

# PLAIN TRUTH<sup>®</sup>

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION<sup>®</sup>

## What Do You Expect From Jesus?



By Greg Albrecht

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**“Save us NOW—not tomorrow—Give us what we want NOW!”**

The citizens of Jerusalem suffered under the brutal oppression of the occupying armies of Rome. They desperately wanted one of their own to rise up and defeat the Romans, giving them political freedom and peace. There’s nothing wrong with welcoming Jesus with shouts of “Hosanna—save

us now,” but we must ask ourselves what the crowds really meant when they welcomed him in such a way.

The crowds welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday as the king they so desperately hoped for and desired ...but in a few days, when Pilate asked another crowd in Jerusalem to choose to give freedom to either Jesus, who was innocent and without sin, or to Barrabas, a common thief, felon and no doubt repeat offender, they chose to save Barrabas.

**On one day the crowds greeted Jesus and yelled out “Hosanna!” A few days later, because he didn’t perform in the way they expected, they yelled out “Crucify Him!”** It is truly a great irony—they begged Jesus to save them but they refused to spare him.

**Save us now** was the cry of the crowd. In a matter of a few days the crowds who prayed for Jesus to save them from the brutality of Rome

**W**hen Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a young donkey, in a customary and appropriate gesture of welcome for a king, people in the crowds spread their cloaks on the road in front of him. Throwing down one’s outer garments in the path of a king demonstrated submission to his authority, in effect this symbolic gesture said something like this: “I place myself at your feet. I bow before you, even if you must walk over me.”

Matthew, Mark and John all say that the crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem cut branches from trees and spread them on the road. John specifically says that these branches were palm branches. Waving a palm branch had a long history—in many ancient cultures the palm branch was as a part of victory celebrations. In the Jewish religion, the palm tree and the word “Hosanna” both played a role

in their Feast of Tabernacles—but that festival was in the fall, while the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was in the spring, just before the Jewish Passover.

The palm branches were most probably used by the crowds because they expected Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem as a sign of victory. But what was the nature of the victory they desired and expected from Jesus?

### Hosanna!

As Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem the crowds yelled out “Hosanna” (Matthew 21:9). *Hosanna* is a combination or contraction of two Hebrew words: *yasha* (deliver or save) and *anna* (beg or beseech). The crowds were effectively pleading “We beg you to deliver us!” and “Please deliver us!”

The intent of this prayerful cry was to **“Save Us Now.”** *Hosanna!* The crowd was saying to Jesus,



# Information Is Not Knowledge...

**W**isdom, according to the prevailing notions popular early in this 21st century, is derived from access to information and the subsequent knowledge that applies that information. But just as **information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom.**

One must wonder whether our 21st century infatuation with information is helping make us and our world a better place. Is passionate addiction to information retrieval systems and inordinate desire for electronic connection enhancing or endangering wisdom?

The Information Highway, as one former presidential candidate called the Internet, is not automatically producing more prudent and judicious citizens. Contrary to what some may assume, the Information Age is not our savior—on the other hand, it may have taken us captive. It's a familiar sight, isn't it? Hundreds of millions are dragging a ball and chain around with them—they are hunched over their devices, playing games, seeking information and even intimacy, and searching for meaning on social media.

This 21st century, flooded by a tsunami of information, is being forcibly reminded that data and information are no substitute for wisdom. Wisdom seems buried in a swamp of "alternative" facts, false equivalences, political partisanship and conspiracy theories.

The Internet provides data and hosts websites and dispenses information indiscriminately, so that the user must exercise discretion and discernment about information and data to be believed and information and data

to be discarded. Danger in many forms lurks on the worldwide web and many lack training and guidance in carefully discerning fact from fable.

The information society is now mired in "fake news." The primary use of the term "fake news" is by those who favor a specific political persuasion and propose that the news media is trying to twist and pervert reality by presenting a false reality and a biased perspective.

