

I Am - Jesus in his own words

5. Light of the world

October 14-15, 2017

A couple of months ago we had a solar eclipse here in the US. How many of you were able to get outside to see it? Was anyone at a location where it was a total eclipse? I didn't see the total eclipse --- I was at work here -- but I moved a meeting outside so I could experience the partial eclipse. I didn't have the special glasses so I didn't look directly at the sun, but looking around I could see that the quality of the light changed... looked different. It didn't get very dark here, but it still felt rather eerie. There is something a little unsettling about the sun being obscured.

What would happen if the sun really disappeared? What would happen to life on earth if the sun suddenly went away? Here's what astronomers tell us. Without the gravitational pull of the sun, the earth would immediately lose its orbit and would start flying off onto space in a straight line. We wouldn't notice anything right away, though. That's because light from the Sun takes eight and a half minutes to reach Earth. But nine minutes later we'd find ourselves in complete darkness. If it was already night time where we are, we'd notice the moon suddenly disappear. That's because the moon does not produce light. We only see the moon because sunlight reflects off of it.

After a few days global temperatures would drop below 0 degrees. Fortunately, the Earth retains heat fairly well, so humans wouldn't freeze instantly. But life would get much more difficult immediately. After a few weeks, all plants would die, because photosynthesis will have stopped the moment the sun was gone. Eventually all animals that rely on eating plants would die. And then all animals that eat other animals would die.

The temperature would continue to drop steadily. Within two months temperature would drop to -190 degrees F! By that time, the top layers of the oceans of the world would have frozen over. Humans would not be able to survive on the earth's surface. Some inventive humans might be able to survive on a sun-less earth for several days, months, or even years. They could live in submarines in the deepest part of the oceans, but it wouldn't be for long, and it wouldn't be pleasant.

Without the light of the Sun, life on Earth would eventually be impossible.¹

¹ <https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-would-earth-be-like-without-the-sun>

<http://earthsky.org/space/what-would-happen-if-sun-disappeared-infographic>

Fortunately, the sun isn't going anywhere - at least for a few billion years. But it makes you appreciate sunrise, doesn't it? Thank God for the next sunrise you see! Our physical existence depends entirely on the light that comes from the sun.

The New Testament book of John tells us that the life of our souls depends entirely upon the light that comes from the Son of God. In *John 8:12* Jesus says, *"I am the light of world."* Just like the sun gives physical light and makes physical life possible, Jesus brings the kind of light that makes a meaningful life here on earth possible. He also is the source of our eternal life. *John 1:9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.* Jesus came from heaven to earth to give light to the world.

But what if Jesus hadn't come? What if Jesus was removed from history; if he had never appeared to bring that light? Based on history, here are just a few ways things would be different:

1. *There would be less compassion and generosity.*

Jesus taught the parable of the Good Samaritan and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He lived a self-sacrificial life. Christians took that cue and went on to create a culture of giving and caring. Western civilization has a strong tradition of generosity and philanthropy because of the influence of Christ-followers. Think Mother Teresa in India, Albert Schweitzer in Africa, the Salvation Army working with the world's poor. Throughout history, many wealthy Americans have been impacted by Jesus' teaching and developed foundations to support those in need. Some even gave away most their money at the end of their lives.

After disasters like hurricanes, it is church groups that send the most people and stay the longest to help. After hurricane Katrina I worked with a team from our church. I saw dozens of groups from around the country there, too. The vast majority of them were Christian groups. Without Jesus, there would be fewer expressions of compassion and generosity throughout history.

2. *People would be sicker.*

Christians have always cared for the health of others. When plagues swept through the Roman Empire, it was the Christians who cared for the sick and buried the dead while pagans headed for the hills. In the fourth century Christians were responsible for establishing the first hospitals and hospices. Our health care systems of today are built on the foundation of the work of those Christians.

