

The Meaning of Jesus Week Two: What Did Jesus Do And Teach? Ankeny UCC Lenten Study, 3/4/15

Series Notes:

Marcus Borg was a leading progressive theologian and scholar of the historical Jesus. His work can be summed up with "The Bible is true. And some of it happened." He was a member of the Jesus Seminar, a group of scholars seeking consensus on historical elements of Jesus's Life.

N.T. Wright, a professor at St. Andrews University and former Anglican Bishop of Durham, is a British evangelical author and scholar who has produced many, many volumes including an accessible commentary series.

Core methodologies:

Wright believes in putting together a hypothesis about Jesus's life and testing it with evidence from scripture, contemporary writings, contemporary Jewish culture and religion and archaeology, in the hopes of coming to a complete understanding of Jesus.

Borg believes in trying to discover what elements of the Gospel stories about Jesus are historical and which are metaphorical based on basic criteria and context, first, then trying to figure out how the Jesus of history interacts with the Jesus of Faith.

Subtle differences, but essentially, Borg assumes that there is a Jesus of history that is hidden and can be discovered, and Wright thinks that the Jesus of history can be discovered through the Jesus of Faith.

Wright: The Mission and Message of Jesus

Jesus a first-century Jewish prophet announcing God's Kingdom and summoning other Jews to abandon other kingdom visions and follow his, and warning of dire consequences for the nation, for Jerusalem, and for the temple, if his summons was ignored. His agendas led him into a symbolic clash with those who embraced other ones, and this, together with the positive symbols of his own kingdom agenda, point to the way in which he saw his inaugurated kingdom moving toward accomplishment.

- I. Jesus a first-century Jewish prophet announcing God's Kingdom and summoning other Jews to abandon other kingdom visions and follow his, and warning of dire consequences for the nation, for Jerusalem, and for the temple, if his summons was ignored.
 - a. God's kingdom the ultimate return from exile
 - b. Did not look like what was expected—the kingdom transcended Israel as a nation-state, and was in the present and the future
 - c. Invitation to hearers to become post-exilic people (redeemed)
 - d. "Repent" effectively means to "Give up your agenda and follow mine"
 - e. Israel as light of the world—prayer and forgiveness as God wants

- f. If Israel doesn't take up the challenge to forgive and pray, but continues with violence, Rome will destroy Jerusalem (so Jesus's vision of the Son of Man is not about second coming, but triumph)
- II. The Clash of Symbols
 - a. Internal Jewish critique, like Pharisees and Essenes (dead sea)
 - b. Conflict between Jesus—Israel as light of the world and Pharisees—Israel as family-based nation-state
 - c. Jesus was anti-corruption, especially around Torah and Temple
 - d. Jesus (and others) challenged oppression of poor and of foreigners as corruption of Temple—moneychangers
 - e. Jesus replaces parochial temple with expansive one (him) for God to inhabit
- III. Jesus' Identity
 - a. Jesus, like other Jewish leaders of the time, thought he was messiah
 - b. Social mission embedded in eschatological vision (time is here for God)
 - c. Good news for us! If Jesus was fighting Evil behind Rome and won somehow, that's important

Marcus Borg: Jesus Before and After Easter: Jewish Mystic and Christian Messiah

- I. Jesus' self-awareness
 - a. Whether or not he thought so (and we can't know), Jesus was messiah
 - b. Mark, earliest Gospel, does not talk about messianic status
 - c. Gospels tend to add on messianic language to older texts (Mt, Jn)
 - d. Maybe Jesus didn't want people to focus on him so much as later followers did
- II. Jesus Before Easter—only 4 years of real recorded ministry
 - a. Jewish Mystic—Spirit person, healer, wisdom teacher, social prophet, movement founder
 - b. Personal experience with transcendent, immanent God—vision quest
 - c. Jesus as Spirit person—visions, healings, exorcisms—historical
 - d. This, Jewish understanding, and experience of injustice shaped him
 - e. Paranormal healer and exorcist as signs of kingdom of God
 - f. Healing was direct relationship to God, without the Temple
 - g. Jesus preached alternative wisdom, not conventional
 - i. a new way of seeing through God's enlightenment
 - ii. A new way of centering in the sacred, in God
 - iii. A new way of living, with compassion and no boundaries
 - iv. Inviting hearers to direct relationship with God
 - h. Social prophet like Amos, against oppression, economic exploitation, and belief that God was with the oppressors—probably led to his death
 - i. Initiated a movement—inclusivity and egalitarian, inclusive meal practice
 - j. Kingdom of God present and future, life with power and presence of God to form a new society as well as eternal kingdom. Not second coming.

What do we think are the major differences here?