

# The



# Way

***REB***

*Cover: Courtesy of Ain Vares*

# ***THE WAY***



They did not call it “Christianity”.

**They called it The Way.**

It was not a religion.

It was a way of life that belongs to the world beyond---God’s World.

Christianity has changed a thousand times.

It is changing now before our eyes.

**But the Way has never changed.**

You do not find the Way.

The Way finds you.

When it finds you, you know it.

A door opens to a world within this world.



## **God's World.**

A world with only one King.

A King with unspeakable power.

A King who is gracious with the humble and  
stern with the haughty.

A King who is our Shepherd and our Friend.

Once we hear the King's voice all we have to do is let go of our delusions  
and follow where he leads.

He will speak, if our heart is open.

He will lead, if our eye is single.

He sets us free.

He makes us whole.

He anoints us as servants of his kingdom.

He causes us to breathe the breath of the world to come.

Christianity has changed a thousand times.

It is changing now before our eyes.

But the Way has never changed.



The Way

***Thomas said to him, “Lord we do not know where you are going,  
how can we know the way?”***

***Jesus said to him, “I am the Way....”***

***John 14***

*Prayer: Lord, find us, call us to you, our king, so we may walk in this world as people of your way, as people of your world. Keep opening our ears, our hearts to your call so we may keep walking in your way. And may this way of life be more than religion to us, more than trying to live righteously for a future reward. May it be the natural outcome from drawing our hearts close to your heart, from seeking to follow where you lead because we can't bear being without you Jesus. Amen.*

Message: REB May 2021

Art: Permission of Ain Vares at [ainevaresart.com](http://ainevaresart.com)

# ***I'M A FOLLOWER OF JESUS***



*“Are you a Christian?”*

*“No, I’m a follower of Jesus.”*

*“Wait a minute! Is there a difference? I thought a Christian was a follower of Jesus.”*

*“The word ‘Christian’ stands for many things that have nothing to do with following Jesus.”*

In past generations Christians went on deadly crusades against Muslims.

They burned Jewish synagogues.

They killed each other over doctrine.

They bought and sold black people as slaves.

These days Christians are allowing the end to justify the means as they pursue political power.

**In all the confusion Jesus is forgotten.**



Will You Also Turn Away?

When the pagan world observes Christian behavior, it shrugs its shoulders and walks away.

Where are the poor in spirit?

Where are those who mourn?

Where are the meek?

Where are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Where are the merciful?

Where are the pure in heart?

Where are the peacemakers?

Where are those who are persecuted for simply walking with Jesus?

***“But if the salt has lost its taste, how shall it’s saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.” (Matthew 5)***

Jesus did not come to establish another world religion.

Jesus came to call us into God’s World, to set us free from our bondage to the Lie.

As far as Jesus is concerned,

It's not our doctrines.

It's not our "spiritual experiences".

It's not our religious insights.

It's not our political activities.

Jesus simply asks:

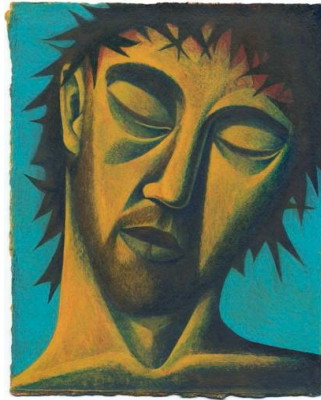
*"Are you following me?"*

*"Are you walking in my light?"*

*"Are you allowing me to help you to love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and your neighbor as yourself?"*

Sooner or later each of us who has heard the call of Jesus will have to answer to him.

**.Only to him**



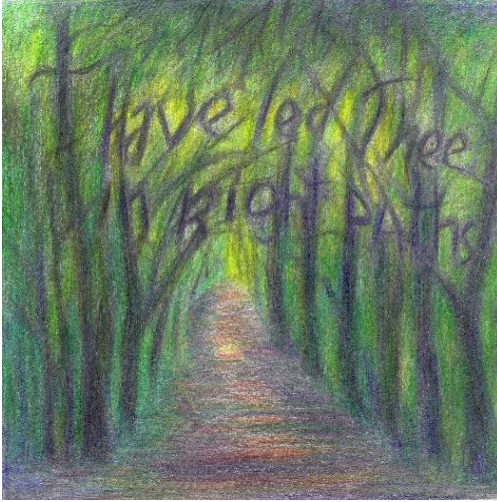
Behold the Man

*Prayer: Yes, Lord as we face what's ahead help us to continue hearing your call and answer only to you. May we never forget you, may we not turn away from you for any movement, for any security, for any crusade. Free us from believing the Lie, free us from religious and political bondage. You are our identity. You alone are who we follow. May we continue to behold you, love you...walking in your light ....loving God and others with all that we have. Because we are your followers. Amen.*

Message: June 2021

Featured Artist: Michael Cook at [hallowed-art.co.uk](http://hallowed-art.co.uk)

# ***THE PATH OF LIGHT***



It's not what we claim to believe.

It's not what we claim to know.

It's not what we have experienced.

**It's a daily walk on the Path of Light.**

The early believers called it *the Way*.

Jesus puts it bluntly:

***“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life,  
and those who find it are few.”***

*Matthew 7*

**Eternal life begins when we start walking on that path.**

Our steps are illumined by the light of God's Spirit.

The glory of the world to come envelops and comforts us, as we follow Jesus to whatever cross he has for us.

Jesus tells us all we need to know, when he says,

***“I AM the way.”***



Faith in Jesus is not a static “belief system”.  
Faith in Jesus is what we do.

