

“Behold the Man”: Contemporary Historical Jesus Research; “Crucify Him!”: The Historical Accuracy of the Trial of Jesus

Let me open us in prayer first, and we will go to the Lord.

Father, as we approach You in this moment we desire to honor You in all that we do. We desire to honor You in our lives, our hearts, our ministries, and even in the way that we approach our school. I, as a professor, desire to honor You in my teaching. I am sure that these students desire to honor You in the way that they study. Lord, in the midst of this we ask that as You are glorified in us that You would also teach us and prepare us for our future ministries. We ask that we might bring further glory to You in years and decades ahead as we are better able and prepared to minister Your Word to others. I ask that You use this class to that end. In the name of our dear Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let me review a few things before we start with today’s lesson. If you were a slave, depending on your owner, the owner had the right to free you. Some of this could be negotiated ahead of time if you were seeking to become someone’s slave. Many owners would boast of freeing their slaves. Then you would change your status to that of a freed person. Once you were a freed person you would continue in a relationship with your former owner, usually in the form of a patron-client relationship. They would seek to look after you, and you would become their client and have responsibilities to them as well. That is not the only way of entering into a patron-client relationship, especially among the upper classes of society. Then you would not have done that but would have simply some sort of a patron-client interaction.

Some ancient Jewish texts are oriented around particular themes of rabbinic teachings. It finds its earliest expression in the Mishnah in 200 AD. There are three works that come out of that. The Tosefta follows the same structure as the Mishnah but includes some other material. The Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds go back to the Mishnah itself, cite it, and then add additional rabbinic stories and debates that are connected topically with what is said in the Mishnah. The Midrash are commentaries, so they might actually cover the same legal material, but instead of following a topical structure they follow the structure of the biblical text.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 has about three things that are controversial. The Hebrew literally says, “If there is in a man a sin bearing a judgment of death...” The question is what the nature of that sin is. The next controversy has to do with whether or not suspension is required and whether or not the person is dead before being suspended. That has to do with the sequence of verbs in verse 22. In verse 23 the major question is what is the “curse of God”? Is it that the person has been cursed by God or is it that in some way they have cursed God, either by being a blasphemer or by being made in His image and yet being suspended.

The Ptolemies were in Egypt and the Seleucids were in Persia. They followed on the heels of Alexander and are part of the group of his successors. Antiochus Epiphanes was a Seleucid.

The deconstructionist says that any text contains gaps that you normally fill in as you read it. You fill in those gaps based on societal conventions. If they instead challenge the societal conventions and insert different material into those gaps, you can make the text fall apart. The text therefore no longer coheres. We should be able to read a text and assume that there is a meaning that constitutes what the text is really about.

Josephus mentions 22 books that are accepted as canonical. Although we have had history after the fact, there is not a verified succession of prophets coming out of that. So we do not esteem those books of like accord. We looked at Eusebius' material and asked what he signaled as concerns in terms of something being canonical or not. The gospel according to the Hebrews is not the book of Hebrews. It is a separate lost gospel that was circulated in the first century. It is principally known among Jewish Christian groups. That is why it is called the gospel according to the Hebrews. It is the Jewish Christian Gospel. We have some fragments of it recorded in other authors. Eusebius likely included the book of Hebrews among the Pauline epistles.

It is worth studying the history of interpretation for the same reason that you should know the history of any discipline. In addition, there are facets of the history of New Testament interpretation that still affect the way that scholars study the New Testament today. Even when they write lay material, they answer questions from that perspective. For example, today we will talk about the historical Jesus. Knowing something about the historical Jesus movement explains why *Newsweek* every year cranks out another article on who Jesus is. Knowing the history of the disciple helps you understand why certain questions are still out there and why people keep debating them.

