

## “The Transparency of Jesus”

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*Fifth in a Lent series on John 12*

John 12:44-50

April 7, 2019

This painting is by William Holman Hunt. It went viral in the early 1900s when it toured the world. About 2 million people saw it!<sup>1</sup>

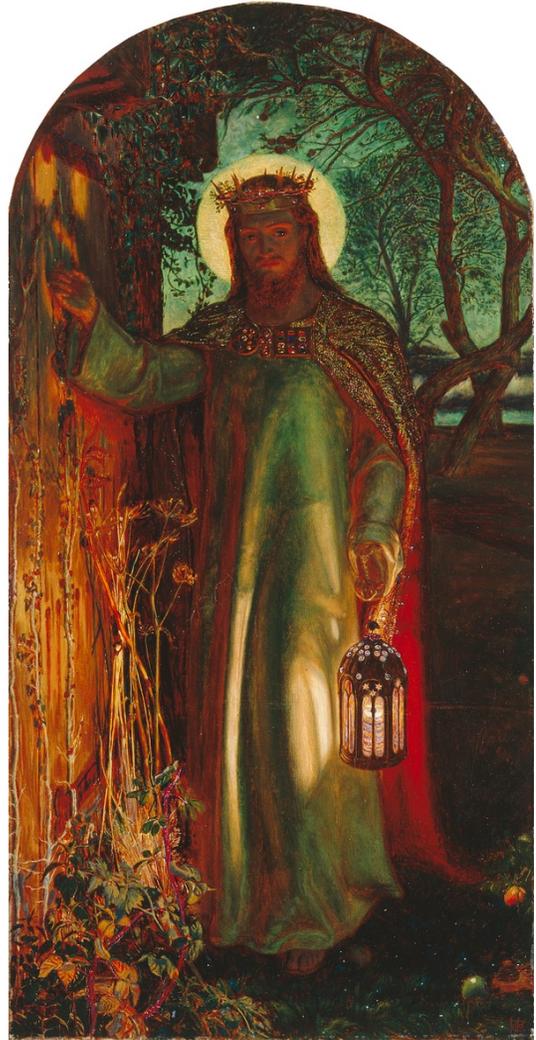
Look closely.

Of course we see Jesus. His head is crowned with thorns twisted to mock him. His hands have nail holes. He wears the vestments of Israel's high priest. Jesus is the final High Priest. He gave himself as the only sacrifice necessary to deal with our Sin.

Jesus knocks at the door. That's us.<sup>2</sup> He wants to come into our lives.

Look closely at the door, though. Weeds have grown against it. It has not been opened for a long time, maybe ever. The door has no handle on the outside. It only opens from within. Jesus knocks, but I have to let him into my life.

There is a darkness to the painting. The only light comes from Jesus. From his halo, or is that the Especially from his lamp. Holman called his painting “*The Light of the World.*”



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<sup>1</sup> Hunt did three versions of this painting. The third hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. St. Paul's has produced a booklet about the painting, which you can download from [www.stpauls.co.uk](http://www.stpauls.co.uk).

<sup>2</sup> In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says: “*Look! I'm standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in. . . .*” (Common English Bible). This verse is inscribed on the bottom of Holman's painting.

## II

We heard in the Scripture reading Jesus bringing to an end his public work. Going forward, his focus will be behind closed doors, fortifying his small (and shrinking) circle of followers for what's ahead. The next time he will be in public, Jesus will be carrying his cross through city streets.

That's ahead. Today, Jesus makes his final plea to the people: see him, believe him, receive him.

## III

See Jesus because he is the Light.

Jesus is the true Light. He is genuine. He is pure. He is honest. With Jesus, there are no games, no fakery, no deceptions.

Jesus is the true Light *who has come into the world*.<sup>3</sup> This world God has created and is creating. This world God celebrates as profoundly good. But this is also the world twisted, tormented, suffering, sinful, hateful, violent, and cursed by Death. Still, this is the world God deeply loves.

Jesus is the true Light who has come into the world *for all people*.<sup>4</sup> He wants to shine into everyone. He is the Light for those who are tossed-aside and trampled-on. He is the Light for those who are devil-possessed and sin-enslaved. He is the Light for those who have gotten lost and given up. For those stuck on the margins of whatever the world counts as important, left to rot on the wrong side, he is their Light. Also, for those who are stuck in the centre of everything and rotting from the inside out, he is their Light too.

