

“The Missing Person of Jesus”

see Jesus Ministries

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I. Rediscovering the Person of Jesus

A. Seeing Jesus Through John’s Eyes (John 13:1-5)

1. Footwashing: Only description of footwashing in the entire ancient world. Footwashing was for slaves. Totally demeaning in the ancient world.
2. Notice the details in John’s description of the footwashing. How many moves does Jesus make? Why so many?
3. This is nearly 50 years after the event and John is an old man as he writes this. Why does he still recall it in such vivid detail? John was a man who was madly in love with Jesus.
4. “I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene....No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus.” - Albert Einstein
5. At times, our Christianity has become lifeless, boring, stale because we don’t know the beauty we’re moving towards

B. Jesus Creates Space

1. What’s unusual about *how* Jesus relates to the disciples as he does this? *Provides no narrative frame, he doesn’t say anything, he just acts it out.*
2. What does that create in his disciples? Mystery. Imagination. Space. Jesus has a funny way of creating space in this way.
3. Faith and people emerge when Jesus creates space (John 20:11-18)
 - a. Peter’s faith emerges
 - b. Mary Magdalene, the person emerges. It’s the only recorded words of Mary in Scripture
 - c. The false Gospel of Peter has a six-story tall Jesus that fills the space. There is no room for the person or to relate.
4. Other examples Jesus creating space
 - a. Creates space with words: Syrophoenician woman’s faith broke through (Mark 7:27-29)
 - b. Feeding of 5,000: Faith of disciples emerge -“You give them something to eat.”
 - c. Lazarus’ death (Jn. 11:14-15) “Lazarus has died and I was glad I was not there so that you might believe”

C. The Missing Person of Jesus

1. Do we know how he loves? Do we know his anger, his honesty, how he creates space? Another way to put it is do we know his cadences?

2. John the apostle fell in love with Jesus the man before he came to love Jesus the God. He is the most beautiful person who ever walked the earth. He is the most attractive part of our faith.
3. Our doctrine of the person is vacant. What does it mean? Our Christianity suffers from depersonalization.

II. Why Has the Person of Jesus Gone Missing?

A. Gnostic imprint on the church's DNA (God-Man Chart)

1. The Greek mind damaged a critical piece of the church's theological DNA. The Greeks disliked the physical flesh. The Stoic controlled his passions. Prudence, one of the four Greek virtues, meant you did nothing in excess.
2. Created an early Christian heresy called Gnosticism and Docetism. *Dokeo* is the Greek word for *seem*. Jesus only seemed to be a man. Gnosticism, like neo-Platonism, had an inner circle of initiates who ascended to the divine by gaining special knowledge of the divine and freeing yourself from the flesh.
3. EX: Jesus appears more "floaty" – almost hovering through life, never fully engaged with the world. Old films depicting Jesus – glowy, almost walking above the ground-wanting to emphasize his "other-worldness."
4. Gnostic is very much like Buddhist and Hindu. Modern day is Oprah, Deepak Chopra, etc.
5. This made a deep imprint on the Christian church. Example of this is Jesus' missing emotions in the Bible translations-he was angry at Lazarus' grave but it is often translated as "deeply moved and greatly troubled" (John 11:33, 38).
6. Only study of Jesus' emotions was B. B. Warfield's *Emotional Life of our Lord* (1912)

B. Loss of Early Church Narrative Tradition

1. There has not only been a loss of a person but also the loss of a narrative. All virtue and morality are always located in a person in a narrative. It is not just conceptual but embodied. (Alasdair MacIntyre, "After Virtue")
2. J-Curve: Dying and rising of Jesus was the narrative frame for Christian morality. The gospel is not a floaty conceptual set of precepts. It is a person and it is embodied in the story his of death and resurrection. Likewise, the gospel is not only known by us in precepts but embodied as our life is framed by death and resurrection.
3. EX: Francis of Assisi's commitment to humility, almost obsession with it, was imbedded in the narrative of God's self-humiliation in Christ. Thus, he created the first ever manager scene in the early 1200s.
4. Medieval extreme was to merge Jesus' suffer and my suffering so I contribute to my salvation. Jesus' work plus mine.

