

God's Holy
Spirit

Jesus: The Great I AM

The shortest Bible sentence (“I Am”) triggers long thought and points to the highest heavens.
by Israel Steinmetz



“Who do you say that I am?”

Jesus’ question rings down through history, confronting each of us. As we reflect on who Jesus is, we should go to the source and see what He said about Himself. In John’s Gospel, Jesus describes Himself at every turn with statements beginning with the powerful words “I am.” With these words Jesus reveals His origin and destiny, His role, and His identity in relation to the Father.

So who does Jesus say He is?

Origin and destiny

“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father” (16:28). In these few words Jesus sums up what He repeatedly stated about His origin and destination (cf. 6:51; 7:28-33; 8:16). This reality set Jesus apart from His audience, for He told them, “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world” (8:23).

This difference created an impassible gulf between Jesus and the rest of humanity: “For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me, and will not find Me; and where I am, you cannot come” (7:33, 34). This gulf was created by their refusing to believe that Jesus was who He professed to be: “I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, you cannot come” (8:21). Thankfully, Jesus didn’t leave His audience without hope. To be sure, those who did not believe would die in their sins. But in 8:24 He opens

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the door. Those who believe in Him can follow Him!

As Jesus would later teach His followers, those who serve and follow Him will be where He is (12:26), even though they cannot follow Him there immediately (13:33). Rather, Jesus would return one day and be reunited with His followers, thus providing a way for them to join Him (14:3, 4). This coming reunion will allow His followers to see the glory given to the Son from before the foundation of the world as a result of the Father's love (17:24).

We can understand, then, why Jesus' followers were anxious to know the way to follow Him (14:5). Jesus' response sums up all that He says about His role: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (14:6).

Role

To grasp the fullness of Jesus' words in John 14:6, we need to look at the various ways He revealed Himself as the exclusive path to the Father, the embodiment of truth, and life itself.

Bread of Life. In John 6 Jesus multiplied bread and walked on water. With Passover nearing, the crowds no doubt saw a link to the manna and the Red Sea miracle. But Jesus was not content to be seen simply as a prophet and miracle worker, like Moses. Rather, He proclaimed, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst" (v. 35). Unlike the manna that left the Israelites hungry, Jesus was the true living bread of heaven who brought eternal life. Such a claim demonstrated that the Jesus event, not the exodus from

Egypt, was now the redemptive act of God par excellence.

Light of the World. Jesus identified Himself as the "Light of the world" (8:12; 9:5). By healing a man born blind and invoking the ire of the religious elite, Jesus redefined darkness and light. Those who believed in and worshipped Him had true vision, no matter how shrouded in darkness they had been. Conversely, those who hid their sin in pride and rejected Jesus were truly blind, no matter how holy they appeared to be (1:9-13).

Good Shepherd, Door of the Sheep. In John 10 Jesus called Himself the true shepherd over God's people. Alluding often to the unfaithful shepherds of Ezekiel 34, He demonstrated that, unlike false shepherds past and present, He was the supremely good and faithful shepherd. In a dizzying array of metaphors, Jesus claimed to enter by the door, serve as door for the sheep, and save and safeguard them by laying down His life and taking it up again. He left His audience with a stark choice: Either He was who He said He was, or He was a lunatic!

Resurrection and Life. In

chapter 11 Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead and proclaimed, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" (11:25, 26). In restoring physical life to Lazarus, Jesus demonstrated His power and authority to give eternal life to His followers, a claim that would receive final proof at His own resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the life-giver because Jesus is resurrection and life itself.

True Vine. Jesus announced, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser" (15:1). The grapevine was a powerful symbol for Jewish people. They believed they were God's vine, often forgetting that many Old Testament references to their being a vine describe their wild and wicked ways! In Jesus' effort to show how He was the fulfillment of all things, He asserted that He was the True Vine. As such, He provided the connection point between God and humanity. By abiding in Him, people find the only source of life, power, good fruit, holiness, and love. Those who don't abide in Him can expect only fiery judgment.



God: How Much Like Jesus?

Occasionally two men, twenty-five years apart in age, look like twins – even talk and act like twins. They’re really father and son.