***“Whoever hears these words of mine and does them.....”***

***“Whoever hears these words of mine and does not do them.....”***

***“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”***

***We get all the help we need.***

Like the cloud of glory by day and the pillar of fire by night,  
guiding the Israelites through the wilderness...

**We are guided by the light of heaven.**

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake.*

The minute we start to wander off the path the Spirit convicts us,  
shows us what we need to do, and helps us to do it.

***"I am the light of the world;  
he who follows me will not walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life."***

***John 8***

***We are never alone as we walk this path.***

As they made their way toward Emmaus those men felt abandoned. The one they hoped would redeem Israel allowed himself to be executed. What was left for them?

A stranger draws up beside them and asks,



***"What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleophas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.***

***Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see." And he said to them,***

***"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.***

***Luke 24***

In one form or another, the risen Lord is beside us as we walk the Path of Light.

Lifting us up, when we're down.

Bringing us down, when vanity has inflated us.

Giving us hope.

Imparting his strength.

***"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.***

***No one comes to the Father, but by me."***

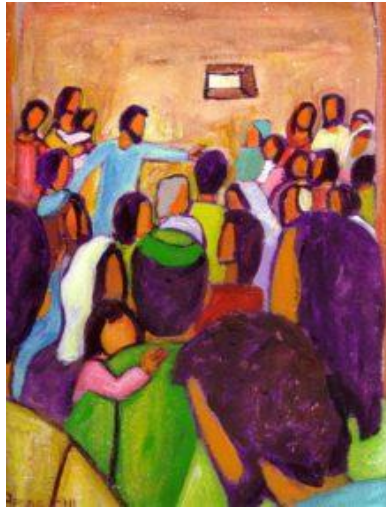
Jesus promises in John 12:32 that sooner or later every human soul will be given a chance to follow the Way.

**Our chance is now.**



*Prayer: Jesus, keep us walking on your path of light. We want to be people of your way. We want to follow you, wherever you take us. Lead us, restore us, convict us so we may remain walking in your light. And yes, protect us from our own vanity, lift us up, give us strength, give us hope... Hope that we are not alone and you are walking with us on this path leading us to the light of life. Amen.*

# ***THEY WERE NOT STUPID***



The Bible is the witness of people who had encounters with God over long centuries.

People like we are.

Their “technology” was primitive.

No smart phones.

No computers.

No rockets to the moon.

But they were not stupid.

In many areas they were way ahead of us.

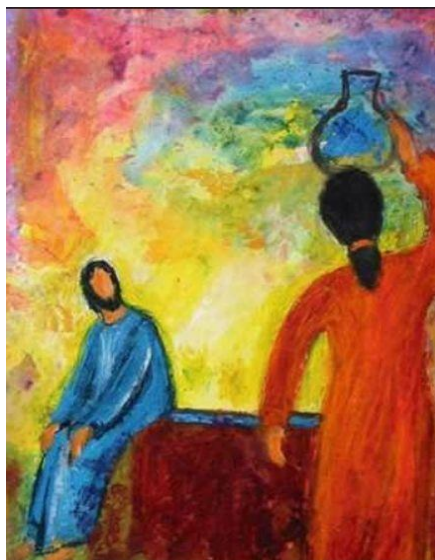
Many of them had a grasp of reality that surpasses ours.

Peter was a rough fisherman, but he knew when he was in the presence of the HOLY.

***“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”***

The woman at the well had no running water, no indoor plumbing. Things were primitive.

But she was smart enough to recognize the truth.



The wisdom of Eternity burned in their ancient hearts.

They had vision.

They found the door to the kingdom and entered it.

*At that time Jesus declared, "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will."*

*Matthew 11*

It is helpful to see the people we encounter in the scripture as contemporaries.

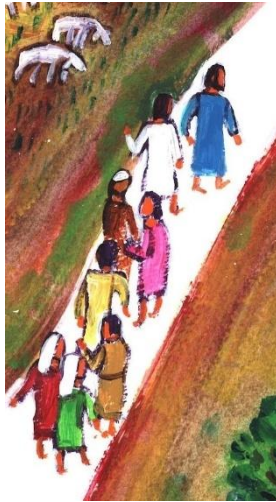
The Spirit wipes away time and distance and connects us with Andrew and Matthew and Mary Magdalene, and Martha.

Jesus is as close to them at this moment *as he is to us*.

All the basic problems they faced we face.  
All the temptations that came to them come to us.

If they could walk by faith, so can we.  
If they could live lives of forgiveness, so can we.  
If they walked in the light of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, so can we.

**All we have to do is listen to the Master.  
And walk with him....  
....as they did.**



*Prayer: Lord, we confess that we allow technology and the access to vast amounts of information to distract us from the knowledge and presence of you, the Eternal One. Oh Lord, help us to seek the wisdom of eternity like the early disciples did. Help us to stop stupidly ignoring your holiness and seeking this trivial knowledge. Nothing, no technology, no information, compares with you and the truth of who you are and your way. May we recognize the truth of how awesome, majestic and holy you are. May this vision of you... lead us to pursue you with all we have, convict us to live lives of forgiveness, inspire us to live the truth of your perfect teachings, and yes Master never stop listening to your voice. Amen.*

Message: REB November 2021

Featured Art: Bernadette Lopez <https://www.bernalopez.org/>

# ***THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD***



**Pushing Back the Darkness**

Everybody can see that we're living in dark times.

And they're getting darker.

***Behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness  
the peoples,***

Yet the light is never far away.

***But the Lord will arise upon you,  
And his glory shall be seen upon you,  
And nations shall come to your light,  
And kings to the brightness of your rising.***

***Isaiah 60:2-3***

Even now, in the middle of all this darkness, light is shining in the most unexpected places.

