

“Stop Looking for a Jesus You Can Believe In and  
Start Believing in the One Who is Out Looking for You.”  
Sermon for 30 August 2051  
Text: Mark 8:22-38

Mark 8:22-38 English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

**22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Do you see anything?” 24 And he looked up and said, “I see people, but they look like trees, walking.” 25 Then Jesus[a] laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him to his home, saying, “Do not even enter the village.”**

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

**27 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” 28 And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” 29 And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” 30 And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.**

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

**31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”** See Mark 2:7,9 for the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins on earth—a prerogative of God alone. Is this not a claim to divine attributes? Cm with Mark 2:2. Note the emphasis on divine matters (as contrasted with humanistic concerns. See Mark 10:33-34. Watch your eschatology—it can trip you up by blinding you to what God is actually doing!

**34 And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his**

**cross and follow me. 35 For whoever would save his life[b] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? 37 For what can a man give in return for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”** Is this not another claim to divinity? To a shared godhead?

Take One: “Be a Critical Viewer” (30 August 2015)

Having been ushered through Buckingham Palace to the gardens by security guards, the pair that came to fetch Sherlock Holmes did not shock me. Big, burly, businesslike men, they are reassuring that the royal family is rather more safe than not. I viewed “A Scandal in Belgravia” Season 2, Series 2 and, *while it is not “family friendly”*—due to implied nudity and graphic violence—it addresses fear of exposure, truth and terrorist extortion aptly as well as vulnerability. Very timely in the wake of the Ashley Madison adultery disclosures! Sherlock is brutally honest when he avers that “consequences happen.” If you do something stupidly immoral, you will have to face the music (or naked truth). There is nothing I can do, there is no remedy. It, the damning video, or images cannot be erased and therefore our sin have a degree of cyber-indelibility! And you can never be sure that the copy you bought back is the only one! (Most blackmailers have back-ups for insurance purposes.) However, what cannot be erased can be forgiven—and the taint of it, mollified. Repentance includes, hopefully, a learning curve!

***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** Fear of media distortion was directly faced. So, I thought the show was great—and the artistic integrity was sound: even the dangerously enticing bits were not gratuitous. And, one of my first observations was this: how very like the story-line of the gospel narrative the show was. The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate and an international level, was hopeful and compelling. Sherlock’s nemesis, mathematics Professor James Moriarty, makes a chilling cameo appearance and, in the process, sets up a trap for the seductive destruction of our hero detective and ends up frustrated—Sherlock escapes the fowler’s snare and is humanized by his harrowing ordeal in the process. His vulnerability makes for intimate drama but the scope of the consequences is global.

So, my point in making this brief movie critique is give you a tool for assessing the “triumph of truth in a baffling plot line” and to share with you my personal proclivity: I am drawn to thinking critically (biblically) about my entertainment. Indeed, thinking Christianly about the media is valuable, satisfying and vital. More of us need to do more of it better and better.

However, there is a real danger that, in the process of finding parallels to the gospel narrative in current media entertainment, we may allow the latter to overshadow the former.

I mean, we end up discussing a good story to the neglect of the best story. For instance, in Mark 8, the narrative moves from the feeding of the 4,000. This large crowd may have been gathered in the wake of Jesus' healing a mute and deaf man kindly brought to Jesus by some residents of Decapolis. A huge, impossible miracle. So huge was the impact that "Jesus as healer" threatened to overshadow "Jesus as the gospeller." Jesus is a gospeller, or **kingdom preacher** was so out of His own mouth (this is **the reason why I have come**-Mark 1:38). It was His priority to proclaim the Kingdom, the coming of the power of God in the person of Himself. Jesus sends the formerly deaf and mute man away, eschewing *publicity* with this command: **Do not tell anyone. But the more he did so** (forbade signs and wonder talk), **the more they kept talking about it. The people were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said, "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."** We watch a movie to satisfy our need to be amazed.

Now, if this is pertinent, it brings us to a baffling thing: if Jesus did not want publicity, or to highlight a public ministry among the Gentiles (for such was the make-up of the population of Decapolis, the place where the Romans designed ten settlements), why did He do such public events?! And why did He mix it up with prohibitions on idle chatter: **Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone.** (Mark 7:36. Of course, He knew they'd talk and that may have partly fueled His *itinerate* ministry style. A moving target comports well with getting the word out.) He later (8:26) **Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."** We may suppose that the man was compliant, but not being blind anymore is a difficult thing to hide—and the change begs explanation. His joy must have been irrepressible. Hopefully, so. The people would talk about it even if he demurred.

Healing is an intimate thing with huge public consequences. It is a public calamity; but a good one. Think of a complete change of garment, as in CLADS:

Capacity changing  
 Life-changing  
 Abrupt, it disrupts family life and routine  
 Duty Changing  
 Status Changing

So, if Jesus isn't big on publicity, what's an alternative: self-disclosure. Adding to our proper understanding of Who He is, and why He's here and what He's doing as He goes about, doing good. He wants us to know the truth about Himself, as well as about ourselves. Those who know these two things know what it is to be free!

***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** The critical viewer aims at uncovering the truth, at discovering the truth behind the truth. This goal motivates and legitimates the pursuit!

Secondly, as in another baffling piece, consider the buzz (**He does all things well . . . He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak**) makes Jesus question (v. 27) **Who do people say I am?** rather more specific, and less vague. What does **He does all things**

**well** suggest about the Son of Man? That He is excellent? The perfect man? Merely that He is skillful and versatile, well-spoken? Or, does it hint at His sinlessness? Jesus is remarkably genuine, sincere and truthful showing no fear, nor favoritism. Or, maybe, remarkably, He practices no self-promotion . . . expends no energy trying to look good, or better than He is. *These things alone make Jesus a real stand out.* How many of us, in representing ourselves, gladly put out a good story to make ourselves look better than we know we are? Choosing our words, deleting this, redacting that—putting the emphasis in all the right places? We use nuances to generate favor in other’s eyes. Those running for president aren’t the only ones with integrity issues, now are they?

But Jesus **does all things well**. Here is another puzzle we must solve—despite it’s capacity to baffle us—at the inception of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, before He has done much of anything, Jesus submits to water baptism by John. Very odd, the sinless one submits to a sinner (although John was also a remarkably good man!) for a baptism of remission for sins by the repentant. We alertly ask, what’s with that?

Well, first, this is not an odd occurrence written into the narrative ages later; it was odd then, in the moment. Remember, John says, **I had better be baptized by You.** (Matt. 3:13) To which Jesus replies, **Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.** John relented, but it is clear, from later developments, he plainly didn’t get it. One way to frame this oddity is that in His submitting to baptism of repentance for remission of sin, Jesus was **identifying himself** with sinners (with their condition of lostness) so that, having identified with sinners fully, He might convincingly bear the burden of those sins on the cross. That accords with the idea that Jesus came to save us, and that He began that work *at the very inception* of His ministry among us. **He does all things well.** So, this is the first thing He attends to (our sinfulness) and the last (in dying as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins). But, while He has not done much of what He will do, a voice from heaven says, **This is My beloved Son, whom I love, with Him I am well pleased.** Long before the Gentiles express their pleasure in Him (**He does all things well**), God has anticipated that praise, saying: **with Him I am well pleased.** (3:17)

I hope by now, I have dispelled some concern that I might be imitating John Eldridge, of Wild at Heart fame. In his intense focus on manhood issues, John, lamentably, I think, subordinates the gospel narrative to current narratives in movies, song and media. Those other stories tend to outshine the gospel (whether or not John intended to do that) and colludes with the myth that newer is better—which it hardly ever is in the realm of spiritual truth! It simply is not possible to best the bible. “Scandal in Belgravia” is a good story, but it isn’t a great one . . . it is certainly not the “greatest story ever told.” Not by a long, long shot. The astonishing complexity of the faux event of blowing up a 747, the passenger list of which consists entirely of the recently deceased (so that no one actually dies in this apparent disaster in the sky) is graphic and shocking. Sherlock’s possession of a ticket for this flight indicates that he was supposed to be dead! But, despite being deceived and drugged and disabled, he is standing there with his would-be assassin is delightful *but it is hardly divine!* Corpses do not need seatbelt, but viewers do. Trying to fake out a fictitious international terrorist group, engineered by an evil mastermind, is as nothing compared to this: Jesus came to save, to lay down His life in payment for our sins

(before we even committed one of them! And despite the towering wickedness of our hearts!). That is a Jesus we can believe in.

So, let's recap. ***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** What have we learned in Take One. As a critical viewer, we want to uncover the truth—the story behind the story whether we are viewing a movie, reading a book, or exploring the bible. So, we found that the indelibility of sin is a real problem: both in that it makes sin, sin and in that the consequences are not something we can dodge. The good news is that while sin cannot be erased, it can be dealt with. It can be forgiven. Mark 8, building on Mark 2 (where Jesus explicitly declares, “the Son of Man” has authority to forgive sins in real life—that is, on earth and in the present), we are being taught the truth about Jesus’ identity—the truth about Him as the Messiah. (As a sidebar, we overheard that Mark 2 is an implicit claim to full divinity—as **only God has the power to forgive sin.**) Wow! That’s a bracing bit of truth.

Then we reviewed Jesus’ commitment to be a “gospeller,” a preacher of the Kingdom come. So the Son of Man forgives sin, and he preaches, **that is why I came.** In all honesty that probably confounded the messianic expectations of almost everyone—certainly those of His disciples! Hence the “itinerant instruction” piece. Let’s walk together and as we go, we’ll talk—we will also do interesting stuff like healing blind, deaf and mute persons. I am not suggesting that the miracles of Jesus were incidental to the cause. By no means, they were quite essential displays of messianic presence. When Christ shows up, people are freed, delivered, healed—even more dramatically, sometimes raised from the dead. Got that?

