

The Quest for the Historical Jesus

Jesus' life and teachings marked a watershed in world history. In the words of Dr. James Allan Francis, *"all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life."*

There is something very special about the name, Jesus, and no amount of modern Bible scholarship or science can take that away. It is true that we will never be able to separate His actual words from the words subsequently put into His mouth by His early followers. We will never be able to be able to reliably validate the historical details of His life and ministry. We will never be able to prove that He actually physically rose from the dead.

Here's what we do know. Although many of the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Bible may not have actually been said by Him, it can be reasonably assumed that they were at least in line with the spirit and intent of what He said.

The early Christians considered themselves followers of Christ Himself, not just followers of His teachings. I believe that if Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead, He must have at least have risen from the dead spiritually. The evidence is very strong that He actually did appear to His disciples after His death and communicate with them. This was the central teaching of the original Apostles, especially the Apostle Paul. Although the New Testament was not written by the original eye witnesses, it was written by people who knew them well and were personally taught and instructed by them. Yes, over the years, many details were added to the story and many of Jesus' sayings were changed.

It is not at all important that we know the exact details of Jesus' life and ministry, just as it is not important that we know and understand the exact nature of God Himself. Jesus said that being born of God is like feeling the wind. We can't see it. We know it is there by its affects. There are no written words that have affected mankind more than those which were attributed to Christ and His early followers.

How do you separate the wheat and the chaff in the narratives and teachings of the Bible? First, do your best to understand what they were actually saying. This is where the biblical criticism and exegesis come in. Then ask yourself these questions. To what extent does your interpretation of Scripture conform to what you intuitively know to be the nature and character of God Himself? To what extent does your interpretation of Scripture conform to scientific and historical reality? To what extent does your interpretation of Scripture conform to plain old reason and common sense?

God is love, and you are His child. He will continue to love you no matter how correct or incorrect your theology might be. What is most important about the way we interpret Scripture is the way we apply those teachings in our lives. It is not the understanding, but the doing, that is most important.