5. Luther rightly reacted to the Medieval corruption, but Luther (while sympathetic to the J-curve), never integrated it with the Christian life. His discipling project was almost exclusively focused on brokenness (law) and grace (gospel). (Carl Trueman, *Luther on the Christian Life*).
6. Narrative frame (the story of Jesus' dying and rising) became wholly focused around justification by faith, effectively depersonalizing the gospel. Lutheran & Reformed catechism's move from God, Creation, Fall, Redemption, and then Law.
7. Particularly in Reformed circles, Christ-imitation is often seen as pietism (emotional), moralism (doing good in my own strength) or trite (WWJD). Moralism is the greatest fear--resulting in a "fencing" of justification by faith.
8. Medieval imbalance: Love overwhelmed Faith. Reformation: Faith overwhelmed Love.

C. Person of Jesus is Low, Slow, and Hidden

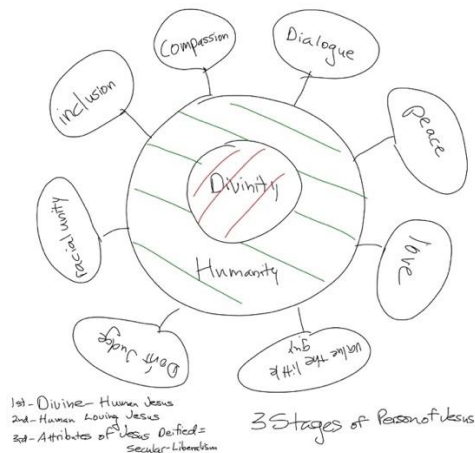
1. Like the seeds in Jesus' kingdom parables, the person of Jesus is low, slow, and hidden. What does that mean? We get to know him more as we follow in his footsteps in the low, slow and hidden places.
2. The person of Jesus comes alive as you love like him. He will remain completely opaque unless you begin washing feet like him. It is a knowledge that only comes from walking in his shoes as you enter the same downward path of his life.
3. Gospels can't be systematized because love can't be systematized.
4. "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (Jn. 14:21, 23)

D. Jesus is a Blue-Collar Peasant.

1. We do not really know the person of Jesus because he is a blue-collar peasant. Typically, biblical scholars are non-peasants. Jesus talks, relates, and thinks like a peasant. He's very concrete, connected to the physical, shares a lot of simple stories.
2. In other way of saying it is, "Jesus is earthy." Yet, those who study his life, write the books and commentaries are usually not. Thus, we know a lot about the historical, cultural and even geographical context of Jesus' life and ministry that shapes his actions and teaching but we don't know a lot about him.
3. Only study of Jesus as a person that emphasized his Jewishness was in Alfred Edersheim's *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883).

E. Secular-Liberalism's Vision of the Good

1. We are losing our kids in the church to a seemingly "better" and more enticing vision of the good that secular liberalism offers.
2. Confusing thing is that it looks and sounds a lot like Jesus. It began rooted in Jesus but is no longer anchored by him. Secular liberalism's vision of the good is a secularized person of Jesus minus Jesus.
 - a. First: divine-human Jesus and attributes
 - b. Second: only human Jesus and attributes
 - c. Third: only attributes of Jesus are left; made absolute and deified



3. This is not just in the world but also the in the church. Secular liberalism not only casts a secularized person of Jesus (compassion, inclusion, community) but also a secularized gospel of Paul (freedom).
4. Example of "outgrowing marriage" - secularized compassion is love at all costs and secularized freedom is fulfilling my desire at all costs. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.
5. Something "bad" (breaking of a vow) is masked by something "good" maturity (outgrowing marriage).
6. This is exactly what Judas does. He masks something bad he does (betrayal) with something good (a kiss).

