ESSAY · FEBRUARY 15, 2024

How to See Jesus

Written by Bill Perkins

Several years ago, Cindy and I vacationed on the tiny island of Bonaire. Situated fifty miles from Venezuela it's known as the scuba shore diving capitol of the world. One evening we sat at a table on a restaurant pier. As the sun set over the harbor, we basked in the vanishing sunlight that cast shimmering shadows from the many anchored sail boats. We will never forget the beauty of that sunset.

We Look and Look but Never See

Nor will we forget the eight college students who sat at a table beside us. Encompassed by the beauty of a Caribbean harbor, clear blue water, and a color-streaked sunset, all of them gazed at their phones. Not once did I see them look up or hear them talk to each other, except to share an image on their phone.

It would be easy to point out the speck in their eye while ignoring the log in my eye. As I watched their indifference to the beauty around them I wondered how is my daily reading of the gospels differed. I casually read the story of *The One* while blind to the beauty of Jesus. I easily get distracted by text messages, emails, YouTube clips or news updates.

I try to overcome these distractions by asking God to show me the beauty of Jesus as I read His story.

Unexpected Answers

Sometimes, God unexpectedly answers. This happened last week while I meditated on the Sermon on the Mount (SOM) where Jesus told His disciples to offer the other cheek when "slapped" (Matt. 5:38-39). I noticed He repeated this in the Sermon on the Plain, except He used the verb "strike" (Luke 6:29). A backhanded "slap" was worse than a "strike" as it insulted *and* injured.

No human always resists the temptation to retaliate when insulted or physically attacked. We sometimes strike back with an insult or worse. The character and conduct recounted by Jesus in the SOM speaks of the behavior of God's children when the Kingdom finally arrives. The Lord's sermon describes men and women free of sin. One day we will live in a world without sin and these traits will be an expression of our identity in the Son.

Jesus Showed the Way

Just as "the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (Rom. 8:21), so God's children wait with eagerness to be revealed. At that moment the character described in the Sermon on the Mount will be more than a longing, it will be reality. Until then, we strive to so saturate ourselves with Jesus that we increasingly live like the people described in the SOM. And yet, the character traits and behaviors of the Sermon are an expression of the outworking of our character in Jesus, not the conditions for admission into the kingdom.

As I reflected on this it dawned on me that Jesus personified such character during the suffering of His illegal trials and crucifixion. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read, “While being reviled He didn’t revile in return. While suffering He uttered no threats but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges rightly.” Isaiah 50:2 is the verse that opened my eyes to the beauty of Jesus, our King. It reads, “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”

Jesus exemplified who we are and how we are to act when insulted or injured. As we read His story, let's focus on His beauty and not the distractions that entice us.

">(legacy link)