Let us transition into our discussion of the historical Jesus. At the end of last time I mentioned that historical Jesus scholarship goes back at least a couple hundred years. It arises out of certain questions that were prevalent in their day, and they remain important. It arises out of the notion, for instance, that we are modern men and women. Modern men and women know that miracles do not happen. Therefore any historical work from antiquity that talks about miracles must be viewed with a certain degree of skepticism. This was not just abstract and out of nowhere, suddenly applied to the New Testament. In some ways it is the by-product of the Reformation and the skepticism of the Renaissance. If you read Erasmus, you can see how something like this happened.

Erasmus tells the story of all the different places you could go in Europe in his day to venerate the saints. All of them seemed to have a bit of wood from the cross. He says if you collected together all the "wood of the cross" you could build an entire house. There were so many things out there that were claimed to be holy relics and associated with particular miracles that the saints performed on behalf of the people. As a result there arose skepticism as people moved into a more modern scientific worldview. It was just a small step from that to then turn to the New Testament and discredit all the miracles described there.

There was also an issue over what is called the Donation of Constantine. The Donation of Constantine was a church document that was used to vouchsafe the importance of the papacy and the Roman Catholic Church in light of the great emperor Constantine. The document was shown to be a forgery, written several centuries later. Yet it was an important document that had been touted much in the Catholic Church. This ties into the Renaissance and Enlightenment. The flames were fanned as well in the Reformation as people began to look again at the Catholic Church and see foundational documents that were not accurate. It is a small step from that to look at the Gospels and ask the same questions: are these historically accurate and responsible accounts? The initial responses to the documents and the miracles were yes; they were believed. But over time the increasing modernist skepticism came to be applied to the New Testament. That was 200 years ago, and it seems like ancient history for those of us who are Americans. It is very real and right on our front doorsteps today.

Some of you may have heard of the Jesus Seminar. You may have seen it advertised in newspapers and magazines. The Jesus Seminar is a group of New Testament scholars who specialize in the study of the

historical Jesus. At one stage they got together on a periodic basis to work through the materials of the Gospels and to vote on what they considered to be authentic or inauthentic. They had a modified blackball system. Black indicated that it was not said by Jesus, grey indicated that we do not think it was said by Jesus though it might have been, pink indicated that it was fairly probable that it was said by Jesus though they are not sure, and red indicated that Jesus said it. Initially they were concerned with the sayings of Jesus. The question goes on to all facets of Jesus' life, at least as it is reported in the Gospels. They are "sorting out the authentic from the inauthentic." This sounds fairly crass, certainly very American and democratic. You get 60 people in a room, and you have them vote on whether Jesus said something or not. It sounds weird. But if you go to their web site, it is very striking that they intended to address discussions that had been going on for 100 years or more in technical New Testament circles. These were places where people were just publishing to one another, and a few hundred people read whatever was published. They say that there is disconnect between what the "scholars" are saying and what the average person in the pew believes. So they launched a project to narrow that gap. In other words, they wanted to bring their scholarship into the pew.

I would say that they inflict their very minimalist view of Jesus on the people in your churches. They are looking for the people in your churches, those you will be sitting across from in a counseling session. These are the people with whom you will be sharing the Gospel of Christ when you are going in your day-to-day ministry. A measure of their effectiveness is in the number of media events that keep interviewing this same group of guys. I mentioned before that *Newsweek* and *Time* have frequently come up with another article on the historical Jesus. This happened especially recently after the *Passion of the Christ* movie. There were a whole host of articles that came out critiquing the movie as being very violent, bloody, and Mel Gibson-ish. But if you read some of the articles in more detail, they were also critiquing the degree of the historical reliability, not just of the movie (and there are some issues there), but also of the Gospels themselves. A lot of critique took place with regard to the trial of Jesus. We will get into that in a bit.

