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

*Lesson 2 – Myth and Competing Christianities*

**Recap**:

1. The Enlightenment brought about a revolution in worldview. God was no longer the center. Man because the determiner of truth by looking at the evidence and using reason and logic. The Bible was treated like an ordinary book. It was approached with doubt and a belief that the supernatural/miracles cannot happen.

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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)*

1. A German professor who is one of the most important people to be aware of when we’re talking about searching for the real Jesus.
2. Like others, we saw himself as a defender of Christianity rather than trying to undermine Christianity.
3. Strauss looks at the scene and in surveying the options see that there are generally 2 camps – supernaturalists and naturalists.
4. The supernaturalists believe that God performed the miracles found in the Gospels just as they are presented. The naturalists believe that there are natural explanations but because the people are “pre-scientific” at this time they thought they were witnessing a miracle.
5. Strauss can’t support either position because they both, in different ways, believe that the Gospels are telling us what happened with some level of truth.
6. Strauss develops a 3rd way between both of these camps🡪The Gospels have no historicity about them whatsoever.
7. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835)
   1. Strauss develops a category that he calls “myth.” This is a tricky category but it’s important for us to try to understand what Strauss means by myth.
   2. “Myth” is something that is religiously true but not historically true. “Myth” is a vehicle for communicating spiritual truth. It doesn’t matter whether an event really happened or not. The event is simply the means by which some spiritual truth is communicated.
   3. Myth is useful for early man and his stage of development, but now that we are enlightened people we must discard the myth to get to the idea/truth that the myth is trying to communicate.
   4. This is called “demythologizing” and Strauss said we must demythologize the Gospels. Get rid of their historicity so we can move beyond them to the idea that they are trying to communicate.
8. Strauss believed that the miracle stories in Scripture were unhistorical myths written by the first Christians to explain what Jesus meant to them in language intelligible to their contemporaries.
9. His book received harsh criticism from both camps which caught Strauss off guard. He saw himself trying to make Christianity intelligible and credible to post-Enlightenment men and women.
10. Example: Incarnation. Strauss believes that the idea of the God-man is important and a spiritual truth. But it’s silly to tie the God-man concept to 1 historical person. Rather Strauss says the God-man concept applies to mankind. The divine comes to full self-expression in humanity as a whole. So the Gospels are trying to communicate this God-man concept and the idea of the divine coming to full self-expression, but it errs in tying this concept to 1 person in history.
11. “The Cross is to be seen as a symbol of the Infinite’s giving itself up in finitude, while the Resurrection symbolizes the ultimate and perfect accomplishment of the Absolute as totally reconciling infinite Spirit.” –Robert Strimple, describing Strauss’ view
12. What Strauss does is he moves beyond a personal and self-revealing God of the Bible and he smuggles philosophical ideals in. So he will talk about the “Absolute” or the “Infinite” or the “Spirit” but these are philosophical concepts and the spiritual truth that he believes the Gospels are trying to communicate. In other words, it’s all about philosophy.
13. Strauss believed the Gospels were written later after the time of the apostles and not by Jesus’ disciples or their companions.
14. The Gospels are myths which communicate the “Christ of faith” but the Gospels have nothing whatsoever to do with the “Christ of history.” In Strauss’ thought, the “Christ of history” doesn’t matter. Jesus was simply an extraordinary personality who had a great impact.
15. Strauss believed the resurrection could be explained by hallucination, subjective visions, by disciples who did not wish to live with disappointment that Jesus had failed as the Messiah. So they start looking to the Old Testament to reconcile Jesus’ death with their view of Him as the Messiah. These hallucinations occur so far after Jesus’ death that there is no recognizable body available to refute their claims that Jesus had risen from the dead.
16. Significance:
    1. Strauss becomes the beginning of the distinction between a liberal and a radical.
       1. Liberal – the Gospels have some connection to the historic Jesus and Christianity, but we gotta get rid of the supernatural
       2. Radical – the Gospels have NOTHING to do with the historic Jesus. The Gospels are made up by the early church.
    2. Strauss introduces “language games.” He uses orthodox sounding language, but he means by that language something completely unorthodox. He didn’t want to be booted out of the church so he used church language, but defined completely different from Scripture itself.
17. What should our response be?
    1. An extraordinary personality isn’t sufficient to create a claim to have risen from the dead and be willing to die for that belief. There have been some huge personalities in human history, but none of them rise to this level. So the claim of extraordinary personality is insufficient to explain the views of the disciples and the early church.
    2. Concerning the resurrection, hallucinations are not a group activity. Hallucinations occur at the individual level. They are individual experiences, not group experiences. Over 500 people claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus.
    3. It takes time (2 or more generations/centuries) for a myth to “build up” around something that happened. Layers get added as centuries pass. Yet we know that the Gospels were written within 20-30 years or so of Jesus’ life so there simply wasn’t enough time for mythological layers to be added.
    4. Plus the 500+ eyewitnesses, most of whom were still living during the writing of the Gospels, would have been able to refute any myths or legends that people would try to add.
    5. Remember, all of this begins with the presupposition or assumption that the supernatural cannot occur. God doesn’t do miracles.

