

The Historical Jesus

Introduction

Describing the historical Jesus

- How would you describe the historical Jesus to someone who has never heard of Christianity?
- How does a historical description of Jesus differ from a theological description?
- Christology “from below” vs. Christology “from above”
- How might a non-Christian *layperson* describe the historical Jesus?
- How might a non-Christian *scholar* describe the historical Jesus?

C.S. Lewis’s “Trilemma”

Relevance of the historical Jesus for the church

Class Schedule:

- 1/13 - The quest for the historical Jesus
- 1/20 - Are the gospels reliable historical documents?
- 1/27 - Jesus outside the New Testament
- 2/3 - Criteria of historical authenticity
- 2/10 - The Christ-Myth Theory: Did Jesus actually exist, or was his story borrowed from pagan myths?
- 2/17 - The Failed Apocalyptic Prophet Theory
- 2/24 - (Missions conference)
- 3/3 - Was Jesus mistaken about the timing of his return? (Matt. 16:28; 24:34)
- 3/10 - How did Jesus understand his own identity/mission?
- 3/17 The Jesus Seminar and the Cynic Jesus Theory
- 3/24 - The Failed Political Revolutionary Theory
- 3/31 - The Da Vinci Code and the Jesus Bloodline Theory
- 4/7 - How did early Christians view Jesus?
- 4/14 - Did Jesus really rise from the dead?
- 4/21 - (Easter)
- 4/28 - Class wrap-up and review

Resources:

- *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel
- *40 Questions About the Historical Jesus* by C. Marvin Pate
- *The Challenge of Jesus* by N.T. Wright
- *How God Became Jesus* by Michael Bird
- *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* by Richard Bauckham
- *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* by Craig Blomberg
- “Refuting 5 False Theories about Jesus” by Kyle Dillon (The Gospel Coalition)
 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/refuting-5-false-theories-about-jesus/>

“Every Jesus is a theological Jesus, even if we run like the dickens from orthodoxy, believe in orthodoxy, or want to do our best to write a disinterested Jesus. Jesus is by nature, because of the history of who he was and who he has become, theological.... Historical Jesus study is a kind of theology because every reconstruction of Jesus is theological.”

Scot McKnight, *“Why the Authentic Jesus is of No Use”*

“Personally I have no fundamental objection to a Christological concept that starts ‘from below’. I believe that it brings out aspects of Jesus’ person and work that are easily overlooked in a Christology ‘from above’. Moreover, it is the very same way along which the apostolic church came to its confession of Jesus as Messiah, as Lord, as the Son of God. At the same time, however, I believe that we who are living after Paul and John have to complement a Christology ‘from below’ by a Christology ‘from above’. We who know Jesus as the risen One also have to go the way from *vere Deus* [true God] to the *vere homo* [true man].... Now that God has revealed his way of looking at Jesus to us, may we not, indeed must we not, also use this approach in order to get a ‘complete’ picture of Jesus who is at the same time *vere Deus* and *vere homo*?”

Klaas Runia, *The Present-Day Christological Debate*

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

“When the Jesus we have (re)constructed is no longer orthodox or the Jesus of the canonical Gospels or the Jesus of the *regula fidei* [“rule of faith”], the Jesus we have is no longer the Jesus of the church, and a Jesus who is not of the church is not a Christian Jesus. That Jesus was virginally conceived as a result of an act of God, lived as a Galilean Jew, preached the kingdom and did miracles and all that, died and was buried and was raised from the dead by God, and was exalted to the right hand of God, and will come again. And these acts are saving and forgiving and justifying and reconciling in such a way that those who participate in that Jesus are granted eternal life. That Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity. He is divine and he is human, fully God and fully man. That is the church’s Jesus; that is the Christian Jesus. To say it one more time: the historical Jesus reconstructed in the historical Jesus enterprise by historical Jesus scholars is someone less, someone else, and therefore not the same Jesus. As such, he is of no use to the church.”

Scot McKnight, *“Why the Authentic Jesus Is of No Use”*