

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## THE JESUS THE CHURCH DOES NOT KNOW

Seven hundred years before Christ was born, Isaiah prophesied that “He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him...he was oppressed, and was afflicted and opened not his mouth, he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:3, 7). This was a prophesy concerning Christ’s death, but it has been interpreted in our teaching and sermons as a description of his life, not his death. Thus this description of Jesus has been held up to us as representing his whole life, and as a result of this Jesus has become “gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” a pale, effeminate, pathetic figure. As a result Christianity has become sentimentalized and romanticized and Jesus himself is identified with effeminate characteristics. The fact that Jesus is not only the “lamb of God” (John 1:29), but is also “The Lion of Judah” (Rev. 5:5) has been overlooked. Ann Douglas in her book *The Feminization of the Church* wrote: “Between 1820 and 1875, the Protestant Church in this country was gradually transformed from a traditional institution, which claimed certain real justification to be a guide and leader to the American nation, to an influential ad hoc organization which obtained power largely by taking cues from the culture on which it was dependent.” This is a result of the church not knowing the Jesus of the Bible.

Jesus said “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). He has not drawn all men, not even a majority of men, and it may be he has never been lifted up as the Scriptures show him to have been. An unreal, imaginary and weak Jesus who is rather placid, unpretentious and timid is being lifted up instead, and men are not being drawn by it. Jesus did say “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matt. 11:29), but this was spoken to common people who were in need. His confrontation with religious leaders and unbelievers was quite different. When he said this he had just pronounced woes upon Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum.

It was not the “meek and mild gentle Jesus” that “found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. And he made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and oxen and he poured out the coins of the money changers, and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling doves he said, ‘Take these things away; stop making my Father’s house a house of merchandise’” (John 2:14-16). He even prevented anyone to carry a vessel through the temple (Mark 11:16). Who would dare go into some church in a rich American suburb, a place taking pride in their massive building and sophisticated congregation, and whip the deacons holding the collection plates, and cry out “make not my Father’s house a market place”. It is interesting to note that when Jesus goes into the house of a synagogue official and raises his daughter from the dead that he ‘puts them all out’ of the room (Mark 5:28-42). The word used here for “putting them all out” (*ekballo*) is the same word used when he drove the money changers out of the temple, and to describe the “*jettison* (NASV), *lightened* (KJV) the cargo of their sinking ship” (Acts

27:18). Then he “strictly ordered” those who had witnessed the miracle that no one should know about it. In several passages Jesus *sternly warned* those witnessing a miracle to not make it known. This was quite different from the so-called miracles the TV evangelists flaunt on their programs today. A “meek and mild” Jesus does not fit into the mold recorded here. In fact several incidents in the gospels cannot be attributed to a Christ of weak character as he is held up to us in many pulpits today. He did not go about with a downcast, humble look as is pictured in most of our religious art. The only reference we have concerning his childhood shows Jesus to be unique. At the age of 12 his parents took him to Jerusalem to the Passover feast. This twelve year old boy slips away from his parents in this big city without telling them and they leave without him. When they found that he was not with the returning company they returned to the city and “after three days found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking questions. All who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when they saw him they were astonished and his mother said to him, ‘Son why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.’ And he said to them, ‘Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?’” Jesus did not continue in this independent action, but “He went with them and continued in subjection to them. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:42-52). Even as a child he was not weak and vacillating. This is not the only time Jesus contradicts our present idea of family values. He did not let his family interfere in the work he had been sent to do. “While he was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to him, and someone said to him, ‘Behold your mother and your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to you.’ But he answered the one who was telling him and said, ‘Who is my mother and who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Behold my mother and my brothers! For whoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’” (Matt. 12:46-50). (This incident is also recorded in Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19, 21). He is saying his real relatives are his followers. Even his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5), and the rest of the family, when “he came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal and when his own people heard of this they went to take custody of him, for they were saying, ‘He has lost his senses’” (Mark 3:20, 21). There are few preachers today that would be accused of losing their senses because of the things they preached.

Jesus was and certainly knew himself to be the son of God, but he also was the son of man and shared fully in human emotions. One of these emotions, hidden in our concept of the “gentle, meek and mild Jesus” is his anger. It was prophesied that unless kings and leaders show discernment and “do homage to the Son” he would “become angry and they would perish, for his wrath is soon kindled” (Ps. 2:10, 12). How could he not be angry when “He entered the temple and began to cast out those who were selling, saying to them, ‘It is written, My house shall be a house

of prayer, but you have made it a robbers den” (Lk.19 45, 46)? In the synagogue “the scribes and Pharisees were watching him closely, to see if he healed on the Sabbath, in order that they might find reason to accuse him” (Luke 6:7), “And after looking around at them with *anger*, grieved at their hardness of heart” he healed the man with a withered hand (Mark 3:5). Jesus seems to deliberately provoke the religious leaders. He could have simply waited until the Sabbath was over. He did this not because he was a trouble maker, but because “he knew what they were thinking” (Luke. 6:8), and it was time to confront them publicly. Contrast this with the prissy preachers today who take great pains to say nothing that would offend or disturb the status quo of any of our seeker-friendly, come-as-you-are, this is not your grandma’s church, adherents. We don’t want to provoke people, so we compromise. This is the religion of niceness. There has been an outbreak of niceness in our day; a nice preacher, in a nice church, on a nice Sunday morning, preaching a nice sermon to nice people, telling them how nice it is to be nice!