However, remember CLADS? Healing is Capacity changing; Life-changing; Abrupt, it disrupts family life and routine; Duty Changing and Status Changing. When Jesus did the things He came to do, it was impossible not to notice. But Jesus chose to stifle idle chatter about signs and wonders even while He performs them. That hasn’t changed. Talk about the important stuff, like the mercy of God, the majesty of God, the movement of God.

Pursuing **the truth behind the truth**, we come to **Jesus does all things well.** He does things perfectly, completely and sinlessly. As we get to know Him, we are increasingly impressed with Him. His capacity, His capability and His comprehensiveness. *He does it all, does it well because He is holy, sinless and carefully attentive.* If we pay attention to what He says and does, and to how He accomplishes His work, we are learning the truth about Him. Jesus was pleasing to the Father from the beginning; yes, even prior to proving His love of God through His obedience. Day by day, He walked in the Father’s will and here is our example for how to live in Him. **For apart from Him we can do nothing.** This does not mean we can do it but poorly, we can do something’s better than others! It means that when we do what Jesus would have us do, we are doing things well.

So, “The Scandal in Belgravia” is not the point. Substitute your favorite movie, book, poem or performance, the outcome will be the same. In Mark 8 we are living a story that is the greatest and the best. It would be harsh to consider how often we have sooner

reviewed our favorite pick than to re-read Scripture. But how shall we learn to discern between good, better and best if we fail to master the standard?! Yes, we need to critical viewers. I have just helped you get started. Do you think you can take it from here? If you need further help, want further conversation, that's what we are here for—either on Sunday mornings, at mid-week meetings or on the phone anytime!

**Amen.**

Take Away: find the story behind the story.

Take Two: "A Jesus We can Believe in" (A fatal humanist misstep.)

**"Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets."** That, of course, is the "big" question for those who are being saved!

***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** Before we give the right answer, we should consider the three wrong ones in the text. To believe that Jesus was John the Baptist is to believe that the man King Herod had beheaded (as a party favor gone terrorist act) and whose body his disciples had buried was reincarnated. Sin has consequences that were unfortunate for John and later for Herodias at Pompei (she was wife and sister to the king). *This did not happen—reincarnation never does. Reincarnation* at root seems a desperate grasp for a second chance, another go at a life in which one hopes to do better and "evolve" to higher being, or plain of being. The truth? There is no second chance. But, wonderfully, there is a first chance—be sure to take it! Oddly, this proposed reincarnation was a lateral one and not linear—the spirit of John the Baptist had, according to this theory, *transmigrated* to Jesus—entered into and taken over someone else's unique body. *And without the second party obliging by become a corpse, so that this spiritual body snatching could occur.* Really?! Who would believe such a thing? Well, the followers of Pythagorus would. Such a transition would line up with their belief that souls (of animals as well as humans) were eternal and had to go somewhere. Finding another body, even if that body already had a soul, was a possibility after death. Stranger beliefs do exist—but saving faith is not one of them.

In keeping with this, but in a linear modality, the Scriptures foretold the coming of a second Elijah. Some had put this label on John<sup>1</sup> (**in the spirit of Elijah**, Luke 1:17, an

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<sup>1</sup> There is, however, a little more information that might prove interesting. Elijah wore, most probably, a camel's hair girdle. "And they answered him, "He was a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite," (2 Kings 1:8). According to the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, in reference to 2 Kings 1:8, Elijah . . .

"he wore a rough garment, either made of camels' hair, as that of John Baptist, or of a skin, dressed with the hair on. Sir J. Chardin informs us, in a MS. note on this place, cited by Mr. Harmer, that the eastern dervishes and fakeers are clothed just as Elijah was, with a hairy garment, girded with a leathern girdle."

Concerning John the Baptist, it says in Matthew 3:4, "Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." It may be that Zecharias, who had access to the temple and things in the temple, may have acquired Elijah's camel hair garment and given it to John the Baptist to wear. This is speculation, but it is an interesting possibility.

[carm.org/bible-difficulties/matthew-mark/was-john-baptist-really-elijah](http://carm.org/bible-difficulties/matthew-mark/was-john-baptist-really-elijah)

angel speaking) but reincarnation, or the transmigration of souls, is **not what Jesus had in mind** when He said: "**For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14**" **And if you care to accept it, he himself is Elijah, who was to come.**" Elijah, in departing this life (bodily) imparted his spirit upon Elisha, his protege. (See 2 Kings 2:9-18.) This impartation is made credible by its recorded precedent. John the Baptist certainly manifested the spirit of Elijah.

The least difficult, most accessible of the three wrong answers is the last one: Jesus is **one of the prophets**. (Lots of unbelievers, humanists, skeptics and liberal theologians vote for this one!) However, there is this one a huge difficulty: the Jewish people were coming out of a prolonged period of prophetic silence (nearly four hundred years of "no word" from God). Not hearing from God was the new normal and part of the despair of faithful Jews! People, at the time of Jesus' and John's miraculous conceptions—yes, there were two miracles—were stirred by the rumors of a prophetic restart (Zacharias, Mary, Elizabeth and emissary angels speaking to shepherds etc—Simeon and Anna, the prophetess, eight days later). Genuine spiritual renewal is always a hard sell—there are many detractors. This piece of our religious heritage is one crucial foundation for the necessity of the birth narratives in the gospel story! **How could anyone prophesy if prophecy doesn't happen any more?!** What I should underscore is that our presuppositions ("prophecy doesn't happen anymore," "the gifts were only for the apostolic age," a credentialing function—which is an enormous distortion of what signs and wonders meant in both Jesus and the apostles' ministries—and faulty end times theory. All this spiritual upheaval was, even if accurately related, baffling. **The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line** is what we are on about, correct? So, the existence of wrong answers, theological error and philosophical missteps are to be expected.

Now, friends, for the real, and right answer: **You are the Messiah.** (v.29) Great. But, sadly, Peter could hardly have known of what he spoke. If Jesus was the Messiah (which He is!), *Jesus was totally unlike what he had been taught to expect.* (Remember those presuppositions!) In fact, he had systematically and programmatically been mis-taught which, rather than distancing us from Peter, joins us at the educational and theological hip—so to speak. **We have all been mis-taught; it is part of the human condition.** However, that is not to say, that Peter's mis-education was intentional (the higher up the education chain we go, the more likely such intentionality crops up, especially in modern state education). But, as ever, the mind of a child is unable to process adult notions as an adult might do. So, despite the best of intentions even, my Sunday School exposure to the person of Jesus was, well, bankrupt. *My dedicated teachers, sweet ladies, were unwittingly committing the error of Peter minding the things of man.* We can position ourselves to rebuke the Lord ("Oh, no, Lord, surely not . . . it's too primitive, too disgusting . . . why all this business about physical abuse and blood!"). Those qualified to teach really need to get their stuff right so as to lead properly, and not repulse those seeking the truth. My teachers, mostly women, built their theology upon the feminine virtues of Jesus (those parts they really liked) and left the less desirable masculine virtues aside. Jesus was gentle as a lamb, not ferocious as a shepherd defending his flock. Jesus was victim, passive, emasculated, a pacifist. Who was I, a mere child, to question the authority of these teachers with their feminized versions of Jesus? *I couldn't know any better unless someone taught me better!* So, I, like the majority of unbelieving men I know, left—feeling empty, devalued, robbed and angry.

The highly politicized, unmanaging of Jesus advanced the cause of feminists and left leaning liberal allies, but damaged the cause of advancing the kingdom of God! Again, another good story (women's rights), another cultural narrative (suffrage (see Eileen Giblin, a English war bride in Australia), human rights), but not the great story—that story was suppressed (by benign persons with the best of progressive intentions) and our cultural oppression as men continued. Occasionally, the scripture objects and disrupts this process. The Word of God defends itself: saying, not that story, but the gospel! Pay attention to the gospel. Jesus is the Messiah. He heals, He performs miracles, feeds multitudes (with multiplied loaves and sufficient fish). He liberates the human race from its cultural and/or religious captivities—they are many, and they are everywhere. The re-emergence of prophecy in the first century AD was iconoclastic—it was in-breaking and shattering in its impact.

Certainly, my Sunday School is not the only false narrative out there. The Sadducean one continues apace. They were open to a Messiah on their terms (a mere man, prophet, healer and exorcist): **no miracles, no afterlife, no judgment, no resurrection and no supernaturalism (angels are obviously out)**. These wealthy, elite, educated, literate and liberal Jews were actually ***Jews in name only*** (that piece hasn't changed). They are so lost. Based on an impoverished personal experience (seen by them as privilege), they reject any ***facticity*** to the traditions of their fathers when it came to such things. It's all symbols, analogies and metaphors—people don't think like that anymore. Of course, Enlightenment thinkers, the Gentile counterpart to these Sadducees (who include German Idealists, higher critics, French radicals and other secularists), began their historical and scientific treatment of the Scripture with strikingly similar presuppositions. A premise of doubt followed by destructive analysis leading to thorough disparagement—with the scholar dominating the whole exercise, thus making himself the actual locus of authority. Expressed biblically, they knew Him not, having chosen to forget.

God (as a personal, theistic being) is excluded, supernatural events not admitted. Before I critique their position too much, I want to propose a game-changing proposition. What if there is a quantifiable as well as qualifiable distinction between the testaments? The Old Testament literature covers centuries of human interaction with God. The New Testament is much more compressed, only seven, or eight decades at tops. Therefore the OT is more conducive to source analysis/criticism<sup>2</sup> (Let me explain: the idea that different theologies contributed to the formation of the literature at different points in time, attracting redaction and revision as the new thinking was harmonized with the existing material is a direct outcome of the so-called scientific/historical method). Within limits, this is a helpful and appropriate approach to Old Testament scholarship—a work hundreds of years in the making. However, the soft underbelly of this approach is the unhelpful presumptions that the OT is, therefore, a purely human artifice. It is only a social construction, ***a cultural artifact*** (like a tool, a shard, or fragment of a ceramic pot) and as such is completely amenable to comparison with other like objects, equally “human” religious streams (as in

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<sup>2</sup> There are also the critical approaches known as “form criticism,” “literary criticism” and “historical criticism.” Linguistics, archeology, paleontology and physical anthropology add additional insights which, with proper qualification, can help us read the text in context.

holy books). The Word of God becomes one “language event of human beings” among many—not sacred, holy or unique . . . Definitely not revelatory truth with an exclusive claim to the truth. What if the Word of God (Scripture) actually is what it claims to be **God-breathed, inspired, revelation truth**? What if it is trustworthy and reliable and accurate? That is not a moon made out of blue cheese, or a purple cow! What if it is a word from the outside (from heaven, as recorded in several places) that is both transformative and re-energizing (like solar energy which replenishes the earth)?