**The light of God.  
The glory of God.**

Radiating from men and women far below the clamor of the media. This light arrived centuries ago in a forgotten part of the world.

*“You are the light of the world,”* said Jesus to a handful of fishermen who had left everything to follow him.

Jesus did not say, “You are the light of the world,” to the multitudes who came for healing, nor to the ‘church types’ who showed up at Synagogue every Sabbath, nor to the man who said, “I will follow you Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home.”

“You are the light of the world,” is addressed to those who are focused on one thing only:

**.... following Jesus---on his terms.**

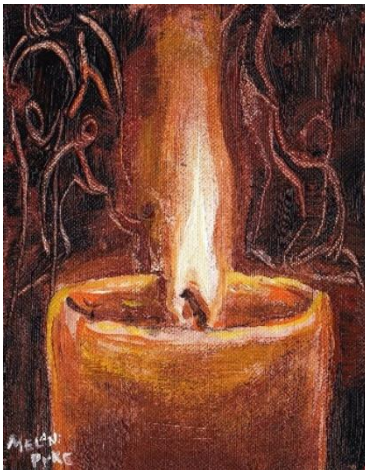
To those who are focused on him Jesus does not say, “Try to be the light of the world.”

***“You are the light of the world.”***

“Take off the bushel, and let it shine.!”

***“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”***

***Matthew 5:16***



If we are disciples of Jesus, all we need to do is *live* like disciples 24/7, and God's light will shine in whatever dark place God puts us.



*Prayer: Dearest Father of goodness and light, we get discouraged, and afraid of this approaching darkness, knowing it's inevitable...yet within this, you promise that your light will rise upon us, that your glory will be seen upon us, that people will be drawn to your shining glory. May we seek you and abide in you until your light floods our souls, so that wherever you place us, your glory shines and darkness is inevitably dispelled. Amen.*

*Written May 2020 REB*

*Art: Courtesy of Melani Pyke at [melpyke.com](http://melpyke.com)*

# ***THE HERD OR THE FLOCK?***



Where do I fit?

Am I in the herd or the flock?

## ***The herd***

Millions are moving in sync with each other and with their leaders.

They have taken a detour, veering away from the footsteps of Jesus.

They have marched with great zeal into the political sphere.

*Consider carefully:*

Does the message of the herd sound like the voice of Jesus?

***“Love your enemies.”***

***“Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you.”***

***“Beware of false prophets.”***

Jesus' teaching about the herd:

***“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.***

***For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”***



### **The flock**

The flock is smaller than the herd

The flock has a single focus:

**to follow Jesus.**

The flock relies on no power but the power of the Spirit.

***“Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”***

***Luke 12***

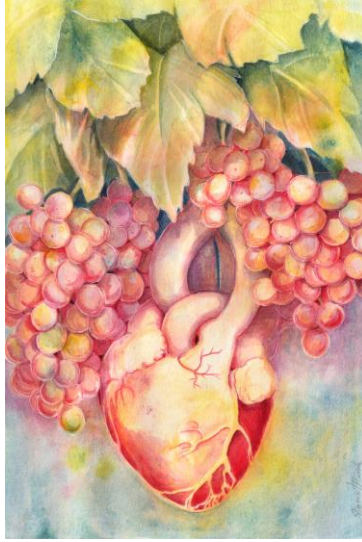
The flock is made up of many branches connected to one Vine:

**Jesus.**

They abide in the Vine.

They bear fruit.

This kind of fruit:



*“I was hungry and you gave me food.  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.  
I was naked and you clothed me.  
I was sick and you visited me.  
I was in prison and you came to me.”*

***So where do we fit?***

We are either in the herd or in the flock.

By the life we live day by day....

By the way we treat our neighbor---every neighbor....

By the way we handle the truth....

...we put ourselves in the herd or in the flock----forever.

***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,  
and they follow me, and I give them eternal life,  
and they shall never perish.***

***And no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”***

***John 10***



*Prayer: Yes, Yes, Lord Jesus... May we continue to be those of your flock. May we continue to flock around you and you alone... our gentle, masterful shepherd. May we keep hearing and truly heeding your voice. Give us your kind and gentle heart so we may care for the wounded, the lame, the lost, the lonely, the fearful, the sick, the hungry, and the thirsty sheep in the fields. Protect us from wandering away and following any shepherd or voice that leads us away from your gentle presence. And thank you for holding us close, keeping us in your hand, and leading us to your present and eternal kingdom. Amen.*

Message: REB November 2021

Featured Art: Signe Flink <https://www.deviantart.com/signeflinkart>

# ***CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY***



It is futile to ask,

“Is she a Christian?”

“Is he a follower of Jesus?”

“Are those people in the kingdom?”

God alone knows those who belong to him.

Who else can see into the human heart?

Rather than trying to weigh the validity of our brother’s faith, our sister’s commitment, what we need to do is lay our hearts open before God and ask,

“Lord, am I actually in the kingdom?”

“Am I truly following you?”

Then we need to hold still and wait for the Lord to turn on the light.

He will.

When the Lord Jesus turns on the light, we suddenly behold who we are in his sight.

It is possible that all our “scriptural knowledge” has failed us.

It could be that our “Christian Crusades” put a frown on the Master’s face.

The Lord Jesus may even place his finger on attitudes and hostilities that betray our faith.

The Spirit might reveal that our love for others is more pretense than passion.

The Lord Jesus will give us all the truth we can handle...

...If we seek the truth about our connection with him.

And if it should be that we find ourselves outside the kingdom looking in,

If it should be that we are weighed in the balance and found wanting, here’s the good news:

To be a Christian,

To be a follower of Jesus,

is simply to have Jesus living and ruling inside us.

