

The World Without Jesus
John 15:18-22
May 2, 2021

Have you ever wondered what the world would be like, or what world history would have been like if Jesus had never come?

We have made the birth of Christ the focal point of human history. We date human history based on that event. The history is recorded in relation to the birth of Christ. We say a certain event happened either before or after the birth of Christ. B.C. and A.D. are just that. B.C. stands for “Before Christ,” and A.D. stands for “Anno Domini” – the year of the Lord. The people who do not believe in Christ use non-religious terms “Common Era (CE)” and “Before the Common Era (BCE)” instead of A.D. and B.C. but still the dividing line between CE and BCE is the birth of Christ.

In our passage today, Jesus says, “If I had not come...” What would it be like if Jesus had never come?

Let us imagine for a moment. Let us pretend that Jesus had never existed. Let’s say that an ancient scroll has been found in a remote place of Palestine, and it tells a fictional story of a man named Jesus, and based on that story people had created the Christian religion. Let’s just imagine that that is what has been discovered. What do you think might happen?

Back in 1903, an English author, Guy Thorne, wrote a novel titled, “*When It Was Dark*.” It was subtitled “*The Story of the Great Conspiracy*.” This novel was written with a similar assumption but with a different subject. The novel is about what happens if people discover that Jesus’ resurrection was a fake. It graphically describes the moral disorder and chaos that would happen if the world suddenly discovers that the resurrection of Jesus was a hoax. A wealthy and powerful English Jew, Constantine Schuabe plots to destroy Christianity by falsifying the resurrection story. He exploits the financial difficulties of English Biblical scholar Sir Robert Llewelyn, and coerces him to plant an inscription upon the entrance of an ancient tomb. This inscription, supposedly written by Joseph of Arimathea, stated that he took the body of Christ from where it was buried and concealed it in that tomb. Thus, the story of Christ’s resurrection was a hoax. When this was revealed, the result was a chaos. People went crazy. The whole society was in turmoil and it was turned into anarchy. There was no moral or order in the society or in the lives of people but in the end, the conspiracy was exposed and the villain

was carried off to an asylum. That is the basic story of the novel.¹ It shows that a world without the resurrected Christ would be a dark and chaotic world.

The world without Christ would be a hopeless, immoral, depraved society. I am sure some of the religious leaders such as Siddhartha Gautama (Buddhism), Confucius (Confucianism), Muhammad (Islam), and others might have filled in the gap. Still, the world would have been a very different world.

According to John's version of the resurrection story Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark. In other words, she came to the tomb before the sunrise. It could be that John is simply reporting the fact. However, could it be that the word "dark" is used here as a symbolic word? When John recorded, "Mary Magdalene came to the tomb while it was still dark," what if it was referring to the state of Mary's heart? Would it make sense to think of Mary's heart as the heart without Christ, the heart without hope, the heart filled with sadness and sorrow, a dark heart?

Darkness could be much more than the absence of light. Darkness could be a spiritual condition or the condition of a heart in which the presence of God is no longer felt. Darkness could refer to a world without Christ, a world without hope, a world without peace, a world of sin and death, a world where God is ignored and forgotten.

There is something about darkness. There is a clinical depression that is associated with the absence of light. This illness is not rare. According to Dr. Michael Gitlin, a specialist who treats this kind of illness says that the patients not only need medication, but they also need to be exposed to sunlight. Dr. Gitlin says that doctors have discovered that light enhances the effectiveness of antidepressant medicines.²

While it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. That darkness was not only physical; it was spiritual as well.

Actually, we don't need to use our imaginations to picture what the world would be like without Christ. We have ample evidence of what the world would be like without Christ in human history. Just look at history.

¹ John H. Westerhoff and Caroline A. Hughes, *On The Threshold of God's Future*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), p. 21.

² It was quoted by King Duncan in his sermon, "While It Was Still Dark". www.esermons.com.

We had people like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, and many others who led their own people in a hellish regime.

Even the societies and countries that are called “Christian” still fall short of the abundant life which Christ had promised because not everyone even in these Christian societies live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is right when he says that not everyone who calls him Lord lives under his Lordship.

There was a novel that came out about a couple of decades ago called “A Skeleton in God’s Closet.” It was written by Paul Maier. He is a historian and novelist. He retired long time ago, but he used to teach ancient history at Western Michigan University.

In this book, one of the characters proclaimed his belief that Christ’s coming has had nothing but a negative impact in this world. The character says Christ’s coming was a bad thing. The Church he created was merciless and cruel. The character further says, “Look to the past...What is Church history but the unholy saga of oppression and wars over the faith: Christians from Venice looting Christians in Constantinople; the Spanish Inquisition burning heretics and Jews; Catholic armies versus Lutheran armies in the 1500s, drenching the countryside in blood; French Protestants getting massacred; witch trials from Joan of Arc to Salem, Massachusetts; and thousands of other grisly events in history.”

The hero of the book responds by saying, “...it’s unfair to blame the Church for the violence on this planet. History would have been much bloodier if there had been no Christianity. It was Christians who insisted on a truce in the Middle Ages, built hospitals to care for the wounded, intervened in quarrels to keep the peace, erected orphanages, shelters for the homeless... You’ve forgotten all about the Church single-handedly keeping Western culture alive during the Dark Ages, civilizing the barbarian invaders of Rome, recopying manuscripts in monastery libraries so that we would even have such things as books written before Gutenberg... Have you forgotten that Christianity is the alma mater of Western civilization; it has built the schools and invented the university? Its record, after all, is far more positive than you seem to recall? Christianity lay behind many of the greatest accomplishments in the last two thousand years, ranging from basilicas and cathedrals in architecture, to Leonardo and Michelangelo in art, to Johann Sebastian Bach in music. The Church has fostered some of the greatest minds ever

to enlighten our world—Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Luther, Shakespeare, Milton, Newton....”³

That is how the author defended Christians and Christianity. Certainly, not everything the Christians and the Church have done in the past or what they are doing now is good. They have made many mistakes. They have sinned more often and greater than we want to remember but Christians also have done incredible good. When they have repented their sins and followed Christ, they have become a beacon of light and hope everywhere in this world, some in big ways, some small, but all significant.

Has the advent of Christ made any difference in the world? Oh Yes, It Has! More than we can count.

After Christ lived and died and was resurrected, the world has never been quite the same. It may look the same on the surface, but a power has been released in the world, the power of God, which will ultimately conquer the evil of this world. The coming of Christ has bisected human history into “Before and After” and has radically changed the situation of humanity on this planet. The big question is: has he come to you and bisected your personal history into “Before and After”?

Because Christ has come into this world and lives with us each and every day through his Spirit, none of us has to live this life alone. The one, who says he is the way, the truth and the life, leads our path, and on this path, we find life eternal.

We all have to answer our personal question. That is: what difference has Christ’s coming into this world made to you? As a medieval poet once put it, “Were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem and not in you, you would still be eternally lost.”⁴ (Angelus Silesius 1624-1677).

May the resurrected Christ live in us and lead our path each and every day!

³ (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994) p. 312-313.

⁴ <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/culture/holidays/christmas-readings/born-unto-us>