This is a big, deep and complicated problem. But, before we get any further into that (because we may not need to!), I want to suggest simply that the methodology apt, perhaps, *with qualification*, to the OT studies is, perhaps, not so applicable to the NT. Because these methods are fundamental to liberal theology, it is vital to distinguish between the timelines. The OT covering centuries is much more vast than the NT which covers mere decades—a single person’s life could span the whole epoch. There are, correspondingly, fewer layers, real sources, traditions and redactions (as proposed, but not documented), because of *the actual compression of time*. Once you start, how do you stop?<sup>3</sup> To fail to make allowances for this discrepancy is to err. Those applying, uncritically, the historical methods of the OT to the NT know this, they have to expand timelines, delay composition, hypothesize more time *to allow for the adaptations which they insist must have occurred*. [*Angels? Can’t be. Evolution? Must be. In other words, we find what we are looking for and make the fact fit the theory!*] Here is a simple contrary consideration: what if the developmental model doesn’t fit the facts? What if the depth of theological insight (well-developed ideas of godhead, the triune God, incarnation and justification, for starters) was there from the beginning, attributable to the crucified and risen Lord—or even to the pre-Calvary instructions of the Master whose stunning insights, authority and depth of knowledge stunned the audiences of the Messiah Jesus, the Son of Man (**No man ever spoke as this Man spoke!**) It seems rather bizarre to suppose that those who reacted with amazement, didn’t even know enough to be amazed! My position aligns with the divinity of Jesus<sup>4</sup> rather better than those who attribute all this wisdom to the community, the church, or the great synodal councils with their creeds and doctrines! Liberal scholarship is constrained by humanity, and controlled by the secularist narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> Another problem is the redactions, as hypothesized, would be constrained by the demonstrable concern for accuracy, reliable duplication (the disciplines of the scribal tradition) in a age where photostatic duplication was absent. The care of accurate copyists is legendary—very few errors! Otherwise, scholars presume that transmission is full of errors (they do) and the scripture is deemed unreliable (as in not “without error”). I believe that the book of Isaiah, over a five hundred year span was found to have 17 errors with none signifying anything critical, or noteworthy!

<sup>4</sup> It is foolish to assume that everything go from stupid to smart, or simple to complex. If as the scholars appear to agree the book of Job might be the earliest book of the Bible—the first book in the library so to speak! For if that is true, some of the most profound theology in the whole Bible is found in the earliest strata. It also seems inept to treat the opening chapters of Genesis as if they are little stories for dummies. Jesus did not treat them contemptuously as do those who seek to dismiss them as primitive, superstitious and simplistic. They are more than the tribal tales of backwards nomadic peoples—they are, I believe, revelations of God to Moses about the mysteries God chose to open to us! We are discontent with what God wants us to know because we want to know what we want to know. No defiance here.

Christ taught and spirit-led interpretation is more the ticket . . . as in not the work of a man's unaided imagination, self-taught and unschooled. Scripture is not innovative, or creative in that way. I am describing Paul's writings which evidence a spirituality, sophistication and depth, dare I say it, that is out of this world! Yes, I know that he demurs to calling all his stuff inspired (**this I have from the Lord**) is honestly distinguished from "this is my considered opinion." But all of it is in the Book! And God intended that it be included, and God uses all Paul's stuff just as He uses all of Moses' writings. ***Some liberal scholars miss the most critical distinction of all: basically, there simply wasn't that much of a time lapse—no centuries even.*** And in the wake of their dissertations, many a wandering soul has been led astray. When, on the basis of your critical method, you insist for instance that King David is merely a fantasy—that he never existed historically. The discovery of an inscription bearing his name<sup>5</sup> is a rock through your picture window! And if physical evidence doesn't ice the cake; the whole liberal apparatus has toppled from over-reach and its own inconsistencies.

The composition of the NT literature was completed, most likely, before the end of the 1st century. Late composition is thereby rendered irrelevant and some physical evidence exists to validate that position. The huge amount of manuscript evidence, and the exhaustive analysis of the same, had led to advances in understanding more consistent with the shorter framework. It is simply not true that certain ideas (such as the deity of Jesus) were injected into the narrative a thousand years later! Only a careless, and unbridled imposition of evolutionist dogma lends any credibility to such assertions. Paul's letters evidence a sophistication and depth—deemed impossible by the experts—which negate the need for hypotheses of late composition. The facticity of the resurrection apparently predates, as one would expect, the completion of the first written record, the gospels. The care, peer review and scrutiny of the apostles make the "work of the Christian community" not only less necessary, but unnecessary. The affirmations of the Nicene Council (325) are just that; and not innovations. They clarify the known rather than create something new.