***I am crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.***

***Galatians 2***

If I am crucified with Christ, I am dead to myself and alive to God. If it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, then he calls the shots, not me.

**I am totally at his disposal.**



**Jesus is my Way, my Truth, my Life.**

Nothing else.

No one else.

It is simply

**“Christ in me, the hope of glory.”**

***To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***

***Colossians 1***

When the Lord Jesus actually rules us from within, he takes us on a path quite different from the path of Christendom.

We begin to see the forgotten ones of this world with his eyes.

We hear the cries of the broken hearts around us.

Our harsh attitude toward those who are “different” is burned away from us by the glory of the Lord.

**Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

Those who follow Jesus are indwelt by Jesus.

Their hearts are ruled by Jesus.

Their tongues are guided by Jesus.

Their eyes are opened by Jesus.

They follow wherever he leads.

They no longer fear the darkness, because Christ, the hope of glory, lives in them.

They are one with the Lord, and with all who follow the Lord.

***“The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.” (John 17)***

*Prayer: Gracious Lord, what a precious, priceless gift to have your holiness dwelling within us. Thank you, thank you. Lord for our sakes and the sake of your Kingdom, expose anything within us that separates from this gift. May we readily let go and instead embrace your life within us. May you be our way, our truth, our life, our hope. By your indwelling power, make us perfectly one with you. By your indwelling power help us to live the love and mercy of the Father himself. By your indwelling power help us to open all we have to the full measure of your love ... where we will find glory upon glory. Amen.*

Message: REB September 2021

Featured Art.: Courtesy of Deborah Nell at [deborahnellart.net](http://deborahnellart.net)

# THAT STUFF



*“Do you really believe that stuff?”*

.... A fair question, considering the strange behavior and weird beliefs swirling inside the Christian world.

The in-your-face man who corners you with the “seven steps to salvation.”

The Rapture-bound lady who grabs your hand and leads you through the “sinner’s prayer.”

The well-dressed gentleman who opens his Bible and tells you who to vote for.

The “Spirit-filled” sister who insists that you sit in that chair while she frees you from your demons.

*“Do you really believe that stuff?”*

Then there’s the TV evangelist who promises prosperity and success in Jesus’ Name to those who send in their “seed money.”

And don’t forget those Christians who insist that the earth is flat “because the Bible says so.”

When people find out that we're following Jesus, they shake their heads and say.....

.... *"Do you really believe that stuff?"*

Are they ridiculing us?

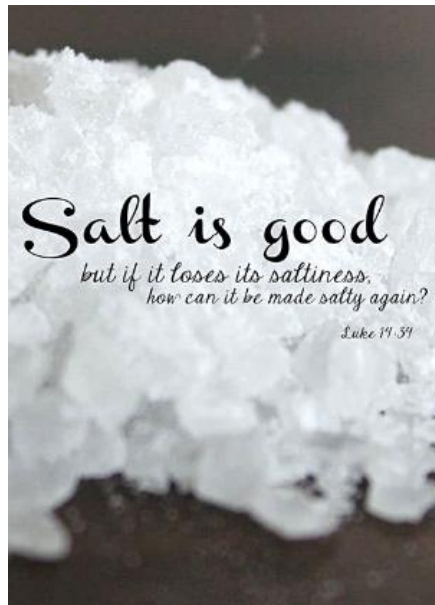
Are they persecuting us?

Or is there something about our Christianity that just doesn't *"taste right"*?

## Salt

***"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.***

***Matthew 5:13***



Does our witness taste like salt?

Does it taste like living bread?

Or is it flat, tasteless, rancid?

Are they tasting the living Lord?

Or is it just more saltless “stuff”?

## Listen to Him

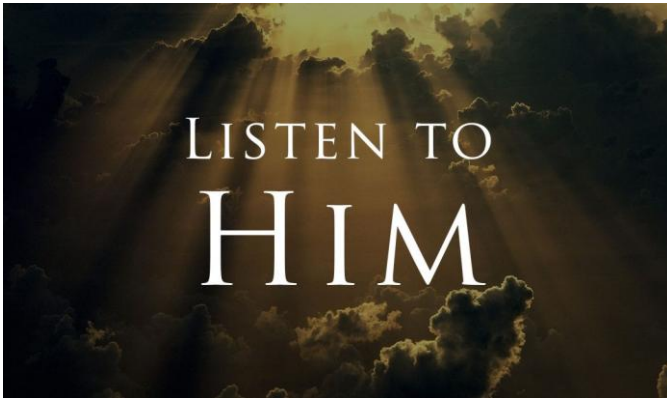
It may be “good stuff,” even “biblical stuff,” but the heavenly Father keeps telling us what he told Peter when he wanted to exalt Moses and Elijah, along with Jesus.

*Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is well that we are here; if you wish, I will make three booths here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah."*

*He was still speaking, when lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."*

*Matthew 17:5*

“This is my Son. Listen to him....and to him alone”.



Whatever we add to Jesus is “stuff.”

It gets in the way.

It distorts our hearing.

It blurs our vision.

It destroys our witness to the world out there.

# Light

***"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.***

***Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.***



***Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."***

***Matthew 5:16***

What's the point of lighting a lamp and putting it under a bushel?

And what is the bushel but "stuff"?

We've wrapped ourselves in so much "stuff" that the world out there cannot "see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven."

## Signs and wonders

Even "signs and wonders" can become "stuff." Jesus warns us that we can be so busy performing signs and wonders in his name that we drift from the path of simple obedience.

***"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***

***On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'  
And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'"***

***Matthew 7:21-23***

One thing is needful: to do the will of our Father who is in heaven, to obey the simple commands of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus.



To walk in his steps.

To do things his way.

To abide in him.

