

# The Essential Jesus

Wayne Waibel – 01/28/2024

When we think back on our school days, I'm sure we all remember at least one teacher that really resonated with us. One who either got the absolute best out of us or made a torturously boring subject come to life. A teacher deserving of the honor bestowed upon them by the character of their students.

There were also some forgettable imposters that roamed the hallways stealing their paychecks, and sometimes doing real damage to young impressionable minds. But teaching with authority – that's some serious teaching, and rare indeed.

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In Matthew's reworking of the early chapters of Mark, we hear the teachings of Jesus, but in Mark we see the teachings. In Mark – the emphasis is on what the teacher does. The words of Jesus are not only powerful, they are performative. These powerful words are not just informational, but transformational.

This is where the essential Jesus begins His ministry, and it sets a tone completely foreign to anything anyone had ever heard or seen before. People were accustomed to hearing the lessons taught by scribes.

And these scribes were just performing their mission as well as they could. They are not often thought of favorably these days, being lumped together with the Pharisees and such, but they really were good people. They were just not Jesus. Now He was a teacher.

Modern day preachers are the direct descendants of scribes, in fact the Presbyterian denomination has a very specific title for Ministers of the Word and Sacrament – Teaching Elders.

Now that I think of it, I probably learned more from various pastors in my life than I did from accredited teachers. No disrespect intended to any who may have worked in the academic world; the former is probably more an indication of where my interests lined up.

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We are mired down in these post-modern times with some of the same trappings of knowledge Paul faced with the Corinthian elites. Although those “elites” wished to discuss the logical implications of their knowledge, Paul focuses on the ethical implications.

The real question is not whether it is acceptable to eat the things offered to gods, because your knowledge tells you that no idol humans create really exists. There is one God who creates through the Lord Jesus Christ for the sake of our existence in God’s creation.

The real question is despite that higher understanding, are you able to maintain the ethic of love and self-sacrifice knowing that choosing instead to exercise the freedom you know to be yours; you are compromising the conscience of a brother who lacks that depth of understanding.

Which is why Paul ends this chapter with the statement, “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat.” It is precisely that ethic that defines the Christian conscience.

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When Jesus “taught them as one having authority,” it not only amazed the people, it stirred the demons within the man possessed by unclean spirits. These demons knew that their time was ended as the kingdom of God was being ushered in through Jesus Christ. Moving forward – the Holy Spirit would reign supreme.

“And immediately His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee.” All of this was done in the outlying areas of the land – the hilltop village of Nazareth – the fishing village of Capernaum. Not the centers of commerce and government like Jerusalem. The essential Jesus – how he was known – was simply as a healer and One who fed people. His fame was that His teaching had authority.

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The nature of God’s wisdom is love. Christian freedom is grounded in love. Love is greater than knowledge. Knowledge without love puffs up the individual, but knowledgeable love builds up the community.

In North America today, advertising, as well as political and religious leaders, increasingly rely on images and jingles and bumper sticker phrases to shape public opinion. The use of click-bait has been taken to new heights or depths depending on your worldview. What suffers as a result is our collective integrity.

As a community of faith, we must recognize the inadequacy of such approaches to Christian thinking, choosing instead to reflect on the common good at a much deeper level.

We don't need icons and mission statements and protocols to inform and condition our day-to-day living. Those all have their place and their limitations. As a critical thinking, fully invested post-modern Christian we need only this – One who teaches with authority. And that, my friends, is Jesus Christ. Amen.