That’s how it was with Jesus and God. To the Colossians, Paul wrote, “He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God . . .” (1:15). An image would be a likeness, a resemblance. Hebrews 1:3 is more explicit: Jesus “is the *express image* of His [God’s] person. . . .” That leans heavily toward everything about Jesus.

He is the image of the invisible God. Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” That sounds like everything about Him was like the Father. John testified, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (17:5). Father and Son shared not only the same “appearance” (“express image”) but also the same glory!

What could be noted wherein they were different? Hebrews 2:17, 18 suggests that Jesus was made flesh so that He could identify with what we mortals experience. As our high priest, He ever lives to make intercession to the Father for us. Yet Jesus himself explained that though we ask in His name, He doesn’t need to convey our prayers to the Father because “the Father Himself loves [us]” (John 16:26, 27). And Matthew 6:32 states, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” No one need tell the Father; He’s omniscient – knows all. So it’s reasonable to conclude God and Jesus are alike even in the matter of understanding feelings and experiences of humans.

Jesus said one day, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father . . .” (14:9). From other texts we learn that only Jesus has seen the Father in visible form – with His eyes. But *seen* can also mean with the mind – “to perceive, know” (see Acts 8:23). Which did Jesus mean by *seen* in John 14:9? It really doesn’t matter. That God and Jesus are like twins is the issue.

– Max Morrow
Owosso, MI

Identity in relationship to the Father

Jesus’ words about His origin, destiny, and role often left people asking, “Who does He think He is?” The answer to this question is one that John sought to answer in the opening words of his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). This mind-bending sentence conveys the mystery of Jesus, the one who is at once God incarnate and yet relates to God in a way that is somehow like a Father and Son.

Jesus frequently referred to God as His Father but also made the incredible assertion that He was one with Him (10:30). The monotheistic Jews understood that Jesus was professing to be the one true God (vv. 31-33), an accusation He did not deny. If there was any doubt about Jesus making this claim, He put it to rest when He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am” (8:58). Here Christ declared His pre-incarnate existence and took upon Himself the name “I Am.” The *I am* phrase Jesus used (Greek, *ego eimi*) was the same used by Yahweh to share His name with Moses (Exodus 3:14) and claim to be the only creator and redeemer of Israel (Isaiah 43:10, 11; 44:8, 24; 45:5, 6, 18, 21-23; 46:5, 9).

Those who could not accept that Jesus was the incarnate I AM conspired against and killed Him. But Jesus rose from the dead, and those who did not believe in Him fell under eternal condemnation (John 3:18, 19). Those who did believe, beginning with Thomas after the Resurrection, proclaimed that Jesus was “My

Lord and my God!" (20:28). This is precisely what Jesus predicted — that the world would know that He was I AM (8:28) after His death. Those who refused to believe would die in their sins (v. 24).

By God's grace, the Church of God has come to embrace Jesus for who He claimed to be. We affirm that He is the one who

was with God and was God but became flesh, dwelling among us in the person of Jesus Christ (1:1,14). We receive Jesus' blessing by proclaiming that Jesus is our Lord and God (20:29). We embrace Him as our True Vine, our Resurrection and Life, the Light of our World, our Living Bread. He is our way, our truth, and our life — the Great I AM! **BA**

Israel Steinmetz serves as Director of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Theology. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



Christ's Preexistence

Several scriptures take us directly to our premise, that the Son of God existed before being born in Bethlehem.

Colossians 1:15-17, for example, tells us that Jesus created all things and is before all things: "For by Him [Jesus] *all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*" (NASB).

By saying He created everything, the Bible affirms that Jesus necessarily existed before what He created. That's the front door approach, and the question is answered. Now we'll come in the back door. The roundabout route will teach us other things about Jesus.

It is recorded in Matthew 28:18 that Jesus said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (KJV). By saying all power "is given," Jesus revealed a relationship already current between Him and His Father. That it was not a new relationship is demonstrated by His creative work.

Who gave "all power" to Jesus? Nobody but God, His Father, can give such power to anyone. Such awesome power is illustrated in John 10:17, 18: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (KJV).

Since God the Father is invisible (Colossians 1:15) and no man has ever seen Him (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12), we need to understand who the God of Israel was who was seen on Mount Sinai. "Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself" (Exodus 24:9, 10, NASB). How can this be?

