

Changing Our Perception Of Life To That Of Christ's

John 8:12, 31, 36 [NIV] *“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” ... “To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” ... “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

John the Baptist was the herald of Jesus Christ.

Mark 1:4-5 [NIV] *“And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.”*

John preached conversion and invited people to be immersed in the waters of the Jordan river as a symbol of the death of an old way of life and the start of a new.

The basic meaning of the word “conversion” is “a change in one’s outlook or way of thinking, a change of mind.”

The immersion in the Jordan was only an outward sign of this inner change.

The Jews of John’s time were longing for the coming of the prophesised Messiah who they believed would be a political and military leader, who would free them from the domination of the Romans.

John’s message was calling for a change of perspective [vision].

The Jews wanted a lion but God was going to provide a lamb whose blood would save them from their confessed sins.

It is so hard for us to let another be different from our beliefs, not honouring our values, or not fight for our causes.

John’s call was to let God be God and save them in his way and in his time.

Isaiah 55:7-9 [NIV] *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

John was calling people to look at things in a different way, a different perspective.

John 1:14-18 [NIV] *“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 testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.”*

John pointed the people towards Jesus Christ who would bring about this different perspective to salvation, not through the law but by grace.

John 1:26-30 [NIV] *"I baptise with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptising. The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'"*

John then introduced his disciples to Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

Jesus from this time spent the greater part of His life, His final three years, teaching the twelve disciples He had chosen.

Jesus' master vision would be gradually laid out before these disciples by His personal example and teaching.

For example Jesus' teaching as recorded in what is known as "*the beatitudes*", challenged the old perceptions and attitudes of His disciples.

Matthew 5:1-10 [NIV] *"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

Jesus was saying that what they considered would make the blessed [happy and fulfilled] life were empty illusions.

Luke 6:27-38 [NIV] *"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners', expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

Often Jesus' teaching seemed to make impossible demands.

The ultimate challenge Jesus was giving His disciples, and us, is to give up an old perception and to accept a new one.

A matter of radical faith and profound trust in His teaching.

Jesus' teaching shattered the disciples' worldly hopes and sought to restructure their self-centred dreams.

The disciples did **not** show notable eagerness to change their perception of happiness.

The disciples' "*own beatitudes*" did not include loving your enemies or giving away your material possessions, walking the un-demanded miles or turning the other cheek.

Even at the time of Jesus' death there was **no** sign of His disciples changing their minds and accepting Jesus' new perception [vision] of life.

The resurrection of Jesus did bring an attitude of reflection to the disciples' minds.

Luke 24:36-43 [NIV] *"While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence."*

The disciples must have been deeply moved by this faithful act of love on the part of Jesus. The disciples had all "walked out" on Jesus and here He was "walking after" them.

It may well have been this act of recrimination free kindness began to break down the barriers of the disciples' resistance to a change of perception.

Luke 24:45 [NIV] *"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."*

The disciples' minds were beginning to be opened to new perceptions and new visions.

John 14:27 [NIV] *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

When we accept the vision of life that Jesus presented to the first disciples, we will begin to experience the legacy of Jesus. A peace that the world can never give nor the human mind even fathom.

We do this by breaking the strong shackles of a self-centred, self-protecting, self-seeking perception of life.

Why are we so like the early life of the disciples, so reluctant to give up our old way of seeing things in order to take as our own the new perception of life that Jesus taught?

I feel the biggest barrier is that we are **not** sure what will happen to us if we give up the vision of life we are so comfortable with.

Where would Jesus lead us?

What would Jesus ask of us?

There is something very possessive about what we call our "comfort zone".

It is so difficult for us to give up our own plans, dreams, and formula for happiness.

It is so difficult to get out of the driver's seat and offer it to Jesus Christ.

It takes so much faith to leave our comfort zone and journey into the unknown.

What will bring about this radical change of our perceptions of life?

Taking on Christ's vision, His perception of reality, is a faith experience and consequently the work of grace.

Galatians 5:22-23 [King James] *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."*

Faith or faithfulness is a fruit of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

All of these “*fruits*” are the result of a prolonged and intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus has sent to continue the work He began when personally on earth as the “*Son of Man*” but now fulfilling His role as our High Priest, on the throne of grace.

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

Only God can make a person a believer, and only by believing in Jesus can we take on this vision.

Faith is **not** and never has been a matter of intelligence or logical ability.

Faith is rather for the open-minded person, the brave-hearted, those who are willing to wager everything on Jesus Christ.

God’s Word and the promises He makes through Jesus Christ only becomes real to us when God touches us by His Grace [undeserved forgiveness of our sins].

Matthew 16:13-17 [NIV] *“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”*

Jesus was quick to congratulate Peter for this new perception that acknowledged who Jesus was, not for Peter’s own intuition but rather that he was blessed by God giving him this new vision.

Our new perception of life is not a matter of intelligence but rather an experience of God’s Grace.

John 6:44 [NIV] *“No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

The initiative is always with God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 [NIV] *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no-one can boast.”*

Not our effort but a gift from God.

There is a second and critical realisation we need to understand about this change of vision to that of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God brought by Jesus that we accept in faith must be presented accurately, not misrepresented to the prospective believer.

If the Good News from God brought to all humanity is misrepresented as a burdensome, frightening and dehumanising message, God cannot confirm this message with grace and faith.

When the Word of God is truly and faithfully presented it should sound like good news to the hearer.

The Word of God is basically an act of love for us by the great and loving God.

1 John 4:13-18 [NIV] *“We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

Why do we seem to have difficulty in accepting this unconditional love of God?

We dwell excessively on ourselves and on our mistakes.

We keep asking, ‘Who am I that God should love me?’

Instead we should be asking ‘Who are you O my God, that you love me so much?’

God accepts that we are human and will make mistakes, for that is a human condition.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

God desires to love us out of our selfishness and into the fullness of life.

Matthew 9:12 [NIV] *“On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”*

Jesus is the Great Divine Physician.

John 10:11 [NIV] *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”*

Jesus is the Good Shepherd to us His sheep.

John 15:13-16 [NIV] *“Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”*

Jesus is our best friend.

Luke 15:11-24 [NIV] *“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything. “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’” So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” So they began to celebrate.”*

In this parable Jesus shows us how God feels about us when we have left Him in pursuit of our own dreams and plans, confident in our own perceptions [visions] of the formula for happiness and fulfilment in life.

This parable depicts God's patient love and goodness.

This love of God doesn't really care where we have been or what we have done, it is only joyful that we have at last accepted His perception of life, and accepted His loving embrace.

Matthew 11:28-30 [NIV] *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

This is the true vision of the message that Jesus Christ brought to this sad and pain-filled world.

To the extent we truly understand and live the perception [vision] of life that Jesus taught, we will be that much more free to live, to love, to mature and to experience the fullness of life that Jesus holds out to us.