



JESUS THE MAN

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Have you ever noticed how certain people seem to fill a room with their presence? They simply walk in and everyone turns their way.

Sometimes this magnetism is due to an individual's athletic prowess, stunning appearance, wealth or great intellect.

Yes some people can captivate others just with their presence.

If you have ever been invited to a reception where a member of the royal family for example is due to appear. People are quite happy waiting, making small talk and nibbling their canapés. Then when the royal member appears all attention is turned towards them. They command your attention; they become your complete focus.

When Jesus was going around Galilee speaking to different groups of people; he also commanded attention and became your complete focus. People said of him; 'no one has ever taught like him before.

Nor had anyone ever divided a room more quickly than this prophet from Nazareth.

It was not his wealth or beauty that people noticed, he did not have those; nor had he much money.

And Isaiah said of him he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him.

So what was it that made him stand out above all others ever born in any generation past, present or future.

Well it was many things; it was his; grace, his power, his forgiveness, his teaching, his miracles, his compassion, his unceasing love and courage.

His presence was unmistakable. People either loved him or hated him, but they Never ignored him.

Many people then and since have tried to soften Jesus' raspy cutting edge remarks concerning the human condition.

But it cannot be done without watering down his message and ruining the picture of his true character.

Much of the history concerning Christianity has centred around domesticating Jesus and reducing his message to one that suits all tastes and one that we are all comfortable with.

But that can't work otherwise the gospel loses its potency and power. In North America and Europe Revisionist theology is causing the church many difficulties as some seek to revise what the bible actually teaches. In other words Christianity should be so watered down that it possesses no risk of offense to anyone. Something like A benign domesticated Jesus who is robbed of his ability to disturb others from their spiritual sleep walk.

Today we live in the age of Equality. Equality is king. It is the god many worship. And equality means no one gets offended.

But the fact is that Jesus is as disturbing now as he was then. Look how many times Jesus provoked outrage amongst his listeners and many of the other disciples for that matter.

Now I am not saying that we should all become firebrand preachers there's enough of them already; or go about being offensive to people of different faiths or no faith.

But the fact is that we cannot portray Jesus without causing some people to feel uncomfortable about the way they live their lives and their attitude to him. Truth by its very nature is exclusive. Truth cannot mean all things to all people.

The Apostle John described Jesus as, 'one full of grace and truth'. These two words encapsulate what it means to be a Christian. We act with grace and empathy, but we also stand for truth. That is biblical truth, which is not distorted or adapted to suit trends. Nor should we be afraid to speak in the public square giving the reason for our faith.

Sadly in recent years western Christianity has retreated from speaking out for what it believes, and instead allowed confusion and distortion to take the centre ground.

Jesus has this knack of shining his light into the darker recesses of our lives, which proves to be uncomfortable because there are things there that we know should not be there.

Jesus spoke powerfully yet skilfully. He spoke with authority yet with restraint. He spoke lovingly yet insightfully.

Jesus had always something productive and effective to say. Something that would make you wonder and look at him and say to yourself; well I never thought of that before.

He also had a knack of shattering our illusions. That's the first point I want to make this morning. He shatters our illusions.

A leading Christian academic once said; 'what we need is more disillusioned people'. It's an interesting comment and one worth thinking about.

Disillusioned people by right should see themselves for what they are; disillusioned.

Disillusioned with the meaning and purpose of life and disillusioned with themselves. Disillusioned or heart broken people tend to be more open to God.

We live in a world filled with illusions; some are physical, some mental, and some spiritual.

Thanks to the advances in cosmetic surgery for example; if we don't like what we see in the mirror; we can hide it; stretch it; tighten it; tuck it; remove it, enhance it; and replace it all in the same day. We gently massage the illusions we create with fantasies of unending health; wealth, eternal beauty; but always avoiding the inner poverty of our souls. The soul is the last place we tend to. We ignore it; and we do so at our peril.

Illusions are things or states of mind that we erect in order to prevent us from dealing and grappling with the truth.

We can maintain the hoax by borrowing money we don't have, or buy stuff we don't need to impress people we don't know and never see again. And so it goes on.

Our cosmetic and monetary enhancements are vain attempts to flee the real truth about life and death, about weakness and insecurity; and the advertising companies are making a fortune as they tap deeper and deeper into our insecurities.

The Pharisees in Jesus day got a lot of bad press. They were the religious zealots, the fundamentalists who viewed themselves as righteous, pure and basically perfect. They had created illusions about them selves; their role, and position in society.

But when they encountered Jesus; Jesus shook their self-righteous illusions to the core. Woe to you; Woe to you; woe to you he said. He then went on to slate them for their hypocrisy.

You could hear people in the crowd saying but Jesus; That's not how you address important religious leaders; but that's what Jesus did. He had to use that particular approach. Jesus of course reached out to others in different ways. He spoke to the woman at the well in a very courteous yet penetrating way. But he shattered her illusion about happiness being found in relationships with different men.

He spoke to the rich young ruler lovingly. But he shattered his illusion that possessing wealth and being good was the key to life. He told him the truth. He did not compromise and run after him and say I'll make it easier for you. Just give some of your wealth away.