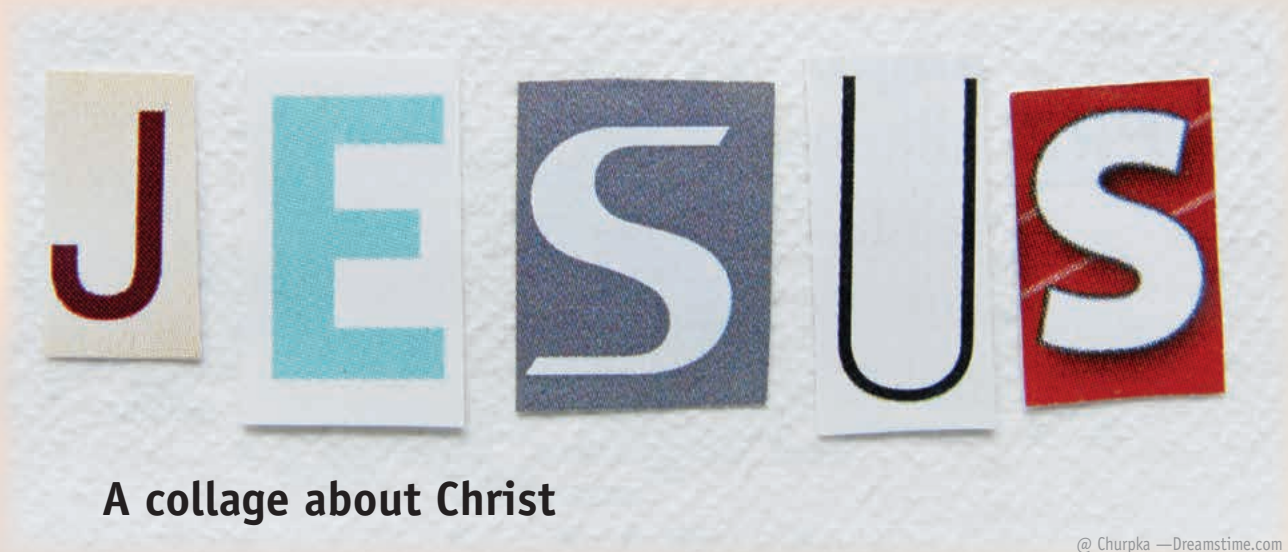
The answer appears in recognizing that Jesus really was before Abraham, as He said to the Jews: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58, KJV). The Bible gives an illustration of this fact in Genesis 18:1ff:

Now *the LORD* appeared to him [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them . . . (NASB).

Here *the LORD* "appeared to" Abraham. That means Abraham saw and talked with the *LORD*, a Hebrew word used only in reference to Christ or His Father, i.e., to Israel's God.

Just as Abraham encountered the pre-incarnate Christ by the oaks of Mamre, so did Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel "see" and eat with Him on Mount Sinai. Though His Father is invisible, the preexistent Son often appeared in human or angelic form.

— Roy Marrs
Lodi, CA



A collage about Christ

Empty Tomb

Imagine the struggle to hold on to hope if Jesus were still dead. If He remained in His tomb, preaching Him would be useless. Studying the Bible, a waste of time! Praying in His name, a mockery. Teaching children about Christ, emotional abuse. If Jesus is in His tomb, we are perpetually sinners, dead and lost for eternity!

A large portion of earth's ground is covered with burial plots and containers holding the evidence that death is certain for us all. Each marker testifies that a former living human lies there in some stage of decay. Travel to the gravesites of famous humans: Washington, Lincoln, King, Kennedy, Reagan, Buddha, or Mohammed. Visit the tombs of the rich and poor, famous and infamous, movie stars and sports icons, clergymen and friends. All these categories, believers or not, rest in their graves.

The amazing, simple truth about Jesus our Lord provides the only exception. He was both human (of Mary) and Deity (of

the Father) — God's only begotten Son. His followers watched Him die. They tearfully took His body off the cross, wrapped it, placed it in a tomb, and rolled the stone across the door. Roman authorities sealed the tomb and posted a guard so Jesus' body would always be there.