There are several words and actions that describe the anger of Jesus; the anger of Jesus is expressed not as much in words as deeds. When the disciples rebuked those bringing children to him, “He was *indignant*” (Greek: angry) (Mark 10:14). These children could have been children of the poorest, unwashed, uncombed, and even malnourished. They were certainly not children of the upper class. This was typical of his ministry; to reach out to those overlooked and rejected by society. He preferred the company of the lowly and despised, he dealt with prostitutes and adulterers, he touched the lepers (forbidden by Levitical law), he dined with publicans and sinners and ate with tax collectors, even calling one to be an apostle. Sometimes the actions of people show us reason for Jesus being angry. This is illustrated in Mark 1:39-45. Jesus freely “went into all the synagogues in Galilee preaching and casting out demons” (ver. 39). He healed a leper because he had compassion on him. He then *sternly* (Greek: scolded) warned him and immediately *sent him away* (Greek: cast out) saying “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, but he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas” (ver. 44, 45). The leper wanted to do something extraordinary for Jesus, but Jesus does not want the extraordinary, he wants obedience. His witness, like much witness today, was for the wrong reasons.

Early in his ministry even his hometown people took offense at him because they did not see him as one of the great religious teachers of his day. They questioned him, not because they could not believe his teaching or accept his miracles, but because he did not meet the criteria of the religious elite. “They were saying, ‘Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to him, and such miracles as these performed by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not his sisters here with us?’ and they took offense at him” (Mark 6:2, 3). Jesus did not associate with or act as they thought a respected teacher should. “He came both eating and drinking, and they said, ‘Behold a gluttonous man and a wine drinker, a friend of tax gatherers and sinners!’” (Matt. 11:19). It was the Pharisees that complained of his eating and drinking with sinners and tax gatherers (Mark 2:15; Luke. 5:30, 15:2). This “carpenter” did not, like the

Pharisees, build fences to protect them from sinners and outcasts. These are the kind of people Jesus came to minister to, and call to repentance. Consider the fences the modern church has built to protect themselves from the social outcasts of society. They are so busy condemning the bartender they have failed to minister to him. We have been more intent of running the prostitute off than offering her hope. We have built a wall around our little group so high we cannot fellowship anyone who will not join us inside our fence and if you don’t do it our way, we’ll just add another picket to our fence. Our “building” should emulate that of the Carpenter from Nazareth.

Jesus was neither politically nor religiously correct. He would not cozy up with the Christian right nor would he become intimate with big shot, celebrated popular CEO preachers taking pride in their rich mall-like cathedrals. He did not come to replace the temple with other buildings, but to prepare a people in whom both he and the Father could dwell (John 14:23), that would later be known as “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 3:16). Herod plotted to kill Jesus, and Jesus called Herod “a fox” (Luke 13:31, 32), he refused to bow to the political aspirations of the people that wanted to make him king (John 6:15), refused Satan’s temptation to give him all the kingdoms of this world (Luke 4:5, 6), and told Pilate he was indeed a King (John 18:37).

Jesus was not a religious man, but he was a spiritual man. What he thought of the religious leaders is spelled out in John 8:44 when he stated “You are of your father the devil and you want to do the desires of your father.” He had earlier called Peter “Satan” (Matt. 16:23). Who would dare today to castigate religious leaders with such language? But that is only one example; consider his words to the religious hierarchy recorded in Matthew 23:1-33). After telling the multitudes of some evil characteristics of the scribes and Pharisee (some which describe much of the modern clergy), he then pronounces a series of seven woes against them (verses 13-33). Seven times he calls them hypocrites, then adding insult to injury he says they are blind guides (four times) and tells them they are fools, serpents and a brood of vipers who shall not escape the sentence of hell. What “man of the cloth” would dare preach such a sermon today? William Barclay wrote: “There is nothing easier than to observe all the outward actions of religion and yet to be completely irreligious.”

The Pharisees were not the only ones to ignite the impatience and intolerance of Jesus. When Jesus came down from the mount of transfiguration and found people in confusion because his apostles could not cast out a demon, his response was: “O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?” (Matt. 17:17). Jesus had some stern words for his disciples when they didn’t believe. He called them “timid men of little faith”; he said to Peter “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” and rebuked them for not believing and called them “men of little faith” and upbraids them for not remembering and understanding (Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8-11). Even after the resurrection he “reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart” (Mark 16:14). The word “reproached” is translated “insult” in Matt. 5:11 and Luke 6:22, and is translated “revile” in I Pet. 4:14. On the road to Emmaus he said to two disciples “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). These are hardly the words one would hear today from our pulpits.

