

**HISTORICAL JESUS VS.  
CULTURAL JESUS  
WHO IS THIS MAN?**

**Galatians 4:4-5**

Pastor Jeff Robinson

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**“It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.” – Sherlock Holmes, *A Study in Scarlet***

**Question 1: Was Jesus a real person?**

- 1) Historical Jesus: Who was the real Jesus?
  - a. Was Jesus a real person?

Q: Why would we address something so basic? What is at stake?

A: Christianity is rooted in real history. If Jesus never lived, then Jesus was never crucified. If Jesus was never crucified, then Jesus was never resurrected. If Jesus was never resurrected, then we are without hope.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

- Your faith is futile.
- You are still in your sins because no Redeemer lives.
- You have no hope beyond death.
- You should be pitied for believing in a Jesus who really can't deliver.

Galatians 4:4-5

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

1 Timothy 2:5-7

*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. <sup>7</sup> For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

b. Denials of the biblical Jesus

1. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768): *The "Father" of the quest*  
"Reimarus begins by arguing for a clear distinction between the actual Jesus of history and the Gospels' presentation of him...Reimarus arrived at his famous conclusion: the real Jesus of history was a would-be Messiah figure who hoped to establish an earthly kingdom through revolutionary force—but these hopes were dashed when he was arrested and crucified."<sup>1</sup>

2. K. H. Venturini: (1768–1849) *A Non-supernatural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth*  
"Jesus' miracles of healing are explained by the fact that Jesus was a proficient herbalist, always accompanied by his "portable medicine chest."<sup>2</sup>

3. David Friedrich Strauss: (1808-1874) *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835).  
Jesus is in the category of myth. "The advantage of the "mythical view" is that it "leaves the substance of the narrative unassailed; and instead of venturing to explain the details, accepts the whole, not indeed as true history, but as a sacred legend." ... He was always forthright about the influence of Hegel on his study of Jesus: "My criticism of the life of Jesus was from its origin intimately related to Hegelian philosophy."<sup>3</sup>

4. Bruno Bauer: (1809-1882) *Critique of the Evangelical History of the Synoptics* (1840-42)  
"It was the evangelists (apostles) who invented this history and imagined these myths."<sup>4</sup>

"Taking his cue from Strauss's critical methodology and concept of myth, pushed the thesis to its furthest possible point and concluded that *all* was myth and *nothing* was history—Jesus never was an actual person in history. With this move Bauer became a leading early proponent of the "Christ-Myth" theory."<sup>5</sup>

*The New Quest for the Historical Jesus*

5. Albert Schweitzer: (1865-1975) *Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906).  
Jesus was a failed social reformer but a teacher of love.

"There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the

world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man, who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.”<sup>6</sup>

### Third Quest: The Jesus Seminar

#### 6. Robert Funk: (1926-2005) *The Jesus Seminar*

George Tyrrell: “Whenever the scholar gazes into the deep well of history in search of Jesus, there is always the real hazard of seeing merely one’s own reflection gazing back, and mistaking that for Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

### Reasons to believe that Jesus is a real person:

- The Apostle Paul bases his entire message on Jesus existing and existing *recently*.<sup>8</sup>

N. T. Wright:

While engaged in a violent persecution of the church, he was confronted, on the road to Damascus, with a blinding vision of the risen Jesus. He continued to Damascus, and there regained his sight and was baptized c. AD 34 (Acts 9:3-19). In obedience to his new Lord he began at once to preach Jesus as Messiah in the synagogues, and became in his turn the object of Jewish persecution . . . at this point he apparently spent some time in Arabia (Gal. 1:17), returning to Damascus for three years before going to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29).<sup>9</sup>

All of the other apostles (except for Judas Iscariot), were alive when Paul converted to the group that he had previously wanted to exterminate. These very same men shared what they had seen and heard with Paul. John the Apostle writes:

*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—<sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—<sup>3</sup> what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-3).*

It wasn't just from the apostles, but an entire generation of eyewitnesses. Paul reminds his readers:

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-3).*

Paul paints a powerful connection in verse one and two between the Gospel that he preaches and what he had received in verse three. Paul delivered or handed over, what he had first received. There is simply no room in the text for Paul formulating a new doctrine of Jesus. One has to step outside the circle of textual evidence to construct a theory of Paul crafting a different message of Jesus.