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<sup>5</sup> The Tel Dan Stele is a broken stele (inscribed stone) discovered in 1993–94 during excavations at Tel Dan in northern Israel. It consists of several fragments making up part of a triumphal inscription in Aramaic, left most probably by Hazael of Aram-Damascus, an important regional figure in the late 9th century BCE. Hazael (or more accurately, the unnamed king) boasts of his victories over the king of Israel and his ally the king of the "House of David" (bytdwd), the first time the name David had been found outside of the Bible. [The claims here are not conclusive—but the debate continues.]

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel\\_Dan\\_Stele](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tel_Dan_Stele)

Subsequently, two more fragments of the stele have been located and transcribed: Lines 7 & 8 of the Tel Dan stone states that Israel was a divided kingdom, because it mentions the "King of Israel" and the king of the "House of David". This is exactly how the bible describes Israel as being divided after the death of King Solomon.

Here is found one of the oldest references outside the bible to King David and his descendants. Thus proving wrong the allegations made by liberal scholars that King David was just a myth.  
[biblehistory.net/newsletter/king\\_david.htm](http://biblehistory.net/newsletter/king_david.htm)

So, Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” Mark 8:30 **And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.** Apart from being consistent with the prohibitions previously noted, we have to ask why **tell no one about him**? Does that mean, tell no one anything about Me? *Or, does it mean, most probably, don't get into discussing Me as the Messiah because, given that you aren't really getting it, how do you expect to achieve anything more than to kick up some dust and cause confusion.* What the people want and what God is providing aren't really aligned . . .yet. Jesus' caution makes sense on the face of things, and is pointedly affirmed in the teaching which immediately follows. **31 And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.** So, if we assume that this is what followed, it is somehow news to them. Peter's affirmation (and rebuke) suggests that, yes, even they had the wrong end of the stick as regards the true Messiah. JESUS IS THE CHRIST IS THE MESSIAH IS THE SON OF MAN—by assimilation to Peter's “inspired” affirmation (Matthew 16:17 **And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” 20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.** The so-called “Markan” secrecy was not limited to Mark!) Neither true wisdom, or salvation come by way of human effort and study or method only knowledge does.

When it says, **must suffer many things and be rejected**, it is safe to assume Jesus spelled things out. He enumerated what He must suffer and why—it is not reasonable to think this is the sum total of the matter! So what would be on the list? How about humiliation (to expose the hatred and pride of those who persecuted Him) and degradation (to reveal the wicked heart, the depth of corrupt depravity to which the Jewish and Roman leadership had sunk—being just as lost as any one else). Christ suffered to disclose just how evil we had become—yes, among the brightest and the best which would include all the rest. The suffering of Christ made crystal clear the rejection of His person and His mission. The message is we will not have you as our king—we do not want what God has for us! Do I think those who did such things had thought it all out? On a certain level, yes.

So, what did we gain? ***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** In finding a Jesus we can believe in, we rejected three erroneous propositions. First, Jesus couldn't be the reincarnated John the Baptist because it doesn't happen. Besides Jesus was still in the body that John's soul would have had to home invade. Second, there is some warrant to suppose that the “spirit of Elijah” had some transferrable properties! However, that transfer seems rather more apt for John than for Jesus as it turns out in the record. The third incorrect response, **one of the prophets**, is the favored choice for “the Jesus we could believe in” among those minding the humanist store—*those who mind the things of man.* No one wants the Messiah Jesus turns out to be! However, the option of being a prophet wasn't a cake-walk in first century AD because of the four hundred years of prophetic silence endured by the Jewish people. Those minding the humanist store back then, most

notably the Sadducees, would not allow that prophecy occurred anymore<sup>6</sup>. That ceased with Malachi! *That is a presupposition that impairs spiritual understanding—we have quite a few of those ourselves. And it is because of that resistance that the birth narratives of both John and Jesus are crucial to what unfolds next in the gospel narrative!*

The right answer is (fanfare): the Messiah. Unfortunately, though this was true, no one had a clue as to how Jesus was the Promised One of Israel. They certainly had their ideas—like my Sunday School teachers—but because they apparently didn't know any better, I didn't know any better. Their feminized Jesus was not for me! (So where were the men who knew the truth?) It is a personal grief to me that my colleague, Prof Marcus Borg, died 21 January 2015 before we could have a dialogue on how the two of us could, hearing the same teachings, in the same period of time, come up with such disparate views. The higher critics, with whom Marcus sided, argued themselves into believing that the Bible was just a human book, a cultural construction, or artifact<sup>7</sup>—no different from any other sacred text of other religious traditions. But the OT is a long, protracted thing, and the NT is brisk and compressed by comparison. I argue that the same approach to both simply will not do. Marcus not only undervalues the divine inspiration of the OT, he undervalues the wisdom and knowledge of Jesus Christ, Son of God whose teaching dazzled, stunned and impressed everyone who heard—sometimes evoking joy, other times shutting mouths. Jesus did not teach simplistically, rather He taught the deep things of God and opens the mind to spiritual understanding—especially we see this in His servant Paul whom He knew in His crucified and risen self! All of the disciples had personalized attention from the Master both pre- and post-resurrection. Things simply don't get deeper than the source, professor. What if what we have is God presenting the truth in person through Jesus, who is the Messiah (Christ) as well as Son of Man—His preferred moniker in Mark?!

