

WHAT THE BIBLE IS ALL ABOUT
Here Comes Jesus--Don't Miss Him!

Luke 7:18-23

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We begin this morning with a brief history review. When we left off this sermon series last fall, the Israelites were captive in a foreign land. Looking at a timeline, in the late 500's, they returned, but the land was very different. Eventually, it was ruled by the Romans. Jesus' birth (around 4 BC) was followed by about 30 years of obscurity. Then his public ministry was from about 26-30 AD. Note that the four gospels were written and collected between 65-85 AD, as the eyewitnesses were dying off.

This morning, we focus on the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. As literature, they are unique. They aren't biography or memoir. They are proclamation. The word gospel means "good news." Their intent is not so much information but transformation. I like the way Adam Hamilton puts it, "During the first decades after the resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament was not a book but a person, Jesus Christ" [*Making Sense of the Bible*, p. 110]. Here's a beautiful saying I ran across years ago: The gospels do not explain the resurrection; the resurrection explains the gospels."

Not all of the gospels agree on details. But that's OK. I have a friend who was preaching a series of sermons on the reliability of the Bible. During the series, he interviewed an FBI agent in his church. He asked, "What would you assume if four witnesses reported the same event in identical language, phrasing and word order?" He said, "I would suspect collusion and fabrication." Each gospel writer highlights different things in different ways. That's truth.

Some may be wondering about other so-called gospels which make the news occasionally--The Gospel of Thomas, of Judas, etc. First of all, they appear much later. Our four canonical gospels were known and quoted early in the second century. They have their roots in real history. Second, these other so-called gospels don't square with the Jesus we know. In The Gospel of Thomas, a young Jesus breathes life into clay birds. Once, when he hears his parents' neighbors complaining, he strikes them blind. Does that sound like the Jesus we know? One focused on getting his way and throwing his weight around?

And that leads us to our text this morning. John sends two disciples to check Jesus out. Are you "The One Who Is To Come?" (a technical phrase in the Jewish art of waiting). You see, most people in Jesus' day were looking for a different kind of Messiah. They wanted one who would end their humiliation and oppression at the hand of the Romans. They wanted a Messiah to fit their politics! Don't we all! But Jesus' answer (v. 22) actually alludes to Psalm 89:9 and Isaiah 35. In other words, "Yes I am the One Who Is To Come; this is the beginning, the dawn of the Age of Messiah, the breaking in of God's Reign, ***but not as you expected it!***"

And Jesus gives both warning and encouragement in v. 23: "blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." Blessed is he who is repelled by nothing in me. This is a reminder that the only way we can experience this Jesus is through repentance--of our sins and of our preconceived notions of God and life. To turn. When I was in South Africa at the BWA, I heard a pastor from New Zealand describe a believer as one who had "solidly repented..." I like that. Nothing vague.

Think about that Jewish phrase, The Coming One, or The One Who Is To Come. What an astonishment that in Jesus, we are meeting someone who is coming after us! Here's what I love so much about Jesus. There is no coercion or bullying (v. 22). Just an invitation that allows us to draw our own conclusions.

And note the words, "seen and heard..." The uniqueness of the Christian faith is in personal experience, not second hand doctrines. It's personal. I know some of you struggle with doubts about the Bible. But rather than trying to get to know Jesus by understanding the Bible, why not turn it around? Why not experience Jesus by faith and then see how much more of the Bible starts making sense? Let me share with you a personal experience about why I take the Bible and Jesus so seriously. Over and over, I read the four gospels in my devotional life. I find in them One who satisfies, saves, cares and changes my life--and those around me.

Read v. 22 in light of the many people in this room and in this city who need Jesus' healing touch. Do you want to know how I know I'm where I'm supposed to be in ministry? In the right church? Do you want to know why I am excited about our church's future? Why I am excited about our Imagine If process? Because at Deacons' Meeting last Monday night, I heard our deacons talking about their burden for the lost, the last and the least in our town. They were trying to imagine what it would be like NOT to know that God loves you, NOT to have a spiritual foundation, a church home, a purpose and a hope.

In other words, people need to hear God's Word, the Bible, the Good News, the Gospel. But I can think of a more compact way to say that: They need Jesus.