So this view is very much in popular media. Over the last three or four years there have been two major releases where Peter Jennings hosted primetime shows on this. One was called "In Search of Jesus," and another one was on Jesus and Paul. He interviewed this slate of typical Jesus seminar people who are highly skeptical of the Gospels. They were critiquing the Jesus that you and I know. The gut reaction for many evangelicals is that these critics are ignorant. Or the evangelicals say they are going to stand by the Gospels no matter what because they are the Word of God. I applaud that; they are the Word of God. You should stand by the Gospels. But I submit to you that you will interact with people, possibly in your family and certainly in the day-to-day ministry in life, who are from contexts where they have been exposed to these media events. There will be people in your daily life who care about these things. They will look to you as a person with a seminary degree to have something to say to them. That is why I think it is important that you know from the inside what is going on with the historical Jesus. You should be able to provide a critique that is a responsible intellectual critique. That is an introduction to this topic.

There is some typical terminology that I want to go over. This is often referred to as the quest for the historical Jesus. This term is associated with Schweitzer and others. People will refer to the three quests for the historical Jesus. There is a very blurred distinction between the new quest, which is the second one, and the third quest. There are also points of continuity though. The first quest goes back to the eighteenth century and a man named Reimarus. After his death, some of his own ponderings were later published by what was one of the most famous German authors of his day, Lessing. These were known as the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments*. In it Reimarus said that basically Jesus was a Jewish revolutionary who sought to die a martyr's death. His disciples later developed the idea of the resurrection and return of

Christ. What is so striking about Reimarus' statement is that people thought like him for hundreds of years afterward. There is a radical disconnect between Jesus as an historical figure and the people who came after Him, especially Paul. Often people will speak of Paul as the one who really founded Christianity. Christianity, as you know it, is more indebted to Paul than it is to Jesus. Jesus was much more concerned about overthrowing the Romans, according to Reimarus, and therefore He died a martyr's death. His disciples later developed the idea of the resurrection so that they could keep going and still venerate their leader, Jesus.

There are a number of names that could be associated with this first quest, two of whom are David Friedrich Strauss and Johannes Weiss. In these men we see a movement away from the revolutionary character of Jesus and the sense that He is trying to overthrow the Romans. Instead they teach something that is much more in keeping with His explicit teachings. Strauss will say that the Gospels provide a basic outline of Jesus' life, but they also add mythological elements to Jesus' life because of the earlier church's belief that Jesus was the Messiah. He says that the Gospels have a generally good outline, but there is a lot of extra mythological stuff, much of it associated with Jesus' miracles. Strauss says this was added later because the church believed that Jesus was such a great guy. What is striking about the move from Strauss to Weiss is that Weiss indicates that Jesus was actually talking about an eschatological kingdom. He was talking about the inbreaking of the kingdom of God that He thought was going to happen any day. He was preparing people for it to happen.

The end of the first quest came about because of Albert Schweitzer, who wrote *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. In some ways he retells the history of the whole quest. Then he launches his own notion of what is the appropriate way to speak of Jesus. There are a couple of very striking images that come out of Schweitzer's teaching; one is the image of a well. He says that the people who have done historical Jesus work up until his time were peering down a well to try to find what Jesus looked like. As they peered down the well they saw Him, and they began to describe Him. But they really saw their own reflection in the water at the bottom of the well. In other words, he accused his fellow New Testament scholars who preceded him of reading into Jesus who they wanted Him to be.

This is a very striking critique because all of this went on during the rise of what is known as German liberalism. The term "liberal" does not mean a pejorative way that is used in rhetoric today. People spit out the term "liberal" or "conservative" depending on what context you are coming from. This was a technical term for a whole movement in theology known as liberalism. It sought to provide a rational basis for Christian religion, and it found three great propositions in the teachings of Jesus. It said that Jesus primarily taught about the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul. That is a very enlightened way of speaking of Jesus; it comes right out of the Enlightenment. This is exactly what moral people were supposed to believe. God was the Father of us all, we are brothers and all have common origins, and we are valuable because we are worthy of value. Those were the three great propositions, and they saw this in Jesus. Paul taught about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus being needed to atone for our sins, but that came later. That was not what Christianity was really about from its founder, Jesus. Schweitzer said that they were reading their own German liberalism into what they saw in Jesus. He said it did not work that way. Jesus was not just some wonderful guy going around spreading peace and love who happened to run into Pharisees who were not in favor of peace and love. There had to be something else going on. Schweitzer suggests that Jesus sought to provoke the eschatological kingdom of God by His ministry and ultimately by His death. He said Jesus was convinced that God was just about on the verge of bringing in His kingdom on earth. All that it would take was a prophetic ministry announcing it and then an event that was so traumatic that it would compel God to bring in His kingdom. If Jesus would just die Himself then God would have to show up. According to Schweitzer, Jesus, at least in many respects, was wrong. But he said that makes