But in its wider usage, "fake news" seems to be information that contradicts the already established truth of the person who encounters it. ***Fake news, in some ways, seems to be whatever one does not wish to believe.*** It is foolish to ignore clear evidence, but as humans we are more comfortable with those "facts" that agree with our decisions and behavior.

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who lived from 1788 to 1860, said "every generation, no matter how paltry its character, thinks itself much wiser than the one immediately preceding it, let alone those that are more remote."

Each generation battles with its own self-serving desire to do what it believes to be right and appropriate, while failing, at some level, to respect the wisdom that can be gleaned from the past. Each generation thinks itself more clever and smart than the ones before it, but being clever and smart is not one and the same as being wise.

Sidney Smith, who was an English pastor and writer, living from 1771-1845, once said, "It is the calling of great men, not so much to preach new truths, as to rescue from oblivion those old truths which it is

our wisdom to remember and our weakness to forget."

In these early decades of the 21st century it seems that many are obsessed with dismissing those who have gone before with whom they disagree—toppling their statues, wiping away their legacy and obliterating any memory of them. It seems we are quick to judge others, but slow to realize we will ourselves be judged by the standards we use to repudiate and condemn.

Wisdom is closely related to humility and compassion—one might say that humility and compassion are the siblings (maybe even the parents) of wisdom. Moral wisdom is always founded upon humility and compassion.

On the other hand, pride and arrogance are the mortal enemies of moral wisdom—pride and arrogance are self-serving and self-absorbed. Arrogant people are generally not wise. One who does not learn does not grow, change and adapt.

Proverbs 16:18 tells us, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*" No matter how much information is gathered, and no matter how much knowledge is accrued, without God all such attempts will end in foolishness.

It is in our humility before God, our submission to him and our trusting in him with our whole heart, in grateful yielding to him, that we receive wisdom from him. □

—Greg Albrecht

*Join us for "Information is not Knowledge and Knowledge is Not Wisdom" at the audio teaching ministry of Christianity Without the Religion, the week of October 7, 2018.*



decided to save a criminal and condemn Jesus (the king who would not save them in the way they wanted) to be brutally tortured and crucified.

### From Cheers to Jeers

I often remember the illustration of something Napoleon is believed to have said. The story surrounds one of Napoleon's triumphant returns from the field of battle. As he returned home from a military victory, cheering crowds welcomed him. When Napoleon's army rode through the crowds in victorious procession one of his generals riding next to him turned to Napoleon and complimented him, imagining that Napoleon had to be gratified to hear the cheers of the crowds.

Napoleon is said to have responded with a comment something like, "Nonsense, should I fail to please the people in the very near future, these same people who are cheering me today would be the first to send me to the gallows."

**When Jesus turned out to be someone other than who people thought he should have been, then many quickly started looking for another savior.**

Welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem, many in the crowd were not merely hoping for him to go out and conquer the Romans by the sword. Some undoubtedly had heard, and perhaps even seen, the resurrection of Lazarus only a few days before. They were convinced Jesus could give physical healing from diseases.

Those people, like so many of us often do, believed what they wanted to believe about Jesus. They expected what they wanted from Jesus. What about you and me?

- Is Jesus someone we can use or someone we are invited to follow?
- Can we reduce Jesus to a catchy bumper sticker slogan that promises to give us what we want to have and achieve—and to compel others to behave as we believe they should?
- Surely we must not use the name of Jesus to justify our own



*The crowds welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday as the king they so desperately hoped for. They welcomed him because of what they thought he would give them—not for who he was and what he actually came to do. What are we looking to Jesus for?*

self-centered desires. The invitation Jesus gives us is to follow him.

Many in the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with cries of "Hosanna!" had heard of the resurrection of Lazarus, they had heard that Jesus had healed the blind, cripples and lepers—they wanted him to **save them now!** They wanted Jesus to give them relief from the oppression of Rome. They wanted Jesus to heal them of diseases and give them freedom from military and financial oppression.

