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

*Lesson 5 – Little Colored Balls & A Popular UNC Professor*

**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 |
| William Wrede (1859-1906) | Jesus = ordinary human being who was created by the early church to be the Messiah |
| Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) | Jesus = a misguided Jewish visionary whose spirit we are called to emulate |
| Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) | Jesus = a person who lived |

*The Jesus Seminar (1985-2006)*

1. A group of scholars founded in 1985 by 3 men – Robert Funk, John Dominic Crossan, and Marcus Borg – to examine all the sayings attributed to Jesus in the New Testament and other early “Christian” documents.
2. Their sole purpose is “to update and then make the legacy of 200 years of research and debate a matter of public record.” In other words, they want to take the teachings of all these men in the table above and let the public know the “truth” about Jesus.
3. Robert Funk – “”We want to liberate the people of the church from the dark ages of theological tyranny. We want to liberate Jesus. The only Jesus most people know is the mythic one [made up by early church]. They don’t want the real Jesus, they want the one they can worship. The cultic Jesus.”
4. John Dominic Crossan denies the deity of Christ, and believes that the virgin birth and death/burial/resurrection are all latter-day wishful thinking of the early church.
5. They gained media attention [intentionally] in 1993 when they published *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?*
6. This book revealed their “scientific method” for determining whether Jesus really did say something that is recorded in the Gospels.
   1. They voted on sayings from the Gospels using a voting system of colored balls.
   2. Red ball = Jesus really did say that (3 pts)
   3. Pink ball = Jesus probably said something like that (2 pts)
   4. Grey ball = Jesus didn’t say it, but it contains Jesus’ ideas (1 pt)
   5. Black ball = Jesus never said that, it comes later from the early church (0 pts)
   6. The sayings of Jesus were then printed in the book according to the color based on averaging the vote.
7. Now it’s called the 5 Gospels because they also include the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*. And it should be no surprise that they give more weight to that writing than they do the 4 Gospels of Scripture.
8. The book ends up claiming that Jesus only said about 20% of what is recorded in the 4 Gospels. In Mark, there is only 1 red verse – “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” (Mk 12:17)
9. Only 15 sayings are colored in red in all the Gospels put together, and only 75 sayings are in pink. Several hundred verses are in black, including the entire Gospel of John and anything Jesus says about Himself (I am the way, truth, and life; I and the Father are one; etc.).
10. So who was Jesus really according to the Jesus Seminar? 2 main pictures emerge since this is a group of scholars rather than 1 person.
    1. Jesus was a sage (wise man) who spoke in parables and memorable one-liners. These sayings of His attacked conventional Jewish wisdom and cultural norms. Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, not about Himself and His death/resurrection.
    2. Jesus was a countercultural social prophet who proclaimed a new way of living that broke down the boundaries between Jewish and Roman cultures. He was a cynic who advocated eating with all kinds of people to break down cultural barriers. His “healings” were not physical healings but re-socializations of people who had been excluded. This is the view of John Dominic Crossan who writes about this in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (1991) and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994).
11. Significance:
    1. No other person or group is more responsible for bringing this search for the real Jesus into the public spotlight. You will see Crossan appear on almost any episode about Jesus on the History Channel or National Geographic.
12. What should our response be?
    1. The Jesus Seminar removes so much from Jesus that they are left with no explanation for His death. If Jesus was just an itinerant preacher going around preaching about the kingdom of God, why would he be handed over by the Jews on accusations of blasphemy?
    2. There are many problematic things about the apocryphal gospels, especially *The Gospel of Thomas*:
       1. One Example: One of the last sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* has Jesus supposedly saying that a woman cannot enter into heaven unless she is changed into a man.
    3. They assume that the Gospel of Thomas is earlier and more reliable than the 4 Gospels of Scripture, but it has been proven that Thomas is much later and the Gospels are actually earlier by almost a century.
    4. The *Gospel of Thomas* is clearly a gnostic gospel which talks about salvation coming from having a secret knowledge and the sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* are supposedly that secret knowledge.
    5. The Jesus Seminar removes the Jewishness of Jesus and makes Him more of a Greco-Roman philosopher or wise man who spoke only in short, cryptic sentences.
    6. The Jesus Seminar determines what topics were appropriate for Jesus to address. He supposedly never quoted Scripture or compared His teaching to Moses. They even remove the topic of judgment from the lips of Jesus.

*Bart Ehrman (1955-)*

1. A NT professor at UNC who started off as an evangelical. He graduated from both Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, both of which are conservative, evangelical institutions.
2. He admits to being raised as a born-again, fundamentalist but during graduate studies became convinced that the “contradictions” and “discrepancies” in the biblical manuscripts could not be harmonized or reconciled. He now considers himself an atheist.
3. He’s a prolific author who, like the Jesus Seminar, seeks to make known to the public and layperson that the Gospels do not present the real Jesus.
   1. *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (2003)
   2. *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (2003)
   3. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005)
   4. *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don’t Know About Them)* (2009)
   5. *Forged: Writing in the Name of God – Why The Bible’s Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2011)
   6. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (2014)
   7. *Jesus Before the Gospels: How the Earliest Christians Remembered, Changed, and Invented Their Stories of the Savior* (2016)
4. Ehrman says Jesus was basically an apocalyptic prophet who saw himself ushering in the Kingdom of God
   1. This is Albert Schweitzer all over again
5. The early church over time came to see Jesus as being more and more divine.
6. “It will become clear in the following chapters that Jesus was not originally considered to be God in any sense at all, and that he eventually became divine for his followers in some sense before he came to be thought of as equal with God Almighty in an absolute sense. But the point I stress is that this was, in fact, a development.” --Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*
7. Significance:
   1. Ehrman’s crusade to destroy traditional Christianity is written for a popular audience and he keeps on churning out books and arguments.
   2. Ehrman continues to teach undergraduate and graduate students at UNC.
8. What should our response be?
   1. Ehrman’s method frequently uses silence to make an argument, but that is a logical fallacy. For example, Ehrman takes Mark’s lack of the virgin birth story to mean that Mark rejected the virgin birth and only saw Jesus as human. Or, Ehrman argues that if Jesus really went around claiming to be God, the Gospel authors would have included that. Since they don’t, Jesus must have never really claimed to be God.
      1. Arguments from silence are horrible. Case in point, I haven’t told you what I ate for lunch today. Does that mean I didn’t eat lunch? Of course not, but it’s not relevant for why we are here.
   2. But notice that in Ehrman’s arguments from silence, he’s assuming that you can trust what the Gospel authors wrote. But that undercuts his whole premise that you can’t trust the Gospels and their stories are really fabrications about who they wanted Jesus to be.