

You Only THINK You Know Jesus

1. We are getting close to that time of year when several television stations will begin advertising in earnest for various specials that they will air on the life of Jesus:

a. While this certainly doesn't represent all of the programs that have aired in the past, many of them tend to have titles along these lines:

i. *The Jesus Mysteries, Jesus; the Missing Years, Secret Lives of Jesus Christ, The Real Face of Jesus, and Bible Secrets Revealed: The Real Jesus*

b. I think you get the point: they all have similar titles that mean to convey the sentiment that everything you *think* you know about Jesus is wrong; that all your traditional views must be challenged because you've either gotten it wrong, or you've been taught the wrong thing:

i. The titles don't stop at TV series; these sentiments are championed on the New York Times Bestseller lists with books like:

1. Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why; Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them); Jesus is Better than you Imagined

ii. **For a long time, it at least seems as though**, these attacks on “what you think you know about Jesus” have come from those who do not claim to be followers of God, and wish to discredit or cast doubt on scripture as a whole:

c. But there has always been another movement, perhaps not as vocal, that has sought to convince us that we are greatly mistaken about Jesus and His beliefs:

i. Unlike these others who have tried to appeal to “hidden gospels” and conspiracy theories, these groups appeal to their interpretations of scripture, and particularly focus on the content of the Gospels above all else:

ii. Some typical sentiments might be:

1. You can't tell people how to live their lives; after all, Jesus hung around prostitutes and drunks:
 2. You are too narrow; Jesus was way more accepting of people than you were
 3. **Here is a lengthy quote that fairly well sums up what many in the mainstream religious world** would have us believe about Jesus: **(See Slide)**
- d. **Is there a grain of truth** to some of these statements? Sure; but the overall picture that is painted by this description is that Jesus was a left leaning, grassroots, rail riding, political reformer who preached a mix of "I'm okay, you're okay" and mind your own business:
- i. Are there some assumptions that people make about Jesus that aren't true? Sure!
 - ii. Are there some things about Jesus that nobody really knows that we try and come up with some definitive answers about, and in the process might get wrong? Sure!
 - iii. Do people sometimes focus on things that Jesus wouldn't place a high priority on or oppose Himself? Sure:
 1. But is Jesus really so drastically different from what I think I know that I need to completely overhaul my religious beliefs and priorities? I don't think so:
 2. I want to use this quote as a template to just look at a few passages that can shed some light on these popularly shared sentiments about Jesus:

2. Let's Start With Some Common Ground:

a. His Methods:

- i. **Non-violent** Jesus never promoted violence among His followers: If it was up to you, peace was the path that was to be pursued: *Turn the other cheek: Matthew 5:39*

b. His Teachings:

i. Never Belittled the Poor:

1. While tending strictly to the physical needs of the poor wasn't at the top of Jesus' list of priorities, having compassion toward them and helping when opportunity presented itself were extremely important to Him:

a. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), His instructions in Matthew 25 on giving food and drink to those in need, His praise for the poor widow in Mark 12; all of these demonstrate that Jesus certainly didn't look down His nose at the poor.

ii. Never Promoted Torture:

1. I think this would certainly fall in the same category as being "non-violent" as discussed above:

iii. Didn't Lobby for Tax-Cuts:

1. **Jesus** promoted paying taxes as you ought in **Mark 12:17** and His fellow teacher John the Baptist taught that Tax-collectors should be honest in what they took: Honesty, fairness, and acceptance were their basic "views" on taxes

c. His Heritage:

i. I don't know if anything can accurately be said about the length of His hair, just how dark their skin was 2000 years ago, but we can certainly agree that He was of Hebrew decent and spoke in Hebrew and Aramaic.

3. Was Jesus Really All That *Radical* or *Revolutionary*?

a. **Jesus was only *radical-ish*.**: The concept that Jesus was radical or revolutionary is going to depend on how and where you define those terms: For the Jews of His day He certainly may have seemed radical, because He challenged the scriptural perversions of the religious leaders of His day, and His morals and standards were very different from what would have been expected in Greco-Roman circles.

