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

*Lesson 4 – A Nobel Prize Winner and Form Criticism*

**Recap:**

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| Herman Reimarus (1694-1768) | Jesus = failed political revolutionary |
| Heinrich Paulus (1761-1851) | Jesus = good, moral teacher (who let the lie of His death and resurrection continue without stopping it) |
| David Strauss (1808-1874) | Jesus = an extraordinary person |
| F. C. Baur (1792-1860) | Jesus = universal, moral ideal |
| Albrecht Ritchsl (1822-1889) | Jesus = good, moral teacher (our supreme example) |
| William Wrede (1859-1906) | Jesus = ordinary human being who was created by the early church to be the Messiah |

*Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)*

1. A medical missionary who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.
2. He saw himself as a Christian and a defender of it.
3. *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906) [In German, the title is *From Reimarus to Wrede*]
   1. This book surveys all of the guys involved in this quest, including the guys we’ve looked at plus more and as he goes through, he slowly dismantles their arguments and critiques everybody who came before him.
   2. Schweitzer’s conclusion is that all who came before him end up creating a Jesus that looks like themselves. In other words, they come to the Gospels looking for a particular Jesus and end up finding that Jesus.
   3. So everybody before him has failed in their quest to find the real, historical Jesus.
4. Unfortunately, Schweitzer ends up doing the very same thing that he accused these other guys of doing, he just does it in a different manner.
5. You see at his baptism, Jesus had some sort of psychological, inner experience (not truly anointed by the Holy Spirit) so that he thought Himself to be the Messiah-elect and started preaching that the Kingdom of God was at hand. At the Transfiguration, Jesus reveals this secret to His 3 most intimate disciples. Peter discloses it to the other disciples when He confesses that Jesus is the Christ, but then Judas betrays this secret to the high priests who put Jesus to death for His messianic claim.
6. According to Schweitzer, Jesus’ main focus in teaching was on the Son of Man who was coming back one day to establish His rule and judge the nations. In other words, Jesus’ main focus was on when the prospective Messiah would be revealed as the actual Messiah.
7. Jesus thought the world was going to end, the judgment of God was coming, and Jesus had a part to play in all of this. Jesus tried to force events in order to bring about the 2nd Coming, the coming of the Son of Man in glory.
8. But like Reimarus said before him, Jesus died as a horrible failure as expressed on the cross with “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”
9. Schweitzer says this a cry of despair that life didn’t turn out like he thought it would. The Son of Man/Messiah didn’t come and so Jesus dies thinking it didn’t turn out like he expected.
10. “Jesus, in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world [history] to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the last days conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel [history] rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it [the wheel] still.” --Schweitzer
11. So why would Jesus still be important for us today? Schweitzer says Jesus’ significance isn’t in His person or what He accomplished, but in His spirit.
12. We must emulate Jesus. We must be free to follow our dreams and be inspired to change the world just like Jesus was inspired to change the world.
13. So all we are to do is be like Jesus and live an “authentic existence,” which means be who God created you to be.
14. Just as Jesus had an inner experience to be who He thought he was, we must have the same experience which frees us to be who we think we ought to be.
15. So Christianity, for Schwietzer, is nothing by a natural religion (not supernatural) of “pure love” and “reverence for life.”
16. “Jesus means something to our world because a mighty spiritual force streams forth from Him and flows through our time also. This fact can neither be shaken nor confirmed by any historical discovery. But the truth is, it is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it.” --Schweitzer
17. Significance:
    1. We would agree with Schweitzer in his critique of all those who came before him and in writing his book, Schweitzer brought the first phase of the quest for the historical Jesus to a close.
    2. From here on out, people would fall into the camp of skeptics (radicals) who completely separate history from Christianity and liberals who still maintain some sort of connection but deny the supernatural and make Christianity all about love (as they define it) and being a good, decent person.
    3. Schweitzer is the first to approach Jesus from a psychological perspective and try to analyze what is going through His mind and how He viewed Himself.
18. What should our response be?
    1. Why would this type of Jesus be worth emulating? If he’s a failure, why would we imitate a failure? Schweitzer ends up turning Jesus into a madman with delusions of grandeur. Jesus was a crazy man who thought he was the key to the end of the world but really he’s not.
    2. This type of Jesus cannot explain the origins of the Church or the early Christian movement. Is this the type of Jesus that would spark the Church and its incredible growth in the early years? By all accounts, if it was following a madman, it should have died out just like other movements led by mad men have died out

*Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)*

1. A German Lutheran theologian and professor of New Testament. Bultmann is a towering figure in this search for the real Jesus and a prominent influence and voice in “liberal Christianity.”
2. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921)
   1. This book applied what is called “Form Criticism” to the Gospels.
   2. Bultmann looked at the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew/Mark/Luke) and saw that rather than being one long story, they are a bunch of little stories broken up into little chunks or snippets.
   3. In other words, the Gospels are little stories brought together.
   4. These little stories originally circulated as oral tradition passed on by the early church. These little stories DO NOT go back to Jesus.
   5. Each story developed orally and was changed over time.
   6. The goal of Form Criticism is to get “behind” the Gospel stories back to the original oral form. You see what we have written is the result of change over time, but we want to go back to the original before the changes were made.
3. A form is simply classifying each of the little stories. So you have parables, miracle stories, teaching stories, etc. Then once you classify a little story into one of these “form” categories, then you reconstruct the story to what it supposedly originally was, then you see where it fits in history (ie does it go all the way back to Jesus or does it only go back to the early church?)
4. Example: In Mark 2:23-28 you have a “sayings story,” but the confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees was simply invented in order to present the saying, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”
5. Bultmann believed there was no relationship at all between the historical Jesus and the Gospels.
6. The Gospels are simply the early church’s opinion and ideas about Jesus that were passed down orally and changed over time before they were finally written down. The Gospels only contain the “Jesus of faith.”
7. **The only thing we can know historically about Jesus is that He existed.**
8. The Christian faith and religion in general has nothing to do with history. Religion needs to be kept in the private sphere of one’s own experience, rather than being a part of history.
9. So what is significant about Jesus? Nothing historically, but that’s ok. Jesus gives people a satisfying experience when He is preached. What’s important is the Christian “message” that emerged from Jesus, somehow.
10. According to Bultmann, Christianity is “true” because it gives us a satisfying and meaningful experience.
11. According to Bultmann, the cross of Christ is able to save because it gives us a satisfying and meaningful experience.
12. It’s all about our experience and whether it speaks to us or not, rather than any objective and historical truth.
13. The New Testament and “preaching” of Jesus is how we become capable of self-commitment and authentic life. In a lot of ways, this echoes Ritchsl’s “value judgments” where whatever you say about Jesus and the cross and the resurrection, it’s only because it’s valuable to you.
14. Significance:
    1. Bultmann rebuilds the wall between the “Jesus of history” and the “Jesus of faith” that Schweitzer had sought to tear down.
    2. Form criticism is still influential today and still taught and practiced.
    3. Form criticism is highly influential on the Jesus Seminar who we will look at next week.
15. What should our response be?
    1. Form criticism uses a type of circular argument. The form critic has developed and defined the forms himself and has assigned each form a historical value based on his own understanding of what the early church actually was.
    2. According to Hebrews, the significance of the work of Jesus Christ is based on the fact that He is the God-man. In other words, the person of Christ is the foundation for understanding the work of Christ.