### What Do You Want Jesus To Do For You?

Many in that Jerusalem crowd welcomed him because of what they thought he would give them—not for who he was and what he actually came to do. What are we looking to Jesus for?

- Many people in that crowd:
- Didn't want Jesus to be humble—they wanted him to be brash and offensive.
  - Didn't want Jesus to take away their religion—they wanted to keep all of their cherished religious traditions and commandments.
  - Didn't want Jesus to be vulnerable—they wanted him to be aggressive and powerful.

- They didn't want to hear about Jesus dying—they wanted to hear about Jesus conquering.

- They didn't want to hear about God's love and forgiveness—they wanted to hear about vindication. They wanted the Romans to "get theirs"—they definitely did not want the Romans to be forgiven.

- They didn't want to hear about accepting hostility and violence and turning the other cheek—they wanted Jesus to crucify their enemies.

- They didn't want Jesus to be who he was—they didn't want his kingdom or his gospel—**they wanted Jesus to be who and what they wanted him to be.** They wanted him to leave their religion, customs and traditions alone. They wanted what they wanted out of Jesus.

There's an incredible scene in the movie "Gandhi" that I shall never forget. Even if you did not see the movie you no doubt recall that Gandhi was the heroic Indian leader who proclaimed and exemplified non-violence as a response to the brutality and oppression of the British who occupied and controlled India, using the land and its resources to fuel its expanding empire.



In a biblical sense, in terms of the teachings of Jesus, we might say that Gandhi, while not a Christian, exemplified the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in turning the other cheek, not responding in kind to violence, and ending the cycle of violence by not responding to it.

The scene I have in mind from the movie "Gandhi" is when the British and their Indian hirelings came to break up a demonstration being led by Gandhi. The British military arrived with soldiers, trucks, guns and ammunition. The Indian resisters, led by Gandhi, had nothing with which to defend themselves—in fact they were a group composed primarily of older men and women.

The British ordered Gandhi's peaceful demonstration to disperse. They were told that if they wouldn't move, they would be moved by force. Gandhi told his followers to stand firm, and not to respond to the threat of violence with violence.

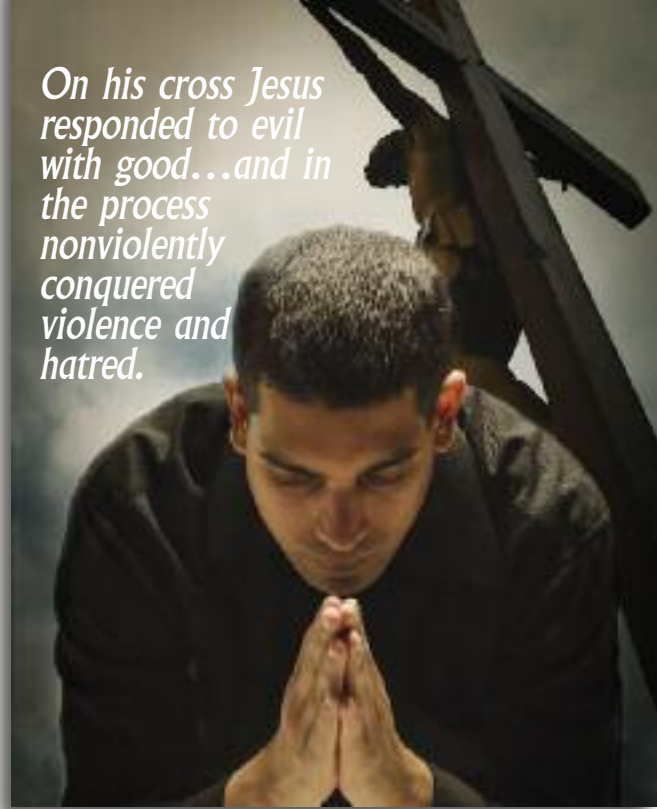
Then the brutality started. The young and strong soldiers advanced on the demonstrators, who had no weapons and were older and weaker by comparison with the soldiers. All day and all night the bloodshed continued—the resisters received the beatings but they did not strike back.