He spoke tenderly to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery; but he shattered her illusion by reminding her that adultery was not acceptable and a sin against God. He told her the truth. He healed on the Sabbath Day shattering the Pharisees illusion about how the Sabbath Day was to be used.

Even his parables shattered illusions concerning money, faith, the kingdom of God and so on.

If the parable of the Good Samaritan didn't shatter illusions about equality, discrimination, race, and creed I don't know what did. A few months back I was listening to Radio 2. A man called John Lloyd was being interviewed.

His name is not particularly well known. But John Lloyd is a TV producer and the man who wrote the scripts for Spitting Image, Hitch Hikers Guide to the Galaxy, QI, and Black Adder to name but a few. It was a very interesting interview.

Lloyd spoke about his fame and fortune as a scriptwriter for many Top Comedy TV programmes. He had a lovely wife, family, home, wealth and position. He had it all. And then he woke up one Christmas Eve morning, and suddenly thought for the first time in his life; what is this all about and he spiralled into years of depression; which he has now come through.

Lloyd possessed the dream of success in the eyes of the world; but when he achieved it; he said; it meant nothing to him. There was a sense of pointlessness to it all.

He built around him the successful trappings of comfort, fame and wealth but ignored the state of his soul. He constructed an illusion. His illusion about life had been broken. King Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes said the same thing.

The second point I would make is this. Jesus often used three little words to get his message across.

Jesus rarely went into lengthy discourses. He tended to keep things short and to the point. Do you know what those three little words were? When he spoke to the crowds he would often say; 'you have heard that it was said.

then he turned things round by saying; 'but I say'; 'but I say'.

Three important words that gave a whole new dimension to what he said and to what others had said before him. The people wondered; who is this who speaks to us in this way; no one has ever spoken like this before.

I don't know if you have ever heard powerful captivating speakers. They are a very rare commodity. But once you hear them speak you will remember them and their message for a very long time. Martin Luther King's highly charged 'I have a dream' speech in Washington DC in 1963 Even when I hear it on Youtube the hairs on the back of my neck still rise.

Or Winston Churchill's speech to the House of Commons during the 2nd W/W in 1940; we will fight them on the beaches; we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets. But Jesus words blow all other speeches away by comparison. Jesus was a highly skilled orator even at the age of twelve he was able to debate with the leading rabbi's of the day in the temple.

When he uttered These three words; 'but I say' basically he was saying; Pay attention; pay attention and listen to what I am about to say,

Because what I am about to say will turn your world upside down and give you a reality check. And you

need to hear this.

Now some people were open and excited about this; others were offended. Nothing has changed. Reading chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew, which includes the Beatitudes, is a reality check for us all. It removes any man made illusions.

'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not murder; but I say anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

You have heard that it was said; do not commit adultery; BUT I say anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

You have heard that it was said; love your neighbour and hate your enemy; but I say love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'

Whenever we hear words like these they not only arouse our curiosity they make us think and look at things in a different way.

It should not surprise us that in Jesus' day his words separated friends, split families and shocked his followers.

Every time he taught or preached he was sparring with the prevailing opinions of society, and was one of the reasons he got himself into trouble.

If a man takes your jacket from you, give him your shirt as well he says. 'If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other towards him.'

'Love your enemies, bless those who persecute you. Lend to those who cannot pay you back.'

These are words that shatter our illusions. This is the way God talks. Let's be honest with ourselves. Whenever we read such words our automatic reaction is to justify ourselves. And we begin an analysis.

Can these attitudes and ways really work in this world; is Jesus really in touch with reality. Does Jesus not know that the world doesn't operate like this?

Does Jesus not know, does he not realise that throwing money at people who can't pay it back displays bad business judgement and may lead to financial ruin for both parties. And what kind of defence policy would our nation have if we took cheek turning seriously with the likes of North Korea and Russia breathing down our necks. There are no easy answers. But Jesus' words remain.

What are the illusions Jesus shatters with you? Might some of your illusions be?

If I follow God he will always keep me healthy and strong.

God helps those who help themselves.

What goes around, comes around.

Because I go to church God will look after me.

I can manage my greed and lust on my own.

Look after number one.

I'm basically a good person.

As long as you have your health.

Don't offend anyone.

The strange thing is Jesus never said any of those things. !!!

Do you see the difference between what Jesus says and how we think and interpret his words? The illusions we erect to safeguard ourselves which really cause us more harm than good.

Maybe you will allow Jesus to shatter or dismantle what you have erected over the years.

Alan Wilson is a Presbyterian Minister in Northern Ireland, where he serves a large congregation, supported by his wife. Before he took up the call to serve Christ, he was in the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 30-years. He has two children and two grandchildren and enjoys soccer, gardening, zoology, politics and reading. He voted for Brexit in the hope that the stranglehold of Brussels might finally be broken. He welcomes any that might wish to correspond with him through the [Contact Page](#) of The Postil.

The [photo](#) shows, "My Soul is Sorrowful unto Death," by James Tissot, painted ca. 1896.

