

Do You Really Know Jesus? Really?

A few years ago, I received an email from a friend that was one of those messages that I just won't ever forget. Her words that day had been pretty unexpected. It was a day that marked me. I opened up my mail to find the answer to a season of prayers. And I instantly began to weep.

Several months before receiving my friend's message, I remember sitting with her over coffee one afternoon, just talking about life's surface—our jobs, our interests and so on. It was in that conversation when my friend asked me if religion was just kind of “my thing.” Like a hobby or something. Some people like sports or cooking or crafts, and I think she understood “my religion” (though I don't ever actually refer to it as that) as my chosen extra-curricular activity.

Oh, but I hope you know. It was, and is, far more than that. And I longed for her to see and know and understand. I prayed fervently for her.

She knew the story. The story most Americans would say they know: “Jesus died on a cross.”

We've all heard most Americans would say they are Christians, right?

Because we've heard it. Right?

But do we *really* know Jesus?

Or is He a familiar name, a familiar story with familiar buildings that people gather in on Sundays to sing familiar songs and to hear familiar messages.

We may know the story, but we've got to ask—has the story

known us?

It has reached our ears, but has it reached down into our deep, and ruined us with awe? Has it ever—and can it still—make us tremble?

It's an old, old story, but it will never get old.

And it should never, and can never, get old to us.

This isn't a religious framework or how-to guidelines for living.

This isn't a fallback plan for comfort when life gets hard.

This is the story of a real, living Person, whose real, living sacrifice was meant to bring us really, really close to Him. Close enough to feel His breath blow through our souls, close enough to bring our heartbeats into sync with His, close enough to feel the shower of His presence roll through and over our frames when we lift the eyes of our hearts to Him.

He's real.

He's alive.

He's made Himself knowable, reachable and approachable.

And He's near to the ones who've let their hearts sink into the deep and flowing red of His sacred story.

That day when I opened my email, my friend had written to tell me that Jesus, at last, had her heart. She'd let her heart sink into the story. And His story became hers.

We've heard the old, old story. But have you stared into Love's most terrifyingly beautiful display and known, and been pierced through in your knowing, that it was for you?

Have we looked into Jesus' pained, passionate eyes, zealous for our hearts, and have we responded, *really*?

Have we come up close to the bleeding skin of the God-Man and let His wounds heal us?

Have we been ruined?

And have we been ruined, again and again?

There's a question for each of our hearts that probes beyond whether we're familiar with His name or His story. It even reaches past whether or not we've ever prayed a "sinner's prayer."

This question is for both the church and the unchurched. It's the question that our very existence centers upon. It's the question we'll still have to answer even after we breathe our last breath.

Do you really know Him?

Or have we belittled the richness of His sacrifice, assuming that our familiarity with a story is the same thing as receiving it?

Truly receiving this story is transformative. For it comes with a divine exchange—when Jesus extends His heart to us, and we extend ours to Him.

To let yourself sink into this story is to surrender your life into the hand of another. It's our heart's looking way up, and it's our soul's bowing way down, as low as the ground will allow. It's the tears of our brokenness spilled out; our dirty, shaking hands held out; our dark, bleeding hearts reaching out ... to receive what we could never earn and do not deserve.

But He gives it to those who want it. To those who want Him.

And when we receive Him, people will know.

We will look different... because we have to let go of the

world's hands if we want to take hold of God's.

Readers, how many of us who are named Christians live our lives, day to day, giving little or no thought to Him? Have we accused Him of being boring and yet have been so full of the world's wine that we've yet to truly drink of the Water of Life? Devastatingly, His glorious grace has been degraded in our eyes when we think we can embrace both His cross and the world, when we think His blood drained out was unto making us comfortable in our sin, when we withhold from Him the very thing He died for.

How many of us live "good and clean lives," sit in church every Sunday, sing songs with the congregation—and yet our hearts have yet to fall in love with the One we sing about?

How many of us have heard His name, come to Him now and then when we need help, know a few things about Him ... but He's no more than a familiar stranger to us?

How many of us have never had that real moment before Him when we tell Him that we need His cross, that we need His forgiveness, that we need Him and that we choose and love Him back?

This is a small but earnest appeal to each of our hearts today, yours and mine. *Choose Him*—whether it be that you choose *again*, or that you choose for the *first time*.

Love Him.

Abandon yourself to Him.

His gift is free. But we can't take something that's free and fail to acknowledge at what unfathomable cost it came to the bleeding Giver.

Withhold nothing from the One who withheld nothing from you. Give Jesus the inheritance of your heart that He so desires

and deserves.

His flesh was torn open for us. Blood flowed from His marred frame until He breathed His last.

Because He wants us close. **He wants our hearts.**

And in this life that we walk (and sometimes trudge and crawl) through, how close has your heart come to Him?

How close is your heart to Him when things seem to be going well and your way, when no big trials are invading your camp, when all (or at least a lot) seems to be smooth sailing?

And how close is your heart to Him when it breaks, when things fall apart, when disease takes one you love, when your family ruptures, when those things happen that make you feel like your heart will bleed right out of your chest, when storms beat against your house?

How close is your heart to Him when your *world breaks*, when national laws are passed that defy God's law, when you read news headlines of children suffering and poor ones fleeing for a refuge, when nations are raging, when crises seem to only be escalating?

Do you know Him?

Do you know the One who came to heal the world's brokenness, and your heart's?

There is going to be an inevitable moment when you and I will lock eyes with Him for the first time. And if we don't know Him now, we will not know Him then.

Each of our lives is heading toward that very real moment. Life's times of joy, sorrow and tribulation are moving us toward an eye-to-eye encounter. And in that moment, all of life's sum will come down one thing, the only thing that matters.

Do you know—deeply, personally and intimately know—Jesus?

When you finally look into the eyes of the God-Man, will you be looking into the eyes of a friend? Will you know the depths of His heart and have let Him into the depths of yours? Will your heart have spent its days in wisdom, building a rich history with Jesus?

Or will you painfully realize, then, that He who has loved us, who has eternally desired us, who was pierced through for us, who was meant to be our nearest, most intimate Friend ... *is only a familiar stranger?*

How close will your heart be to His in that moment His eyes stare into yours?

This isn't a hobby or a mere fraction of life's whole. Jesus is Life. He gave His all, and by the grace of God, may my all, and your all, be His.

And may we be overcome, undone and astounded—again and again—with the wonder, the awe and the terrifying beauty of His story.

“Listen, ye children of God, it is the old story over again, but it is always new to you. See Him giving His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. See Him as He hides not His face from shame and spitting, dumb like a sheep before her shearers, and like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter. ... See Him with the cross upon His mangled shoulders, staggering through Jerusalem's streets. ... See Him, ye that love Him, and love Him more as He stretches out His hands to the nail, and gives His feet to the iron. ... Behold Him as they lift up the cross with Him upon it and dash it down into its place and dislocate His bones. ... Stand, if ye can, and view that face so full of dolour. Look till a sword shall go through your own heart as it went through His virgin mother's very soul. Will you not love Him who did all that friend could do for friend; who gave His life for us? Beloved,

here are a thousand crimson cords that tie us to the Savior, and I hope we feel their constraining power. It is His vast love, the old eternal bond, the love which redeemed, which suffered in our stead, the love which pleaded our cause before the eternal throne; it is this which we give as a sufficient reason why we should love the Savior, if needs be, even unto death.” (C.H. Spurgeon)

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