- b. But when it came to His “core” religious teaching, it wasn’t so much a radical thing as it was calling on God’s people to behave in the ways that God had always called on them to act:
- i. When Jesus called on His audience in **Matthew 7:12** to *"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* Is that radically different from what God said through His prophet in **Micah 6:8** *He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?*
 - ii. In **Matthew 9:12**, when Jesus dealt with the attitudes of the Pharisees about His sitting down to eat with those sinners who came to Him to learn, did He come up with a radical new teaching? No, rather He quoted what God had revealed to another Prophet in **Hosea 6:6** *God desired mercy over sacrifice.*
 - iii. In **Matthew 15:4** When Jesus confronted the Pharisees about the way they mistreated their parents, did He promote radical new ideas in the care for senior citizens, or did He quote what God had already revealed in **Exodus 20:12**?
 - iv. In **Matthew 21:12-13**, when Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple, was this Jesus being a revolutionary? Or were His actions based on the scriptures He quoted from **Isaiah 56** and **Jeremiah 7**?
 - v. An enormous amount of Jesus teaching was calling back to principles that God had already revealed: This is by no means a definitive number, but Jesus personally quoted from the OT at least 84 times and did so from at least 24 different OT books.
- c. **Why Claim that Jesus was so revolutionary?**
- i. The claim that Jesus was a complete radical is an attempt to dismiss all “traditional views” of morality and standards: Jesus didn’t come to keep the status quo, He came to shake everything up!
 - ii. Jesus purpose in coming was indeed a revolution; He came to provide salvation! But Jesus came to forgive sins, He didn’t come to redefine it.

4. Jesus “Hung Around” Hookers and Crooks

a. Let’s admit right off away that yes, Jesus was often found in the company of what society would consider the worst of the worst: He could be found in the homes of men who had cheated and extorted their fellow brethren: He ate meals with people that in the eyes of many cast doubt on His credibility as a teacher: He was fond of the poor, He spoke to Samaritan women, He laid hands on those who were unclean: This is all true!

i. But can we take a step back and agree that to say Jesus was “*hanging out*” with them is at worst, incredibly disingenuous, and at best a misrepresentation of what Jesus did around these different men and women?

ii. At least to me, this is supposed to conjure up an image of the “non-judgmental Jesus”; That He would much rather prefer to be hanging out at the local bar being a man of the people than He would being in that stuffy old synagogue: Can we look at some examples of Jesus “hanging around” those in sin?

b. The Tax Collector (The Crooks) Luke 19:1-10

i. As Jesus passed through Jericho He called up to Zaccheus to come down from the tree; that He was to stay in his house: As could be expected this didn’t sit well with many who saw it—Here Jesus goes again! Sitting hanging around with those sinners!

1. And yet Zaccheus stopped; it seems to me, although it isn’t necessary, that Zaccheus heard this: He stops and says what he does to the Lord in response to this criticism: He intended to pay back 4 times over those he had wronged in his possession:

a. First off, where do you think he got an idea like that? Was this need to reform his ways encouraged by non-judgmental

Jesus? Or was he perhaps convicted by the teachings of Jesus?

2. Furthermore, what is the response of the Lord? Does He tell Zaccheus not to worry about it? That he is okay just the way he is?

a. Salvation has come to this house: I came to seek and save what is lost:

ii. Jesus said that yes, Zaccheus was a sinner who was lost; But now this sinner has been influenced by the teachings of Jesus and is making changes in his life—he isn't a sinner anymore—he isn't a crook anymore; This sinner has had Salvation visit his house:

c. The Immoral (And Shaming them)

i. **Let's** start with an informal definition: *act of making a person, especially a woman, feel guilty or inferior for certain sexual behaviors, circumstances or desires that deviate from traditional or orthodox gender expectations, or that which may be considered to be contrary to natural or religious law. Some examples of circumstances where women are "slut-shamed" include: violating accepted dress codes by dressing in sexually provocative ways, requesting access to birth control, having premarital or casual sex, or being raped or sexually assaulted.*

1. I'll go ahead and state upfront that I hope we can agree outright on the fact that blaming victims of sexual assault should turn our stomachs;

2. Also, what do we mean by shame?

a. Is my goal in discussing somebody's sin to make them feel remorse and repent? If that is shame then I'm all for it:

b. If my idea of shame is to ridicule and humiliate someone, and belittle their existence, then no—I'm not for it:

i. However, that if you are in disagreement with any of the above notions, you will automatically be placed in the second category:

ii. So by this definition all of the following is "shaming" an individual:

1. If you encourage someone to dress in a way that doesn't reveal their bodies or isn't sexually overt
2. If you encourage someone to save sex for the marriage relationship
3. If you encourage someone to pursue the role for their gender that is outlined in scripture:
 - a. There are a few "banner" passages that are often used to promote the idea that Jesus was a fan of "whatever you do is your own business" idea, we will look at one:
 - i. Side note on the woman at the well: If what Jesus said to her in 4:17-18 about her having had 5 husbands and now was living with someone who wasn't her husband doesn't fall into the category of shaming I don't know what would:

iii. Jesus and the Adulterous Woman: John 8:1-11 (read)

1. This passage is perhaps one of the most mutilated texts in scripture; The dishonesty that many approach this text with is infuriating in the extreme:
 - a. Here are a couple of quotes that are conclusions based on this passage:
 - i. *"Jesus is encouraging people who are taking positive steps, but he associates with all people with no strings attached,"*
 - ii. *"...A Christ who offers fellowship to all indiscriminately without condition, no strings attached? That would be a Jesus who is better than we've imagined, and that would be good news"*
2. First, can we acknowledge the context of the passage? This is not a group of people who are trying to follow the Law of Moses: This is an angry mob who have hauled this woman before Jesus, not for the purpose of fulfilling any commandment, but with the intention of trying to find charges to bring up against Jesus:

- a. After all of the woman's accusers leave Jesus bids her to leave also:
- b. Can we please look at vs 11?
 - i. Go, what you do with your body is your own business?
 - ii. Go, and don't let anybody make you feel ashamed?
 - iii. Go, and continue to enjoy casual sex, for I have come to free us from traditional gender roles and societal trappings about morality?
 - 1. Go; from now on **SIN. NO. MORE.**

3. There is NO translation of scripture that doesn't have these words! Every last one, even *The Message* says Don't Sin Again!

4. How can you look at those three little words; where Jesus clearly states that what she did was sin, and she had to stop doing it, and honestly say with a straight face that Jesus had attached no strings and no conditions?

d. **Passages** can be cut and pasted, taken out of context, and ignored. To paint a picture of Jesus as someone who just bounced around from party to party with sinners of all stripes regardless of their willingness to change and follow him requires a combination of all three.

e. **We can and should** acknowledge and imitate that Jesus passionately pursued sinners from all types of backgrounds, both of society and race; but it **MUST** be done so under the banner of "seeking and saving that which is lost".

- i. By its very definition this phrase requires that sin must be identified, and the sinner must be helped.

5. Jesus Was Anti-Wealth:

- a. Out of the many issues that divide our nation, the wage gap is one of the heatedly debated issues of the moment: Movements like Occupy Wall Street, and mass strikes over minimum wage are often the topics that dominate the news;

- i. I think we can certainly agree that many people in our world are consumed with the idea of wealth, and it devours their time and energy as they try to pursue more and more of it:
 - ii. But is it fair to say that Jesus was opposed to the very idea of having a surplus of money?
- b. In **Matthew 6:24** *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*
 - i. This is a pretty straightforward and simple sentiment; you can't serve God and Wealth; So Wealth is evil right?
 - ii. Is the point that blank a (God) is good, and blank b (money) is bad? Or is the point that the only thing you can devote your life to is God?
 - 1. Let's try putting some other true statements in this and see if it means they are inherently evil:
 - a. You cannot serve God and Food
 - b. You cannot serve God and Education
 - c. You cannot serve God and your career
 - d. You cannot serve God and Sports
 - iii. In each case, it is a true statement that if I become a slave to the pursuit of any of these three things, I will no longer be devoted to serving God; but does that mean they are all evil?
 - 1. They all have their proper place, but the abuse or obsession with any of them would be wrong.
 - 2. Why is money any different? Is this a denunciation of wealth as being outright evil, or is it a warning against those who became rich through their selfish, immoral, obsession with always accumulating more?
- c. In **Luke 16:19-31**, we have the familiar story of the Rich man and Lazarus: The rich man gorged himself every day while Lazarus sat around starving: Rich man is the villain, Poor man is the hero; Again—simple enough right?