The movie depicts an English reporter watching this savagery, and then sending his report back to the British Isles. He said, "This day the British Empire has lost any claim to moral justification. Without firing a shot, the Empire was defeated and dismantled, non-violently."

### The Significance of the Cross

Jesus went to his cross, as the Lamb of God—he went to demonstrate the love of God, he went to accept all of

*On his cross Jesus responded to evil with good...and in the process nonviolently conquered violence and hatred.*



our hostility, all the hatred and rage of humanity. On his cross Jesus responded to evil with good, and without responding in kind, ended the cycle of eye-for-an-eye retaliation and in the process non-violently conquered barbarism and hatred.

Of course, no one who witnessed the death of Jesus on his cross thought it was a victory. It didn't seem like salvation. It seemed like a defeat—it seemed like utter and total humiliation. **But let's take a trip in a time machine back to the cross of Christ**, and with the very mind of Christ, report on the meaning of the cross.

What would a reporter in whom Jesus lived his risen life say, reporting from the foot of the cross? The bulletin would be something like that of the English correspondent after witnessing the non-violent response of the followers of Gandhi as they were repeatedly beaten, yet without retaliation.

A Christ-centered reporter would announce, at the foot of the cross, "Today, without raising his hand to respond to his brutal beating, torture and humiliating death on his cross, Jesus of Nazareth single-handedly defeated the kingdoms of this world." □

*"I'm still a rookie second officer but even I know it's not supposed to happen like this."*

*"The captain called 'Before Landing Check.' That's normal. The first officer and I moved the appropriate switches, levers and buttons, and chanted the usual incantations. That's normal. The trusty old Boeing 727 responded with its arcane dialect of flashing lights and flickering needles. That's normal. And the all-important landing gear panel is now showing three green lights assuring us that the wheels are locked down. That's normal. But the landing gear control panel is also glowering at us with a trio of red lights, telling us that the green lights are not to be trusted. That's not normal."*

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# Religion or Love?

By Greg Albrecht

Excerpted from *Unplugging from Religion...Connecting With God*



**H**ave you ever wondered why many people who identify themselves as Christians can be some of the most obnoxious people you will ever meet? Why is it that most non-Christians think of all Christians as opinionated, judgmental and critical? What about John 13:34-35? *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

How will you know if you live next door to a Christian? How will you know if you work with one? What's your first clue? Will it be how persistently they attempt to convince you that you aren't good enough, and that you will never measure up until you allow them to evangelize you into their particular denominational name brand of Christianity?

Will you know someone is a Christian if they can outclass you with clever arguments, or impress you with their knowledge of the Bible by quoting proof-texts at machine gun-like speed?

Will you be convinced of someone's Christianity when they make dogmatic predictions about the future, speak in tongues or invite you to a healing crusade? Is the sign of Christianity the constant condemnation of those who don't belong to the right religious club? Is patronizing name-calling the sign of

God's love, epithets such as "pagans," "the unsaved" and the ever popular "the world"—the one that God loves and Jesus died for? Is the sign of Christianity hostility to those who don't march to some denominationally-composed drumbeat?

It's religion that masquerades as Christianity that puts up highway billboards that supposedly pass on messages from God—messages like "Don't make me come down there." That's fear religion misrepresenting God. I don't think God is amused with such scare tactics. I believe he looks at this manipulative message and says, "I already came down there. Haven't you folks read the gospel? Don't you know it's good news?"

It's religion, not love, when a congregation, denomination or movement convinces its followers that they can be spiritually validated by taking its pills and potions. It's religion, not love, when human performance is placed at the center of our relationship to God. Jesus is the center of God's love—human performance is the center of religion.

It's religion that convinces its slaves to perpetually try to vindicate themselves by human deeds. It's religion that turns its captives into mean-spirited, judgment-dispensing religious drones, attempting to make everyone else in the world just as miserable as themselves.

