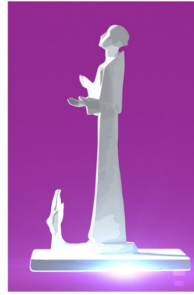


EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



Theme 5: The Bible's Big Themes

Question 5d. Who does the Bible say Jesus is?

1. Have you noticed the actions of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels? Sarah suggested that to know who Jesus is, it helps to see what he did. His actions 'bring divine love, grace and forgiveness, to build and restore community and relationship'. Choose a Gospel and read through it with this focus: what is Jesus doing here? (PS: the shortest Gospel is Mark!)
2. Imagine you have the task of communicating who Jesus is to a modern audience. What type of communication would you consider using? Facebook post? Tweet? Bus stop poster? Film advertisement? What would the result look/sound like?
3. What would you like to say to your audience about the Jesus we know through the Gospels?

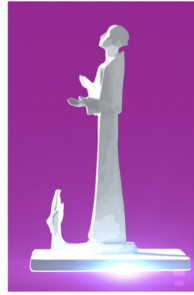
Sarah Plowman

When I look through the Bible for evidence about who Jesus is I could look for what the writers of the Bible say, the labels they give, what St Paul says about Jesus, or what the authors of the Gospels say, but I do like to take a slightly different tack.

I look at Jesus' actions or what they say to me that Jesus is. Think about the things that Jesus did a lot of: Jesus healed people, he forgave people of their sins, he brought people together and back into community. These actions indicate to me that Jesus is a restorer of community, that Jesus is a builder of communities based on love, grace and forgiveness. When Jesus healed someone of a physical ailment that did more than just bring

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



them physical peace, it actually brought them back into their family life. It made them able to be contributors to society and most importantly it meant they were able to go back to the temple and worship God. So, through the simple act of healing someone of a physical disease Jesus actually restored family community, religious community and then through that, relationship with God.

When Jesus forgave someone of their sins, or welcomed an outcast to the table, Jesus was restoring and building loving community. Even right up to the point of his death on the cross, when Jesus looked down and saw his mother Mary, and his disciple John, he says to John, 'this is your mother,' and to Mary, 'This is your son.' He's bringing people together in loving community, and as a follower of Jesus I believe that is the mission of the Church as well - to continue the work of Jesus, which is possible only through grace, and love and forgiveness which comes from God.

So, to answer that question really simply: who Jesus is, is answered by what Jesus does, and that is to bring divine love and grace and forgiveness and build and restore community and relationship.

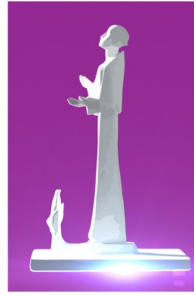
Jeremy Greaves

The Gospels tell us a lot about who Jesus is, but I think essentially, they are a reflection of communities of faithful people trying to make sense of who Jesus was for them, particularly in the light of the resurrection. And so while the Scriptures tell us that Jesus was the Son of God, Jesus was great teacher, a miracle worker - all sorts of things - it was communities of people living in the light of the resurrection trying to understand who this person was that they'd heard stories about.

So people try to make sense of that for themselves. They'd heard stories, or they knew people who'd experienced this person first hand and as they'd gathered together as a community of faith they wanted

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



to understand those things for themselves. So when they wrote down the stories those things came out in what was written down. As they worked out what it meant to live as people faithful to the memory of Jesus Christ, those things arose out of that experience, so it made sense to think of Jesus as the son of God, it made sense to think of him as the fulfilment of all those prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures.

So I think the Gospels tell us more about the experience of those communities perhaps than they do directly about the person of Jesus. We can work hard to uncover who the historical Jesus was and to tease out from the texts what we can know about the historical Jesus but I think the writers of the Gospels were less concerned about that and more concerned about who this person was for us now in the light of the resurrection.

Greg Jenks

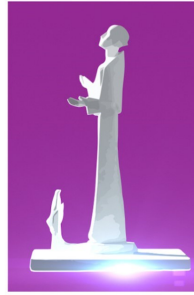
In terms of the New Testament itself, Jesus is the central theme of the New Testament but the answers the New Testament offers or the way that the New Testament talks about Jesus is actually offering different understandings of Jesus.

The most, if you like, the top drawer kind of view of Jesus is what you'll find in John chapter 1, the prologue to John's gospel where Jesus is the divine logos which has been there from the beginning, from before the beginning and is up there with God and is God. That's the top-level theological comment on Jesus in the New Testament and of course it's corroborated or validated or echoed in some of the post Pauline texts like Ephesians and Colossians which also tend to talk in that way.

If you compare that for example with the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is kind of demoted to a lesser place within the divine household. He's still the son and heir within the household, but he's not the master of

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



the house. So in the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus has a different place in the universe than he does in the gospel of John and if you go to the letters of Paul which are the earliest Christian texts where're they're first trying to kind of make sense of this Jesus thing , then we find this strange formula that's used all the time. Paul typically begins his letters with some version of this: 'from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the saints of God or whatever, grace and peace and so on, but he's gonna say *from God the father and the lord Jesus Christ*. Ok, for Paul, there're still two separate entities that he's working with here. And he can't talk of God the Father without talking of Jesus and vice versa, but he hasn't yet got to the Johannine kind a principle.

When we go back to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is a much more complicated story focussing naturally on what Jesus said, what Jesus did and really comparing him with the prophets of the Old Testament rather than with God. You know someone greater than Moses, greater than Elijah, greater than John the Baptist even.

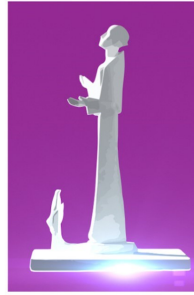
So the benchmark in the Synoptic Gospels are the prophets. How did Jesus rate against the prophets? For Paul Jesus has to be mentioned in the context of God the Father but that reflects the Roman household system, where there'll be a father in charge of the household and there'll be another person who is really the one you had to deal with. That's the model that Paul is dealing with.

By the time you get to Hebrews there's still a bit of that but it's become a bit more sophisticated. By the time you get to John, Colossians and Ephesians, Jesus is the embodiment of the fulness of God.

So the New Testament speaks about Jesus in different ways which keeps people teaching Christology in a job I guess so a large bit of the New Testament does not agree with the Nicene creed and the council of Chalcedon. But what does the New Testament say about Jesus? Do we identify the highest point, take that as the norm and

EXPLORING THE BIBLE

a St Francis College short course



apply it backwards to all the other pieces or do we recognise the New Testament doesn't speak about Jesus with one voice?

I'm one of those scholars who tends to focus on the diversity of the scriptural witness rather than trying to shoehorn it all into a nicely shaped shoe that's come out of the council of Chalcedon.