us uncomfortable because that is not our image at the bottom of the well. But it is more accurate to the teaching of Jesus.

Schweitzer's critique of the historical Jesus could be brought against him in some respects. He also saw in Jesus what he wanted to make of it. It was such a shocking critique that people went underground for a while. The interest and the quest for the historical Jesus waned in many sectors of scholarship for a while. Part of the reason for this is that an existentialist approach to Christian religion came in, especially in the form of Rudolf Bultmann. He said that whatever Jesus was like is somewhat irrelevant because we can also speak of the Christ of faith. When we believe the Christ of faith, it produces sufficient existential change in us that that is fine. Just follow the Christ of faith and do not worry so much about the Jesus of history. That is an oversimplification, but that is basically the thrust in Bultmann's work, who we talked about earlier.

Let me tell you something about German scholarship. The person who you work under for your doctoral work is known as your doctor *vater*, literally your "doctor father." To go against what your doctor *vater* believes would be as if you were to go against your own father. Bultmann had a student named Ernst Käsemann, who said that we need to look at who Jesus was because it matters. He also parted from Bultmann in a few other respects. That was so shocking in scholarship that it reopened interest in the historical Jesus. It was also shocking in the German scholarly scene because he broke with his doctor *vater*. He suggested that the quest for the historical Jesus was a valid endeavor. There were a variety of people associated with "the new quest," and more than anything they managed to say that they needed to keep talking about Jesus. They could not just keep going with the Christ-of-faith idea. James Robinson was the person who brought that to the English-speaking world and especially to America.

The third quest is perhaps most marked by a couple of things. One is an attempt to situate Jesus in His historical environment. There is some debate about what that historical environment should most look like. Burton Mack said that Palestine, like the rest of the Mediterranean world, was so influenced by Greco-Roman thought that we need to find a Greco-Roman philosophy that matches Jesus. If that is the case, then Jesus was a Cynic. The Cynics were traveling philosophers. Jesus would have been a Mediterranean Jewish Cynic, a person who shocked people with His teaching. Cynics traveled from place to place, having little care for their own possessions but interested in changing people's philosophical outlook. The more prevalent background that people find today is that Jesus was Jewish. The question is what He looked like in His Jewish world.

There are several people who take this Jewish approach to Jesus. One is Gaziver Mesh, who said Jesus is a Galilean charismatic miracle worker. The term "charismatic miracle worker" puts Him in a class of people who claimed to do miracles in Palestine in the first century. Ben Myers indicates that what is most important is Jesus' proclamation. He says Jesus is interested in the restoration of Israel, the throwing off of Gentile oppression, but also in the restoring of the spiritual constituency of Israel. E. P. Sanders says Jesus sought to bring in a new age by invoking the overthrow of the temple. Sanders is quick to defend the Pharisees as not being as bad as you think they were. He says it is not principally the Pharisees who opposed Jesus, but in seeking to overthrow the temple, He brought out the aristocracy against Him.

