

An Imaginary Christ

Before me now I see the impression I saw years ago. There are two scenes. One is of a clear and sunny horizon lined with an endless multitude of people. The other is of a vast forest with no one in sight. Dense fog covers the forest, and out of the fog comes the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, for the most part, is not found among the general populace. People have to really look to discern Him.

Think about it. Our Savior was not born in a big metropolis, but in the small town of Bethlehem. And He grew up in the despised country of Galilee. He was not born in a palace where kings are, but in a lowly stable. The wise men had to really search and diligently follow the star to find Him.

When Jesus entered into public ministry, it is written that He had no place to lay His head (Luke 9:58). He did not have a ministry headquarters. He died a criminal's death on a cross, naked and nearly alone. His grave was a borrowed tomb. His throne was an invisible one hidden from the multitudes of those who were healed and delivered through His ministry. He was called meek and lowly—certainly not a description fitting for a king.

If you, like so many others, were looking for Him in the external, you'd miss Him. If you were looking for Him to come a certain way, in a certain form, according to a certain brand of theology, or doctrine, or a denominational view, packaged according to a set of certain traditional ideals, you'd miss Him again. "Where have you hid my Lord?" We've subtly hidden Him behind our forms, our facades and our fads. We've masked Him from the multitudes who need to know Him as He is.

And why have we hid Him? Is it not for the same reason that He had no place to lay His head? Because He makes us too uncomfortable the way He is. He deals with our hearts, our

attitudes and our manner of life. He speaks the truth in love. He searches our motives and looks deep within. We don't like that. It's too uncomfortable.

We don't want our controlled habitats and boundaries we've created upset by Him. We don't want His glory to disturb our traditions and way of doing things. We allow Him to visit us occasionally, but He can't stay. If He did, we'd have to change the rules and play by His instead.

So what do we do? We design our own sanctuary or create our own culture and put Him there. We corral Him and control Him and place Him within our own boundaries and by-laws. We make Him one of us. We make Him fit into our lifestyle, our doctrine, our denomination, our traditions and our culture. We make Him cool and hip. We make Him like us.

To the female novelist, He is the romantic Christ. To the half-converted cowboy, He is the sentimental Christ, or worse yet, the Man Upstairs. To the academic egghead, He is the philosophical Christ. To the effeminate poet, He is the cozy Christ. To the all-star athlete, He is the muscular Christ. To the celebrity artist or popular actor, He is the cool and hip Christ (partial quote from A.W. Tozer).

How radically different those images are from the way the apostle John saw Jesus in a vision near the end of his life:

"Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when

I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death'" (Rev. 1:12-18).

John saw Jesus in all His majestic strength and splendor. So mighty and overwhelming was the glory of His presence that John could no longer stand on his feet. Today most people have no idea of the fullness of Christ's identity. To many He is just a picture on the wall, a cross around their neck, or a stone statue in front of a church building. As Aaron did with the golden calf, they mold and fashion a god according to their own image and liking. They craft a god to meet their needs, and then they stick a Jesus label on their man-made idol. May God help us idolatrous earthlings see the real Jesus.

There is such a great need today for the unveiling of the intimate, holy knowledge of the real Jesus.

Oh people, do you see what we've done with the Holy One?

We've brought Him down to our level and made Him too common. Yes, He was made a common man, but yet so uncommon. No man ever lived like Him. No man ever loved like Him. No man ever spoke like Him. He was filled with grace and truth. He spoke from the fullness of the Godhead. All His words were the purest of wisdom. His works were the purest of power. His motives were the purest of love. He was the perfect man; not like us, but sent to make us like Him. Instead we've tried so hard to make Him like us.

Listen again to A.W. Tozer's revealing words:

"We serve a God today who very rarely ever astonishes anybody. He manages to stay pretty much within the constitution. Never does He break over our bylaws. He's a very well behaved God and very denominational and very much one of us, and we ask

Him to help us when we're in trouble and watch over us when we're asleep. The God of the pretentious believer isn't a God I could have much respect for. But when the Holy Ghost shows us God as He is, we admire Him to the point of wonder and delight."

When was the last time you were filled with wonder and delight at the sight of Him? Have you been filled with the Spirit to even see Him that way?

There are a great many bogus Christs among us these days. John Owen, the old Puritan, warned people in his day: "You have an imaginary Christ, and if you are satisfied with an imaginary Christ, you must be satisfied with an imaginary salvation."

May the great Holy Ghost open our spiritual eyes so that we may behold the real Jesus.

Bert M. Farias, founder of Holy Fire Ministries, is the author of *The Real Gospel* and co-host of the *New England Holy Ghost Forum*. He is a missionary evangelist carrying a spirit of revival to the church and the nations. Follow him at Bert Farias on Facebook or @Bertfarias1 on Twitter.