

When something is missing

By [Scott Gunn](#)

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The [Lens](#) at the New York Times has a fascinating collection of images entitled, “Iconic Scenes, Revisited and Reimagined.” **Here are famous photos, but without the thing that made them famous.** Recognize this one?

iconic photo

Of course, it’s the photo of “[Tank Man](#)” who stood up to a line of tanks in Beijing during a government crackdown. Click the [link](#) to see the original photo.

These photos are engaging on their own — both the reimagined versions and the originals. **But I also think they could be read as metaphors of our church today.**

If you look at many of these photos without their subjects (go [do that](#)), you’ll see a photo that is not uninteresting. Without its fame-providing subject, it could be a pleasant scene. Unremarkable perhaps, but still worth a look. **You might not even think the picture needs anything else, if you didn’t know better.**

I think the church gets like that sometimes. We are an unremarkable scene, perhaps worth a look. **But the thing that gave the church renown — the thing that made it, if you will, famous — is missing.** We become only the scenery, when Jesus ought to be front and center all the time.

We’d rather think about how much we love our church building, or how much we feel entitled to the ministry we’ve been carrying on for decades. We like things to be familiar. We want a place that is pleasant, surrounded by friends we know. **After a while, “unremarkable” stops being a liability, and it becomes an asset.** We tell ourselves, “That’s a lovely vista of a well-constructed road in that photo. Look how straight the lines are!”

Then there's this other layer: the missing layer. Put Jesus in the center of our church picture, and the scene changes. We stop caring so much about the lines in the parking lot, the building, the committee that we like to meet with every Tuesday. We realize that our friends do not need to define our community. **Suddenly, we remember why it all matters.**

What do you think? Is your church more like the picture with the famous subject? Or the surrounding scenery?

What would our church be like if Jesus were in the center, always?

Wave of the lens cap to [Gizmodo](#).

P.S. I'm not saying Tank Guy is Jesus. Maybe he is. He certainly didn't stand on the side and complain about the rumbling of tanks. He turned his world upside-down.

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