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

*Lesson 3 – Liberalism and the Messianic “Secret”*

**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 personality |
| F. C. Baur (1792-1860) | Jesus = universal, moral ideal |

*Albrecht Ritchsl (1822-1889)*

1. Another German professor and rationalist.
2. Ritchsl started off as a disciple of F.C. Baur but then became one of his harshest critics
3. He viewed Jesus as just a good moral teacher. He is the prototype of what morally perfect humanity should look like and in His morally perfect living, Jesus reveals God as love.
4. Ritchsl liked that God is love but rejected God as holy, just, or wrathful.
5. He was only concerned with right living, but did not believe in sin, salvation, judgment, justification, etc.
6. Moral improvement is a good thing and everyone ought to strive for that.
7. The most important thing to know about his beliefs is that he said religious affirmations about God or Jesus are merely “value judgments.”
8. A value judgment is simply saying what is important to you (what you “value”) and helps you make the kind of life you want to have (the kind of life you “value”).
9. In other words, when you talk about God or Jesus, you’re not saying anything objectively true and real. You’re simply making statements about your experience.
10. If you say, “Jesus is God” that’s simply a claim that Jesus has great value to you and is important for your life, but that doesn’t necessarily mean Jesus is really of one substance with God, co-equal in power and glory.
11. “You ask what Jesus means to me, well, he stands so preeminently at the very center of my religious and ethical life that for me he has the religious and ethical value of God.” –Ritchsl
12. In other words, Jesus is so wonderful to me, so meaningful to me, so special to me, that he’s like God to me and so I can say “Jesus is God” because I’ve experienced him in such a way that he is God to me.
13. This is extremely dangerous because it allows someone to make what seems like an orthodox confession, but mean something completely different by it.
14. Truth comes from your own experience, not from Scripture.
15. Christianity or the kingdom of God is nothing but moralism (being a good person).
16. It doesn’t matter what Jesus was like historically, what matters is your religious experience with this idea of Jesus.
17. It’s not about objective truth, it’s about your experience. “I feel”, “I think”
18. Significance:
    1. His teaching was the foundation for the battle between “liberalism” and “fundamentalism” in the early 1900s.
    2. His teachings found its way into formerly conservative schools such as Princeton in the 1920s who booted out the conservatives who would go on to found Westminster Theological Seminary.
    3. His teachings found its way into Southern Presbyterianism which ultimately led to the founding of RTS.
    4. This view that God is love stands behind modern liberalism with its acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual “ministers”, and it’s the basis for why modern liberal churches are so focused on social justice and social activity. For them, it’s all about loving the oppressed and helping others (being morally good), but they don’t have categories of sin, salvation, hell, atonement, etc.
    5. Up to now, the people we’ve examined have asked questions about history – something either happened or it didn’t. Ritchsl re-frames the debate and says religion isn’t about history. Religion is just your private, personal experience. If you try to make religion about objective history, you’ll ruin it.
19. What should our response be?
    1. If truth is determined by our experience, then you have chaos. What happens if I believe it is ok to steal your car and burn down your house?
    2. Question a liberal about accepting homosexuality and they will become dogmatic and starting talking in absolutes, yet they don’t believe there is anything absolute. It’s all subjective. Why would liberals argue with Bible-believers about homosexuality, if it’s all relative? What is really happening here is that liberals are dogmatic about a certain set of principles. But it makes no sense to be dogmatic about anything if truth is relative.
    3. God’s love defined in Scripture includes His holiness, justice, wrath, goodness, mercy, etc. You can’t have just one of God’s attributes and do away with the rest.
    4. Also, you have to define “love” in terms of how Scripture uses it, rather than what you want it to mean. In other words, they are inconsistent. You can’t take God’s statement that “He is love” and then not let Him define what He means by the word “love.”

*William Wrede (1859-1906)*

1. NT professor and German Lutheran
2. *The Messianic Secret* (1901)
   1. Wrote that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah during His lifetime.
   2. The early Christians, after the resurrection experience, concluded that Jesus was, after all, the Messiah.
   3. In other words, Jesus’ followers decided that after His death they wanted to make Him the Messiah.
   4. Problem: How do we explain why Jesus Himself never claimed to be the Messiah?
   5. Solution: The Gospel of Mark was written to explain how Jesus could be the Messiah although He never publicly claimed to be the Messiah. Mark says that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah in private, but never in public. That’s why you have all those passages in Mark where Jesus warns others not to talk about His identity.
3. Conclusion: The Gospels are not reliable historical records, but are simply the church’s attempt to explain who Jesus was.
4. The Gospel of Mark is just a coverup, designed to explain the church’s early stories, rather than being about the historical Jesus at all. The Gospels are the church’s version of Jesus, not what He really was like. The Gospel writers changed things up to make the theological point that they wanted to make.
5. Why would the early church believe that Jesus had become the Messiah? They believed the resurrection happened.
6. Who is Jesus? Wrede says Jesus is simply an ordinary human being.
7. Significance:
   1. Wrede so discouraged people that they could find out anything about the real Jesus from the Gospels that they stopped trying to figure out what Jesus was really like altogether.
   2. The early church is responsible for Christianity as we know it, not Jesus.
   3. The wall between the “Christ of faith” and the “Christ of history” is infinitely high and impenetrable.
8. What should our response be?
   1. Mark does include passages where Jesus warns others not to tell, but it also includes passages where Jesus doesn’t warn others not to tell.
      1. Forbidden to tell: Mark 1:24-25, 34, 44; 3:11-12; 5:41-43; 7:36; 8:26; 8:30; 9:9
      2. Not forbidden to tell: Mark 5:1-20; 6:56; 7:24-30; 9:9, 14-29
      3. If Mark was written to explain the “messianic secret” then he did a rather poor job. You would expect every miracle to come with a warning not to tell. But the data in Mark doesn’t support Wrede’s theory.
   2. The majority of the “not to tell” passages involve demons. Jesus doesn’t want demons to authenticate or validate His ministry. That’s what the miracles, signs, and wonders are designed to do. God will not allow Satan’s messengers to be the heralds of His Messiah. However Jesus doesn’t forbid those who had demons cast out of them to tell what He did for them.
   3. Mark 1:45 provides a great explanation for why sometimes Jesus did forbid healed or raised people from telling others. Many times it hindered His mission rather than helping His mission.
   4. Jesus wasn’t the only one resurrected (Lazarus, small children, etc.). Why is it that Jesus was “given” the status of Messiah and not Lazarus or somebody else? The idea that the church could have this idea out of nowhere is not accounted for by Wrede.
   5. Others before Jesus claimed to be Messiah as well as during His day and afterwards. How do you explain the Jesus as Messiah movement continuing when other supposed Messiah movements died off?