This covers the suffering, death and accomplishment of the cross—with full exposition of the OT, no doubt. (Remember the walking bible study on the Emmaus Road?) He taught the details so that as He suffered and died, they would recognize the path He took! He was humbled to expose the hatred and pride of those who rejected Him and He was abused to show forth the depth of depravity in mankind's wicked heart—all corruption, defilement and death. In His passion we witness our evil potential which has shined out at various times and places under the judgment of Almighty God—the Civil War, the World Wars, Vietnam and the Holocaust, abortion slaughter and genocidal madness, the Gulag, re-education centers, POW camps and concentration camps. There seems to be no limit to the terrible and merciless things we perpetrate, either intimately or internationally, or both. Thank God, the Lord Jesus, Messiah, has had and continues to have mercy on us all.

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<sup>6</sup> It's of the devil, human fakery and deception—simply made up. Hence the charge against Jesus that He was a false messiah in league with Beelzebub. See Mark 3:22 and Luke 11:15

<sup>7</sup> No two fragments are the same! In liberal theology the text has become a mere “thing” in their hands as defined by them! It has no inherent meaning, or independent reality or value except which they attach to it!

Take Away: The Jesus Who is Out Looking for Us is the One We want

### Take Three: “Do We really Want a King Like Jesus?”

That is what makes difficulty for us. It is very clear that many of us do not want a king—or if we do, we don’t want King Jesus! In our own rejection of Christ, we are manifesting the same pride, arrogance, hatred and depravity. How could anyone be so blind becomes how come we are so complicit with sin? Why are we cheering on the opposition? If it doesn’t cause difficulty for us, what can we say but we aren’t getting it either. Jesus wouldn’t be killed by hired assassins, street thugs but by judicial order of the Roman authorities and their collaborationist Jewish allies. This is murder in high places and fully reprehensible for all that. Did the disciples find that unthinkable? Well, it appears that one of them did: Judas. What bitterness of heart must have directed his choices? Why how horrible is it to trust in the Jewish leaders and be forced to buy his bullets: **what is that to us?** That question sounds chillingly familiar to my ears: **At this point in time, what difference does it make?** or these closer to Judas’ day, **And what is truth?**

This rejection of Christ, again, was brought home to me sorrowfully, when I learned that my acquaintance, and colleague Marcus Borg died January 21, 2015 (at age 72). We crossed paths at Mansfield College and I was troubled by reports of him, by his participation in the Jesus Seminar. But procrastination got the best of me and now I will never have the chance to ask: “How is it that you and I could hear the same teaching, attend the same lectures and frequent the same college and come to such opposite conclusions?” I am sure that I would have experienced a cordial and thoughtful response. I miss that. It is to my huge, irretrievable regret that I never reached out to him before and now it is too late.

***The triumph of truth in a baffling plot line, on both an intimate level and an international level, is hopeful and compelling.*** But, more importantly, I am distressed that Marcus missed the truth, like Peter, concerning what Jesus **spoke plainly about** and has now, in all likelihood, received to his face a rebuke from the Lord: **Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.** (v. 33)

Marcus could not bear the thought of “believing in a God who would permit the holocaust”—the terrible evil and extreme wickedness of Nazi ethnic cleansing (of the Jews, some Christians, and political opponents of left wing progressives like the Christian pastor Bonhoeffer). The horror of what enlightened, scientific idealists perpetrated in the 1940’s is a monumental warning of the dangers of radical socialism (Nazi, Communist and Socialist in branding). It is so horrific that we have holocaust deniers: Iranians, blinded by hatred, ancient jealousies and embedded in their spiritual DNA, even claim it never happened, various Arab governments endorsed the genocide and some leftists have dealt with it by rewriting history so as to blame it on the right!

What Marcus missed is that our God, the God of love and justice, is, from Scripture, willing to visit judgment on deviant nations—including His own beloved Israel—and has done so, according to the facts on record. Apostate Jews were carried off into exile, after gruesome slaughter several times. And we, if we weren’t so antsy about blaming the victim,

might humbly suggest that the judgments of God against the godless in the twentieth century (the World Wars qualify) are part of the moral fabric of the universe according to the Scriptures. God has not changed, the wicked do not escape the consequences of their sinning forever *and some are cut short in this world as we speak*. Many of the leading lights of the secularist movement were disenchanting (and antagonistic) Jews. It is not therefore their fault, but their disloyalty is plain and, as it is written, **God is not mocked**. Or, rather, when He is mocked there may be real, historical, in time consequences—terrifying, temporal experiences of wrath (fully warranted and deserved—not petty or arbitrary) even outside the pages of Scripture. Some see it and, in brokenness, repent; others turn on God and unfairly accuse Him of psycho-pathologies. As if. There can also be horrific personal fall-out just ask Josh Duggar.