*F. C. Baur (1792-1860)*

1. Another German professor who was an admirer of Strauss.
2. His view of religion was it is a “coming to awareness of the universal moral idea.”
3. The resurrection is beyond historical investigation. What’s important about the resurrection is not whether it happened or not but that it inspires “faith” in people to be good and do good.
4. Developed the theory that there were originally 2 competing forms of early Christianity
   1. Christianity wasn’t unified when it started.
   2. There was Jewish Christianity (Matthew, James, Peter) and Pauline Christianity (Romans, Galatians, Corinthians)
   3. Galatians reveals this war between Paul and Peter
   4. In the mid-2nd century, the 2 sides came together and formed a new, hybrid Christianity that synthesized both camps (Mark, John, Luke-Acts, Hebrews, etc.).
   5. Only 4 epistles really belong to Paul and other letters “claiming” to be written by Paul were simply written by somebody who attached Paul’s name to give it credibility and authority.
5. Significance:
   1. He was the first person to suggest that Paul was the real founder of Christianity and not Jesus
      1. Jesus was a good moral teacher who taught about loving people and being good (the universal moral idea).
      2. Paul hijacked Jesus’ Christianity and made it about atonement, blood sacrifice, judgment, and sin.
   2. The first person to argue that each book of the New Testament had a particular agenda.
      1. Each book was written to defend its camp of Christianity.
      2. Therefore, because each book has an agenda, we can’t trust any of the books in the New Testament. They are “party” documents designed to defend the party’s viewpoint.
      3. They are intentional fictions to promote one’s own view and attack the other view.
   3. Baur’s influence is still with us today. Any time you hear somebody pit Paul against Jesus (i.e., teaching on homosexuality, etc.), they are indebted to F.C. Baur for this type of thinking.
6. What should our response be?
   1. Again, if Christ hasn’t been raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain. Scripture ties the historicity (the fact) of the resurrection to the very existence of the Christian faith.
   2. Again, if the majority of the NT writings are intentionally made up, then the apostles are frauds and died for a fraud.
   3. When we examine Scripture, we see that Paul and Jesus are in agreement and major doctrines would include:
      1. Atonement – John 10:11, Ephesians 5:2
      2. Deity of Jesus – John 8:58, Colossians 2:9/Phillippians 2:5-8
      3. Forgiveness – Matthew 6:14, Ephesians 4:32
      4. Exclusivity of Jesus – John 14:6, 1 Timothy 2:5
      5. Justification by Faith – John 5:24/3:16-18, Romans 5:1
      6. Resurrection – Matthew 17:22-23, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4
      7. Reward/Punishment – Matthew 16:27, Romans 2:6
      8. Sinfulness of Man – Matthew 15:19-20, Romans 3:11-12