

## REFLECTIONS - and Comparisons

By

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Now that the excitement of the holidays is gone, this might be a good time to reflect on the facts and simplicity of Jesus the Christ.

There was no Nine-One-One for Joseph to call, no ambulance to carry Mary to a stainless steel delivery room to a team of doctors, so in the place reserved for animals the Son of God was delivered by untrained hands, perhaps with the aid of a midwife.

It was appropriate that the one who was to become the bread of life was laid in a manger, where the animals received their food.

Mary's husband was not able to bring her flowers, but the baby's real Father in heaven sent an angelic choir to welcome her baby into the world.

He grew up in obscurity, but under the watchful eyes of loving parents. Although he suffered all the temptations to which youth are usually exposed, he never rebelled against the restraints of his parents but was subject to them as long as he lived in their home. He never sowed any wild oats for which he would repent in sorrow, and instead of following the crowd because "everybody's doing it" he chose to do those things which pleased God, making him unique, not only in the miracle of his birth, but in the fact that unlike all other men, he never sinned.

When his cousin John came preaching repentance and baptizing, Jesus obeyed the message of God, and submitted himself to John for baptism. The religious world wages endless debates over baptism, and the high mucky-mucks of TV evangelism insist that it is only a symbol with nothing to do with conversion and salvation, but it was not until after Jesus, who had no sin, came forth from being immersed in the river Jordan that God said, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased"

So well-pleased was God that His spirit, in the form of a dove, was sent to rest on Jesus, and it was soon afterwards that Jesus announced that he had been anointed to preach good tidings and perform miracles.

He had the personality and the ability to rise to the pinnacle of power and enforce his will upon others, but instead, he went about doing good as a servant. Unlike most modern evangelists he sought no place of prestige or rank and accepted no title other than the generic "teacher." (Rabbi, in Greek)

In contrast to the church's hierarchy of both then and now, he never used his skill or astute perception to manipulate people into the acceptance of his teaching. Nor did he use

his keen mental powers to intimidate those who had doubts or were slow in grasping his message.

As he went about doing good, healing the sick and afflicted and even raising the dead, he never took any credit for these great feats, but declared that it was all due to The Father having empowered him. "I can of myself do nothing," he said (John 5:30). Even the words that he spoke he attributed to his heavenly Father. "I speak not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he has given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John. 12:47). In all his actions and words, he glorified God, his father.

His preaching demanded a response that required a decision. "Except you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5). "Every one therefore that hears these words of mine, and does them, shall be like a man who built his house upon the rock," he said. "And every one therefore that hears these words of mine and does them not shall be likened unto a foolish man" (Matt.7:24-27). Clearly Jesus expected people to make such a decision of their own free will.

His teaching was plain and direct, so that the common (uneducated) people knew what he was talking about without the help of professionals. They understood that he claimed to speak for God; that he claimed to be the way - the only way - to eternal life, and that to reject him was to reject God who sent him. When he said, "No one comes to the Father but by me," they were stunned, for it was a strong statement and hard to accept. But they didn't debate over it. There was no part of it hard to understand.

Jesus taught that we cannot compromise our loyalty. One cannot serve God and also serve money (Matt. 6:24). Instead of seeking to "have it all" he taught us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt.6:33). The popular path, he said, leads to destruction, but the path that leads to eternal life is narrow and often difficult and fraught with hardships (Matt. 7:13-14).

To the clergy he was dangerous because he saw through their masks of holiness to their true character. He had not studied under their distinguished teachers and had no degrees from their approved schools. People could easily see the contrast. "This man speaks not as the scribes and Pharisees, but as one having authority" (Mark 1:21). The opinions of the doctors of law and religion were ignored. The scribal profession was outraged and extremely jealous, as Pilate later observed (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10).

He labeled their orthodoxy as nothing but the traditions of men. This made him a heretic to be reviled, ostracized and one worthy of death. Truth is always unwelcome to evil. Times haven't changed. Much religious orthodoxy is still made up of human traditions that have no basis in scripture, and those who expose them are still considered heretics, to be despised and excommunicated as enemies of the church.

Jesus chose a few men to be his special messengers, men from common walks of life rather than from the professional religious leaders. Only one of them had any formal education in religion, and that was Paul. But unlike so many who use their education as a

means to gain worldly esteem, Paul counted his successful career as worth less than garbage and gave it all up for Christ that he might gain the blessing of righteousness and the hope of the resurrection in him (Phil. 3:8-11).

His enemies falsely accused him and used the powers of the state government, a government that they despised, to persecute him and put him to death. These tactics are still used by the Christ-deniers who seek decisions from the courts to silence the voices of Christians and to blackout the truth in public places.

In all of this Jesus did not flinch or become bitter or paranoid, but steadfastly held the course the Father had set for him. He willingly submitted to be crucified, that his death might meet the penalty of sin for Christians so that we might not have to suffer the final and total death at judgment.

For three days and nights he was lifeless in the tomb. But death could not hold him, for he had no sin of his own (Acts 2:24). God broke the Roman seals of the tomb and raised Jesus out from among the dead. To prove that he was not just an apparition he ate with the apostles and had them touch him. Later he would say to the apostle John, "I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1:18).

After forty days he ascended to heaven where God seated him at his own right hand and placed him in authority. Because he had been an obedient son, obedient even unto death, God exalted him above every creature and made him Lord of heaven and earth.

As the High Priest for God's people he is now the mediator between man and God. (Heb. 4:14-16) According to his own instructions each Christian has the privilege of approaching Almighty God, anywhere at any time, in the name of (by authority of) Jesus. One needs no special human agent such as a clergyman or a priest to get the ear of God. Nor does one need the help of a dead person, whether Mary the mother of Jesus, or some celebrated saint.

Through Christ's death we may have the boldness to enter into the very holy presence of God, "the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God (Jesus himself); let us draw near with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:20-22).

This means that each Christian has help as he seeks to resist sin and live in obedience to God. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1)

It also means that we have hope. In raising Jesus from the dead God gave assurance of two things: (1) In Jesus, God will judge the world at the appointed time (Acts 17:31); and (2) Christians will also be raised up to immortality like that of Christ's. (1 John 3:2).

In the fullness of time, when God wanted to reveal Himself and His purpose, He did not send a book. He sent a person, Jesus, in whom we find all spiritual blessings (Eph.1:3). In Jesus, God reveals His love as well as His power, His mercy as well as His justice, His gentleness as well as His strength, and His compassion as well as His firmness.

The gracious invitation of Christ still stands:

“Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your lives. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

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