Could Paul have intentionally distorted the account? Regardless of one's view of inspiration, historiography, and textual criticism, no one is exempt from the need for Ockham's Razor, the *lex parsimoniae*, or that postulates must not be multiplied beyond necessity.<sup>10</sup> The most reasonable explanation is that Paul received the message of the orthodox Jesus, as contained in the early creeds, and preached that same Jesus throughout the Roman Empire.

Most importantly, Paul hinges this received gospel as the one "by which you are saved." Hence, Paul connects the content of his preaching to the past and the future: to the past because it is what he had received from the early believers (some of which he may have persecuted), and the present and future reality of God continuing the save those who call upon the name of Jesus. Paul also argues in Galatians 2:2,6 that the Apostles validated the gospel he had preached to the Gentiles and "*added nothing to me*" (Galatians 2:6).

This raises the question of what 1 John means by "the beginning." In this sense, "the beginning," clearly refers to the public ministry of Jesus and the calling of the disciples. What did the Apostles do since the beginning? John makes it clear that they proclaimed this message. J. N. D. Kelly also highlights an often overlooked aspect in the study of early Christianity:

There is no reason to infer, however, that the primitive Church regarded the apostolic testimony as confined to written documents emanating from, or attributed to, the apostles.

Logically, as it must have done chronologically, *the testimony stood prior to the documents*, and it would be more correct to say that the latter were valued precisely because they were held to enshrine the former.<sup>11</sup>

The connection with the historical Jesus and early Christian creeds is simply that earlier historical accounts are strong evidence for the historicity of Jesus as well as what the early church believed about Him. Close proximity to a historical event the higher the chance of accuracy.

How then can one know that the New Testament, or even the early creeds, is what the Apostles actually preached? The answer is that the early churches were founded upon the gospel that the Apostles preached and those churches both believed and passed down the same message. We do not find any evidence of a coup d'état within the circle of the Apostles, the early churches, or among the authors of the New Testament. From the dawn of the earliest Christian house gatherings to the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E., the core of the gospel message was continually preached and affirmed: Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, and died on a cross according to the Hebrew scriptures, and was raised from the dead. Had Paul or any of the other Apostles altered what the earliest Christians believed there would be ample evidence, yet we only find an agreement on Jesus.

Despite the fact that the early church never had rest from doctrinal assault, such as the invasion of Judaizers (Galatians 2:14), or physical persecution from the pagan world, the church held fast to the Gospel. To edit Jesus in any form would have surely caused a seismic split within the early church.

- Appeal to eyewitnesses: The apostles, brothers of Christ, Cephas, Jesus's half-brother, James, 500 eyewitnesses who were still alive.

Eyewitnesses are of utmost importance in ancient history. One could argue that eyewitness testimony, especially if the account was recorded in the lifetime of the eyewitness, is akin to the modern equivalent of high-definition video surveillance of an event. Galen is well noted for his historical proverb, "better to be an eyewitness (*autoptes*) by the side of the master himself and not to be like those who navigate out of books."<sup>12</sup> Papias echoes the same thought in his Prologue, "For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice."<sup>13</sup>

- Enemy attestation: Support from early non-Christian opponents.

- Manuscript evidence: The New Testament stands head and shoulders above all other ancient manuscripts.
- Basic standards of historical fairness: If we throw out the New Testament then we should throw out virtually all of ancient history.

Michael Grant: “If we apply to the New Testament, as we should, the same sort of criteria as we should apply to other ancient writings containing historical material, we can no more reject Jesus’ existence than we can reject the existence of a mass of pagan personages whose reality as historical figures is never questioned.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Quest*, 44, in Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 14.

<sup>3</sup> D. F. Strauss, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 56, in Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Frédéric Lichtenberger, *History of German Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. William Hastie (United Kingdom: Clark, 1889), 375.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Schweitzer, trans. W. Montgomery, *Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1968), 370-371, in Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

<sup>7</sup> George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-Roads* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1913), 44, in Paul Rhodes Eddy and James K. Beilby, “The Quest for the Historical Jesus: An Introduction,” *The Historical Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce Demarest, *New Dictionary of Theology*, 496.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 568.

<sup>11</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Galen, *Temp. med.* 6 pref (Kühn ZI.796-97, also cited in Galen, *De libr. Propr.* 5 (Kühn XIX.33), both quoted in translation in Alexander, “The Living Voice,” 228; cf. Alexander, *The Preface*, 83. Cited in, Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.3-4. Cited in, Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Grant, *Jesus: An Historian’s Review of the Gospels* (New York: Scribner’s, 1977), 199-200, in Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 36.