Jesus is the true Light who has come into the world for all people *to give life*. He gives life in its fullness. He gives life that thrives and flourishes. He gives life, a riot of colour and variety. He gives life that's a celebration. He gives life that is lasting, forever.

*"I have come as light into the world,"*  
Jesus cried out,  
*"so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness."<sup>5</sup>*

## IV

See Jesus the Light. Believe in him because he is transparent to God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John 1:9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John 12:46.

<sup>6</sup> Bruner calls this Jesus' "Transparency Sermon." Frederick Dale Bruner, The Gospel of John, A Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 741.

*“Whoever believes in me doesn’t believe in me.” Jesus cried out,  
“but in the one who sent me.  
“Whoever sees me sees the one who sent me. . . .  
Whatever I say is just as the Father has said to me.”<sup>7</sup>*

A transparent material lets light pass through. A brick wall is not transparent. Some windows, like maybe in your bathroom are translucent. They let light through, and distort it so you can’t see the details of the person in the shower. Most windows are transparent. They let the light shine through so you can see what is on the other side. No window is perfectly transparent, though. There is always some distortion. Even without a window, the air molecules between us slightly distort how I see you, (as do my weakening eyes).

Something that is perfectly transparent would let you look through and see what’s on the other side as it really is.

Jesus is perfectly transparent to God. When Jesus speaks, we hear what God says. When Jesus does something, we see God in action.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus is God’s love for the world. God did not send a messenger. God did not send yet another prophet. God did not leave a note. God came in person. God the Father sent God the Son who delighted to come.<sup>9</sup>

So when you listen to Jesus, you are listening to God. When you trust him, you are trusting God. When you follow him, you are following God. When you love him, you are loving God.

You are loving God, who you know loves you, because Jesus showed this love for you.

## V

See Jesus; he is the Lielieve in him; he is fully transparent to God.

Receive him. Do not close your eyes to the Light and stay stuck in darkness.

*“If people hear my words and do not keep them,” Jesus cried out,  
“I don’t judge them. I did not come to judge the world but to save it.  
Whoever rejects me and does not receive my words  
will be judged at the last day  
by the word I have spoken.”<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> John 12:44-45, 50b.

<sup>8</sup> Bruner, 741.

<sup>9</sup> N. T. Wright, John for Everyone, Part 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 40.

<sup>10</sup> John 12:47-48.

When we hear Jesus the Word, when we see Jesus the Light, we can receive him. Or we can reject him. Rejecting him means remaining in the darkness.

We hear a warning about something. That's good! The warning is a good thing. It's given to help us. A lighthouse shining its warning into the stormy night about rocks ahead is good news. Now, if I ignore the lighthouse and keep sailing into the dark, I'll smash on the rocks. That's not good news. But that outcome doesn't make the lighthouse bad news, does it?

If my ship wrecked, would you judge me about my skills as a captain? If there had been no lighthouse and I had no warning, we would say the wreck was bad luck, an unforeseen tragedy. But because there was a lighthouse and I rejected its warning, I'd be responsible. That lighthouse, that warning word of good news, would now become my judgment. Because I was warned, I'd be judged responsible for the disaster I made.

What I think Jesus was saying to those who were first hearing and seeing him, and what I hear him saying to us, is *"I am the Good News. I am your warning and your way. Follow me, please. Don't let there be a disaster."*

Now, the Light who is Jesus is not a lighthouse we steer clear from. He is more like the open doorway out of a dungeon who we walk towards. Or, to change the metaphor a bit more, he is the Light outside our door, hoping to come in.

## VI

Let's finish with *The Light of the World* painting again.

Look at Jesus' face. Many see love in his face. Also, sorrow. It's like he has been knocking and waiting, his light shining, for a long time. The painting leaves us with a question: Will I open my door to him?

He is my Light. Will I see him? He shows God to me with perfect transparency. Will I believe in him? He is my way to safety, to life that is deep, full, abundant and everlasting. Will I receive him?

Have you? Do you? Will you?