God's love, when we accept it, lifts us out of the bondage of the religious salt mine, and transforms us from miserable critics of the world at large into Christ-followers, who reflect his love to a sick and dying world.

God's love convicts us that we are in no position to condemn others, but merely to gratefully accept his grace, and as he chooses to use us, to allow him to shine his light to others through us.

*Unplugging from religion* means unplugging from the judgment and condemnation which is part and parcel of the religious game—a determination we inevitably make about others who fail to measure up to the same standards that religion has us slavishly attempting to meet.

*Connecting with God* comes after we lose our religion, unplugging from its control, by his grace, and allowing God to free us from all of its devices and contrivances.

*Connecting with God* means to live in Christ, to live with Christ as the center of our lives. *Connecting with God* means that our life flows out of him and from him.

When we are connected with God we are Christ-centered. When we are connected with God we exist, we live and we have our being in him and because of him. □

Excerpted from pages 80-82 of *Unplugging from Religion...Connecting With God*, by Greg Albrecht. *Unplugging from Religion...Connecting With God* is available at [www.ptm.org](http://www.ptm.org).



# Bricks or Stones?

By Michael Peterson

**A**s you look around any college campus you will see many bricks—a wonderful building material in construction and architecture. However, bricks are also a metaphor for uniformity and lack of individuality.

Bricks are made in a mold, and heated to create an identical building material that lacks individuality. Bricks are symbolic of pressure, systems and structures that conform individuals to specific behaviors, ideologies and perspectives.

Common Core programs in schools, government over-regulation, media bias, religious dogmas, and politically correct standards are forces that can mold and conform us into bricks.

Faced with these forces and pressures that seem to be the accepted social norms, we can stop thinking, stop questioning, stop reasoning and stop trying. We risk becoming what others want us to be, think and believe, rather than what we are designed to be, and know to be right and true.

When individuals are viewed merely as bricks, they are reduced from their unique characteristics into a mass set of units where each person loses their individuality and exists only in the way a brick exists in a big brick wall.

Bricks are individually insignificant—part of the whole, as determined by those who form the bricks for their own purpose.

## Stones by Way of Contrast

Stones are all unique. No stone is exactly like any other stone. They vary in color, hardness, luster, shine, clarity, tone, hue, durability, shape, symmetry, weight and quality.

Each of us is unique, having specific talents, gifts, abilities, qualities, skills and characteristics. Your parents gave you a specific genetic make-up—so that how you live your life, the choices you make, the characteristics and character you develop, and the skills you practice make you different and unique from everybody else. Your uniqueness defines the type of stone you are, and will be.

Albeit you may have gone through a similar experience as others, your life is not predetermined, nor is it going to be equal to those around you today. Likewise, stones are not equal, nor are they all used in the same way.

To bring out the best in a stone requires cutting, grinding, friction and polishing. Turquoise, moonstone, rubies, onyx, lapis or amethyst are not that valuable or attractive in their raw form.

A Lapidary, or Stone Cutter, takes the raw stone and all its uniqueness and grinds it, forms it, and polishes it to bring out the best in that individual stone.

Each cut is part of a process of designing the stone to be what it is intended to be. Each stone is polished to highlight its uniqueness so that when light shines upon it, it becomes a thing of beauty and glory.

In contrast, bricks are predetermined to be a certain size, shape, and color—created in a mass structured system with no variation or differences. Bricks reflect no light, nor offer any individual beauty, adornment or unique value.

## Resist the Brick; Become A Stone!

In the Old Testament God wanted altars to be made of stone, not brick. Nimrod wanted to make bricks, and built the Tower of Babel out of brick. A Nimrodian system that hunts and pressures people to conform into bricks is the antithesis of Jesus. God does not want human bricks.

I think Christ sees us all as precious gemstones, and as the master stonemason Christ is working with and in each of us to radiate his glorious light in our own unique way.

We are not being conformed into bricks—that is what religion does, and what the world wants. But, we are all radiating the same Light.

As we live, Christ is shaping us, honing us, grinding us, and polishing us to be a uniquely wonderful and radiating reflection of God's love and glory.