3. *People would have less freedom and fewer human rights.*

Jesus showed respect and dignity to each person he met, even to society's outcasts. Since then, where the Gospel goes, freedom follows. For example, Christians were the first people in history to oppose slavery in a systematic way. Early Christians purchased slaves in the markets simply to set

them free. Christians drove the movements to abolish slavery. British Parliament member William Wilberforce was a Christ-follower, and motivated by his faith he became the primary force behind the ending of the international slave trade. By 1835 two-thirds of the members of the American society to abolish slavery were Christian ministers.²

4. Fewer people would be able to read.

We take public schools for granted, but for much of history they didn't exist. Education for the masses has its roots in the Protestant Reformation. For example, the first Sunday Schools were literally schools <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/when-did-sunday-schools-start.html>]. In the 1780's children were working in factories 6 days per week and could not go to school. Christian leaders began Sunday Schools as a way to educate poor children so they could read the Bible.³ Out of America's first 123 colleges and universities, all but 1 was a Christian institution -- started by Christians in order to train up Christian leaders. Harvard, Yale, and the Ivy League institutions of today were established by pastors and run by them for years.⁴ If Jesus had not come, that would not have happened.

5. We would not have the moral compass we do.

Biblically-based moral principles became the foundation for the Western legal system. Without an ethic that is based on what God says, there is no reason to believe anything is absolutely right or wrong. The only basis for ethics is the opinion that is in style at the moment.

6. We would have less great art.

Much of the great art and music of our culture has been produced by Christians who wanted to express their faith.

If the light of Jesus had never come, Western civilization would be very different. But praise God, Jesus has come to the world! However, even though Jesus' light has entered the world, it has not reached every person's life equally. The light of Jesus shines brightly in some people's lives, but others have not yet invited Jesus to lead them. So let's ask this question from a different angle.

***What happens in the life of someone who doesn't have the light of Jesus?
What if Jesus has not entered my life?***

² *Why You Think the Way You Do*, by Glenn Sunshine

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/when-did-sunday-schools-start.html>

⁴ <http://www.faithfacts.org/christ-and-the-culture/the-impact-of-christianity>

Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life." So without Jesus, I will have less soul-level satisfaction because I don't have that spiritual bread. That leads to problems, because if we don't have soul-level satisfaction, we will look for it elsewhere. Sometimes we will pursue satisfaction in destructive ways. Substance abuse, pornography and other addictions are ways to escape and to dull pain. But they only work temporarily. Afterward, they leave us in even greater pain and brokenness.

Or, we will chase fulfillment in more socially acceptable ways like money, success, fitness or popularity. These are not evil in and of themselves, but they are not enough to satisfy our souls for long. So eventually we find that substitutes for Jesus don't deliver as promised. The body eventually breaks down. Career success never makes us feel truly significant. Money is not a sufficient enough purpose for living.

What we need is the Bread of Life. Jesus also said, "I am the Good Shepherd" - that when we know him he will give us guidance and strength. But without him, we won't know what to do when the wheels of life come off. When we find ourselves in places we never thought we would, or face a loss so deep we're not sure how to continue -- without the Good Shepherd there's nothing there. Jesus said, "I am the truth" - the truth about God.

Without Jesus in our lives we will believe things about God that aren't true. We will believe that he doesn't exist, or we will create him in our own image instead of the other way around. Some will see evil and pain in the world and conclude that God doesn't care or he doesn't exist. But that is not true. God is not remote or uncaring. He came to the earth in the person of Jesus and was nailed to a cross and said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Without Jesus we won't know who God really is. Jesus said, "I am the way" - he is the way back to God. Without Jesus in our lives, we will not be able to find our way back to the home with God that we were created to enjoy. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." Without Jesus we'll stumble into sin and guilt instead of knowing his forgiveness and transformation.

Without Jesus we will get lost in the darkness of bitterness toward those who hurt us instead of living in the light of the freedom that comes from forgiving others. And Jesus said, "I am the life..." Without him, we have no life. We have no ultimate purpose. We exist for a while on the earth, pursue what we think will make us happy, then we die. And after death, our bodies will lie in the ground forever, and we'll enter the ultimate coldness of death, forever separated from the God who loves and created us.

But it doesn't have to be this way! Jesus *has* come! His light is available! *[Jesus] said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

The Viet Nam war was raging when on June 8, 1972, 9 year-old Kim Phuc ran out from the temple in her village in South Vietnam. She saw an airplane getting lower and then four bombs falling down. They were napalm bombs. She saw fire everywhere around her. Then she saw the fire cover her body, especially her left arm. Her clothes were completely burned off by fire. She started running. She was 9 years old but she still remembers her thoughts at that moment: "I would be ugly and people would treat me in a different way." A war photographer took a picture of Kim and others running down the road. The picture became one of the most famous pictures in US history and won the Pulitzer Prize.

