



Talking Theology at *The Shack*

Week 5
Chapters 10 - 11

1



Walking on water

- ❖ Mack heads to talk with Jesus in the workshop.
 - Jesus is working on his latest project and suggests a walk.
- ❖ They head down to the dock, where Jesus expects Mack to walk across the lake with him!
 - See Peter's story at Matthew 14:22-35

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Fear

❖ Jesus says that he dwells with us in the present and that our imagining of the future is usually built on fear. Jesus tells Mack that when Mack envisions the future, Jesus is rarely in the picture.

➤ ***This is a good question for us, especially in these scary times. When we think about the future, is it a future with Jesus? Is he part of the picture in our minds?***

❖ Jesus tells Mack that the future we imagine isn't real. It can't be because things never turn out just as we imagined they would. Yet, we let that imagined future of fear control us.

➤ ***This seems pretty self-evident. What do you think?***

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Fear (part 2)

❖ Jesus says to Mack that when we have too much imagined fear, allowing it even to control our lives, it is because we don't really know, deep, deep down that God loves us?

➤ ***What do you think about this? What do you think we ought to fear above all else? How can we come to really know God's love for us?***

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Ecology

- ❖ But Mack does walk on the water . . . all the way across the lake. When they arrive, Mack is staggered by the awesome beauty of it all.
- ❖ Jesus reflects on the damage done to the planet he created and the renewal that awaits it.
 - Mack asks Jesus why he doesn't just fix it. Jesus replies that it would end the story prematurely.

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The King of Kings

- ❖ Jesus asks Mack if he has noticed that the King of Kings doesn't act the way earthly kings do. Jesus doesn't force anyone . . . “to force my will on you is exactly what love does not do.”
 - ***Given what's come before, we are not surprised at this emphasis on free will. For the author, freedom is simply necessary for there to be genuine love.***

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Men, women, and submission (part 1)

❖ Jesus then gets into “submission” – a heated topic in some Christian circles. Jesus says the Trinity are submitted to each other and they are submitted to Mack, that submission is all about love and relationships.

- ***What do you think the author is really getting at here? The dictionary definition is “to yield to the authority or will of another.” Do you think that this is what the author has in mind? What if both persons in the relationship have the same will – want to do the same thing – like the persons of the Trinity? But if that’s case, of what use is the word “submit.” In all, I think this is a bit muddled.***

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Men, women, and submission (part 2)

❖ Jesus tells Mack that women are better at relationships than men, because men find fulfillment in achievement. Men express their independence from God by turning to the “sweat of their brow” but women expressed their independence by turning from God to men. (see p. 146-148!)

- ***Do you agree with the author? What are the implications of this view? Do think this is the author’s explanation for why women are better than men at relationship? How many problems in marriages result from our unwillingness to simply acknowledge some of the differences between men and women and then extend some grace to each other?***

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Men, women, and submission (part 3)

❖ Jesus tells Mack that God created men and women to be equal and complementary. That woman was “birthed from man” (the story of Adam’s rib) so that men could be birthed from women, creating a circle of relationship. This is why Jesus came as a man.

- ***The author spends a good bit of time on all this about men and women. I’m not sure I understand exactly what the author is trying to say; e.g., how does Jesus’ gender complete a circle? What do you make of all this?***

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“What would Jesus do?”

❖ Jesus tells Mack that he can neither “do” love nor “do” submission on his own, apart from Jesus’ life in him. It isn’t as easy as simply asking “What would Jesus do?” Jesus says then “seriously, my life was not meant to be an example to copy. Being my follower is not trying to ‘be like Jesus,’ it means for your independence to be killed.”

- ***Yikes . . . I have to say that some of this seems pretty off-the-mark, or at least throwing out the baby the bathwater. Seeking Christlikeness, the imitation of Christ, discipleship, and so on all seem to go out the window. For example, Paul says, “You became imitators of us and the Lord . . .” (1 Thess. 1:6). Do you think that the author is merely critiquing all our “Jesus-doings” while we cling to our independence? How might we better express this?***

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Judgment

- ❖ Jesus sends Mack back. But he soon reaches an impasse, but pushes through a wall behind a waterfall, and finds himself in the middle of an open blackness, broken only by a circle of radiance that surrounds him. There is a desk and behind him an Hispanic-looking woman who is the essence of beauty. Even the sound of her voice is like that of a rainbow.
- ❖ She engages Mack in a conversation about how he loves his children and she knows that he does, and that he loves them well. She asks which child he loves the most.
 - Mack says he loves them equally, though differently. He is “especially fond” of each one. Their bad behavior doesn’t affect his love for them.
 - She says that it isn’t love that grows, but our knowing . . . “love is just the skin of knowing.” She says that Mack loves his children much the way the Father loves his.

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Judgment (part 2)

- ❖ Mack expresses his anger at God. How could God really love Missy and then let her be murdered? The woman invites Mack to sit in her chair – it is time for judgment. Mack now thinks he has died. Mack thinks that he is about to be judged, but he is to be the judge!
 - Mack says he isn’t the one to judge, but she points out that he does it all the time, in ways big and small.
 - Mack is to judge God and the human race. She forces Mack to confront the truth that he judges both God and humans. When he blames God for Missy’s murder, he is acting as God’s judge.
 - ***For most of human history, we knew that we were the ones in the dock, that God was the judge. But in the last 150 years, we increasingly insist on putting God in the dock, with ourselves the judge of God.***

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Choosing for “heaven” and “hell”

- ❖ Then, she tells Mack that he must choose two of his children to spend eternity with God and the three who will not. Mack, of course, knows that he can’t condemn any of his children to “hell.” He even volunteers to go in their place. She tells him that he sounds a lot like Jesus.
 - ***I guess the implied question here is whether God could condemn one of those whom God loves . . . and is there anyone whom God does not love? How might this line of thought begin to change some of our understanding of eternal punishment?***
- And still the question remains . . . why Missy? Why did she have to die? For what?
 - ***Perhaps so long as we insist that Missy died for some reason, some larger purpose, we can’t help but end up with a “God” who isn’t much like Jesus. Mack admits that he sees Jesus’ love, but can’t square that with his “God.”***
- ❖ The woman tells Mack that the answer is to stop judging God and simply embrace God.

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Seeing through the waterfall

- ❖ Then, through the wall Mack sees his children – all five, even Missy. They are playing on the other side of the waterfall. In a way, Missy sees Mack and mouths the words: “It’s ok . . . I love you.” Missy is really there, the woman says, but for the children, it will be a dream.
 - ***What do you think is the purpose of this scene? Is it a glimpse into God’s kingdom, the most real “reality” that exists alongside our own? Is the waterfall then a window into God’s kingdom?***

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Judgment redux

- ❖ The woman tells him that “judgment is not about destruction, but about setting things right.”
- ❖ ***Do you agree with this? Is judgment a way of speaking of the triumph of God’s mercy and justice? After all, what is judgment if it isn’t the triumph of justice? And what is justice, if it isn’t the making right of all wrongs?***