

## MEETING JESUS ALL OVER AGAIN

### I. ONGOING DEBATE

2000 years after His death, Jesus remains a popular figure. You will find Him in cartoons, on magazine covers like *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *US News*, as the subject of editorials, named as the reason for certain organizations and movements, quoted in political debates, etc. I would venture to say that there are more pages filled and more ink spilled about Jesus than any other person in history. But for all this “research” and writing and thinking and talking Jesus’ true identity continues to be a mystery. Sometimes we have what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery,” believing that only in our age have we begun to question Jesus’ real identity because we are a much more sophisticated and educated society, much more so than those people living in the backwoods two millennia ago. But the same debates swirled then as now. In Matthew 16, Jesus, aware of the controversy surrounding His identity, asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” What were some of the answers? Now?

### II. THE RADICAL CLAIMS OF JESUS

Why so many different ideas? Jesus was not unclear—in fact He was radically clear about exactly who He is. Eight times in the Gospel of John, Jesus lays it out for us with what have been called His “I AM” Statements. So, we can get it “straight from the horse’s mouth” by going and listening to Jesus’ own words. The reason for the debate then, I would say, is to let us off the hook because the things Jesus said were too radical to really believe and live by. **Ex. N.T. Wright.** It’s not just other people, but we do it too. Our self-interest requires that we take the things that Jesus said and reinterpret them or work hard to strip them of their distinct and powerful meaning. Why? Because Jesus’ claims of identity are so far-reaching that if we believe them, we have to radically re-orient our lives around Him and that is the very thing we are hesitant to do. Instead we try to domesticate Jesus, to tame Him. Listen to just a few of Jesus’ claims:

A. Verily, Verily (Amen, Amen).

B. Luke 9.57-62, 14.26-27

C. Mark 10.17-22

D. Matthew 13.44

E. “No man can serve two masters”

F. I AM Statements

When Jesus made these claims, people simply walked away—the Pharisees said, who does this man think He is claiming to forgive sins and to have the authority of God. The rich young ruler walked away sad because He could not abandon everything for Jesus, the followers in John 6 found his sayings too hard and left Him. What we often do, I think, is a bit different. We totally deconstruct the claims of Jesus until they fit our desires and then we embrace Him wholeheartedly. But do we only have a god of our own making?

“We are giving in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist Him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with. A nice, middle-class, American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn’t mind materialism and who would never call us to give away everything we have. A Jesus who would not expect us to forsake our closest relationships so that He receives all our affection. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts, because, after all, He loves us just the way we are. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who, for that matter, wants us to avoid danger altogether. A Jesus who brings us comfort and prosperity as we live out our Christian spin on the American dream.” (David Platt)

“Maybe this is why we fill our lives with the constant drivel of entertainment in our culture—and in the church. We are afraid that if we stop and really look at God in His Word, we might discover that He evokes greater awe and demands deeper worship than we are ready to give Him.” (Platt)

Because of these things, it may be more dangerous for us and our kids in the suburbs than the ghetto. Ladue and Kirkwood might be more dangerous than East STL! In fact, studies show that in the suburbs, anxiety, depression, boredom, unhappiness, apathy, somatic disorders are much higher.

### **III. THE RADICAL CALL OF JESUS**

This is why Jesus' call is not to simply believe His words because if we truly believe His words, it will change everything about us. The Gospel does not require us to add Jesus to our already busy schedules or to make it a point to pull up to Jesus' religious drive-thru window to get our daily dose of religion nor does the Gospel call us to accept Jesus as Savior or pray a prayer. We can believe the truth without loving the truth; we can appreciate Jesus without devoting ourselves to Jesus; we can be good people without reorienting our lives. These responses are simply far too weak—the only appropriate response to Jesus, to a man who makes claims like this is to hate and ostracize Him as a crazy person or to give our entire lives in unconditional surrender to Jesus and His mission.

*What is the Gospel?* Many would say that the Gospel is that I can have forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death or the Gospel is that Jesus died for me and loves me, but that definition is far too small because it centers on me. Jesus' Gospel includes me but centers on His glory in the entire world. God gives me grace so I can make that grace shine in every part of God's creation. The Gospel is not about forgiveness of sins or being saved or being justified. We have made those things the end, the goal, but they are only the means to the end. We enjoy God's deep, rich, robust grace so that all the nations are blessed and come under the rule and reign of King Jesus.

#### **John Paton, missionary to cannibals, a man who understood the radical claims and call of Christ:**

He wrote that “with regard to my life among the Cannibals, as I had only once to die, I was content to leave the time and place and means in the hand of God. I sought to serve and honor the Lord, whether in life or by death.” Many tried to prevent him from going. One such was an older churchman named Mr. Dickson who repeatedly said, “The Cannibals! You will be eaten by Cannibals.” In an amazing response Paton cried out, “Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or by worms. In the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer!” Where are the men like this today?!

Sometimes I shudder to think at what Jesus might require of me if I take Him seriously. If we don't want our lives to be disturbed or disrupted, then don't get near Jesus. If you don't want your comfort, security, stability, and convenience to get challenged then don't get too close to Jesus. If you don't want your life to get messy, if you don't want to be challenged, if you don't want your idols to be toppled, if you don't want to reorient your life, then stay far away from Jesus—that's why he tells us to count the cost. He might require of us our comfort, our convenience, our money, our relationships, our time. The question is what is my life being oriented around? On what basis do I make decisions about time, money, and family? What vision do I have that I have been called to spread God's glory to the ends of the earth?

The cost is great but the reward is greater. Jesus gives us a promise that comes right after the rich young ruler's departure—“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Mark 10.29-30). His grace is enough. He is the treasure in the field worth losing everything for.

#### **3 Ways I need to reorient my life around Jesus instead of orienting Jesus around my life:**