

Who Is This Jesus?

✘ During the 19th century, liberal theologians began a search to rediscover the historical Jesus. They were intent on determining the true personality of a Jesus who existed 2,000 years earlier. Leading this pursuit was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the Nobel Peace Prize-winning philosopher, theologian and medical missionary.

The fruit of his work was disclosed in his highly acclaimed book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which was released in 1906—the same year the Azusa Street Revival lit the world on fire.

After exhaustive research, Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was a mysterious, power-hungry ruler who arrogantly considered Himself the Son of Man. Titles such as Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God, Schweitzer said, were merely “historical parables,” and Jesus’ claims of divinity were not based on reality. Schweitzer wrote, “We can find no designation that expresses what He is for us.”

In Schweitzer’s opinion, Jesus had nothing in common with contemporary society, but He could be known through individual experience. For Schweitzer that meant running a hospital in Africa. Although he helped a great deal of people and was truly sincere—Schweitzer was sincerely wrong.

He sought the Jesus of 2,000 years ago rather than the Jesus of today. The tools of his research were human intellect, the scientific method and subjective experience rather than Scripture, prayer and meditation.

YOU CAN KNOW JESUS THROUGH THE BIBLE How important is it to rediscover the Jesus of the Bible? I venture to say it means everything. However, revelation—which doesn’t come from human intellect or scientific method—is at the core of who Jesus is.

Revelation is the process God uses to show the beauty and power of Jesus in your life through the Word of God.

When you know the Jesus of the Bible, you daily fall more and more in love with Him. Jesus doesn't want you following Him out of cold, rigid, legalistic obedience as if He were an impersonal taskmaster or an exacting judge. He wants you to obey Him because you love Him and delight in pleasing Him!

Yes, He is a monarch and righteous ruler, but He is foremost a loving Lord who laid down His life for you and continues to pray for you every day before the Father (see Heb. 7:25). In fact, He desires to relate to you as a Bridegroom with His bride. Jesus wants you captivated, fascinated and exhilarated by a true revelation of Him, by truly "knowing" Him.

To know Jesus, you must begin with the Bible. The Bible was written to introduce you to a Person—Jesus. By wholeheartedly believing in Him, you can share eternity with Him. In the closing words of his Gospel, John wrote, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31, NIV).

For many Christians, believing in Jesus the Son of God is much easier than believing in Jesus the Son of Man—a real, live person. Without forfeiting any of His divinity, Jesus came to Earth and clothed Himself with human skin.

But after His resurrection, Jesus didn't stop being a man. Jesus did not temporarily become a man (the incarnation) for a season and then return to heaven, dissolve His humanity and "go back to being only God." The eternal, uncreated, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent second Person of the Trinity became a man and will remain a man forever!

Relating to a personal God who is a literal Person is so much easier than relating to some "beatific vision" or "ethereal presence." Unfortunately, a great deal of religious training

not only distorts the personality of Jesus but also ignores His humanity in attempting to emphasize His divinity. We need both! By building a friendship with the man Christ Jesus, you build a relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.

AN INTERESTING ROMANCE During the 1870s two unbelievers sat on a railroad train discussing the life of Christ. Both were skeptical attorneys: one a writer, the other a famous agnostic. "I think an interesting romance could be written about Him," the writer commented. His friend replied, "And you are just the man to write it. Tear down the prevailing sentiment about His divinity and paint Him as a man."

The writer, former Civil War general Lewis Wallace, accepted his friend's challenge. Yet the challenge didn't come from an unknown agnostic attorney. It came from a noted opponent of Christianity, Robert Ingersoll, whose scurrilous attacks on biblical belief commanded up to \$3,500 for one lecture—a hefty sum in those days.

In the process of constructing the history of Christ, Wallace found himself facing the greatest life ever lived on Earth. The more he studied the Bible, the more he was convinced. He fell in love with the compassionate Savior.

His heart was so captivated that one day he felt compelled to cry, "Truly this was the Son of God." He finished the book, and it eventually became the all-time classic Ben-Hur.

MEET THE REAL JESUS! God wants you to know the love of Christ. He wants you to drink deeply of His love and discover the beauty, the reality of His only begotten Son, who is "beautiful beyond description."

