

The Influential Christ: His Individual Integrity

In high school, I loved playing songs by / B. J. Thomas on my 8-track player, songs like *Hooked on a Feeling*, *Just Can't Help Believing* and *Hey Won't You Play Another Somebody Done Somebody Wrong Song*. But the song that made Thomas famous was the theme song from the movie / “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,” *Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head*. I really got excited when I heard B. J. Thomas had become a Christian and began writing songs that expressed his new faith in Jesus. He soon came out with a Christian album, / “Home Where I Belong.” As much as I loved his previous songs, these new songs had a great impact on me, especially a song titled, *I Want to be more like Jesus*. The lyrics go like this. / *What kind of man would wash men's feet, get pushed around, then turn the other cheek. I want to be more like Him. So little time, he took for himself, he was more concerned for everybody else. I want to be more like Him. / As tears of pain, fell from His eyes, he prayed for those who had him crucified. I want to be more like Him I want to be more like Jesus, that's why I've put my life in His hands. I want to be more like Jesus and with His help I know that I can*

/ That song surely expressed the feelings of a lot of people in Jesus' time. Something about Jesus attracted people. / He walked up to two lowly fishermen and said “Follow me,” immediately they left their nets and followed

Jesus, eventually to their death. / One of the most revered rabbis in Jerusalem is so attracted to Jesus that, under cover of darkness and with no small risk to his reputation, Nicodemus sneaked over to where Jesus is staying to hear what he has to say. What he heard impressed him so much that later he is willing to be seen with Jesus in broad daylight as Jesus hung in shame on the cross. / An adulterous Samaritan woman had an uneasy conversation with Jesus as she heard Jesus itemize her every sin, but instead of running away she runs to town bring her friends saying “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did.”

/What was it about Jesus that attracted /poor beggars and / rich rulers, / pious priests and / streetwise sinners, / religious rabbis and / detestable tax collectors? I know some just came / for the circus. There was often a circus atmosphere around Jesus. I can hear the ring master barking, / “Step right up; see how he makes the lame to walk, the dumb to talk, watch him turn water to wine, cast demons out of swine and, if you’re lucky, maybe he’ll raise someone from the dead!” Many came not for Jesus, just the Jesus Show. I’m not talking about those people. / I’m talking about those who left every-thing to follow him, who risked their reputations, who bet their lives on him, those who decided to believe in him. What was it that led people to say over and over, “I want to be more like him.” There are many qualities

we might mention. I want to start with this; Jesus attracted people with his / integrity.

The word / integrity is not in the Bible. But there are words that mean much the same words like / alethinos, which means / what is true, genuine, certain, with no pretense. Jesus was alethinos. Socrates once said, / *The first key to greatness is to be in reality what we appear to be.* / That's Jesus. He was the same inside and out. The word / "true" comes from the Old English word / "dru" which means / tree. I suppose the idea was a tree was strong, stable, certain, / something you could lean on, that wouldn't collapse under your weight. I think that's what people sensed about Jesus. You could trust him. He wasn't phony. He had no hidden agenda. His heart, his words and his actions were one. There's something attractive about a person who you can lean on, who is not going to collapse under the weight of who you are.

That isn't to say people were always / comfortable with Jesus; they certainly were not. How could they be? Jesus spoke the truth and truth is rarely easy to hear. / Occasionally I go to my physician for a check up. He looks at me and then tells me the truth. I hope to hear him tell me I'm fine. I would like to hear him say, "My what a magnificent specimen." There are several things I do not want to hear him say. But good or bad, I want to hear

the truth; I need to hear the truth. He does me no favors telling me I'm fine if I'm not. The great physician is no different. Jesus tells us what we need to hear, the truth. Things like, */ I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. / You have heard that it was said 'You shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. / You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* *But I tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. / I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. / No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? / So, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. / I could go on, but you get the point.*

Here's an idea. */ Next dinner party you go to try saying a few things like that and see what happens. How attractive do you think you will be?*

Next time you're / watching a movie with friends and there are scenes you know you shouldn't be seeing, how will your friends respond if you say, "I don't think we need to see this." / Next time you're trash talking the politician you love to hate, blaming him for all the country's woes, what if you said, / "Hey, lets take a moment and pray for our leaders." How would that go?

/ Do you feel uncomfortable telling people how they ought to live? Probably, because we don't have enough integrity to do that. We feel hypocritical demanding of others what we have trouble with ourselves. I get angry at people. I've called people fools. I've had my share of lustful thoughts. I'm not great at loving my enemies. I enjoy far more luxuries than I need. I live blissfully unaware of the needs of the least of these around me. If someone struck me on the right cheek, my reaction would not be to turn the other cheek; I'd much rather slap the tar out of the guy. It's hard to talk the talk when we so often stumble walking the walk.

Here is what is so amazing about Jesus. / He didn't just tell people what they wanted to hear. He told them what they needed to hear. Even more amazing was how people responded. / Sinners crowded around him. / A harlot washed his feet with her tears. / A tax collector gives back with interest the money he stole from the poor. / A thief hanging on a cross turns

and asks Jesus to remember him in Paradise. / Crowds were amazed because Jesus taught as one who had authority, because he was real, true; he had integrity. People can smell a phony a mile away. Jesus was no phony. / He told people the truth. But he told them the whole truth. More than just letting them know the laws they had broken, he also told the truth / about God who gave those laws, that God is more than a law giver, he is also a father who loves his son even when his son has run away from home and thrown away his life. He is a God who loves people like shepherds love sheep, leaving the 99 who are safe to find the one who is lost. Jesus did more than tell how God felt about them, he showed them. Once on a hill overlooking the city of Jerusalem, the disciples saw in Jesus the heart of God expressed in a heart-breaking prayer. / *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.*

Integrity drew people to Jesus. / He didn't just live the way he told people to live, he loved the people he told to live that way. When he saw people disobeying God's law he wasn't just upset they were breaking the law, he was upset the law was breaking them. When someone chose to lie instead of tell the truth, Jesus wasn't just upset that God's law was broken

but also because the life that dishonors truth will be broken. When someone was immoral with another, it is not just the violation and disregard of God's law that grieved Jesus; it's the violation and disregard for oneself and one's partner in the immorality. The difference between Christ's integrity and ours is that / Christ's integrity was perfect, without compromise; you could trust it. Jesus loved God's law passionately and loved God's people with equal passion. / Our integrity... not so much, and thus not so reliable.

We tend to choose law or people. Some of us are concerned about the law. We stand on the hill / overlooking Lubbock, (well maybe the Loop), but we don't weep. We may yell, we may complain, we may criticize, but we don't weep. "Look at those people. Look at all the rules they break." Our faces may be red but not from crying. We have little concern for the people. / We have much concern for law but little concern for law- breakers. But that's not really the law we love; the law instructs us to love our neighbors, even neighbors who break the law. If we say we love God's law but have no love for those who break his law, then we really don't love God or law at all. The way to love God is to love others. Sinners were attracted to Jesus because they knew his love for them was no less than his love for the Law.

/ Others of us aren't that concerned about God's Law, we just want to get along with people. We don't want to bring up much God stuff. It might upset people. Besides, if we start acting like God is important to us, they might look at our life and start asking embarrassing questions, pointing out the hypocrisy between what we say and what we do. So, we just love people and don't worry too much about telling people how to live. But a love for people that doesn't tell people about God's law isn't really love at all; its really selfishness and fear. We fear if we speak truth and live truth people might reject us. So we selfishly cling to being accepted even if it means someone will not hear a truth that might save his life. We're like the doctor who says, "I probably should tell him he has cancer, but it will upset him. I'll just let it be, perhaps it will go away."

/ Jesus had integrity; his life and words were consistent with God's truth, all the truth, the truth of his laws and demands and the truth of his love and mercy. We lack that kind of integrity. Our life message is not nearly so consistent. We struggle to love truth and love people. We wrestle with integrity because we're sinners and until Jesus comes we always will be.

But while we will never in this life reach Christ's level of integrity, that does not mean / we should not submit our lives to the transforming influence of Christ and continuously strive for greater integrity. For us

integrity cannot mean being as perfect as Christ in how we live and love, but constantly and honestly measuring our life and our love by the perfection of Christ. If we are Christians more concerned about obeying law than loving lawbreakers, then we need to hear the Christ's word, / *Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.* If we are Christians who love people but are unwilling to share with people God's word about how to live, then we need to hear Christ's word, / *Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.* Jesus had integrity. He was real. We'll never have integrity like Christ, but / if people see that we love Christ, then by God's grace, people will see the shadow of Christ's integrity on us, and be drawn to Christ through us, even as people were drawn to Christ in his day. / Then we will begin to have the influence of Christ in our life. So as disciples of Christ today, let us say with disciples who followed Christ in his day, "I want to be more like him."