

Weekly Encouragement

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Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

Knowing Jesus

By Rev. Peter Eng

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Is there a Jesus you don't know?

Many Christians are not aware of the extent to which Jesus challenged conventions. *If Jesus had not taught something radically different from the world, there would have been no change to our world.* But we know that Jesus changed the world. Yet in today's world, the Christianity we own is often toothless and dumb. There is no bite and there is no message. We seem to hear and repeat the same old platitudes. Perhaps for some of us, that is all there is to the Christian faith. We have a comfortable belief system.

Is there nothing about Jesus you find hard to accept? I'd like to suggest that if you don't find anything about Jesus that tests you to the core, there are several options. (1) You have come to an amazing understanding of Jesus, and you are totally surrendered to him. Hallelujah! (2) You have a shallow

understanding of Jesus and there is nothing that challenges you. In that case, it is also likely that you have not found something so desirable about Jesus that you would forsake all to follow him. (3) You have a selective perception of Jesus. That is, you see what you want to see about Jesus that suits you, and ignore the things that do not suit you. You have depth of understanding in some areas, and ignorance in others. So Jesus serves your assumptions and prejudices and never confronts them.

These options are not pleasant. Option #1 suggests you have arrived, and that is a hard claim for humble people to make. Option #2 suggests you are rather ignorant, and that is not a pleasant admission to make. Option #3 suggests you lack clarity in your mind and submission in your heart, so that may be the hardest to admit.

Why do I give such stark and unpleasant choices about how we know Jesus?

The first reason is personal. As a student of the Bible, I have lived at option #3 for a longest time, and even now, I am challenged by the Jesus that comes to me through the pages of the Gospels. Someone rightly calls it "the Jesus I never knew." There is usually a Jesus we don't know. The Jesus most of us know is the Jesus of Sunday School knowledge layered over with our own agenda, likes and dislikes, and biases. Every time I embark on another study of Jesus, I need to come ready to be challenged by the Jesus I never knew. And I invite you to this same adventure.

The second reason is from the Bible. The Gospels record for us the struggle people have in accepting Jesus. And not all of them turn out well. The Pharisees cannot accept Jesus reaching out to the sinners and the common people, those they call the "*am ha'aretz*" or the people of the land. These do not keep the law. And what about the prostitutes? Surely Jesus cannot offer them the same thing he offers us! How could Jesus rewrite the Sabbath laws! What audacity! What radical teachings and actions! Jesus is a heretic to be rejected.

The Sadducees are the establishment. They are the chief priests appointed by Rome, and they control the temple, and so control the religious life of the people. They are not really qualified to be the chief priests because they are not from the line of Aaron. If Messiah comes, they are finished. Messiah will replace them. So they will get rid of anyone who seems to be getting popular. They cannot accept Jesus.

The disciples know Messiah will rule over the house of David. He will overthrow the Romans. He will be Israel's king, and they will rule with Jesus. They even quarrel over who will sit at his right and who at his left. The mother of two of his disciples tries to ask a personal favor of Jesus so one will sit at Jesus' right and another at his left. And the disciples end up quarrelling over positions ([Matt 20:21ff](#)). When he tells Peter he will die, Peter cannot accept it ([Matt 16:22-23](#)).

John the Baptist has told everyone Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ([John 1:29, 36](#)). He will decrease and Jesus will increase ([John 3:30](#)). Then he finds himself in prison and hears about all the wonderful things Jesus is doing. And he begins to wonder if Jesus has forgotten him. The message Jesus has for John is that he must not stumble over who Jesus really is and what he is setting out to do ([Luke 7:18-23](#)). As John is led from the prison to be beheaded,

he clings on to Jesus by faith because Jesus does not fulfill his expectations. He has to bow his head to the sword and his heart to the Jesus he never knew.

When we come to Acts, we see the first disciples struggling with the good news going to the Gentiles. The leaders and the respected people are the last to respond. They are leading from behind. The Holy Spirit of God has to bring the gospel to the Gentiles in spite of them ([Acts 15:1-35](#)). And throughout that first period, there remains the constant debate over whether Gentiles need to be circumcised to be saved (Galatians).

I humbly submit to you that when we study the Word of God, especially the life of Jesus, the Word of God will be a double-edged sword that pierces through our being and our spirit, that it will discern our prejudices, our fears, our idols, our lusts, our ignorance, our greed, our laziness, our excuses, our innermost being ([Heb 4:12](#)). And when we bow to the Jesus revealed in the Word of God and become like him, our lives will be radically transformed.

Mine was.

2011.01.01



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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.