N. T. Wright has written both academic works and popular level works, and he has spoken at some conferences, including Urbana. It is very important in reading N. T. Wright to know of his longer works and to realize that he is writing them to secular New Testament scholars. He is not writing them to evangelicals; that is not his audience. His purpose is to try to convince his peers that the thrust of what

the Gospels have to say about who Jesus is is accurate. Even in his most recent book, he has defended the resurrection of Jesus, which is a huge shock in secular university, New Testament scholarship. I have a great deal of respect for some of the things he tries to do, although I would not necessarily agree with him in all of his particulars. He says, "Jesus announces the restoration of Israel from exile." Israel still thought it was in exile. The Babylonian exile had not really ended because they were still under the thumb of foreign nations, so he claims that Israel still felt itself in exile. This is one of the weakest claims in all of Tom Wright's books because the evidence for Israel still conceiving of itself in exile is very sparse. In any case, "Jesus announces the restoration of Israel from exile, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the coming judgment." So Jesus wanted to bring Gentiles into this new Israel. "He is put to death for appearing an insurrectionist; He then is resurrected."

It is important to know some of the tag lines associated with these different names. It gives you a sense of the movement of how people have talked about Jesus over the last couple hundred years. In addition, it is important to know the names so that when you read them you know that they were connected with the historical Jesus and you know what they believed. If you know that much, you can start to enter into some of this literature and understand some of the things that inform people today.

A lot of complex things were going on in Germany in the day. Part of it is the notion of Reformation coming from Martin Luther. Some extreme teachings became associated with scholastic Lutheranism that put some people off. It also created categories of thinking about things like the relationship to the Law. There was some stuff within the church. There were movements in broader scholarly society, a movement toward Hegelianism and toward rational thought being supreme above all. Kant wrote about enlightenment, and people after him understood the life of the mind and the mind as the arbitrator of truth. Kant was even able to write a book entitled *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*. There were philosophical principles like that going on. Then there was the rise of a defacto German liberalism that held to the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, and the infinite value of the human soul. All of these are very lovely thoughts. But sin, judgment, punishment, the need for a sacrifice, and the Gospel is missing. Germany was the hotbed of this. You will realize that a lot of these names are German names. In the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the movers and shakers within New Testament scholarship came out of Germany. There was a shift at the beginning of the twentieth century to British scholarship receiving the same kind of respect as German scholarship. As the twentieth century progressed, Americans became a part of it as well. It was not always for good; Americans made things worse in some respects. But there were whole cultural movements going on.

Let us talk about the question of criteria. There are a lot of scholars involved in Jesus scholarship. There are at least a half dozen books coming out on Jesus every year from this perspective. They try to work out who the historical Jesus is. Some of them are happy to use the Gospels as very important source material. Therefore they respect the Gospels. But some almost completely reject the Gospels and say they cannot vouchsafe any of it. You have extremes going on. It is almost impossible to keep up with all the literature that is coming out now, so I am going to just point out some of the main figures in this movement.

One of the things that is a benefit of the new and the third quest is that the scholars came up with what their criteria were. They said that Schweitzer was correct: too often people come and read into Jesus who they want Jesus to be. They needed to come up with some criteria that were more objective in order to be able to sort out what Jesus really did and did not do. The list of criteria can vary from a handful to dozens of criteria that are employed. There are some criteria that are agreed on by everybody doing the historical Jesus work. By criteria I mean ways of thinking about a saying of Jesus in the Gospels to

determine whether He said it or not. As soon as I state that, you realize that we are in a fairly skeptical enterprise. You cannot treat the Gospels as if everything they say is true, so you need some criteria to judge what of it really goes back to Jesus and what of it is later in the history of the church that was read into Jesus. There are five criteria I want to look at. I want to show that if you were thinking of the Gospels in a very skeptical fashion, these are five interesting ways of trying to determine what is accurate and what is not.

