

What is Jesus Doing?

FAITH: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN

I will admit that I am always perplexed and not a little disturbed when people who have heard me preach and even those who have come to know me, will say to me “now John, I know you are very religious...” This is the preamble, undoubtedly, to some observation about the nature of religion and/or their perception of religious people. Depending upon the specific nature of their question, my response varies, but will always contain some version of my strongly held belief that as a committed follower of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, it does not glorify my King for me to be religious in the usual, worldly sense. After all, the Pharisees who facilitated Jesus’ death on the Cross were, arguably, the most religious people of their time, and Jesus was extremely vocal about His distaste for their narrow, self-serving adherence to legalism which was more about shutting people out, than inviting people in, to the Kingdom of Heaven.

I will usually then go on to point out that the only time religion is mentioned favorably in the Bible is by James, the (half) brother of Jesus, who said:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

- James 1:27

Now religion as the Pharisees practiced it, and as many “religious” people do today, is more about tradition and ritual than it is about honoring God. In fact, most who practice religion in this way do so because their parents practiced in this way and their grandparents before them and so on. This in fact, is why it makes sense that there are baby baptisms, and other rituals claiming for the Kingdom a child too young to make their own decision about having a relationship with God. What God desires from His people, I will always tell my friends, is a true relationship with those who want to have one with Him.

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You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

- Jeremiah 29:13

These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.

- Matthew 15:8

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

- James 4:8

What God truly desires from us, in fact, is faith. His Word says as much.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

- Hebrews 11:6

So here is my premise, and one that I share freely when trying to draw for my friends the distinction between their perception of my religion and my real relationship with God. A true man or woman of God is faithful as opposed to religious. We walk with God, following as He leads, hearing from His Spirit and worshiping Him in our spirit in obedience in accordance to His truth.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

- John 4:24

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

- Hebrews 11:1

This takes exactly the faith that I am talking about. That faith which sees those things that God reveals in the Spirit although they don't (yet) actually EXIST. This is the nature of miracles.

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It is the faith of the believer, not just to believe what the Spirit shows him, but to WALK OUT that belief and then and only then, does the CO-OPERATION between God and the believing saint CAUSE those things to come into existence!

A leading reason many unbelievers refuse to believe in a God who loves them, and sacrificed His Son (Himself) for them, is because of their perception of religion as men using the threat of a vengeful God to control other men. This is understandable given the way “religion” has been applied and practiced throughout history by power mongers who used religion for their own ends. Yet throughout history real men and women of faith have worked behind the scenes, pulling innocents out of the fire, feeding, clothing, sheltering the poor and hungry, and preaching the truth of the Gospel to the captives in darkness, to set them free.

There is another reason that causes people to shun a relationship with God, and also, frankly, often causes those who want to believe, from fully grasping that relationship with God which would spur them to action. The Bible is full of promises of protection from enemies, freedom from disease, hunger and all kinds of trouble, and yet we/they find ourselves/themselves going through trials constantly. This then causes a dichotomy that creates a dissonance between their “reality” and the reality of God’s promises. They just can’t seem to reconcile it. Here is where faith comes in.

Faith IS the bridge between God’s promises and man’s reality. Faith IS the bridge between sinful earth and Holy Heaven. Faith (and specifically faith in Jesus Christ the Son of Man and the Son of God) IS the bridge between sinful man and a Righteous God.

God Himself built that bridge when He sent Jesus to die at our hands FOR our sins. God Himself made the ultimate (and final) sacrifice for us, who did not deserve it, that we may have a way back to Him. Jesus, without sin, did what only He could do to save us, sinners beyond self-redemption.

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But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- Romans 5:8

We are all prodigal children, sinners who have fallen into idolatry at the very least. Our Heavenly Father, knowing that there was no way that we could come to Him in our fallen state, came to us in the person of the Son of Man, the Messiah. Jesus came to us to be our sacrifice, the propitiation for sin, because He loved us so much.

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

- Luke 15:20

Nothing pleases a loving father more than when his son or daughter acknowledges and receives that love, and even more so, demonstrates that love by loving their siblings in a real and palpable way.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

- John 13:34

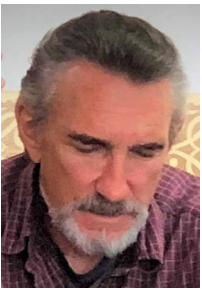
It is the acknowledgement of this great gift of love (Jesus' sacrifice) and our gratitude and expression of love towards God that allows us to receive this great salvation (eternal life AND temporal joy, peace and strength while we live) and the outpouring of that love towards our fellow men and women, that glorifies God and reveals our true Kingdom nature.

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for our brethren.

- 1 John 3:16

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So... when I said “yes” to my Lord Jesus Messiah, did I become a “religious” man? No. I maintain that I became, for the first time, a man faithful to my true purpose. I crossed the bridge that God had made in faith. Now I am a Kingdom man pouring light and salt into a dark and tasteless world. Thank You Father for Your Grace, Mercy and Love towards me. The question isn’t how religious am I, but how much do I love God and love other people. Who will cross that bridge of faith with me? That is the real question.



*In Joy and the Love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi*