

The Jesus You Can't Ignore | John MacArthur

Reviewed by Max Frazier in the August 2010 Philogian

When I mention the name Jesus, what words come to your mind? I mean, how would you describe Him to someone who did not know who He was? Jesus was love. He was mercy. He was grace. He was truth. You might say that He was life. He was meek and mild – those seem to be the most famous descriptive terms. Yes, Jesus was a lot of things to a lot of people. But there are two words that you probably would never associate with Jesus – deliberately confrontational. Jesus would never do that – right? Wrong! Jesus did it and quite often, especially with those religious leaders known as Pharisees.

In his most recent book, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008), John MacArthur takes the reader through the four gospel accounts, focusing upon the relationship Jesus had with those who opposed Him. According to the author, Jesus would have a very difficult time espousing to today's emphasis on acceptance. He writes: "To review, then, here are the new rules of post-evangelical engagement: All our differences over biblical and theological matters are supposed to remain blithely congenial and complacently detached from any sort of passion in a purely academic-style exchange of ideas and opinions. Truth isn't our primary goal. (How naïve that would be!) We don't even need to be seeking consensus, much less biblical orthodoxy. After all, diversity is one of the few virtues postmodern culture has achieved, and we must honor that. ... at the end of the day, then, if we can congratulate ourselves on our own "civility," we should be satisfied with that." (p. xxiv)

Was Jesus always nice? Was He always congenial? Was He quick to make friendships with everyone? Was He inclined to sit down, reason with an individual, and find common ground upon which to base a relationship? The answer to all of the above is no! To those who came to Him with physical and spiritual needs, Jesus ministered to freely; yet those who opposed Jesus called Him a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19).

Of all the people most hostile to Jesus and with whom Jesus was deliberately confrontational were the Pharisees and others who bore their religion with outward symbolism rather than inward change. The one area it appears from the Gospels that Jesus increased His deliberate hostility toward them was in His actions on the Sabbath. As you know, the fourth Commandment prohibited work on the Sabbath; the Pharisees had developed a long list of those actions that constituted work. Jesus, almost to His delight, challenged them with their Sabbath rules. One of the classic stories is found in Luke 13:10-17.

It was the Sabbath. Jesus was not only in the synagogue, but was teaching. Present that particular Sabbath, in the area curtained off for the women and children, was a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all (Luke 13:11). Now, what Jesus invites this woman to do was a violation of synagogue protocol and only reinforced what He was about to do. Luke continues, When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God (Luke 13:12-13). Jesus invited this woman to leave the area for women and come into that area of the synagogue reserved exclusively for men. I can close my eyes and see her hobble down those stairs from the upper balcony and, with a fear in her face, approach Jesus. She knew what she had been asked to do would be very antagonistic to the Pharisees there. And she had no idea what Jesus planned to do. There in the very presence of the men in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, Jesus did that which He knew would cause them to become more incensed with Him. This was a deliberate act.

Why would Jesus do this? Because He wanted to expose the Pharisees to the shallowness of their own religious efforts and to let them know of His great truth – a truth that truly would set people free. MacArthur writes, The truth mattered more to Jesus

than how people felt about it. He wasn't looking for ways just to make people "like" Him; He was calling people who were willing to bow to Him unconditionally as their Lord (p. 187). Again, listen to these words from the author: Unpleasant and unwelcome truths sometimes need to be voiced. False religion always needs to be answered. Love may cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), but the gross hypocrisy of false teachers desperately needs to be uncovered – lest our silence facilitate and perpetuate a damning delusion. The truth is not always "nice." (p. 171).

Now that does not mean that we go around picking a fight with anyone who disagrees with us. But, it does mean that we stand for the truth; at times even being deliberately confrontative about it. At times there is no common ground for pressing the dialogue. At times there is no reason to water down our words so as to get a hearing. Often we just need to be bold and speak truth from our hearts.

I found this book to be both a blessing and a challenge. In this day when the Church tends to err on the side of collegiality, it was good to be reminded that Jesus was more focused on the proclamation of truth than in making friends. It is the truth that brings liberation.

I highly recommend this book to you. In fact, I think it would make an excellent resource for small group Bible studies. Yes, there is a Jesus that we can't ignore.