The first criterion is “dissimilarity with Judaism and with the early church.” The fear in approaching the Gospels is that the Gospels came out of Christian circles a few decades after Jesus. By that point the traditions have changed more to the needs of the church than to what Jesus was really like. If that is the case, then they are afraid that people are reading later Christianity back onto Jesus. The material that is said in the Gospels that shocks you and would have made the first-century Christians uncomfortable must go back to Jesus. The Christian church would not have come up with that on its own. So shocking things that are dissimilar with later Christianity likely go back to Jesus. Likewise Jesus said and did things that were not typically what a Jewish person would do, and it made Him stand out from the crowd. To the degree that He is dissimilar both from Christianity and Judaism, you respect it all the more. You realize that this was not just a cultural thing that was read into Jesus. It was something He really did. That is the first criterion, the criterion of dissimilarity.

The second criterion is “consistency with other material known to be authentic.” Authenticity is generally determined by criterion number one. Criterion number one is admitted to be fairly minimalistic. Only the stuff that really stands out as separate from what the church believed can be accepted. However, we might be able to sneak in other aspects and sayings of Jesus that are found in the Gospels if we see that they agree with or follow the same line of teaching in the material that we know to be authentic. This is because other material is so different from later Christian teaching. You establish a minimalistic guideline in criterion one, and then you can add further information to it insofar as it coheres with that minimally accepted nature of who Jesus is.

The third criterion is “multiple attestation in many levels of tradition.” They say here that if something shows up in a whole lot of accounts of Jesus from a variety of different sources, then the possibility of it being accurate is increased. Unfortunately Matthew, Mark, and Luke are thought to be largely dependent on one another. Matthew and Luke are especially dependent on Mark, therefore they are not independent witnesses. But if you get Matthew, Mark, and Luke on one hand, the Gospel of John on another, and another tradition that also attests the life and teachings of Jesus, that is good. But what else is there that is potentially early that accounts the sayings of Jesus? That is where the Gospel of Thomas comes in. This is a Gnostic gospel that is associated with Thomas the apostle, though he did not write it. It is a collection of sayings of Jesus that are attributed to Jesus. Some of them are clearly Gnostic and therefore came out of the second century. But some of them very much parallel the sayings that you find in the canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This criterion of multiple attestation comes down in modern practice to this: if it is in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and in the Gospel of Thomas, then it is likely to be true. That is the third criterion.

The fourth set of tests involves whether the sayings appear to be Aramaic based. They need to have a Semitic language feel to it. Jesus probably spoke Aramaic and not Greek. The Gospels are in Greek. They look for terminology that Jesus uses that is Aramaic and therefore has to be translated. Or if there are Aramaic patterns of speech that are crudely translated into Greek, then it is more likely to go back to a native Aramaic speaker and potentially to Jesus. That is criterion number four.

Finally, criterion number five involves cultural tests. It is important whether the material can be attributed to a Palestinian Jewish person. This is especially associated with the third quest for Jesus. I mention at least four people in the third quest for Jesus that see Him as Jewish. They say that the degree to which Jesus acts like an average Palestinian Jewish person is likely to be authentic. The church very quickly went Gentile, so the information that goes back to a Jewish Jesus is likely to be more authentic. Those are the five criteria that are typically used to sort out that which is true from that which is false in your Gospels.

Let us talk about some concerns over these criteria. Are these good criteria? Do you think they will produce verifiable results? Do you think this will lead to a good accounting of who Jesus really was? This strikes some as if they immediately judge the Gospels as being inauthentic, but they are willing to bring in other material as more authentic because it is not written by Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Criteria one and five seem to be in conflict with one another. On one hand, it is important to recognize where Christ is dissimilar with Judaism. Yet criteria five looks at the degree to which Christ is the same as Judaism. You see a tension among modern Jesus scholars as to the degree to which we expect a Jewish Jesus or not. They are contradictory. The scholars both disagree on these points and use both of the criteria. There is disagreement over how much you should expect a Jewish Jesus. Therefore you have some people like Burton Mack, who is willing to see Jesus as much more Hellenized than He is Jewish. On the other hand, people have this sense that He was Jewish, so He should be like the Jewish. Yet there is a skepticism of the very Jewish passages that are there. They are at odds with one another. It enables someone to pick out the stuff that he or she wants to be authentic and say it is so because it is Jewish. And that person can look at the other material that he or she does not want to be authentic and say it is not so because it is Jewish. It becomes a much more subjective endeavor.

