

Session 9: The Gospels: Legend or History?

(1). Inventing Jesus:

In 1926, skeptical Bible scholar, Rudolf Bultmann, wrote the following statement:

“I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing about the life and personality of Jesus...”

Rudolph Bultmann was famous for his controversial approach of “de-mythologizing” the Gospels texts. He asserted that the gospels are only merely _____, and are therefore not worthy of any serious consideration.

The person of Jesus is thus now held in infamy. There are as many different pictures of him as there are people who paint them.

As recent as 1971, Leander Keck, held that the search for Jesus is a _____.

Popular culture has therefore despaired of the project, consigning the search for the historical Jesus to perpetual _____.

(2). The Judas Gospel: (“What about the other gospels?”)

The Judas Gospel turned up in Cairo Egypt after being sold twice and stolen once.

Upon its unlikely public debut, skeptic scholar, Marvin Meyer, told National Geographic that this new rogue gospel was written at a time when Christianity was “...trying to find its _____.”

But did the Judas Gospel preserve an early authentic tradition? The evidence seemed to defy the very possibility. For example, one scholar who worked closely on the project commented, “We all feel comfortable putting this copy in the fourth century.”

Such a late date places the only surviving copy of “Judas” far too _____ from the crucifixion to have been written by the man himself.

Moreover, the earliest mention of a “gospel” written by Judas Iscariot only occurs a _____ years after the death of Jesus Christ.

So How do we know which gospels to trust?

(3). Can We Trust the Gospels?

When most historians face the task of reconstructing history, they normally rely heavily upon _____ eyewitness accounts. In the case of the life of Jesus, these would be the biblical gospels,.

“...we have good reason to treat the Gospels seriously as a source [for]...the life...of Jesus.” (R.T. France)

Sadly, the common opinion is that the early church lied about Jesus.

As Albert Schweitzer once thought, the early church _____ “the [real] Jesus...[to remain] consistent in it’s [views].”

But do such fantastic indictments truly fit the picture? Could the notion that Jesus was a Jewish cynic truly _____ his biblical identity?

In answer, many have wondered how a social-liberal Jesus could wind up _____.

Returning to Leander Keck, himself an avowed skeptic:

“The idea that this Jewish cynic (and his dozen hippies) with his demeanor and aphorisms was a serious threat to society sounds more like a conceit of alienated academics than sound historical judgment.”

For this reason, many skeptics today are _____ the gospels. A new level of interest towards them is steadily rising in our time.

The results of the study have caused many skeptics to conclude that we can now know as much about Jesus as about any figure in _____.

(4). Why The Gospels Must Be History:

The idea that the gospels could be corrupted by later legendary fiction now stands within academia as an utterly _____ hypothesis.

Greco-Roman historian, A.N. Sherwin-White, for example, has noted that the time between the life of Jesus and the authoring of the gospels is very _____.

Legend could therefore not have reconstrued the true Jesus and left us with a _____ impression of him today.

On this point, however, it is important to note a critical distinction—namely, the difference between the rise of legends and the obliteration of _____.

For no Christian scholar today seriously claims that legends cannot arise about a person within his or her own lifetime.

The point, however, is that such legends do not _____ genuine history.

Returning to Professor Sherwin-White, this was in fact his main thesis. Using the science of historiography, White showed that at least two generations are needed to supplant genuine historical _____.

(5). The Gospel Truth:

In closing then, no one can deny that the Jesus of history behaved as he did. The power of this point simply cannot be overstated.

Even radical skeptic scholar, Rudolph Bultmann, as a scholar and historian, ultimately had to admit that the gospel reports were, in fact, _____.

“Most of the miracle stories contained in the gospels are legendary or at least are dressed up with legends. But there can be no doubt that Jesus did such deeds, which were, in his and his contemporaries’ understanding, miracles, that is, deeds that were the result of supernatural, divine causality. Doubtless he healed the sick and cast out demons.” (Rudolph Bultmann)

“Even the most critical historian can confidently assert that a Jew named Jesus worked as a teacher and wonder-worker in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius...” (Luke T. Johnson)

(6). Summary Argument:

P1: The gospels are _____ the work of myth, legend, or history.

P2: The gospels are _____ the work of myth or legend.

C: The gospels are the work of history.