[Pic: <http://www.thewalleye.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/kimphuc.jpg>]

A soldier gave Kim some drink and poured water over her body. Then she lost consciousness. Several days after, she woke up in the hospital, where she spent 14 months and had 17 operations. When she finally went home from the hospital, she faced a very difficult time. Her family's house was destroyed by the bombing; they lost everything and survived day by day. Kim suffered from pain, itching and headaches all the time. Her long hospital stay made her dream of becoming a doctor, but the government wouldn't let her go to school. She said, "The anger inside me was like hatred as high as a mountain. I hated my life. I hated all people who were normal because I was not normal. I really wanted to die many times."

She started to spend her days in the library, and started to read a lot of religious books to find a purpose for her life. One of the books that she read was the Bible. Finally, on Christmas Day 1982, she opened her life to Jesus Christ. She asked him to forgive her and lead her life. <http://blog.ioemcnally.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/mcnallyshow-234.jpg> Kim said, "It was an amazing turning point in my life. God helped me to learn to forgive — the most difficult of all lessons. It didn't happen in a day and it wasn't easy. But I finally got it. Forgiveness made me free from hatred. I still have many scars on my body and severe pain most days but my heart is cleansed. Napalm is very powerful, but faith, forgiveness and love are much more powerful."⁵

Jesus Christ brought light to Kim Phuc's darkness. And he will do that for everyone who invites him. It doesn't matter how far someone has fallen, it doesn't matter how deep the darkness is -- Jesus' light is more powerful. ***John 1:4-5 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*** Jesus' light cannot be overcome by hatred, guilt, sin, loneliness or pain. The darkness has not overcome it!

⁵ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91964687>

Jesus' light is available to EVERYONE. *[Jesus] said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."* Crossroads exists to help others find their way back to Jesus, and then learn how to live in Jesus' light.

In **Matthew 28:19** Jesus told his followers: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."* That means: God wants to use me to reach people. It's true! That's why at the end of every service, I say, "You are sent with love and power, go make disciples." And we want to equip you to do that. In two weeks we are going to be intentional about responding to Jesus' commandment. We are going to have a special service. It's called an "Invite your one" day.

We're challenging everyone to invite someone to worship with them on Oct. 28-29. Now, we consider every week to be Bring a Friend Week here. But on this weekend we're going to make an effort to do it altogether. The content of the service will not be much different than normal. We're not going to have dancing elephants or flame throwers, or anything. We are going to worship by singing together and hearing a message based on the scripture. We're going to pray that our guests hear that Jesus loves them no matter where they have been. We'll partner with God to shine the light of Jesus in our region.

Our part is to pray and invite, or more accurately "Pray, Invite, Pray." We're going to *pray* about who God wants us to invite. Some of us immediately know exactly who that is. We have a friend or family member who needs a growing relationship with Jesus. Others of us don't know who we can invite. All our friends are already Christ-followers. We don't work around people far from God. If that is the case for you, consider who you say hello to -- the clerk where you buy gas, the receptionist, your barista... whoever. We pray for that person to be open to that invitation and be drawn to Jesus. In fact, we have a whole prayer team that is praying for the cards you have already submitted. (If you would like to be part of that prayer team, just write that on your Communicator Card.)

Then we **Invite**. We are providing an Invite card for you to give to them.

Suggestions for inviting

- **Be natural and enthusiastic**. If you are nervous, they will be too. If you are casual about the invite, they will be too. Invite them the same way you would if you were talking about going to a concert or movie together. Use the words "with me", so they know you'll be going. Tell them why you like to go. You might suggest going out to eat after the service.

- **Tell them what to expect**. Going to a church is a great unknown for some people. Let them know they can come as they are; no one will point them out as new. Tell them there will be good music by a band, and they won't be bored.

- **Expect a positive answer**. Will some of us be turned down? Sure!! And that's OK. But this might be the time they say "yes." Helen Baratta remembers saying "no" about 10 times when she was invited, but eventually she came and met

Christ, and her life is dramatically different in almost every way. Today she is joyfully serving Jesus by helping others live healthy lives.

Jesus is the light of the world, and it is our privilege to shine that light.