Let Christ work and radiate in you so you can be the beautiful and precious stone you were always meant to be. □

*Michael Peterson has worked in higher education for 30 years, and encourages his students to think and pursue the truth.*



## Broken Bridge

*Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).*

Imagine tucking your baby daughter in a blanket, placing her in a basket and abandoning her at a bustling district of the city. The basket would obviously be discovered, officials would be contacted, and the child would be taken to join the multitude of other infants housed in a crowded orphanage.

On the surface it seems to be utterly inhumane. Indeed, what could possibly motivate a young mother to do this?

She was married with another daughter who would have been delighted to spoil a little sister. How could she do it? I'm reminded of a healthy newborn baby boy recently discovered by a worker in a restroom at the Tucson International Airport. Washed and wrapped, the tiny infant carried with him a message:

*Please help me. My mom had no idea she was pregnant. She is unable and unfit to take care of me. Please get me to the authorities so they can find me a good home.*

The infant girl left in a basket also carried with her a note—a note written more than twenty years earlier and some seven thousand miles from Tucson. In this case, the mother, Qian Fenxiang, was neither unable nor unfit.

She was living in Hangzhou, China at a time when the government was strictly enforcing its one-child per family rule. She and her husband, Xu Lida, were caught in a bureaucratic quagmire, the local officials threatening to tear down their house—and worse—if she refused to have an abortion.

But she couldn't do it. Instead she and Xu fled to the Suzhou canal, some eighty miles away, and there on a watercraft she gave birth to her baby. We can only imagine the heartbreak of her holding their darling little girl to her breast, knowing she cannot keep her.

It wasn't as though the couple didn't try

to find her a home. They pleaded with relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers and anyone else who might take her as their own. But there were too many unwanted babies at the time, and who would take a girl if a boy might be available?

There were no other options. Their baby would go to an orphanage. And it was Xu, not Qian, who left the basket near a busy intersection. We can picture that grief-stricken mother at home weeping, consoled only by her other daughter who could not comprehend her mother's anguish.

But hidden under the infant was a note explaining how they were forced to give up their baby whom they dearly loved. Their deepest desire was that she would find a loving home.

And then, in what seemed like an odd request, they asked to meet their daughter in ten or in twenty years on the famed Broken Bridge over West Lake in Hangzhou. Ten years to the day they wait at the bridge. No news. They return home heavy hearted.

But then there is a stunning development. A local TV station reports that a "scout," frantic to find a baby's birth parents, had been delayed and had asked a film crew working on a project at the bridge for help. The story goes viral.

In the following months the birth parents would make contact with the adoptive parents, but it would be years before Kati Pohler, living in Michigan, would learn that Qian and Xu wanted to see her.

Soon Kati and her birth parents are writing to each other and Skyping and making plans to be together.

Just imagine that meeting. Here's a beautiful grown-up daughter last seen in person a million tears ago in a basket with a note. Television crews were there, this time to film *the rest of the story*—a story of tender mercies on Broken Bridge.

More than that, a story of hearts broken no more. □

—Ruth Tucker





## Quotes & Connections



"I preach to you that the base of all literature, of all poetry, of all theology, is one and stands on one rock: The very highest Universal Truth is something so simple a child may understand it. This surely was in Jesus' mind when he said, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'" —Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, (*On the Art of Reading*, 1953). Couch, who lived from 1863-1944, was a Professor of Literature at Cambridge.

"Sadly, a focus on the wrath and damnation that God is supposed to wreak on the godless has spread among many Christians. This is a direct contradiction to the love of God, which the New Testament so clearly teaches." —Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (*Everyone Belongs to God*, Page 43)

"When we demand justice, it is always justice on our behalf against other people. Nobody, I imagine, would ever ask for justice to be done upon him for everything he ever did wrong. We do not want justice—we want revenge; and that is why, when justice is done to us we cry out that God is vindictive." —Dorothy L. Sayers

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