

We Would See Jesus: The Son of God

“You Are Remembered Throughout All Generations”

Mark Blackwelder

When one travels the world, he has the opportunity to see some impressive things. Some are natural wonders, like the Grand Canyon here in the United States or Victoria Falls in Africa. Others are man-made, like the Great Wall of China or Machu Pichu in Peru. Both categories stand as testimony to the ones who are responsible for their existence—the former to the Creator of all things, the latter to human ingenuity and determination. Of those things that are of human origin, one might ask, “What would cause someone to devote that much energy and that many resources to such a project?” Answers are varied, of course, but the most common explanation for the various monuments that exist is simply, “to be remembered.” There seems to be a strong desire for immortality among those who achieve prominence in our world. If one is remembered, they seem to think, in a sense one lives on.

In Psalm 135:13, the psalmist exclaims, “Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages.” [All Scripture references are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.] He contrasts the God of heaven with the idols of his neighbors, which come and go with the capricious

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moods of fickle men. Certainly, the gods worshiped by pagans in centuries past are little more than religious curiosities today. Baal, Asherah, Isis, Osiris—these are names virtually unknown today. Yet, the Lord continues to be known and revered in every generation. In fact, with the coming of Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel, the scope of the Lord's influence and reputation only expanded. Isaiah the prophet connected the past with the future, what was with what would be, as he revealed information about the Messiah. He seems to be saying, among other things, generations yet to come will be witnesses to the power and sovereignty of God (Isa. 52:15). His actions will continue to have a profound influence on the world.

However, the dramatic impact of God in the flesh will not follow the pattern of human megalomaniacs, who seek immortality by emphasizing self. This God/man will accomplish what they cannot—a lasting memorial and an undying influence—all while *deemphasizing* self! Isaiah's portrait of the Christ is striking; He often sounds more like the loser than the winner! Some 800 years later, when the Messiah came, He was just as Isaiah had portrayed Him, and indeed there were those who might well have put Him in the category with Theudas and Judas, just another failed revolutionary who would soon pass from memory (Acts 5:35-38). After all, Jesus of Nazareth did not follow the ordinary path to greatness, nor did His end exclaim "success!" Yet, almost 2,000 years have passed since Jesus uttered, "It is finished," as He hung on that Roman cross, and not only has He proven Himself to be ultimately victorious, it is He who stands out as the central figure in human history. It is He who will be remembered "throughout all generations."

A poem entitled “One Solitary Life” (origin uncertain but has been attributed to James Allen Francis) captured the impact of Jesus’ unusual journey of influence:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn’t go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned — put together — have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.

When Jesus Christ left this earth, He had set in motion a series of events that would not only define His

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own memory, but also shape the course of history. Note the following as illustrations.

First, He changed the lives of those who knew Him. The Samaritan woman we read about in John chapter four went back to her people reformed and bubbling with excitement (4:28-29). Zacchaeus committed to repay fourfold any injustice he had perpetrated (Luke 19:8). The Lord's appeal was broad. The Pharisees expressed their frustration with His popularity by telling each other, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him" (John 12:19). Even when He selected His apostles, He did not look for those who were obvious candidates for leadership on the world stage. Impulsive fishermen, men hated by their own people, political radicals, even Jesus' most vicious adversary, Saul of Tarsus, were among those to whom He later entrusted the ministry He had begun. It is this same cadre of misfits (by the world's standards) that was transformed into the most effective force of missionaries the world has ever known. No wonder their opponents in Thessalonica were worried, exclaiming, "these who have turned the world upside-down have come here also" (Acts 17:6). Jesus had changed them, and they changed the world. What explained the transformation in these men? Even their antagonists saw the obvious answer: "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Second, Jesus Christ is remembered because He changed the lives of people who never knew Him. Before the end of Paul's life, he was able to claim that the gospel had been "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Col. 1:23). Much has been made of Emperor Constantine's adoption of Christianity in the fourth century, giving him credit for the popularity of the faith in his day. However, sociologist and historian Rodney Stark suggests quite the