- i. What was the Rich Man condemned for? Was it the fact that he was rich? Or that he was selfish and abusive of his wealth?
 - ii. I believe that he pleading to Abraham is telling: **Read vs 27-31**
 - 1. The rich man and his brothers were condemned for not following Moses and the Prophets; There is nothing in this passage that indicates or says the rich man was punished because he was wealthy:
- d. **Finally, in Mark 10:23**, Jesus laments how hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of heaven:
 - i. **Jesus had** just finished His exhortation to the rich man, a man that the text points out Jesus loved, to sell his possessions and give to the poor. As we well remember, this was something that didn't end well.
 - ii. **But is it fair** to take what Jesus said further than He did? That acknowledging the difficulty of using riches correctly is a proclamation of Anti-Wealth?
 - iii. **Is this** not another warning about the dangers of trusting in physical riches rather than God? Notice that Jesus never defines wealthy; He never puts a number on what it is to be rich:
 - 1. There is no magic number of zeros attached to your net worth that when achieved suddenly puts you across the line into something Jesus opposed;
 - 2. Jesus was opposed to those who trusted in riches and put their faith in things that could be taken away at a moment's notice: He was anti-selfish and anti-shortsighted.
- e. **Why say that Jesus was anti-wealth?** It *feels* to me that it is a "lump" issue. Opposition to the wealthy is just one of many issues that are usually bundled together with a certain set of political ideals; it isn't always the case, but many times is. Jesus as a crusader against the 1% fits the picture that many want to paint as the way they imagine Jesus.

6. Jesus Was Opposed to the Death Penalty?

- a. There are a handful of passages that tend to come up in this conversation, but much of it seems to be assumptions based on a very limited knowledge of what Jesus taught:
 - i. In other words, statements like; Jesus thought that all life was valuable, so how could you say that He would want the death penalty?
 - ii. Or, didn't Jesus say to turn the other cheek? How is favoring the death penalty following that command? Or what about do unto others?
 - iii. Some will make statements that show a clear misunderstanding of the reason that Jesus came in the first place: Even though **Mark 10:45** records Jesus as saying that He came to give His life as a ransom for many, I've seen multiple people write these statements:
 1. *I have a feeling that the executed first-century teacher would not support the death penalty or want his followers to.*
 2. *st theologians believe he considered all life sacred and, thus, would most likely oppose the death penalty. Also, since he was a victim of it, he may have a rooting interest in seeing it abolished."*
- b. But if we can agree that what **I think** someone might **think** isn't exactly reliable evidence, what textual proof might there be to support this concept?
 - i. Matthew 5:38-39: *"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*
 1. Here Jesus is quoting a text from **Deut. 21** and **Lev. 14** where at least one cause for instituting the death penalty was laid out. It is important to note that the passage that Jesus quotes is not the only situation where the death penalty was to be incurred; Under the Old Law it was only one among many: So the first question that I'd ask is whether or not it is fair to assume that Jesus comments about one specific instance, is a complete dismissal of all other instances:

2. The second observation I'd have is that of Jesus audience: Who was receiving these instructions: I'm not asking from a Christian/non-Christian kind of perspective, but rather than Jesus is speaking to groups of individuals. These were instructions for individual men and women in their own personal lives:
 - a. Is anyone really willing to say that there is no difference between the actions that a Government Entity can and should take, and the authority that an individual citizen has?

ii. What about the passage in John 8?

1. As we've already alluded to, Jesus had more going on in this situation: These were not men and women who were interested in keeping the Law:
2. But let's look at it from a "legal perspective". The Law of Moses did not allow for an execution unless there were multiple witnesses who could testify:
3. Also, what does the Law say that they brought before Jesus? *If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. Leviticus 20:10*
 - a. So here is a situation where there are no witnesses, and there is no man brought with her to be charged, and yet Jesus is supposed to condemn her?
 - b. Again, we can surely see the compassion of Jesus, but is this really a tacit disapproval of the Death Penalty?

c. Is there any textual evidence that Jesus would have approved of the Death Penalty?