To bear fruit that brings glory to God alone.

**Everything else is just “stuff.”**

*Prayer Jesus, Living Lord, Beloved of God, may we seek and find the one thing that is necessary... to do your will, walk in your steps and abide in you. Help us to unwrap ourselves from all “that stuff” that keeps us from you, whether worldly, vain or even religious. May our connection to you be so strong and genuine, that those questioning skeptics don’t find our lives to be insipid, spoiled, flavorless imitations. Instead of skepticism, may they be amazed at the life and vitality flowing from you to us. May they sense your presence and living power in us so strongly, that they know you are not “stuff” but real, alive, and eternal and that you are calling them to yourself. Amen.*

REB 2018

# *THE JESUS APPROACH*



“That’s the last time I’m going there,” he said as they left the church. “It’s a waste of time!”

“So, you’re giving up on God?” asked Sandra, his wife, as they headed for their car.

“I’m not giving up on God. I just don’t think God wants me wasting my time in that place.”

“Excuse me,” said a man who came running up behind them. “Is this your wallet? Somebody found it by the water cooler, and the picture on the license looks like you.”

“Thanks a million! You saved me a lot of trouble!”

All his credit cards were there. Nothing was missing except the money.

“At least I helped somebody in there,” he said as they drove away. “Whoever took the money is welcome to it.”

“Okay, Jack,” said Sandra. “You haven’t given up on God. You’re just not going back to that church. So where do we go from here?”

---

In Jesus' day, everybody went to Synagogue on the Sabbath. It's what you did. It's what Jesus did.

But when Jesus headed for the hills on Tuesday afternoon, thousands followed him. He had something they didn't offer in the Synagogue.

Jesus had a different approach.

Both Jesus and the Synagogue used the same Bible.  
They spoke about the same God.  
They awaited the same Kingdom.

But Jesus used an approach so different that when he spoke, people knew they were hearing from heaven.



*And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

*Matthew 7:29*

In Jesus' day going to the synagogue was "the thing to do."

In our day going to church is no longer "the thing to do."

*And yet....*

We are beginning to see multitudes following Jesus outside the traditional setting, just as they followed Jesus into the hillsides of Galilee, proving that Jesus' approach still works.

Consider Jesus' approach....

**Jesus keeps it simple.**

He uses no gimmicks.

He never appeals for funds.

He relies solely on the power of his words to bring....

good news to the poor,  
sight to the blind,  
freedom to the captives.

Jesus simply calls us to follow him on a radically new path ....  
straight into the Kingdom of God.

**Jesus never wastes a word.**

He never tries to embellish his message with entertainment, jokes, vanity talk. He speaks in parables---"***whoever has ears, let them hear.***"

Jesus likewise requires his followers to cut back on the jabber.

***I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."***

***Matthew 12:36-37***

## **Jesus' performs signs of the Kingdom without fanfare.**

Always low-key when he performs signs of the Kingdom, Jesus says,

***"Tell nobody."*** He simply sends us on our way with restored health, knowing that the Kingdom of God has come near.

His healings are signs of the coming Kingdom, performed at the pleasure of the Father. But his focus is *always the Kingdom*, not signs and wonders.

## **Jesus is looking for disciples, not groupies.**

Whenever the crowds become large, Jesus does what our modern evangelists would never do: he drives away the groupies with a dose of reality.

***Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple."***

***Luke 14:25-26***

Jesus never chases after multitudes. He lets the multitudes come and go. His focus is on the ones nobody wants, the poor, the blind, the lame, prostitutes, drunks, "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."



## **Jesus demands radical commitment.**

We can hang around and listen for a while, if we like. But sooner or later we have to decide whether we're going to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, or walk away.

Jesus has no fan club. "Either you're with me, or against me. Either you gather with me, or you scatter."

***"Whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks back, is not fit for the Kingdom of God"***

***Luke 9:62***



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The day when "going to church" was the thing to do has long-since disappeared.

Is the Lord Jesus upset?

Not at all!

**Jesus' approach is as alive today as ever.**

Across the face of the earth are men and women who focus simply on what Jesus has to say, on what he calls us to do.

It's happening in unexpected places.

Jack and Sandra drove away from that church, never to return. Then one day (by coincidence?) they stumbled upon a “motley crew” meeting in a hall in a forgotten part of town. They could hear the voice of the Master speaking through many mouths.

For all their flaws, these people seemed to have the “Jesus Approach.”



“What do you think, Jack?” said Sandra.

“I think we should stay a while.”

*Prayer: We cry to you Lord Jesus as our church buildings are changing and emptying. Show us where to go from here. Keep us approaching the Kingdom as you showed us, bringing good news to the poor, sight to the blind, and freedom to the captives. We want to continue to hear from heaven, wherever we are, be it church, couch, basement, prayer closet, streets, stores, sickbeds, or our neighbor’s kitchen table. As you call us to approach your Kingdom, may we hear your call above all other voices. May we not be misled by any signs and wonders that lack your approach. May we come after you, wherever we go, as true disciples bearing your cross. Lead us to others who have the Jesus approach so we can stay awhile. Together, may we keep our hands on the plow with our hearts singing for joy at the labor you have gifted us. Amen.*

# ***WHY DID THE FIG TREE HAVE TO DIE?***



*The Withered Fig Tree...Melani Pyke*

***And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.***

***Matthew 21:19***

Many people dismiss Jesus as “inadequate for today’s world” because he’s just “too nice.”

In a world where politicians lie, and dictators snuff out their enemies, and billionaires call the shots, who needs “nice”?

We need some backbone, some steel, a leader with clout!

Jesus is just too nice!

Is he?

Maybe your Jesus is “nice”.