Hallelujah! The tomb could not hold Christ incarnate! He rose from that place of death. An angel rolled back the stone so we could see it was empty. Visitors to the tomb were fearful, amazed, and hopeful at what the angel said: "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. *He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.* Come and see the place where he lay" (Matthew 28:5, 6, NIV).

That one exception — the empty tomb of Jesus — is our hope. The resurrection message of 1 Corinthians 15 really is the foundation to the promise of eternal life. Jesus is alive! This is "of first importance" (v. 3, NIV). Take your Bible to a quiet place and read the entire chapter. Read it a second time! This message confirms that our faith in Jesus'

death and resurrection is solid basis for genuine hope in our own resurrection to life. When He returns and you rise to meet Him, your tomb and those of all the faithful who have ever lived will become empty also. Thank You, Lord Jesus, the first fruits of the resurrection.

The simple and joyful truth of our faith is this: *His tomb is empty!*

— Ken Lawson
Cottage Grove, MN

Acquired Taste

Have you ever wondered where you came from, how the world around you came into being? One has only to view a sunrise, the intricate structure of a butterfly, or the beauty of a flower to realize a Master Hand has provided it for our enjoyment. But sin made havoc of God's world, left a bad taste in man's mouth, and drove a wedge between Him and us. We are without faith and hope.

God's Word is sure, its message magnetic. What draws you

to the gospel? What whets your appetite for more? If you've sampled the world and been left with sin's aftertaste, why not "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Psalm 34:8)?

God provided an antidote for sin in the person of Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. This anointed One was commissioned to preach the gospel, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, open prisons for those bound by sin, and give people a purpose for living (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Taste-test the gospel. It is good news, and the good news is Jesus. Acquire a taste for Him, for His presence in your life. The central theme of the Bible is Jesus, the Word of God and the way to eternal life. He is a strong tower. You can safely trust in His protection.

Job contemplated the importance of God's Word: "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). The words of Jesus are food and drink to the seeking soul (34:3).

Have you been forgiven and immunized against sin by the shed blood of Jesus on the cross? Jesus is the antidote for sin, the

missing component needed for faith and hope in God. Continual communion keeps the relationship intact. Have you acquired the taste for Jesus?

— Dorothy Nimchuk
Medicine Hat, Alberta

Jesus' Complexity

Considering the simplicity of Jesus, I'm convinced He is enough for my salvation. Jesus — plus and minus nothing — saves me completely. Believing, accepting, trusting Him will accomplish my eternal salvation (John 3:16).

And yet I am astounded by His complexity. As Son of God, Deity personified, preexistent in the heavens, and of humble birth in a Jewish body, Jesus fulfilled the role of Israel's Messiah and humanity's Savior. He manifested His Father's will for us. He offered us wisdom, understanding, obedience, and the possibility of pure thoughts and an abundant, guilt-free life.

I met Jesus over fifty years ago, and I'm still trying to comprehend the revelation of this Man. I desperately needed His power to change me then, and I still do. The more I learn of Jesus, the more I see His hand

in changing my attitudes and actions. Each year I discover more about this Giver of life who transforms me as I walk with Him.

Jesus is an anomaly: forgiving, loving, accepting on the one hand — simply Jesus; exhorting, teaching, and correcting me on the other — comprehensively Jesus!

— Richard Cress
Muldrow, OK

I Love Jesus

It is nothing short of miraculous that I should love Jesus, for I have neither seen Him nor heard His voice. Yet I love Him, genuinely and deeply!

Why do I love Jesus? Can't I love Him just because? Wasn't I made for this purpose? Doesn't He exist to be loved? Does a mother need reasons to love her baby? Doesn't she love him just because he is? Does Jesus love us just because we are?

Things so simple can be made complex by human reasoning — by questioning. A little child can love Jesus from a pure heart, not the least concerned why she loves Him.

Why do I love Jesus? The answer today is not the same as why I loved Him seventy or fifty years ago. Not even last year. Ask tomorrow, and it may be different yet.

Before I trusted and received Him into my heart, Jesus was my hope of escape from judgment. I knew enough Scripture to know that someday everyone would be held responsible for the way they had lived. I knew destruction awaited those who had lived in sin without knowing Christ. Jesus



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was my anticipated deliverer, and I loved Him for it.

