**Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?**

*Lesson 1 – Introduction, The Enlightenment, and 2 Rationalists*

**Introduction:**

1. As Christians approach the advent and Christmas seasons and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, secularists use the time to try to disprove that the Gospels are not true and therefore the Jesus of the Gospels is not true.
2. In 1988 Martin Scorsese released the movie *The Last Temptation of Jesus Christ* in which Jesus while hanging on the cross hallucinates that He comes down from the cross and has a child with Mary Magdelene.
3. In 2003, Dan Brown released his novel *The Da Vinci Code* which suggests that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, fathered a child with her, and intended for her to be his successor as head of the church. Brown goes on to argue that the Gospels are writings of man that evolved over time and so they do not present a true picture of Jesus.
4. A 2004 *Time* cover story reads, “in the debates over the literal truth of the Gospels, just about everyone acknowledges that major conclusions about Jesus’ life are not based on forensic clues. There is no specific physical evidence for the key points of the story.”
5. In 2015, *Time* ran an article called, “What We Know About When Jesus Was Really Born.” One exemplary statement from the article reads, “What’s commonly accepted by those who observe the holiday isn’t exactly true to history, according to Mark Goodacre, a professor in the Duke University Department of Religion.”
6. *Newsweek* in 2017 included in their story a picture from two homosexuals which depicted a nativity scene with 2 Josephs.
7. Many people today reflect the sentiment of a letter that was sent to the editor of *Time* magazine in 1996 which said, “It doesn’t matter who Jesus of Nazareth was or what he was. What’s most important is the lessons he taught.”
8. Since the Gospels tell about Jesus’ earthly ministry, it makes sense that there’s a connection between one’s view of the Gospels and one’s view of Jesus. Why do liberals view Jesus as nothing more than a good man or a good example? Why do authors such as Dan Brown or Bart Ehrman gain a popular audience?

*The Enlightenment*

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| **Pre-Enlightenment (up to 1750)** | **Enlightenment (~1750 – today)** |
| God is the center of all things | Man is the center of all things (human autonomy) |
| Scripture is the standard of Truth | Unaided human reason is the standard of Truth |
| We can have real knowledge of God in Scripture | Unaided human reason allows us to have real knowledge |
| Man bows to God as the divine authority | Sacred Scriptures must bow to the authority of human reason |

1. With the Enlightenment, man now determines what is true by using human reason, human logic, and looking at evidence.
2. When looking at the Bible, Enlightenment thinkers developed some “criteria” by which to judge what is true and what isn’t:
   1. Begin by doubting everything. So you approach the Bible from a position of doubting what it says before you even begin to read what it says.
   2. What happens today is the way things have always been. We don’t see miracles today so there couldn’t have been miracles in the past. Therefore the miracles of Scripture are false.
   3. Everything that has happened in history is a chain of natural causes and effects. Therefore anything supernatural is ruled out.
3. So from the beginning, Enlightenment thinkers began from a position of disbelief and doubt. They claimed they were neutral and unbiased but we see they are not. Their very starting point is one of doubt and disbelief.
4. Therefore you can guess what’s going to happen. If you approach the Bible from a starting point of disbelief and doubt, you’re going to end up concluding that the Bible can’t be true. It’s not real history because its full of stories of miracles and the supernatural which we enlightened thinkers using our autonomous (free from God) reason know cannot happen because there is no evidence for it.

*Herman Reimarus (1694-1768)*

1. A German Rationalist who was also a Deist. He was a theist but against Christianity
2. *Concerning the Aims of Jesus and His Disciples* (1778)
   1. This writing is considered to be what kicked off the “Quest for the Historical Jesus”
   2. Jesus was not trying to start a new religion, but establish a political kingdom. He wanted to throw off Roman rule and set Israel free.
   3. Jesus failed in this attempt as He says “My God My God why have you forsaken me?”
   4. Christianity was established by the fraud/deceit of the Jesus’ disciples. After Jesus’ failure, they come up with a new story and another vision of what the “kingdom of God” should be. So they stole Jesus’ body and preached that He had been raised from the dead.
   5. At the core of the writing is the idea that Jesus’ purpose and the purpose of His disciples are fundamentally opposed to each other.
   6. “All the doctrines of the Christian faith were invented by Jesus’ disciples and other power-hungry theologians who followed them.” --Robert Strimple summarizing Reimarus
3. Reimarus is the first person to separate Jesus into the “Christ of history” and the “Christ of faith.” The “Christ of history” is Jesus as He really was while the “Christ of faith” is Jesus as created by the early church. In other words, you can’t trust the Gospels to tell you the truth about Jesus as He really was since it was all made up by the early church.
4. What should our response be? It’s incredulous to think that 12 people would commit fraud then knowingly die for that fraud. As B.B. Warfield puts it, if the Jesus of the Gospels is not the real Jesus, we are left with no reasonable explanation for the origin of the Christian church.

*Heinrich Paulus (1761-1851)*

1. A German Rationalist who wanted to “save” Christianity in light of the Enlightenment. He wants to keep Christianity from being devoured by the Enlightenment.
2. Does this by stripping all the supernatural elements out of Christianity. He believed if he could explain Christianity without the supernatural, then it could be saved as a viable religion.
3. If Reimarus takes Jesus out of Christianity, Paulus wants to show Jesus as being part of Christianity.
4. 2 main beliefs
   1. He believed the miracles in the Gospels are subject to a natural explanation.
      1. The disciples were primitive and uneducated therefore what they saw as a “miracle” was due to their dumbness. An equally convincing “natural” explanation can be found.
      2. Example: Jesus was walking on a sand bar when He “walked on water” and the disciples didn’t realize it because it was night time and they were closer to land than they thought.
      3. Example: At the feeding of the 5000, as soon as Jesus breaks the bread, the crowds broke out their own food and the disciples didn’t know what was happening.
      4. Example: Jesus didn’t die on the cross. He simply passed out from the pain and was placed in the tomb. The cool air of the tomb and the spices revived Him and He re-appears to the disciples who believe He has risen.
   2. Jesus was simply an ethical teacher.
      1. Jesus was concerned about being a good person and right living. He wasn’t concerned about judgment, the final days, being made right with God, the 2nd Coming, etc. He simply wants us to be a good, moral person.
      2. What does this sound like?
      3. “The truly miraculous thing about Jesus is Himself, the purity and serene holiness of His character, which is genuinely human, and adapted to the imitation and emulation of mankind.” –Paulus
5. What should our response be?
   1. The swoon theory turns the Roman guards into inept killers who didn’t know how properly to crucify people but that goes against all the accounts that we have of that time.
   2. Jesus is dehydrated, whipped/beaten, crucified, and speared and we’re supposed to believe that He had strength in that condition to roll the stone away from the tomb, overpower the guards, and then present Himself as a “risen” Lord.
   3. What about what happens when Jesus “really dies” years later?
   4. How can Jesus be a good moral teacher if He knowingly goes along with the claim that He has risen from the dead? On the one hand you want Him to be a good teacher, but on the other hand Paulus is calling Him a fraud.
   5. In an attempt to save Christianity, Paulus turns Jesus into a deceiver