But the Jesus who roamed the hills of Galilee and drove the bankers out of the Temple with a whip was far from “nice”.

When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he backed up his words with signs.

Awesome signs.

He healed the sick, opened the eyes of the blind, cast out demons, raised the dead.

Every one of these signs was a manifestation of a power unknown to this world:

the power of the World to Come.

Jesus was far from “nice.”

On his final visit to Jerusalem Jesus came upon a fig tree that had leaves but no figs.

He cursed it with such power that it dried up from the roots.

Jesus was hardly “nice” to the fig tree.

### **But why did that poor fig tree have to die?**

Every sign Jesus performed burned with a message. This sign was no exception.

It happened on his way to the Temple, which was indeed a “fig tree with leaves but no fruit.”

It could be a church with leaves but no fruit.

It could be me, or you, with leaves but no fruit.

The same Lord who heals the sick and opens the eyes of the blind expects those who follow him to produce more than “leaves”.

When we say, “Lord, Lord,” that’s  
leaves.

When we do the Father’s will, that’s  
fruit.

Jesus is incarnate mercy.

Jesus is fathomless love.

But Jesus is far from “nice.”

**He burns with holy fire.**

And Jesus makes clear.....

***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’  
shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but  
she/he who does the will of my Father who  
is in heaven”***

***Matthew 7:21***

Written May 2020 REB

Art: Melani Pyke [www.melpyke.com](http://www.melpyke.com)

*Prayer: Father of Truth rescue us from pursuing lies, from being deceived by the father of lies who calls our hearts and minds to dark paths, to fruitless pursuits, fruitless thoughts, fruitless lives. May we not be like the fruitless fig tree... looking alive but unable to bring nourishment. What a waste of your gift, your life, all you offer...no wonder the fig tree withered, no wonder you cursed it. Lord wake us up, keep us pursuing your life-giving truth, seeking you with all that we have, seeking to be truly your obedient and loving disciples ...so that we truly can bring your nourishment to the hungry and needy of this world and be repulsed by anything that turns us from this pursuit.*

# ***THE DARK SIDE OF THE GOSPEL OF GRACE***

## **THE GOSPEL OF GRACE**

Awed by the power of his words, thrilled and terrified by his signs of healing, people were drawn to Jesus from the moment he came out of the wilderness and began to preach.

Men and women left their daily chores, laid aside their worries, and came to hear a man who gave them what no religious teacher had ever given:

A taste of the World to Come, God's Kingdom.

When Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven," all guilt vanished. When Jesus said, "Rise and walk," or "Receive your sight" ...

The laws of this world gave way to the law of the World to Come.

When Jesus hung on the cross, and the sky darkened and the earth began to tremble, only the eye of God could see the evil, the corruption in us all funneling into his dying body, opening the way for a world far better than this one: God's Kingdom.



Three days later the earth shook again and the stone that sealed his tomb gave way. Jesus stepped into the early dawn as the Firstborn of the New Creation.

It was the beginning of the End of the Age.

**Unspeakable power was at work.**

When the Spirit fell on the believers on Pentecost they glorified God with new tongues, manifesting to the startled onlookers the power of the world to come.

What was this power?

**The apostles called it Grace...**

**God's unspeakable mercy,  
given to restore us all to what we were meant to be.**



**It's all Grace.**

Jesus' death on the cross,  
his resurrection,  
the outpouring of the Spirit,  
the fact that you are reading these words---

**---it's all God's Grace!**

Over the years believers have perceived God's Grace in different ways.

## **Infused Grace**

*But grace was given to each of us  
according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

*Ephesians 4:7*

In this view, God puts his Grace into us as a kind of transfusion of divine life. Filled with this life, we are able to bring hope to others, to make this world a better place. This infusion of Grace is a free gift, available to all who thirst for it.

## **Predestined Grace**

*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to  
be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that  
he might be the first-born among many brethren.  
And those whom he predestined he also called; and  
those whom he called he also justified; and those  
whom he justified he also glorified.*

*Romans 8:29-30*

In this view, Grace is given to certain ones whom God chooses for reasons of his own. Once the elect ones receive this gift of Grace it is theirs forever. It can never be lost. These favored ones are eternally secure in God's Grace.

## **Universal Grace**

*Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

*John 1:29*

In this view, God will see to it that everybody "makes it" in the end. There may be a season of purification for many, but God's Grace will ultimately bring the entire race out of darkness into the light of his Kingdom.

After all, didn't Jesus die for us all?

***“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth (on the cross) will draw all people to myself.”***

***John 12:32***

All people. Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, anarchists.

Somewhere, somehow, all are drawn to the Fountain of Grace. That's a promise from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself.

But will we all be overwhelmed by Grace?

Will we all walk the walk of Grace to the very end?

Are we all destined for the City of God?

## **The Dark Side of the Gospel of Grace**

Coming from the mouth of the Lord Jesus, the gospel of Grace has a dark side. If we overlook its dark side, the gospel of Grace loses its power and becomes quite limp.

Consider, for instance, the branch that fails to abide in the Vine.

***“If a person does not abide in me, they are cast forth as a branch and wither. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.”***

***John 15:6***

God's Grace is there for me.

But if I fail to stay connected to the Master, if I allow my own agenda to draw me away from him,

**Grace in me withers; and I wither.**

That little thread that holds me to the Vine is soon cut, and I'm on my own.

There is also such a thing as Grace built on sand.

***“And every one who hears these words of mine***

***and does not do them will be like a foolish man  
who built his house upon the sand;  
and the rain fell, and the floods came,  
and the winds blew and beat against that house,  
and it fell; and great was the fall of it."***

***Matthew 7:24-27***

Jesus' words are pure Grace.