When I met Jesus at an altar, He instantly became my Savior. He took away my guilt and fear of hell. I rose with tear-stained cheeks, a clean heart, and a liberated spirit because Jesus had saved me. And I loved Him for it.

When my father yielded his life to Jesus after refusing for years, I finally had an example to follow who had skin. As a pre-teen, that gave me a security I didn't understand, but I loved Jesus for it.

When I received the Lord's call to ministry while kneeling at the altar during campmeeting in Colorado (1951), a bond developed that continues to this day. And I love Him for it!

When my mother faced cancer surgery and I was fifteen hundred miles away with no money for plane fare, Jesus gave me a peace that all would be well, and I loved Him for it. My mother lived another thirty-plus years.

When I lay in an ER with less than half of my blood remaining because of a bleeding ulcer, prayers were heard and the bleeding stopped. I was restored to my wife and little ones, and I loved Him for it.

When my parents died eight years apart, I felt sure they slept in the arms of Jesus. My own hope for one day following them was strengthened. I too would meet death with His assurance, and I loved Him for it.

Through days and years of ministry, experience after experience has given me new reasons for loving Jesus: when anointing and praying for someone resulted in healing; when my life touched another's for eternal good and a soul was saved; when young men proved faithful to God's call and became pastors; when an estranged couple found renewed affection after pastoral counseling; when backsliders were prayed back to salvation; when the brethren opened their hearts to pastoral nudges toward the Lord and revival broke out. In times like these I found new cause for loving Jesus, as He assured me He was intimately involved in my life.

Today I feel stronger love for Jesus because He is fulfilling His promise to stay with me and not desert me (Matthew 28:20). At eighty years, I am even more impressed with the psalmist's appeal: "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails"

(71:9). I love Him for staying with me in old age.

Living for Jesus is great! Living *with* Jesus is extra great! Among the church in Sardis, a few were promised to walk with Jesus "in white," for they were worthy (Revelation 3:4). To me, walking with Jesus is as real as life itself — an experience like none other.

In this day of great chaos, Jesus gives me peace that surpasses all understanding. I know it is not within me to direct my steps. Things are too unstable. Risks run too high. Failure is too rampant. I need One who sees the whole picture, One who sees the end from the beginning, to point the way. No wonder I love Him.

Jesus is with me just as He promised. He shows me where to work in His vineyard. He guides me in preparing sermons and calms me in days of troubled water, giving Romans 8:28 assurance. He picks me up when I fall.

Though I cannot see Jesus, I feel His touch. He is within and all around — ahead of me, behind me, above me, underneath me, alongside me — every moment.

With Jesus to guide, my confidence is beyond human strength. I find myself involved in things I don't understand; He's leading me. I experience marvelous blessings; I don't know why. I see Him at work in the lives of others; I can only praise Him.

His love for me seems more real, more powerful each year, and my love for Him mounts higher and higher. It is indeed like one hymn writer put it:

Richer, fuller, deeper,
Jesus' love is sweeter,

Sweeter as the years go by. **BA**

— Max Morrow

Owosso, MI

More “Simply Jesus”^{.org}

Note: Short quotes from eight more authors who wrote for this BA are here. If you like these, the uncut versions may be read at baonline.org.

The synonyms of the word *Lord* in the parables of Christ include the words *Master* and *Owner*. When we say, “Jesus is our Lord,” we are recognizing an obligation to serve and obey. To all of us who follow Jesus, it is an obligation to love.

*“Jesus: Savior and Lord”
by Josias Hernandez
Elizabeth, NJ*

At Christ’s gravesite, Mary was told Jesus was gone. A moment of terror must have come upon her. Then she spoke to Jesus, mistaking Him for the gardener. He took note of her state and control of the situation. Using a tone she knew, He said, “Mary.” Just the simple mention of her name, and Mary’s terror ceased. When life gets complicated and we’re caught up in our trials and ourselves, Jesus comforts us as only He knows how.

*“His Voice”
by Aubrey “Bill” Williams
Mississauga, Ontario*

You were still waiting, and I felt Your presence, Lord. I will not run from You anymore. Accepting You was my best deci-

sion. Your forgiveness brought peace that I longed for many years. It is great joy walking alongside You, Jesus. You filled my empty life and gave meaning to my existence.

