

5. Jesus—The Heart of God

Utter centrality of Jesus—we know about God's character and passion through him.
Unique characteristic of Christianity: revelation of God primarily *in a person*. He shows us the heart of God.

An Earlier Image of Jesus Unpersuasive

In the earlier paradigm the Gospels are read literally as historical documents. Emphasis on Jesus' identity:

- Son of God
- "Light of the World" and "Bread of Life"
- Promised Messiah will come again
- He knew and taught this about himself

Earlier paradigm also emphasizes:

- the saving significance of his death and that was the purpose of his life;
- the miraculous (esp. the virgin birth and physical bodily resurrection);
- Jesus as the only way to salvation—exclusivism.

Pre-Easter and Post-Easter Jesus

Pre-Easter Jesus: Jesus before his death—flesh and blood Jesus, figure of the past.

Post-Easter Jesus: What Jesus became after his death—Jesus of Christian *experience* and *tradition*. Experience—experiential reality *today*. Tradition—New Testament and creeds.

If *not* distinguish Pre- and Post-Easter Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible is super human and not a credible human and not one of us. Also, Jesus becomes a divine figure of the *past*.

The Nature of the Gospels

- Gospels are the product of a developing tradition. The New Testament community's experience of the Post-Easter Jesus affected the way they remembered the Pre-Easter Jesus. Gospel's two voices:
 - Voice of Pre-Easter Jesus
 - Witness/testimony of the community to their experience of the Post-Easter Jesus.
- Gospels combine memory and metaphor—profoundly true even if they are not literally factual. Gospels should not be *incredible* but, rather, *compelling*.
- Metaphor reading enriches the text. Literal reading flattens it. Example of Jesus at wedding in Cana in John. Story of Jesus is about a *wedding banquet* at which the wine never runs out and the best is saved for last.

The Meaning of Our Christological Language

"Son of God", "Messiah", "Word of God", "Wisdom of God", "Great High Priest and sacrifice", "Lamb of God", etc.

1. Although John's Jesus makes these claims, Pre-Easter Jesus did not. They are the community's testimony to the Post-Easter Jesus in our lives.
2. All this language is metaphorical. Jesus is the "door" and the one "standing at the door knocking". "Son of God" also metaphor of Jesus' intimate relationship to God. This understanding of "Son of God" is found in the Jewish world of Jesus and in the Hebrew Bible. Also, a "son" can represent the "father" and speak with authority of the father.
3. Language of confession and commitment. We see Jesus this way. With a literal reading one can believe that Jesus made these claims about himself and yet think Jesus was mistaken.
4. Jesus is decisive revelation of what a life full of God looks like. In him we see God's passion. But *not* the only and exclusive revelation of God. God defined by Jesus but not confined to Jesus.

Glimpsing the Pre-Easter Jesus

A historical study of Jesus can flesh out the incarnation.

1. *Jewish mystic* like Abraham, Moses, Jacob, prophets for whom God was experiential reality.
2. *Healer*.
3. *Wisdom teacher* teaching a way, path, of life. Dying to old identity and way of being and being born to a new identity and new way of being.
4. *Social prophet*. Prophets of Hebrew Bible were "God intoxicated". Spoke of what life here would be like if God were king and worldly rulers were not.
5. *Movement initiator* who was deeply Jewish, subverting social boundaries; inclusive meal practice (eat with sinners and outcasts).

Death of Jesus: The Cross in History and Theology

Christianity is the only major religion whose founder was executed by an established authority. Historical view: Jesus was killed because of his politics—his passion for God's justice. The atonement theology (Jesus dies for our sins) does *not* go back to Jesus himself. That is Post-Easter interpretation.

Five interpretations of the cross in the New Testament:

1. Authorities say "no" but God says "yes".
2. Domination *system* killed Jesus and disclosed its moral bankruptcy but God triumphs over them.
3. His death is revelation of the way: dying to old way of life and being raised to a new way of being.

4. Revelation of the depth of God's love for us.
5. Sacrificial understanding that is central to earlier paradigm. Limit on God's power—God can only forgive if adequate sacrifice is made. Requirement at the center. The first century's view of "Jesus died for our sins" was that that statement was a subversive statement against the Temple's monopoly on forgiveness—we have access to God apart from the Temple. Radical grace.

Faith in the Cross

Bog has faith in the first four interpretations and not the fifth interpretation historically/literally.

Jesus as Metaphor and Sacrament of God

We see God through Jesus. He discloses both the character and passion of God. Heart of God made flesh. *Sacrament*: a means through whom the Spirit of God becomes present. The Church and creeds point us to Jesus and then Jesus points to God.

Questions

1. What is meant by the "Pre-Easter Jesus" and the "Post-Easter Jesus"?
2. How does distinguishing the Pre-Easter Jesus and Post-Easter Jesus help us in learning about him in the Bible and deepening our relationship with God?
3. In what ways does *not* distinguishing the Pre-Easter Jesus from the Post-Easter Jesus create barriers to our study, devotion, prayer and worship?
4. What are the two voices in the Gospels that Borg describes? In what way is listening for the two voices helpful or not in your reading of the Bible?
5. How does Borg's emphasis on a metaphorical reading of the Gospels make you feel?
6. In what way can a metaphor reading of the Gospels enrich your experience of the Post-Easter Jesus?
7. How are the titles of Jesus such as "Son of God", "Word of God", "Light of the World", etc. a language of confession and commitment for you?
8. How can a historical study of the Pre-Easter Jesus be helpful in our relationship with the Post-Easter Jesus and with God?
9. Which of the five interpretations of the Cross resonate(s) most strongly with you? Is there another interpretation to add to Borg's list?
10. How is Jesus a sacrament of God for you? How are the stories of Jesus in the Gospels a sacrament for you?