Heaven and earth will pass away,  
but those words will echo through eternity.

But those words are of little use,  
if we fail to do what those words tell us to do.

But surely if I perform signs and wonders, prophesy, and cast out  
demons in the name of Jesus, I'm wrapped in God's Grace!

Again, the dark side of the gospel of Grace warns me to be careful.

***On that day many will say to me,  
'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name,  
and cast out demons in your name,  
and do many mighty works in your name?'  
And then will I declare to them,  
'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'***

***Matthew 7:21-23***

One way to understand the dark side of Grace...  
is to remember that Grace is holy.

You take off your shoes in its presence.

Once I open my heart to God's Grace, I am accountable to God in a  
way I never was before.

***"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not  
have sin. But now they have no excuse for their sin."***

***John 15:22***

It's quite simple.

I have been forgiven.

So the Father expects me to forgive.

The Lord Jesus has shown me unspeakable mercy.  
So he expects me to live that mercy.

God has been generous with me.  
Now he expects me to be generous in my dealings with others.



When I not only receive Grace, but live Grace, the power of the Kingdom of God begins to anoint all I do.

I become broken bread and poured-out wine for all the lives I touch.

I will live the gospel of Grace in the place where God has put me. I will proclaim that Jesus is Lord (the gospel of Grace) to all whom God sends across my path.

Now the fire which the Lord Jesus ignited at Calvary (his baptism of fire) will begin to spread out from my life and ignite others. Such fires are now burning across the earth. They will continue to spread until the earth is engulfed by the gospel of Grace.

Then the End will be upon us.

When the Last Day arrives, I will be asked, not whether I subscribed to the gospel of Grace, but whether I lived it.

***"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.***

*Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for....*

*I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,  
I was naked and you clothed me,  
I was sick and you visited me,  
I was in prison and you came to me.'*



*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'*

*And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'*

*Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for....*

*I was hungry and you gave me no food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,  
I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'*

***Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?'***



***Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."***

***Matthew 25:31-46***

*Prayer: Lord we are awed by you. What power, what love, what unspeakable mercy that you rescued us from darkness, from the evil and corruption in our own hearts. Our hearts can never stop adoring you for your beloved grace, for restoring us to what you call us to be. Precious Lord, may our branches never wither because we pulled away from you, seeking any other agenda except living in your grace. Holy, holy Lord we take off our shoes in your sacred presence, we cannot hide from you, we cannot cover our separation, our sin. We lay our hearts before you willingly and lovingly. Make them like yours... loving, merciful, kind, tender. Light us with fires of faith and compassion that ignite others as we touch their lives with your grace. May we never dishonor, darken, or make a sham of your grace, by not living it, by not carrying it to, and by not seeing your very heart in the least of these. Amen.*

2020

# ***Partaking of the Divine Nature: A Dying and Living Sacrifice***



*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.*

*2 Peter 1:3-4*

## **What does it mean to be a partaker of the divine nature?**

Does it mean that if we are partakers of the divine nature, we have supernatural power and that we can walk down the street and snap our fingers and turn the trees into stone?

Often people think that having divine nature might mean having supernatural wisdom so that we can read people's minds and foretell the future.

Now, there may be times when supernatural power, supernatural wisdom attend the ways of the children of God. But that's not God's nature.

To have God's nature, simply, is that now, instead of having a nature which is set upon taking, we become like God...

**...with a nature that is set upon giving.**

**All the time, giving.**

Instead of following the corrupt human nature... always trying to acquire, to increase, to hoard, to build up for ourselves....now the one thing that matters to us, the one thing we live for, is to constantly give.

When the divine nature which is to give, comes down into this sin warped human race, giving becomes a sacrifice.

It becomes a costly sacrifice.

It becomes a bloody sacrifice.

Because this sin warped human race will always trample on divine love and kill it. And also because God knows that if we are ever to come into his fellowship again, a blood sacrifice is necessary.

So if we're ever really going to be able to get hold of the promises of God... by which we can escape the corruption which is in the world through passion....through lust, and become partakers of the divine nature...

We're going to have to see the divine nature.

We're going to have to have eyes that see what God is really like. His goodness.

We're going to have to see that he's giving us the very best he has, his treasure of treasures, his pearl of great price, his only begotten son.

God's nature is not seen in displays of power, or manifestations of force, or supernatural fireworks.

**Gods' nature is seen in his unspeakable  
kindness, patience, and generosity.**

There was once a man who owned a small factory and with it he made himself quite a fortune. The wages his workers received were more than fair. And yet his employees resented the fact that this man drove to work every day in a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce, and lived in a magnificent mansion on a hill overlooking the town. *"Sure, we're getting paid twice as much as all other factory workers in the land, but we don't drive a car like his, chauffeur driven, and we don't live in a mansion like he has, and our kids don't go to the best schools in the country as his son does".*

One day, the economy took a sudden plunge and in a very short time, millions of workers across the land were unemployed. Unemployment insurance benefits quickly expired. Blue Cross coverage ran out. The

famous soup lines of the Great Depression reappeared again. But somehow this little factory kept right on chugging along. Not one worker was laid off. Everybody got a paycheck each week. People wondered who was buying our product, since factory after factory were closing and businesses were going bankrupt all over the country. But after a while they just shrugged their shoulders and went back to work.

One day the boss appeared at the factory without his Rolls Royce. In fact, he walked and walked every day after that, but his smile was still the same. It was rumored that his son was brought back from university, for some strange reason. Then one day, five moving vans pulled up in front of the mansion and emptied out all the fancy furniture and drove off with it. But the factory kept going and people got their paychecks every week.

