

A FAST Biblical Portrait: Jesus Christ

Religion NO, Relationship YES

John Kain, 2010

Jesus is God's ultimate expression of his love for us, and Jesus is also the focal point of our Christian faith. It's essential to understand why God revealed himself in this way. He did not come to earth to start a new religion. The divine Son of God, Jesus came to establish a new kind of relationship between God and humanity. His invitation to enter into a saving relationship with him is a call to intimacy with God, not a call to work our way into his favor through our performance.

Religion can be thought of as an institution (a formal organization with specific beliefs and practices) or a philosophy (a set values and attitudes that we live by). In either case, the increased scientific knowledge of our time does not reduce our spiritual interests, so religions continue to attract people who are, by nature, spiritual beings. Sometimes religions collide and result in discrimination, injustice and wars because they have become imperfect, works-oriented expressions of our spiritual needs.

Christianity as a religious institution is certainly not immune to all that can go wrong with religion. Christianity as a basic faith in the message and life of Jesus is different, though. In fact, the name *Christians* was first used after Jesus Christ had completed his ministry and left this earth (Acts 11:26). It was merely a label for those who accepted his teachings. Jesus himself did not ask anyone "Are you a Christian?" Instead he asked "do you know who I am?"

Not Constrained by Death

In describing Jesus, the Gospel of John underscores his deity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) and "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, **who came from the Father**, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). John described Jesus as the true vine (John 15:1) and the source of all spiritual fruit. We also learn that Jesus is the giver of God's Spirit to his people (John 16:7-15).

John also proclaimed that Jesus was raised from the dead (John 20:9). The risen Christ further demonstrates his divinity by bestowing the Holy Spirit on his disciples (John 20:22). He also lovingly demonstrated his care for his followers by acts of service, such as preparing a meal for them (John 21:9-12).

Jesus expressed his invitation to relationship by asking his beloved disciple Peter a straightforward question: “Do you love me” (John 21:16)? It’s a question for each of us to consider, a question that can be compared to a wedding proposal by the Almighty. Our “yes” must reflect our commitment to an intimate, lifelong relationship with God if it is to have any meaning.

Jesus Opens Minds

When the resurrected Jesus visited with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, he spoke of the Old Testament scriptures and explained how he fulfilled them during his life on earth. In Luke’s words, Jesus “opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:25). He reminded them of the things they had witnessed during their time with him, and he assured them that the Holy Spirit would empower them to make a difference in the world by proclaiming the message of the new access to God made possible by his death and resurrection.

Still today, we better understand Jesus as we mature in our understanding of Scripture, a process that God—by his Spirit—is directly involved in. He reaches out to us through his Word as we seek after the truth. At the same time, he opens our minds and hearts to that life-changing truth. And I can personally attest to that. Since 1973 when I came to understand the truth and recognize the power of God’s Word, my life has been a journey toward increased intimacy with God. It is a journey I’ve traveled with my wife Jan, many friends, my daughter Ina, and my son Michael.

This Jesus whom I love and serve is very real. He wasn’t just a great moral teacher, and he did not come to earth merely to start a new religion. He is the giver of love (from the Father) and life (through the Spirit). So I invite you to get to know him. Read the Word of God—and don’t be surprised if the Holy Spirit opens up your mind to God’s truth in a whole new way.