This assumes that the early church changed things. If it is Christian it must have been changed. The assumption is that if it is orally passed down then it must have been changed. Not all of it got changed, but it leads to so much change that you cannot trust it anymore. For example, let us say that I am Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and I followed Jesus for a year to three years. I listened to everything Jesus said, and I consider Him to be the Messiah. I believe Him to be crucified and resurrected. Would I not try to be somewhat faithful to what He taught? Would I not be so marked by that year or so that the things that I believe that make for my theology go back to Jesus? The idea is that the Christian church got it wrong inherently just because it is the Christian church. Therefore the only areas that are accurate are those where Jesus taught something that is different from what the Christian church taught. That is balderdash!

I would hope that you leave here with a few notions from what this course is. You would not want to say that what is "authentically Chapman" is the stuff that disagrees with what you actually believe. I hope to change some of your beliefs. Certainly Jesus hoped for the same. These criteria seem to be very presupposition laden. They seem to be saying that the canon should be reopened and the deity of Christ is not true. They also say that miracles are not true and do not happen. That is a major presupposition coming into the quest for the historical Jesus. Some have wondered about the degree to which egos and the desire to say something new influence what is being said in the quest for the historical Jesus. It is not just that they are trying to say something new, but the names that are remembered have all said something new. That is why they are remembered. If you say something that a dozen people have said before you, then you do not stand out. You become remembered if you say something new. It is also fair to say that we want to critique them because it is their pride getting in the way. That could be true, but it is not a fair intellectual critique of what they are trying to say. We have to interact with people respectfully. I want you to mull over whether or not you think these criteria are reasonable.

I agree with the critiques that have been made. I think it is very presupposition laden. There are points of disagreement between some of the criteria. They fight against one another. It is the case largely, and that is what has happened, in the Gospel of Thomas becoming, to them, a canonical Gospel. If you can find it in the Gospel of Thomas and it is in the other Gospels then Jesus said it. It is a back-door way of bringing the Gospel of Thomas in. They do not view the whole of the Gospel of Thomas as accurately Jesus; that is an overstatement. But if something in the true Gospels is in the Gospel of Thomas, then it has to be Jesus. That is not reasonable. I argue that the Gospel of Thomas is a second-century work that is derived from the Gospels. To the extent that it changes the traditions of the Gospels, it tends to do so in a very Gnosticizing direction. In other words, it changes Jesus' teaching toward a second-century heresy.

The central criteria, the one that quest advocates live and die by, is the first one about the dissimilarity with Judaism in the early church. To me that is extremely skeptical. It assumes that Jesus was not a good enough teacher that He would have influenced and changed the people who followed Him. They rule out the possibility that people's beliefs were molded and shaped by Him, and therefore when the people believed something it might be very well because Jesus taught it. It is extremely skeptical. I mention all of this because very rarely, especially in *Newsweek* and *Time* articles, do the people mention why they say something is authentic and why it is not. But they run with these kinds of presuppositions. The most powerful critique of much of historical Jesus scholarship has more to do with the presuppositions that people bring to bear than it does with the specific results of what is accepted or not.

There is a scholar named Gerd Ludemann, who is another German scholar who is on the Jesus Seminar. One of the things I appreciate about Ludemann is that he is a very skeptical New Testament scholar who admits it. He is very overt about his presuppositions, what he holds to be the case, and why he accepts something to be authentic or not. Many of the other scholars play a much more dodgy game of not coming out and overtly stating why they throw out stuff as being authentic or not. Ludemann has a section in his book, *The Great Deception and What Jesus Really Said and Did*, where he talks about the presuppositions of his work. He actually gives his criteria, not just for authenticity, but for inauthenticity. Most scholars are not willing to say what their criteria for inauthenticity are. It is much more muted. They simply just reject something, and they do not tell you why they reject it.

