

Knowing Jesus

Who is Jesus? Seems like an odd question to ask, I know, but we have to admit that Jesus is a fascinating character. And He is fascinating not only to Christians, but to most all religious people. Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, mystic cults of every stripe and color all share a fascination with Jesus. Even the Far East can't help but be spellbound by Him. Gandhi, no less, once said, "I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians". Although He is universally fascinating that doesn't mean Jesus is fascinating in the same way to everyone. He means different things to different people. He is able to fill these various roles because people usually just paint Jesus in their own image making Him an idealized version of themselves. He is the ultimate wish fulfillment. There's Jesus the radical. Jesus the liberal. There's Jesus the capitalist and Jesus the socialist. There's Jesus the pacifist, the activist, the friendly neighbor, and the backyard guest. There's Jesus the no-nonsense hardliner and Jesus the softhearted enabler. Surely, He can't be all these things, and yet, at one time or another, we find Jesus being twisted and contorted to support most every worldly cause. So, how do we keep from projecting our own wishes and desires onto Jesus? How do we let the real Jesus speak for Himself without clouding His message with our own agendas? This is a very difficult task. And the only way to do this is to pare away the excess of over 2,000 years of dogmatism. But what are we left with? Truth be told, we are left with a rather ordinary peasant, who had but one message to impart to this world. No matter what anyone thinks of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God, there is no denying that He was very single-minded in His outlook. He was committed to sharing one fundamental truth with humanity. And for this singular truth, He willingly sacrificed His life. Whether His death was a noble death or an ignoble one is a matter of faith. But by every account, Jesus was an historical figure, who spent His adult years making predictions about the fate of the world and the human race.

Although Jesus had much to say, everything He said revolved around a common theme: The Eschaton. The Eschaton deals with the events pertaining to the end: The End Times, the Last Day, the Day of Judgement, the end of all of history. This is what occupied the mind of Jesus. Over and over again, we hear the historical Jesus say things very unhistorical like, “My Kingdom is not of this world” or “the Son of Man will come again in glory” or “the Kingdom of God draws near”. He taught about a future Kingdom, a future King, a new and better Temple, a reunified people. He prepared His followers to meet this imminent end by being sober-minded; ever waiting, ever watchful. So, if you want to know the historical Jesus, the real Jesus, you best familiarize yourself with eschatology. And where you place that “End” will determine whether you think Jesus a failure, a liar, a madman or truly the Son of God. For anyone who is serious about Jesus has to take His message seriously. And what He told His disciples poses the greatest challenge to any real Jesus admirer. Jesus said to His disciples: “Assuredly I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.” Now at face value, this seems to make Jesus a failure at best or an outright liar at worst. Because we know the disciples made it much farther than the cities of Israel and Christ did not physically come again. In fact, here we are all these centuries later sitting on this side of the world and still no sign of the physical Son of Man.

The logical explanation to all of this is that while Jesus is certainly fascinating, He was ultimately wrong. For the End He prophesied did not come, or did it? By faith, we believe it did. Just as water is displaced and pushed aside by a passing boat but then closes in behind it very rapidly, so there will be those who are only moved by Jesus for a fleeting moment and then consign him once again to the dust heap of history. As for us, by faith, we believe Jesus was absolutely right in His prediction that the disciples would not make it through the cities of Israel before He returned for they didn’t even make it out of Jerusalem. The Son of Man’s end-time arrival was

marked by the festive events we know today as Pentecost. Most Christians think of Pentecost as a kind of beginning—the beginning of the Church or the beginning of the Christian movement. But I say Pentecost is the End, the Parousia; the last and great Eschaton. If we want to call Pentecost a beginning, let us call it the beginning of the end. For the historical Jesus died, and all of history died with Him. But by His resurrection, He redeemed history from the savagery of time. The Messiah now reigns eternal, and the Kingdom of God now draws near. But this End Times Kingdom that Christ spoke of so often while on this earth is not a flesh-blood, brick and mortar Kingdom, but an internal, spiritual, transcend-this-world Kingdom. The Kingdom of Heaven draws near you for Christ has entered His temple and now takes up residence in the palace of your very being. You are now a world unto yourself; you are the very Kingdom of God, the new Temple, by water and the Spirit. And when Christ said “My Kingdom is not of this world” He spoke truth for you dear brothers and sisters in Christ are in the world but not of the world. You have been lifted out of this world by the very same Holy Spirit who lifted Christ from the grave, and elevated the speech of the disciples on that first Pentecost Day. The Holy Spirit now proclaims the End in you. But this End knows no end. For in Christ there is neither beginning nor end for all time stands still. We are living the eschatology- the now but not yet of eternity. For what we look forward to in the future is ours right now in the present. The line between heaven and earth is blurred and the Kingdom of God shines forth in all its glory. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy H. Mills