opposite was true. Christianity was not popular because Constantine became a Christian—he became a Christian because Christianity was popular! “Constantine’s conversion would better be seen as a response to the massive exponential wave in progress, not as its cause (Stark, *Rise of Christianity* 10). For the first three hundred years of its existence, the church had sustained a rate of growth of 30% per decade. Stark attributes this to the unique practices of the church: intimacy in relationships, demonstrations of kindness and caring to strangers and courage in the face of tragedy (211). The disciples of Jesus were generous to the point of sacrifice. They stood up for the weak and powerless. They ministered to the sick at great personal risk to themselves—and the world took notice. As His first disciples had been, these too were changed by their relationship with Christ, and they too changed the world.

Third, Jesus Christ is remembered because He has changed even modern society. His influence pervades countless aspects of many different cultures. Please note the following examples of the profound impact of Jesus on the modern world:

1) The current world calendar is based on the advent of Christ into the world. The “A.D.” that follows the number of the year stands for “anno domini” (the year of our Lord). Prior to His coming, the Jews counted time from creation (at least as they could best estimate it) and the Romans began their calendar with establishment of the city of Rome. The Greeks marked time from the first Olympic games (Winkler 40-41). The birth of Jesus has been recognized for centuries as the hinge of history.

2) Many societies base their system of government on Christian principles. The vast majority of those who signed the Declaration of Independence and framed the

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United States Constitution were unabashed "Christians," and those documents and others are indebted to Christianity for both the ideas and the language they contain. Indeed, each of us is indebted to the teachings of Christ, as they have transformed the world into a much more congenial place in which to live. Nations around the world have looked to the U.S. Constitution as a model when creating their own legislative systems, thus continuing the influence of Jesus' teachings.

3) The teachings of Jesus have had a major impact on human and civil rights around the world. Without the influence of Christian principles, man's cruelty to man runs amok. Seneca, a Stoic philosopher and contemporary of the apostle Paul, wrote these words: "We strangle a mad dog, we slaughter a fierce ox, we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are deformed or weakly we drown" (as quoted in Barclay 39). By contrast, Christianity has continued to call societies to a higher standard. Abortion was rampant during the church's early years, but Christian women were not subjected to that (Stark, "A Double-Take"). In fact, Christianity has had a very positive effect on the status of women in every culture where it is found. When Ephesians 5:28 is followed, for example, women are not mistreated. Stark says, "Christian women had tremendous advantages compared to the woman next door" ("A Double-Take"). Slavery, while not explicitly forbidden by the New Testament, was clearly at odds with Christian teaching. Winkler rightly says that, "though the New Testament does not say, 'Thou shalt have no slaves,' wherever it has gone slavery has ceased" (Winkler 43). Jesus' teachings, like the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), make slavery untenable.

The list could go on. Everything from art and literature to education and the home have been profoundly influenced by the life and teachings of Jesus. Certainly, other world religions teach many of the same principles and might lay claim to positive influence on society. None of these, however, has had such a broad and overwhelmingly positive impact as has Christianity. Everywhere Christianity has gone, society has improved morally, socially, economically and religiously.

It is ironic then that our society seems more and more bent on minimizing the impact of Christ. Even as they proudly proclaim that they do not want Him or need Him, they are benefitting from the existence of a world order undeniably indebted to principles drawn from His teachings. As Winkler declares, "There is not an infidel alive, of any stripe, who would want to live where the influence of Christ has not gone" (43).

Indeed, Jesus has been remembered throughout all generations, from the first century to the twenty-first. Not because He sought immortality for Himself, but because He sought it for us. Not because He erected a colossal monument to His own accomplishments, but because He has gone to prepare a mansion for us. Not because of who He thought He was, but because of who we know He is—Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Let us do our part to insure that He is remembered in our generation and until He comes again!

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