



Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times

Week 3

Startling Surprises

Much of the material for this class, even its general structure, is taken from the work of N.T. Wright, currently the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. Dr. Wright is one of the foremost New Testament scholars and probably the most respected first century biblical historian working today. He is currently working on the fourth volume of a projected six volume work titled, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. This is a monumental work and an extraordinary gift to the church.



Matthew – Jesus, the Jewish Messiah

- ❖ Twice as long as Mark – but incorporates 80% of Mark
 - Adds the birth narrative, then 5 blocks of teaching, and, finally, the resurrected Jesus
- ❖ Though Jewish in perspective, the message is for all – Matt 28:19
- ❖ Matthew has often been read as anti-Semitic
 - It is critical of the Jewish leadership, in general, and the Pharisees, in particular, but the criticisms are from *within* Judaism – a critique from within!
- ❖ There are strong words of judgment for Israel
 - If Israel does not give up her way of being God's people and follow Jesus' way (i.e., repent), then Israel's doom will follow! **And it did.**



The Essenes & Purity

*Neither the blind nor the lame
Nor the deaf nor the mute
Nor the lepers, nor those whose flesh is blemished
Shall be admitted to the council of the community*

This is from the Essene community's regulations in the Dead Sea Scrolls

- ❖ There was an old Jewish belief that only the pure, the physically whole, could be a part of the community.
 - The exclusion of lepers was not solely a medical issue.
- ❖ Jesus healed – what was that all about?
 - Is there something more at work here than compassion?





Party Time!

- ❖ John the Baptist was not one to party. He lived in the wilderness, eating locusts and honey. Jesus, on the other hand, performed his first miracle at a wedding. He spoke of his own work as a wedding banquet. He seemed to be the sort of person you'd want at your party. Jesus was a celebrator!
 - In John's Gospel, Jesus' first public miracle is the changing of water into wine so that a wedding celebration can proceed!
- ❖ Why? – could it be that God was throwing a big party for his people? On top of this, Jesus kept partying with the wrong sorts of people!
- ❖ Is it the "Prodigal Son" or the "Prodigal Father?"
 - Luke 15:11-32 – "and they began to celebrate"



The Time is Now

- ❖ Key Jewish beliefs => driving the tension
 - Monotheism – Israel believes in one God who created all that is!
 - Election – Israel believes that this God chose Israel and made a covenant with Israel! – *but it sure doesn't look like it!?*
 - Eschatology – When will the story reach its climax? When will Israel be vindicated? When will God's promises be kept?
- ❖ Jesus was saying: Your story is reaching its climax! – here & now. The kingdom is coming. But it doesn't look anything like you expect!
 - Isaiah 55:10-13 – the image of God sowing seed
 - Luke 8:5-8, 11-15 – Jesus' parable of the sower
 - The kingdom is coming but its coming is strange. There is a harvest but there is also barrenness. God will not affirm Israel simply as she is. Could there be Jews who will be left out??



YOU are invited

The Call to Repent and Believe

- ❖ Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is near; repent and believe in the Good News."
 - The call to repent is a call to return to God and give up our own agendas! Just as it was a call for Israel to return to Yahweh, to give up its revolutionary zeal, and to embrace a new way of being God's people.
 - See Luke 13:1-5 for examples of the destiny of those who fail to repent!
- ❖ Matthew 4:19: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."
 - A good 1st (or 21st!) century Jew would have found it scandalous that Jesus would say "follow me" rather than "follow God" or "follow Torah."
- ❖ Jesus' invitation is focused on Jesus!



The Shocking Welcome

Sinners and Forgiveness

- ❖ Why did Jesus eat with "sinners?"
 - *All are welcome in this arrival of God's kingdom*, this return from exile and the forgiveness of sins – but, to the Pharisees, this is a scandalous offering to the wrong people! No longer is it about allegiance to Torah, but to Jesus!
- ❖ Matthew 21:28-32
 - The parable of the two sons . . . Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."
- ❖ "Forgiveness was to be the central character of the life of those loyal to Jesus. Thus were they to show their belief that the kingdom of YHWH was indeed dawning." (N.T. Wright, *Jesus & the Victory of God*)



The New Challenge

The Call to Live as the New Covenant People

- ❖ Living as the renewed Israel, the renewed people of God, in a renewed covenant
 - Jesus did not want to found a new church, he wanted to reform and renew the people of God!
- ❖ The renewed covenant and the renewed heart!
 - Jeremiah 31:33 -- But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
 - Mark 10:5 – But Jesus said this to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you.”
 - John Wesley’s heart was strangely warmed!



The Startling Summons

The Call to be Jesus’ Helpers & Associates

- ❖ The invitation “to follow” is a summons to follow Jesus!
 - Being willing to abandon everything, even family, and follow Jesus
 - The parable of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22). The young man is to give up all his idols (\$\$\$!) and follow Jesus!
 - Matthew 10: “and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”
- ❖ “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The last verse of Matthew’s Gospel.



The Warning

- ❖ There was an ending to Jesus' story. There would be sure consequences to the path of violent revolution.
 - Luke 13:1-5: This is not some veiled or mysterious reference. Jesus was talking about the immediacy of Roman soldiers and falling buildings!
- ❖ Jesus was very much like an Old Testament prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah. When the world fell on Jerusalem it would not be some historical accident!
 - See also Matthew 24-25. There is an immediacy to Jesus' warnings here also.
- ❖ We would be wrong to think that these warnings have nothing to do with us. Our lives, our actions, do matter.
 - The Sermon on the Mount is about doing – Matthew 7:24-29
 - Paul: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 – our work will be tested!



Jesus Clashes with the Symbols

- ❖ Torah – the Sabbath, circumcision, & dietary laws
 - Luke 13:10-17: Jesus is challenged for healing on the Sabbath.
 - Mark 7:14-15: Nothing that goes in can defile, but only what comes out! This is NOT what a Pharisee would want to hear!
- ❖ Temple – where sins of Israel are forgiven
 - Jesus forgave sins, but sins could only be forgiven by God and in the temple! Jesus symbolized the destruction of the temple. In Mark 11:1-25, the cursed fig tree is the cursed temple. It is an "acted" parable. See also Jeremiah 8:11-13.
- ❖ Land – the most sacred of Israel's possessions
 - Jesus said that possessions only get in the way of our entry into God's kingdom; see Matthew 6:19-21 for example
- ❖ Jewish family identity
 - Jesus said that anyone who did God's will was his mother and brother and sister!



The Kingdom Question

- ❖ Jesus used his own symbols to point to his kingdom announcement.
 - The calling of twelve disciples as the new Israel; the healings as acts of welcoming and inclusion; his invitation to Gentiles
- ❖ Jesus was saying that they were to be the return-from-exile people, the forgiveness-of-sins people. They were to abandon their old ways of being God's people and embrace a new way – the way to which the Torah had always pointed.
 - Think of it this way – Jesus didn't bring so much a New Way, as he called them to the Way God had always wanted them to go.
- ❖ Clearly, Jesus had inaugurated God's kingdom, but what did he think would happen next?