

# You are being transformed to be like Jesus

Message for Sunday, March 2, 2014  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17; Exodus 34:29-35

**Children's Message:** from Exodus 34:29-35

When I read this story in the Bible, about the face of Moses changed so that it was shining, I thought to myself, "Wow! Wouldn't that be neat if I could do that!"

So I got some oil and rubbed it on my face (*do this as I talk*). But that just made it look oily, not shiny. Maybe if I made my face a bright yellow, like the sun: so I rubbed butter on my face. But that just made it look like, well, like I had butter on my face. Then I realized: in order to shine, I need a light. So I carried around a flashlight to make my face shine. But then people asked me, "Bruce, why are you shining a flashlight on your face?"

So I went back to the Bible, to see how Moses did it. And then I discovered: Moses didn't do anything! It was God's Spirit working in him that made the difference.

So now I'm not bothering to make my face look any different. It's what's on the inside that counts: God's Spirit living in me, helping me to follow Jesus — that's what's special.

**Message:** "You are being transformed to be like Jesus"

## 1) We are being transformed to be like Jesus

Paul Brand is a surgeon who specialized in reconstructive plastic surgery. When Royal Air Force pilots in World War II had their arms and legs burned in plane crashes, he would use the techniques of plastic surgery to rebuild hands and feet from the charred remains. After the war, he did the same work in India, this time with people whose limbs had been lost to leprosy. As well as treating patients, he also taught medical students. He tells about going on rounds one day with his students. The student who was the leader that day was examining a woman in a hospital bed.

The group was giving full attention to the student as he made his diagnosis. He was half-kneeling, in the posture I had taught him, with his warm hand slipped under the sheet and resting on the patient's bare abdomen. While his fingers probed gently for telltale signs of distress, he continued a line of questioning that showed he was weighing the possibility of appendicitis against an ovarian infection.

Suddenly something caught my eye—a slight twitch of movement on the intern's face. Was it the eyebrow arching upward? A vague memory stirred in my mind, but one I could not fully recall. His questions were leading into a delicate area, especially for demure Hindu society. Had the woman ever been exposed to a venereal infection?

The intern's facial muscles contracted into an expression combining sympathy, inquisitiveness, and disarming warmth as he looked straight in the patient's face and asked the questions. His very countenance coaxed the woman to relax, put aside the awkwardness, and tell us the truth.

At that moment my memory snapped into place. Of course! The left eyebrow cocked up with the right one trailing down, the wry, enticing smile, the head tilted to one side, the twinkling eyes. All these were unmistakably the features of my old chief surgeon in London, Professor Robin Pilcher.

I sucked in my breath sharply and exclaimed. The students looked up, startled by my reaction. I could not help it; it seemed as if the intern had studied Professor Pilcher's face for an acting audition and was now drawing from his repertoire to impress me.

Answering their questioning looks, I explained myself. "That is the face of my old chief! What a coincidence—you have exactly the same expression, yet you've never been to England and Pilcher certainly has never visited India."

At first the students stared at me in confused silence. Finally two or three of them grinned. "We don't know any Professor Pilcher," one said. "But Dr. Brand, that was your expression he was wearing."<sup>1</sup>

Paul Brand, without even knowing it, carried in himself the image of his old professor. He thought he had been learning surgical techniques and the procedures for diagnosing diseases. But he had also received his teacher's manners, instincts, expressions, his smile. He had been transformed into the very likeness of the one he had admired so much.

The apostle Paul writes:

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<sup>1</sup> In Paul Brand's wonderful book *In His Image*, chapter 1.

**2 Corinthians 3:18, New International Version:**  
**And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

He says that we take on the likeness of Jesus. His manners and instincts become part of our nature. When people look at us, they see a reflection of Jesus.

This is an astounding claim. If it is false, it is a horrible lie, a fraud, for we pretend to be something we are not. But if it is true that we become like Jesus... the implications are staggering! Let us look into this matter, for it is supremely important.

Christian theologians over the centuries have adopted a word which sums up this whole thought: we are *sanctified*. It comes from the Latin *sanctus*, holy. It means "to make holy." It is not something we accomplish by our own efforts. It is the wonder God works in someone who has put faith in him. It is part of the Gospel of grace, which is our source of hope.

## 2) Because of that, never give up on someone

The gospel of hope declares that anyone, no matter how bad they may be, can be transformed, and grow to be like Jesus. So this matter has tremendous practical implications. It means we never give up on someone.

There is a story told of two brothers who were convicted of stealing sheep. They were branded on the forehead with the letters ST, to indicate "sheep thief." One couldn't bear the stigma, became bitter, and moved away. Eventually he died and was forgotten. The other brother chose a different course.

He said, "I can't run from what I did, so I'll stay here and win back the respect of my neighbours and myself." As the years passed, he built a solid reputation for integrity. One day a stranger saw him, now an old man, with the letters on his forehead. He asked a local person what they stood for. "It happened a long time ago," said the villager. "I've forgotten the particulars, but I think the letters are an abbreviation for 'Saint.'"

The apostle Paul echoed this thought two chapters later in the same letter to the Corinthians:

**2 Corinthians 5:17, New Living Translation:**  
**This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!**

Yes, change is possible. Common sense may tell us to write off someone. But the foolishness of God is wiser than all human wisdom. The power of God is stronger than all human plans and theories.

There is a saying, "Some help people by putting a new suit of clothes on a person. Jesus helps by putting a new person in the clothes."

Charles Bradlaugh, an avowed atheist, once challenged the Rev. H.P. Hughes to a debate. The preacher, who was head of a rescue mission in London, England, accepted the challenge with the condition that he could bring with him 100 men and women who would tell what had happened in their lives, since trusting Christ as their Saviour. They would be people who once lived in deep sin, some having been born into homes where the parents taught them that way of life from their earliest years.

Hughes said they would not only tell of their conversion, but would submit to cross-examination by any who doubted their stories. Furthermore, the minister invited his opponent to bring a group of non-believers who could tell how they were helped by their lack of faith. When the appointed day arrived, the preacher came, accompanied by 100 transformed persons. But Bradlaugh never showed up.

There was an alcoholic who became a Christian, and his new Lord helped him to put away his old lord, drink. An acquaintance who scoffed at religion challenged him to tell exactly how Christ had changed water into wine. The new Christian answered, "I do not know how or why Christ changed the water to wine. I only know that in my case he did something more useful: He changed my beer into furniture."

Have you seen evidence of this transformation happening? Look at your own life. Think of what you were like before you made a commitment to be a follower of Jesus. (For some, that may go back a long time: try anyhow. For others, you have never made that step; you're just following your parents: it's time to you followed the leader.)

How have you changed:

- in the way you treat other people?
- in the way you handle money?
- when someone criticizes you?
- when you feel angry with someone?

Here's an even better idea. It's hard to be honest with ourselves with such subjective questions. I invite you to ask someone else, a close friend or your spouse, "Tell

me, honestly, have I changed at all since I committed my life to follow Jesus?"

Also ask, "How about in the last year: how have I changed in that time?" (Remember, Paul talked about a continuing, on-going transformation which will not be complete until we are made perfect in heaven).

**Next Steps:**

- Ask yourself: How have I changed in the last year? the last five years? since I became a follower of Jesus?
- Ask someone else to answer the same things about you.
- Open yourself to Jesus to come in and do even more, especially in those areas where you are lacking.