- i. **Matthew 5:17-19.** In a conversation where you are limited to what is found in the Gospels, the importance of these 3 verses cannot be overstated: If Jesus came to fulfill the Law, if He forbid annulling even the smallest portion of it—what part of the law did He not approve of?

1. Is capital punishment required under the Old Law? Yes or no? Did Jesus explicitly say that He supported even the smallest ordinance of the Old Law?
 - ii. **Matthew 15:1-6:** When Jesus condemns the Pharisees for not following this Law, is He not saying that there were those among the Pharisees that should have been put to death for the way they had neglected and dishonored their parents?
 - iii. **Luke 23:39-43:** As one criminal on the cross ridiculed Jesus, the other acknowledged that they were deserving, and that Jesus was not: Those who were guilty required the death penalty, those who are innocent do not: Jesus responds to him by saying he would be in Paradise:
 1. **This** would seem to be a strange way of showing your disapproval.
- d. **I need to be careful not to put words in Jesus' mouth.** I don't know that I could say 100% that Jesus would approve of all the varieties of death penalties that have been invented, but I feel fairly safe in saying that He at least supported the just use of it during His day and time:
 - i. **Trying to** force Him to say otherwise to fit a modern political debate doesn't seem like it gives much regard to the context or volume of His teaching.

7. Jesus Was Never Anti-Abortion:

- a. I refuse to spend more than a moment even addressing this: **Is someone honestly willing to oppose the death penalty for murders on the grounds that all life is sacred, and then in the same breath turn around and support the destruction of innocent life?** They should be embarrassed for even opening their mouths.
 - i. **Luke 1:39-35**
- b. **It's the woman's body and she can do what she wants with it:**
 - i. Excuse me: isn't it this kind of complete selfishness without regard for the welfare of others that led Jesus to condemn some of those who were rich? But I suppose this is another situation where something is bad if it makes one point, but good if it can make another.

8. Jesus Was Anti-Public Prayer:

a. **Matthew 6:5-6:**

- i. First, can we point out that this passage is ripped out of a broader context of “ways to do good things that will render them ineffectual”? This is not a treatise on public prayer; this is a section of warnings on actions that make prayer useless.
- ii. It isn't a ban on public prayer, it is a ban on hypocrisy: Speaking of Hypocrisy, if Jesus really did intend to come out as Anti-Public prayer, is the best way to accomplish that by immediately leading a public prayer in front of multiple thousands of people? (**Verses 9-13**)

b. This was a fairly common practice of Jesus: **Matthew 11:25-26**

- c. In fact, the last words of Jesus on the cross were a prayer: **Luke 23:46:** Father into your hands I commend my spirit!

9. Birth Control? Leper for a Co-Pay?

- a. I don't want to answer disingenuous statements in an equally disingenuous way; but using the logical fallacy of “appealing to ignorance” is a very ignorant way of making a point:
 - i. Jesus never mentioned Climate Change, so I guess it isn't important
 - ii. Jesus never mentioned nuclear weapons so he must not mind them
 - iii. Arguing from ignorance is a two way street, and isn't an effective or honest way to make a point no matter which side you are on:
- b. Yes, Jesus never asked a Leper for a co-pay;
 - i. Jesus also was a divine physician with miraculous powers that had no need of earning a living because He was supported by His numerous disciples, and had no need of a retirement plan since He knew He would die at around age 33.
 - ii. So, modern physicians and insurance companies that are businesses obviously have a lot of parallels to follow
- c. I don't mean to be bitter or sarcastic, but these and other sentiments like them are arguments based on nothing, and sound quite ridiculous if taken to their logical

conclusions:

10. Why is there a need to reinvent Jesus?

- a. If I took everything on our list as truth, what I'd basically be saying is that Jesus was a 22 year old ethnic college student who was the president of the democratic student body, with plans to join the peace corps after finishing His undergrad in Political Geography:
 - i. These are efforts to take Jesus and forcibly align Him with a political agenda:
 - ii. I believe that these passages, taken in context, would show that not to be the case:
 - iii. But I have to be just as vigilant that I don't forcibly try and turn Jesus into a 50 year old white republican business owner:**
- b. **Any** approach to learning about Jesus that has the goal of making Him fit the mold I choose is an exercise in futility: If I want to learn about who Jesus really is, all I have to do is let Him reveal it in His word.