The Bible says that God loves you and delights in you so much that in spite of your shortcomings and sins He bursts forth in heartfelt song! If you are a Christian, the wrath of God is no longer upon you. He's not mad at you anymore—He's on your side!

In fact, Scripture says He not only saves you; He also sings over you! "On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing'" (Zeph. 3:16-17).

Believe it or not, God enjoys you. He not only loves you; He likes you too and wants to spend time with you. He wants you to follow Him out of sheer delight, captivated by the compelling personality and character of His one and only Son.

The real Jesus is full of life and joy, and He loves you extravagantly. In the deep recesses of every heart, Jesus whispers, "Come. Stop trying to fill the hole in your heart with things that cannot satisfy. Drink of My love and find true life." A love relationship with Jesus is the foundation of your very life.

Jesus is the Bridegroom who ravishes His bride, the church, with His love. This same Jesus ravishes you with His love. Jesus wants a full-time bride—not some part-time girlfriend!

To see yourself as part of a bridal party is not about gender but position. He longs to be with you as a bridegroom longs to be with His bride! It is this joyful Jesus who, as a bridegroom, beckons you to follow Him as His beloved bride.

Who is this person who calls you to Himself? It's the festive Jesus who enjoys celebrating a wedding feast; the servant Jesus who prepares a seaside breakfast for His men; the masculine Jesus whom brawny fishermen follow unashamedly. It is the pure Jesus whom hypocritical leaders despise and the joyful Jesus whose infectious smile melts the hearts of the multitudes.

THE JESUS OF MY FIRST LOVE The Jesus I am describing is the Jesus who won my heart when I was much younger. After 20 years

of emptiness, which included 12 years of religious schooling, I discovered that true Christianity is not based on religious rules. It is based on a living, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Up to that point in my life I had searched everywhere for peace and purpose. Then someone introduced me to Jesus. Scales lifted from my eyes and I realized that Christianity was not about performance or production—it was about a Person!

I was overwhelmed by the real Jesus of the Bible, and I embraced a relationship with the One who created me and laid down His life for me so that I could experience His abundant life (see John 10:10).

Over time, however, I strayed from my love relationship with Jesus. The tendency after experiencing a true revelation of Him is to replace intimacy with ministry, passion for the Lord of the work with production for the work of the Lord. While Jesus was calling me back to emulating Mary, I was stuck mimicking Martha (see Luke 10:38-42).

I needed to discover Jesus again. I needed to leap off the treadmill of performance and pressure, back into the loving arms of the smiling Shepherd I once knew.

In the closing hours of her life, Eileen Wallis (wife of one of England's premier prophets and church leaders, Arthur Wallis) gave me this counsel: "Enjoy Jesus, Larry. Take time to simply enjoy being with Him."

How about you? Are you enjoying your relationship with Jesus Christ, or have you slipped from sheer delight in Him to drudgery, activity and more and more ministry?

If your hunger to spend time communing with Jesus has decreased, if your experiences of God's faithfulness are limited to stories of the past, or if you continually struggle to win victory over battles that stand in your way, you may

need to rediscover Jesus.

REKINDLING YOUR FIRST LOVE Jesus once spoke to a group of believers who had become settled in their relationship with Him: “‘I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

‘You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love’” (Rev. 2:2-4).

The Christians in Ephesus weren’t bad people. They opposed wickedness; they tested all teaching with the truth of God’s Word; and they refused to give up under persecution. From outward appearances these people would be considered solid Christians—and they were. Yet, Jesus said, “You have forsaken your first love.”

If you can identify with these solid believers, then this Scripture passage gives three simple keys that can help you rekindle your passion for Jesus.

****Remember.** Think back to the former days when you enjoyed the sweetness of Jesus’ presence and favor.

****Repent.** In prayer, confess that you have allowed yourself to stray from your first love. Ask for forgiveness, and choose to turn around and return to Jesus.

****Repeat.** Do again those simple things you did to cultivate your relationship with Jesus. Read your Bible and spend consistent quality time with Him in worship, prayer and meditation. Remember He likes you, He longs for you—in spite of your shortcomings and sin.

Respond to Jesus. Be motivated not by guilt and pressure but by His deep-seated, passionate devotion to you! “We love [Him]

because He first loved us,” John says (1 John 4:19). What a joy it is to rediscover Jesus and be rekindled in bridal affection for Him as the “Lover of our soul.”

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