

# The One Who Taught Beside the Sea



In just two stanzas, John Thornburg puts the gospel on the page and on our lips and in our worship. Should we choose to actually sing this hymn, he puts the gospel in our mouths and dangerously close to our hearts. He also puts the gospel in our time. He has Jesus ministering to the demon-ridden, befriending the refugee, and teaching the children's simple ways, and pastoring the simple folk.

Does all this make Jesus a naïve looser? Many in our time and society would say so, but the author of this hymn will not allow us to sing so. Never has the gospel been more in contrast with a hymn-singer's surrounding culture and environment.

A biblical image comes quickly to mind: the risen Jesus in on the seashore preparing the meal of a new dawn, motioning for us to join him. Or perhaps, Jesus walks and talks with a few disciples, or address a larger gathering. Either way, the listeners find themselves at a point of decision; the land is at its end, the sea is at its boundary. Is this the place of ending a journey or beginning a journey?

As we make our decision in the space of just two stanzas, the hymn tells it like it is. This is the truth the Teacher is presenting. These will be the goals and guidelines of the journey. We rock in the boat, we stand on the beach; the hymn marks the time. What will be our response to the Teachers deep demands and hard teachings?

"Jesus Christ is Lord." We hear the words coming out of our mouths. We taste the words. The gospel summation we sing gives weight to the words. Will we have a journey-beginning meal with the Master? Will we point our energies toward the Master's invitation? Will we be the one who learned beside the sea?

The One Who Taught Beside the Sea is the Lord of land and sea. The One Who Taught Beside the Sea is Messiah, is The Gospel. He is our salvation. He wants to be our Lord. He meets us and calls us and teaches us at the point of decision making. He meets us where endings and beginnings overlap.

This hymn is no day at the beach. It is a moment when and where one kingdom laps at the shore of another.

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