*“Accepting Him”
by Victoria Rivera
Montreal, Quebec*

What brings deep faith in Christ varies. The disciples’ personal experience – walking and talking with Him, observing His miracles – fueled their faith and flamed their love. For others, our faith and love comes more through exposure to the Word. Whatever it is for you, the important thing is that you do have personal faith that can heartily exclaim “my Lord and my God.”

*“My Lord and My God”
by David Kidd
Adelaide, South Australia*

Jesus knew the only way to reverse the curse was an act of self-sacrifice. My “true love’s kiss” came in the form of a cross. With the power of love He bore my shame, doing for me what I could never do on my own.

*“A Kiss So Passionate”
by Kurt Lang
Harrisburg, OR*

How often do people put Jesus-plus-something-else in their testimonies? Jesus plus my heri-

tage. Jesus plus my education. Jesus plus my correct doctrine, my good behavior, my religious experience. Jesus plus my denomination.

God provided a better way. There really isn’t any other way to the Father, except Jesus.

*“Jesus Plus What?”
by John Lemley
Vancouver, WA*

Jesus remains a controversial figure even now. Modern portrayals give inaccurate views of Christ’s humanity. Are His teachings practical in today’s post-modern, enlightened society, or irrelevant? If He is who He says, that changes everything!

*“Reality in Jesus”
by Troy Gedack
Colorado Springs, CO*

Jesus didn’t meet the woman to condemn her, but to change her. He took a broken person looking for love and acceptance and gave her what she’d always hoped for: a relationship that satisfied. Jesus mended her life by filling the God-sized hole in her heart – with Himself. How do we know it was filled? The woman went back to tell others about Him.

*“Jesus and the Woman”
by Jody Crowson
Eugene, OR*

My Gethsemane

When life is pain . . .
an open sore,
and I,
in weakness, cry
“No more!”
help me, Father,
pray as He:
“Not my will . . .
but Thine —
for me.”

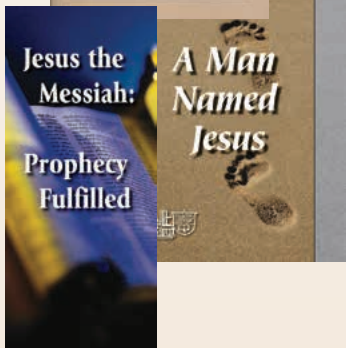
— Marcia K. Leaser



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Who Is Jesus?

And you shall call His name Jesus, because, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Jehovah Our Righteousness, Lord of Lords, Root of David, Holy One, Father, Son of God, Son of Man, Saviour of God's Anointed, the Word, I Am, Lamb of God, The Prophet, Redeemer and High Priest of Our Confession, King of Kings, LORD, Prince of Life, The Truth, Light of the World, Right and Loving One, Head of the Church, Shepherd and Bishop of Our Souls, Chief Cornerstone, Author and Finisher of Our Faith, Lord of the Light of the World, The Door, The Good Shepherd, The Resurrection and the Life, The Way, The Truth, The Life, The True Vine, Righteous Judge, The Alpha and Omega, The Beginning and the End.