And then the boss sold the mansion and moved his family through a cheap flat on the lower side of town. That winter, his wife caught pneumonia and died. But his grief was not strong enough to keep him from taking care of business. The factory kept going, people got their paychecks. His son was now working in the factory. One day, one of the employees came in drunk and stumbled into a conveyor and in saving that employee's life, the son was killed. Still, the factory stayed open. The employees began to notice that the boss had lost quite a bit of weight and his suit was rather tattered.

*"Surely, said his secretary to him one day, "if you can afford to keep this factory open, you can afford to buy yourself a new suit". "I can afford to keep this factory open one more week" he said. "Then what will you do, I suppose you'll close the factory and retire in Florida" she said. "Retire in Florida with what" he replied? "You mean you spent all your money to keep us working? You've lost your wife. You've lost your son. You've lost your money. Don't you regret it"? "Of course not", he answered*



Before the end of the week, a huge order came in, bringing with it enough money to keep the factory operating. But to this very day, there's a division among the employees as to the mystery behind 'the factory that never closed'. Many of them, the majority of them, attributed it to some kind of luck. Only a few knew who it was who paid the price. And paid it gladly.

And those who know have never felt as safe again.

***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.***

*2 Corinthians 8:9)*

***Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.***

*Philippians 2:6-8*

Ever since the garden of Eden, Satan has been trying to mislead the human race as to what God is really like, has been trying to get us to be suspicious, untrusting, anxious, full of dread in our attitude toward God.

If it thunders, God is angry. If it's lightning God is really angry. If the sun comes out after the storm, God has been appeased.

But if you want to know what God is like you don't look at the thunder and the lightning. The thunder, the thunder, the sunshine, and the rain all belong to God. If you want to know what God is like, you have to look into God's heart.

**And God's heart is in his son.**

***"This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased".***

***"This is my beloved son, listen to him".***

And what do you see when you look at God's son?

You see a sacrifice.

You see innocence offering itself for us.

You see love.

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.*

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*Isaiah 53:4-6*

*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*



**That's what God is like.**

### **Do we really want to be partakers of the divine nature?**

If we really want to be partakers of the divine nature so that it comes down and gets hold of our hearts, we must understand that for the divine nature to truly possess our hearts that each one of us and all of us corporately become together a living sacrifice.

So that now our lives are spent, and poured out, and given, even unto death...gladly... out of thanksgiving for him who laid down his life.

***I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.***

*Romans 12: 1-2*

Just as surely as the divine nature in this world becomes a dying sacrifice...

**....so the divine nature in our hearts and bodies....  
becomes a living sacrifice.**

If we are partakers of the divine nature, then we no longer are living to get, and acquire, and extend our influence and horn our power over others.

But now like God.... our purpose, our one purpose, is to give, to pour ourselves out, to spend ourselves... so that we might build, and save, and heal, and encourage, and strengthen those around us. And we do this not in order to get to heaven, or to build up brownie points, or to sanctify ourselves...we do it because this is our nature.

**Having seen God's love for us, *what else can we do?***



**To present our bodies as a living sacrifice means forgiving with our hearts and minds**

Becoming transformed by the renewal of our mind means first of all that we begin to forgive gladly as God has forgiven us. So that we take our rights, and our grudges, and the scars that have been put upon us by the wrongs wrought against us by other people and lay all of them on the altar.

**And praise God as they go up in the flames and disappear.**



What a relief to be able to forgive as God has forgiven us.

**To present our bodies as a living sacrifice means that we begin to forebear**

We forebear the way God has been forbearing and patient with us. So that we give people a little bit of room... instead of crowding in on them, and jumping on them, and judging them, we pray for them.

We even endure mistreatment from their hands....When we remember the long years we walked on God's goodness, trampling on his very heart.

## **To present our bodies as a living sacrifice means that we spend ourselves**

Now our one purpose in life is to spend ourselves and give ourselves to show God's mercy.... exactly in the place where we now find ourselves, touching the lives around us with it.

When people carry their Bibles around and talk about Jesus, but are stingy, self-conserving, quick to judge, cautious, unwilling to expose themselves to the pain and anguish around them, this means that their vision of Jesus, if they ever had one, has shriveled down to the size of their own withered spirits.

If we carry the nature of God in us, if we really share the divine nature, what else are we here for? What other purpose do we have but to give forth and spend and do mercy right where we are.... to give.

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

*1 John 3:16-18*

The test of anything that calls itself Christian, including your life and mine.

### **Does it bear the mark of the divine nature?**

Does it give some evidence that it has been to the cross and been changed?

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.*

**The divine nature *in this world*....Is a dying sacrifice.**

**The divine nature *in our hearts*....Is a living sacrifice.**

May God today right now refresh our vision of his heart, that seeing what his heart is like....our hearts may break, melt, humble themselves and become like his.



*Prayer: Lord how wonderful you are that you would offer us the gift of partaking in your divine nature, this great gift to us which cost you so much. Oh Lord, make it so precious to us that we are able to rise up and offer a living sacrifice for your dying sacrifice. And yes give us hearts that break, melt and humble themselves like yours. That the love of what you have done for us causes us to take on your giving nature, causes us to spend ourselves for others, causes our hearts and minds to be ever willing to forbear the weaknesses of others, causes us to be ever willing to spend forth the mercy you have given to us .... And causes us to forgive completely, laying our bitterness and pain on the altar, as an offering to you, to be burnt up in the flames of your love. That our living sacrifice of giving all these things, of reaching into your heart becomes a daily act of worship to you and that we are filled with abundant life as we partake of your divine nature. Amen.*

Message Richard E. Bieber 1978. Originally "A Dying and Living Sacrifice"

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THE LAMB  
WHO WAS SLAIN  
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN