

Simplify

message preached by Dan Farm
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A man at a major airport was worried about missing his plane. He had no wristwatch and could not locate a clock, so he hurried up to a total stranger and said, Excuse me; could you give me the time please?

The stranger smiled and said, Sure.

He sat down the two large suitcases he was carrying and looked at the watch on his wrist.

He replied . % is exactly 5:09. The temperature outside is 73 degrees, and it is supposed to rain tonight. In London the sky is clear and the temperature is 38 degrees Celsius. The barometer reading is 29.14 and falling. And, let's see, in Singapore the sun is shining brightly. Oh, by the way, the moon should be full tonight here, andõ +

Your watch tells you all that? the man interrupted.

You see, I invented this watch, and I can assure you there's no other timepiece like it in the world.

I want to buy that watch! I'll pay you two thousand dollars for it right now.

No, it's not for sale, said the stranger as he reached down to pick up his suitcases.

Wait! Four thousand. I'll pay you four thousand dollars cash, offered the man, reaching for his wallet.

No, I can't sell it. You see, I plan to give it to my son for his twenty-first birthday. I invented it for him to enjoy.

Okay, listen. I'll give you ten thousand dollars. I've got the money right here.

The stranger paused.

Ten thousand? Well, OK. It's yours for ten thousand even.

ted. He paid the stranger, took the watch, snapped it on his wrist with glee, and said Thanks as he turned to leave.

Wait, said the stranger. With a big smile he handed the two heavy suitcases to the man and added, Don't forget the batteries.

(Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*. Pg. 519)

Heading into the New Year we want to be very careful we don't bring too much baggage.

We don't want to make it complicated. Let's keep it simple. Let's be clear about the simple things we already have that we are bringing into 2011. Let's simplify our lives.

The most important thing we bring is the certainty of our faith.

“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?”

y I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You

are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16: 13-16)

Jesus begins by asking the disciples who people think He is.

There was a lot of confusion about who Jesus was. Oh, there were huge crowds following Him and clamoring for his attention.

Jesus was certainly a teacher who commanded a large and growing following. He was able to perform miracles and so for many He was the greatest show in town.

The religious leaders of the ancient world were following Him, but for them it was because they were angry and frustrated at the attention Jesusqteaching was getting.

They saw Him as a threat to their religious status quo.

people was clear in the answer the disciples gave. Some say John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

Why these? The ancient world viewed Jesus as one of the great figures of the near or distant past, ~~re~~incarnated or come back to life.

Some thought He was John the Baptist risen from the dead while others called Him Elijah, whom the Jews awaited as a forerunner of the Messiah.

Still others saw Him as a reincarnation of Jeremiah, the great preacher of repentance and prophet of judgment. Others simply saw Him as one of the hundreds of contemporary prophets.

The crowds were greatly impressed by Jesus' personality and miraculous power, but as powerful as He was He could not possibly be the long awaited Messiah.

They still regarded Him as nothing more than a forerunner.

What about our day? Who do people think that Jesus is?

Many have the picture of Jesus as the meek and mild shepherd gently holding little lambs in His arms.

For some Jesus is like the compassionate country doctor who always shows up in an emergency.

For yet others He is just someone who gets in the way of how we would like to live.

Too often, we have made Him a convenient god by shaping Him into the image we want.

And, if He doesn't fit our idea then we simply discard Him like used Christmas wrapping paper.

We now have a whole generation of people who are growing up outside the church, giving Jesus and religion no thought whatsoever.



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Christ followers are thought of as silly, misguided people. God and the church have become irrelevant in day-to-day life to many.

People have always tried to shape Jesus into a way that is comfortable for themselves and their ideas.

For example, a few years ago I spent some time on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota with a friend. I learned that the American Lakota Indian tribe refers to Jesus as the Buffalo Calf of God.

The Cuban government distributes a painting of Jesus with a carbine slung over His shoulder.

During the wars of religion with France, the English used to shout, "The Pope is French but Jesus Christ is English!" The English have always had an attitude! ☺

Philip Yancey in his book, "The Jesus I Never Knew" states that modern scholars further muddy the picture.

It is suggested that Jesus is a political revolutionary, a magician who married Mary Magdalene, a peasant Jewish cynic, a mystic prophet, a hippie in a world of yuppies. So much confusion.

As Jesus listens to Peter's response. He gets personal – all this is wonderful, ***but who do you say I am?***

Peter answers Him with **the words:** ***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***

Peter pronounced his faith with great certainty and strength. Peter's mind had obviously been made up about this, and the other disciples for whom he spoke no longer had any doubts either.

This is an admirable statement and we would say, Yes, Peter gave the right answer.

Maybe that is the end of the story- but wait a minute. But wait a minute.

Did Peter have this giant "Ah ha!" moment quite suddenly?

Matthew's gospel offers a few milestones in Peter's life that I would like to review for you—events that preceded and followed this confession. It is a great picture of our journey as well.

We are introduced to Peter first as he received his call from Jesus.

“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.” (Matthew 4:18-20)

The next time we see Peter in Matthew's account, it is so that he could witness a personal miracle.

“When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him,

ts with a word and healed all the sick.”

(Matthew 8:14-16)

Next, Peter's faith was tested and it didn't look good for him. The disciples were out on a boat in a storm at night when Jesus came walking towards them.

“Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.” “Lord, if it's you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

(Matthew 14:27-31)

Next, Peter shows that he is willing to learn, an important trait of discipleship.

“Then Peter said to Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that says people aren't defiled by what they eat.”

“Don't you understand yet?” Jesus asked. “Anything you eat passes through the stomach and then goes into the sewer.

**come from the heart—that's what
defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder,
adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These
are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never
defile you.”** (Matthew 15:15-20 NLT)

The next major event in Peter's life is his confession as we see it in
our text. ***You are the Messiah, the son of the Living God.*** (Matthew
16:16)

It was only after a number of encounters that Peter was able to
respond with the words of his conviction.

It is clear that many events took place to bring Peter to the point of
confession!

Every word of Peter's confession was spoken with great emphasis:

You are the Christ.

or human speculation. Jesus and the

Messiah are one and the same. He is the Christ, the focus of all
God's promises and all mankind's hopes.

Jesus was no longer an abstract thought for Peter, but the personal
confrontation prompted a personal response.

Jesus asks each of us this same question and He expects an answer.

The answer can be:

- I don't care.
- I don't know.
- You're a good teacher.
- You're a good role model.
- You're interesting.

The answers vary. However when we come to the place where we
say, **You are** who you say you are.

It is only then when our lives begin to change.

But, let's get back to Peter for a moment.

... on a lofty spiritual plain from which he
never came down?

You see, one of the great lessons for us in Peter's life is that it was a
rugged journey with lots of turns and twists.

When Jesus told the disciples that He would soon be put to death,
Peter challenged and tried to correct Him.

***“Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!”
he said. This shall never happen to you.” Jesus turned and said
to Peter, Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!
You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the
concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” (Matthew 16: 22-
23)***

Then Peter was in the select group that was to experience the
incredible transfiguration of the Lord.

***“After six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John, the
brother of James and led them up a high mountain by
themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face***

s clothes became as white as the light.” (Matthew 17:1-2)

Next there was the disappointment by Jesus in Peter at the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Could you not keep watch with me for one hour?” He asked Peter. (Matthew 26:40)

Then there was the heartbreaking denial of Jesus by Peter as Jesus was being prepared for death.

“Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.” (Matthew 26:75)

It is important for us to recount these events to show the ordinary nature of faith for ordinary people.

Peter was an ordinary man on an ordinary spiritual journey.

He was like most of us.

one and at the high points he was strong,
at the low points of his journey he was questioning.

Isn't that an encouragement to us all?

- Jesus asked the disciples
- He asked Peter
- And now, he asks us.

Who do you say that I am?

Philip Yancey says when faced with this question of Jesus:

“I am drawn to Jesus, irresistibly, because He positioned Himself as the dividing point of life—my life.” According to Jesus, what I think about Him and how I respond will determine my destiny for all eternity. Sometimes I accept Jesus’ claims without question.

Sometimes, I confess, I wonder what difference it should make to my life that a man lived two thousand years ago in a place

**ve this inner tension between doubter
and lover?**

(Yancey, Philip; *The Jesus I Never Knew*, pg.17)

The remarkable truth of the gospel is that even with all our knowledge and all our research and all our questioning, the decision is always thrown back to us.

Jesus says: Examine me! Test me! You decide!

However, the important question is still the one that Jesus asks us today! Who am I?

- Do you understand that I am the source of truth and life?
- Do you comprehend that without me you can not know God?
- Do you understand that I came to give you freedom from all that this world puts on you?
- Do you see that I offer release and freedom for you? My desire, says Jesus is to have you wake up.

N.T Wright in his book - *Simply Christian* states:



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wake up.

In my family, we all wake up differently.

For William, waking up is a rude and shocking experience. Off goes the alarm; and he jumps in fright, dragged out of a deep sleep to face the cold, cruel light of day.

For Claire, it's a quiet, slow process. She can be half-asleep and half-awake, not even sure which is which, until gradually, eventually, without any shock or resentment, she stops hitting the sleep button and is happy to know that another day has begun.

I hear my alarm, jump out of the bed like Tigger from Winnie the Pooh and am ready for the day, much to the dismay of my half asleep wife.

Most of us know something of these three approaches, and a lot in between.

most basic pictures of what can happen
when God takes a hand in someone's life.

There are classic alarm-clock stories.

Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, blinded by a sudden light,
stunned and speechless, discovered that the God he had worshipped
had revealed Himself in the crucified and risen Jesus.

And yet some people take months, years, maybe even decades,
during which they aren't sure whether they're on the outside of
Christian faith looking in, or on the inside looking around to see if it's
real.

The point is that there is such a thing as being asleep, and there is
such a thing as being awake.

And it's important to tell the difference, and to be sure you're awake
by the time you have to be up and ready for action, whatever the
action may be.



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...ory is the question that Jesus asks and

our response to it.

The %not simple+piece is the living out of that changed life because it doesn't follow the script we have in our minds.

Adrian Plass in his book *Jesus: Safe, Tender, Extreme* says:

- We learn very quickly, and we learn very slowly.
- We find great encouragement, and we sink to the lowest place that it is possible to be.
- God seems to be absent; God appears to be gloriously present.
- Mist clears, mist forms.
- We believe with all our hearts, we doubt everything.
- He makes us laugh, He makes us cry.
- Terrifyingly He will ask us to talk to people in the supermarket checkout; frustratingly, He tells us to keep quiet in the office.
- He gives us rewards, He disciplines us.
- He whispers sweet words to us at the worst times.



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things that constitute the lifeblood of living with Jesus.

This is the richness of a simple but not simplistic life with God.

My friends, may we simplify and enter the New Year with the assurance of a simple faith in Jesus that was modeled by an ordinary man in his disciple Peter.

As we close the chapter of 2010 and open the pages of 2011, I have a simple question for you

How will you answer the question . *Who do you say I am?*

May we say with confidence . *You are the Christ, my savior, my leader and my hope!*

And with the Spirit's power and guidance, may we live a life of consistency to the truth of that victory cry.