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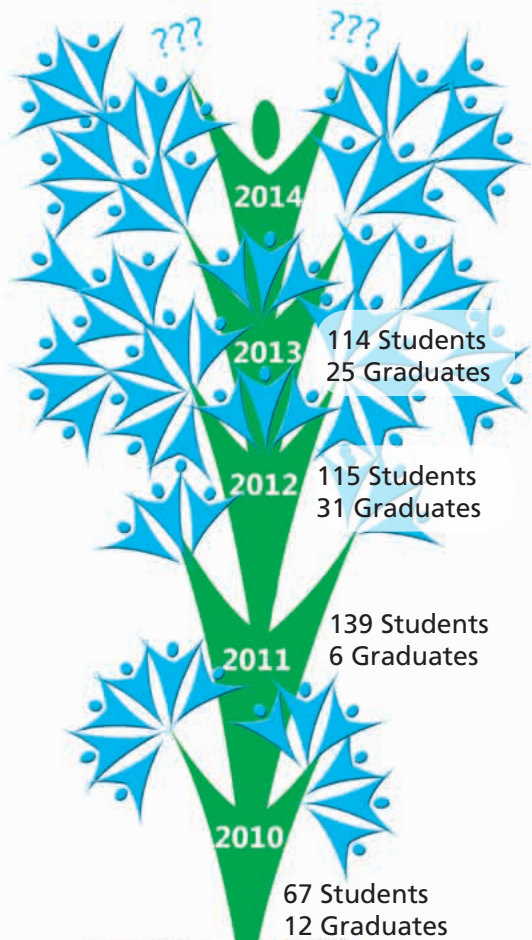
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CoG7 in Indonesia. Newly affiliated Pastor Ferdy Suoth of Manado City and pastor-evangelist Alfred Ander of Jakarta are shown here with IMC Zone 6 Representative Phil Kordahi (center) of South Australia. The Indonesian pastors received Pastor Kordahi's visit (November 2013) with gratitude. They serve in a religious environment dominated by Islam. Your prayers and offerings to Cristo Viene and CoG7 missions can help.



PMT in Villahermosa. For 10+ years Pioneer Missionary Training (PMT) groups of youth and adults have completed short-term mission trips to Mexico. The 2013 team, with participants from Oregon (8), Texas (4), Michigan (3), Mexico (1), Florida (1), Idaho (1), and Washington (1), is shown here in the state of Tabasco. Testimony-reports from this group may be read online (baonline.org). For info on the next PMT, contact monico.muffley@cog7.org or kurt.lang@cog7.org. 

CoG7 Events and Dates

Annual G. C. Prayer Initiative on "Beholding the Beauty of the Lord" - March 1-31

Pacific Northwest Super Sabbath, Jefferson, OR - March 8

Alumni Weekend, Spring Vale Academy, Owosso, MI - March 21-23

Spring classes at LifeSpring begin April 6; register by March 25

National Women's Retreat and 75th anniversary, Englewood, CO - April 4-6

Central District Youth/Young Adult retreat at Camp IODIS-ECA, Solon, IA - April 17-20

NE District Pastors-Leaders retreat at Laurelville Mennonite Church Center, Mt. Pleasant, PA - April 17-20

Unity of the Spirit team in Wister, OK - May 3

Spring Vale Academy graduation weekend near Owosso, MI - May 23-25

National SWORD Retreat, Brookhaven Camp, TX - May 23-26

Dover Family Camp at Camp Cimarron near Kingfisher, OK - June 8-12

Eastern Canada Conference with Whaid Rose, Cobourg Inn Convention Center, Cobourg, ONT - June 27-29

National Hispanic Women's Retreat, Chicago, IL - August 29 - September 1

Northeast Women's Retreat, Mackinaw Island, MI - October 3-5



Remembering Brother Garza

Minister Jose H. Garza of Houston, Texas, passed away January 11, 2014, at age 84. As owner-operator of an auto shop adjacent to his home, Brother Garza loved the Lord and the Church. This love led him to convert an extra room into a place of worship, where for several years he led a house church for his family and others, who were influenced to faith in Christ by his example and his words. Brother Garza is survived by his wife of 65 years, Estella; sons Jose Luis, Carlos, and Victor; daughters, Sylvia Valdez, Sandra Garza, Estella Alas, and Leticia Garza.

On baonline.org, read the testimony of Abrahams Odongo (Kenya) about Nigeria's convention and the report of Daniel Flores (Texas) about SHINE's prison ministry in Mexico. [.org](http://baonline.org)

**Annual Lord's Supper
in every congregation,
Sunday evening, April 13**



Big Sabbath in Ghana. A full house worships here in Offinso, near the city of Kumasi, during the visit of Bryan Cleeton, Robert Crawford, and Calvin Burrell to Ghana in December. The next week, 14 Ghanians made a three-day bus trip to attend the African convention in nearby Nigeria. In addition to church-planting efforts, Ghanaian pastors are working to restore unity among various CoG7 groups in their country.