It is not for nothing that we read: **Honor your father and your mother**. And, **you shall have no other gods before me**. This hits anti-traditionalists hard. And it also rocks the anti-literalists—including Marcus and friends. I read some disturbing praise of Marcus: “Hearing Marcus Borg’s interpretation (at the 2007 Friends General Conference, River Falls, WI) has been incredibly liberating for me. Here we have a Jesus who is not required to perform magic tricks. He doesn’t have to be born of a virgin, or rise from the dead and walk around showing the wounds in his body. He doesn’t have to take the weight of all the sins of the earth’s billions of humans on his shoulders. And the God this Jesus follows does not require a blood sacrifice to satisfy a debt he feels humanity owes him.” (David R Woolley) I have to say, liberating is not quite the right word. The contempt of denigrating the signs, the miracles and wonders is transparent in Woolley’s words. The problems with Woolley’s position are numerous. Out of charity, I respond, *no, Jesus was not required to perform magic tricks* (as if the epitome of some freak, side show) but Jesus graciously did perform many miracles to demonstrate the power of the in-breaking kingdom of God—yes with the power in His person, He healed the deaf mute, **looking to heaven**. (Mark 7:34-35). He doesn’t have to be born of a virgin, but He was in fulfillment of scripture (and in the revival of prophetic utterance concurrent with His conception)—that being the point! That Jesus rose from the dead is not a theological embarrassment but an essential truth (affirming the truthfulness of His prophecies, the reality of eternal life in a body modality, the power of God over death and the grave, and hope) **If Christ be not risen our faith is vain and we are proven to be false witnesses**. The truth behind the story.

What is a light thing to Woolley is not a light thing to Paul who was utterly convinced by living encounter with the risen One! What a foolish thing to disparage. The wounds display was essential in demonstrating the reality of everything: from His abuse, through His death. Apparently, that is too real for the spiritual man?! The fact that the wounds were not the last word on it all seems to have eluded Marcus. How sad. What is most devastating is the denial of the atonement! It is not as if the sins of billions doesn’t need to be addressed—including brazen faithlessness. That Jesus explains this precisely as His mission doesn’t faze unbelievers! The truth behind the story.

No, they take offense that God should be offended by their rebellion and disrespect. How dare God be angry over my wickedness and disobedience! (I wonder how it goes with some parents here?) I know that the blood atonement—the OT is rife with animal sacrifice for atonement—strikes the sensitive as bizarre and gross. But this sets aside that God

moved us out of that practice through a final, perfect and efficacious sacrifice doesn't seem to register. (So the adjective "sensitive" is rather strained; maybe insensitive fits?) I hesitate to suggest this but the willingness of enlightened people to shed blood (genocide, abortion, murder, rape and violence) might just have to do with their misplaced horror! Spiritual squeamishness? Thank God it wasn't beneath Him to deal with the mess! Jesus actually did embrace a bloody sacrifice, *His own*, to pay that debt, not asking others to die to attain my utopia. The sad truth is we do not merely sin these days, we write sonnets about it, direct movies to express it where actor revel in it and they and the audience revel in the extreme of lawlessness before us. We embrace rebellion as healthy, as necessary and entertaining *and we entice others to join us in the madness. **This cannot be good*** Do we really want to pretend that He didn't know what He was doing when He judges, when He saves? It is very clear to those who do not choose to be blind, and deaf. Gutting the gospel is a very bad idea. Receiving it is compelling, life giving and hopeful.

I say, we do have a king like Jesus. He is the only king worthy of kneeling before. Long live the King of Judah! He is the King of Glory, He is the God of all His Redeemed and they should say so!

### Amen

To summarize: we are divided over whether Jesus is to be our King of Choice. It is not about whether or not He is king. He is King. He has been crowned and He sits upon the throne. He died as prophesied in the Scriptures, completely fulfilling the Word—in every detail—to enter into His kingdom. Amazing.

Wicked nations run out of time. They cross the line and God withdraws His restraint, allowing the wicked to slay each other. He doesn't loose destruction on us half so much as loosing us to enact it! It is not rational. It is demonic. And we punish our selves, and hurt many others.

I cannot read the credo of Marcus and not weep: a Jesus without miracles, born in the ordinary way to an unmarried, under-age teen, he was executed, dead and buried—there was no resurrection, no victory display of overcoming the evil worked on His broken, pierced and beaten body. He dies for nothing because there is nothing to be forgiven. He dies abused by an brutal and senselessly bloody team of butchers—the kind that staffed Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. A Jesus just as sinful and selfish and lost as everyone else. I can tell you this, "That is not a Jesus I want anything to do with—I'll take the real thing."

The Take-Away: There is no substitute for the Real Thing.