

Come, Thou Warm and Fuzzy Jesus

(First, let me express my apologies to the great hymn writer, Charles Wesley, for bastardizing the title of his wonderful Christmas hymn, “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus.” Having said that, I shall proceed to make my point; and I hope that my comments will justify the corruption.)

At the surface level there is a degree of rapprochement between the major religions of the world. There is a certain “I’m okay, you’re okay” truce understanding. “We won’t speak negatively about you, so long as you don’t speak negatively about us.” In this way we can all just get along; after all, there are many roads to God – right? Some religious leaders have spoken positively about Jesus, noting that he was a prophet, who gave his followers – and by extension the world – a high set of moral values. They point out that Jesus said we should love one another, deny ourselves, and take the initiative in treating others as we would like them to treat us. These things are true, and they are good as far as they go; but they do not go nearly far enough.

Because the minute that we get past the superficial “warm and fuzzy” level, things diverge very quickly. What I intend to demonstrate is that, when it comes to Jesus, we cannot just twist open the Oreo cookie and lick off the sweet filling. Jesus was not running to be popular. He was not about just telling people what they wanted to hear. But he was, most certainly, about telling people what they needed to hear – especially within the context of their own eternal destiny.

Consider the following statements from Jesus’ lips, as reported in the gospels. These documents are the memoirs of the Apostles. They were written by the men who actually heard Jesus speak, or in the case of Luke, by a well-educated medical doctor, who carefully researched his material.

“I and the Father are one.”^[i] Jesus here unambiguously claimed to be equal with God. And we know that his hearers got the point, because they took up stones in order to kill him.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”^[ii] Note Jesus’ use of the definite article (the) here. He is clearly not saying that he is “a” way among many ways to the Father, or that his teaching was “a” truth among many truths. He is stating emphatically that he is the only way and the only truth. So that we cannot possibly miss the point, Jesus goes on to say that no can come to God the Father except through his Son.

“At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.”^[iii] In one short sentence, Christ affirmed both creation and gender. Neither of these concepts is on the current most popular list.

“Up to the day Noah entered into the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.”^[iv] In another very brief statement, Jesus affirmed a real guy named Noah, a real ark, and a real flood. (The worldwide geological and fossil evidence for such a “Mass Extinction Event” is enormous.)

“Because I live, you also will live.”^[v] Jesus predicted his future resurrection, and he promised that if we committed our future destiny to him, we would likewise be resurrected to eternal life.

“In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”^[vi] This is an answer that Jesus gave to a “leading question” after being placed under

oath at his trial. Christ's hearers clearly understood what Jesus was claiming here, because they instantly accused Him of blasphemy and condemned Him to death.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world...Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”^[vii] In this passage Christ declared that one day he is going to return to the earth in glory, accompanied by the angels, and sit in judgement on the world. He went on to promise that those who meet his criteria would be rewarded with eternity in heaven. And he also warned that those who did not meet the standard would be assigned to eternal punishment.

(Suppose we took a college course and the professor determined that there would be a final exam. Without question, the professor is entitled to establish the rules – it is his class. But would we prefer that the professor put that information in the syllabus, or waited until the actual day of the test to announce it? Christ, by virtue of who he is and what he has accomplished, is fully entitled to judge. Thankfully, he has announced it in the syllabus – well before test day.)

We are free to not believe the things Jesus said. But it is prudent that we clearly understand what Christ claimed in these statements before we reject them. And we need to consider the serious implications of rejecting them before we make that eternity determining decision. Are we going to trust our eternal destiny to some guy who got his view of origins and earth history all wrong? Are we going to follow a false teacher who was deluded into thinking that he was God? There has been no shortage of such pretenders over the course of history. On the other hand, if these statements are true, ought we not bow the knee to the One who is everything he claimed to be?

It's that Oreo cookie thing again. Either we accept all of Jesus or we can't have any of Jesus. We cannot just take the statements of Jesus we like. If we go down that path, everything about Jesus becomes subjective; and nothing is objective. The statements He made and the truths that he asserted become relative and optional – rather than absolute. This makes no sense either logically or theologically. If trusting our eternal destiny to Jesus brings no particular advantage to the one who trusts, then there is no compelling reason to follow Jesus. On the other hand, if following Jesus brings us to eternal life with Him, then there is nothing to be gained in following anyone else – and everything to be lost.

Thoughtfully yours,

Dwight

^[i] John 10:30 (Context 10:22-33)

^[ii] John 14:6 (Context 14:1-11)

^[iii] Mark 10:6 (Context 10:1-12)

^[iv] Luke 17:27 (Context 17:22-37)

^[v] John 14:19 (Context 14:15-21)

^[vi] Matthew 26:64 (Context 26:57-68)

^[vii] Matthew 25:31-34, 41,46 (Context 25:31-46)