Baptisms in Sierra Leone. Following the convention in Nigeria, Bryan Cleeton joined leaders in Sierra Leone to visit three new locales on behalf of the Church. Results: Lands were identified to grow church-sustaining crops (rice), and more than 170 souls were baptized following Sabbath evangelistic services. This photo shows the Massahun church, one of several young congregations in Sierra Leone.



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International Congress

Africa Highlights

Accompanied by IMC Representative Robert Crawford of the UK, Calvin Burrell and Bryan Cleeton of G. C. Missions worked in Zone 5 for two weeks in December 2013.

Ghana. In the cities of Accra, Kumasi, and Ofinso we met for five days with national conference leaders, visited a church construction site, preached and taught at a large Sabbath gathering, and met with a pastors-leaders group to work for unity among CoG7 groups in Ghana.

Nigeria. In the town of Omoku (near Port Harcourt) we attended a five-day convention for delegates and leaders from thirteen African nations where the Church exists. Fifty-plus visitors from Africa and elsewhere joined many more Nigerian members and families to make large crowds (up to 6,000 on Sabbath) for a program that featured a Festival of Choirs – dozens of them – from the host country. Preaching and teaching were strong, and 120 persons were baptized the last day! Other convention attendees from the US were Whaid and Marjolene Rose, Elizabeth Umana, Daisna Gibson, and Lucilda Hutchinson.

We believe the momentum seen and gained in Nigeria will result in increased gospel effort and fruit



across the entire continent. African nations where CoG7 is currently represented through IMC or G. C. Missions efforts: Burundi, Cameroon, D.R. Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Thanks to the entire Nigerian church and to Pastor Robert Crawford for their love and hard work in planning and providing for this pan-African convention.

Sierra Leone. Following convention, Bryan Cleeton met with Peter Blackie and his leadership team for three weeks in Sierra Leone. They reviewed the extensive Orphan and Widow work there and discussed development of agriculture and other means to sustain a growing, long-term ministry. In the cities/towns of Freetown, Makeni, Segbwema, and Rokupr, needed contacts were made with public officials. The gospel was preached on three Sabbaths, resulting in 175 new converts being baptized, having committed their lives to Christ!

— Calvin Burrell



It's That Simple

Simply Jesus — what a beautiful thought. Not Jesus-plus, no complicated formulas. Simply Jesus.

Simplicity is implied. It runs counter to the complexity of our modern world. Science and technology have advanced progress, but their messianic promise is now doubtful. They haven't solved the human dilemma. We can't have it all. More isn't always better. The secret to peace and contentment isn't progress. It's simply Jesus.

This is also an invitation to religious folks — to embrace simple faith, to live free from the exhausting pace that leaves us empty of the life Jesus promised, to say “no” to the “Christianized rat race,” to accept Jesus' offer of the easy yoke: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The easy yoke is applying the life and teachings of Jesus to all aspects of our daily experience: Jesus in our waking, eating, talking, sleeping, dying. This reduces us to love — love for God and love for others. It is living by Jesus' commands in the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the attitudes that demonstrate simple faith: poor in spirit, repentant, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, rejoicing when persecuted.

Sounds too simple? Isn't Christianity serious business? What about correct interpretations of truth? Defending the faith once delivered? Protecting pure religion? These are important, make no mistake about it. But apart from Jesus, they become the “rubbish” Paul gladly exchanged for

the joy of simply knowing Jesus (Philippians 3:8).

We tend to forget that He is the greatest truth we can know, the ultimate truth to which Scripture points: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39, 40). To get a lot of things right but miss the truth about Jesus is to miss it all. A right understanding of Jesus is essential to the true gospel. The prevailing notion that Monotheism — belief in the one true God of the Old Testament — minus “the Jesus part” equals saving faith, is false belief.

Peter learned this on the Mount of Transfiguration. His desire to build booths parallels our tendency to build boxes. They make life more manageable. Problem is, they can lead to the invention of “a box-sized deity,” found in the tight grip of those who want a god that fits their theology. So God declared, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” (Mark 9:7). Moses and Elijah, Israel's lawgiver and prophet, have disappeared, and Jesus stands there alone. It's all about Jesus.

So Paul warns, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3). There's simplicity in Christ; the gospel isn't complicated. Rest, trust, look to Jesus, and live. It's that simple. It's simply Jesus.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*



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