Ludemann gives four propositions for inauthenticity. First, "Those sayings and actions are clearly inauthentic in which the exalted Lord speaks and acts or is presupposed as the one who speaks and acts. For Jesus Himself no longer spoke and acted after His death. But as we cannot exclude the possibility that words or actions of the historical Jesus have been attributed to the 'risen Christ,' for the early Christians the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith were identical, each time we must check whether particular sayings of the exalted Christ are not perhaps based on a saying of the earthly Jesus." In other words, Jesus did not rise from the dead. Ludemann has actually written a book to that effect. In the process he basically lost a lot of respect among German university scholars. It was all right if you believed that; most German university scholars believe that the resurrection did not happen. But you can never say it because the German university is the training ground for the German state church, which is the whole Lutheran church in Germany. Ludemann admitted that he did not believe in the resurrection, and then he admitted that that meant he was not a Christian because Christians believe in the resurrection. For someone to come out and say that was so shocking that he was excluded from some of his scholarly endeavors. That is one of the reasons I respect him. Admit where you are coming and be overt about it. I respect that.

His point is that Jesus was not raised from the dead, so any sayings that are attributed to a risen Jesus

could not have come from the real Jesus. Second, “Those acts are unhistorical which presuppose that natural laws are broken. The fact that people in the time of Jesus did not know these laws or did not think in scientific categories is irrelevant.” He is basically saying they were stupid, and miracles do not happen. Anything that is a miracle is thrown out. Third, “A suspicion of inauthenticity attaches to all the sayings of Jesus if they give answers to community situations in a later time.” If a saying of Jesus gives an answer to a dilemma that shows up in later Christianity, then it comes from later Christianity and not from Jesus. We can rule it out. Fourth, “Those sayings and actions are inauthentic which presuppose a Gentile and not a Jewish audience. For it is certain that Jesus was active exclusively in the Jewish sphere.” Jesus would not have healed the Syrophenician woman; He worked only among Jewish people. Ludemann also states his criteria of authenticity, most of which overlap with the four points I just made. That gives you a sense of the presuppositions that go into this.

Let us talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the quest for the historical Jesus. There are some strengths in that we really do want to know what Jesus was like. The Gospels only give us a particular slice of His life, and there is probably more to say. One of the things that I appreciate about F. F. Bruce, for instance, is that he correlates aspects of the Gospels and their narrative of the life of Jesus with other historical material that fills in the context in which Jesus lived and walked. I do not want to say that the idea of trying to find out who Jesus was is wholly bogus. On the other hand, in terms of weaknesses, it is very presupposition laden. Proponents of this will come to you and say something like, “You just believe the Gospels, and that is naïve.” Your response can be that you have your presuppositions, but they do too. Then you can engage in conversation about their presuppositions. There are evangelicals who work among the quest for the historical Jesus, and it is a very difficult context to work in. Most of the people they speak to are very skeptical of the Gospels. So someone like Tom Wright or Scott McKnight comes in, and they try to show that Jesus was who the Gospels say He is. They still play on the playing field of these very skeptical criteria. In some ways I am not even willing to go onto that playing field. The playing field itself is very uneven.

To review, they start off with Jesus’ words that are clearly not in league with the stuff that comes later. Any of the stuff that is later is considered authentic based on that second criteria or possibly the multiple attestation criteria. The second criterion allows us to bring in some of the other stuff that Jesus said that was picked up in the later church. This is as long as it is like the kind of radical stuff that Jesus Himself taught.

Let me give you an example from Ludemann. He says, “Many sayings and actions of Jesus might prove to be authentic by virtue of the criterion of offensiveness. For example, among Jesus’ actions, His decision to be baptized by John belongs here. From very earliest times, the baptism of Jesus was offensive to Christians.” Why does the forerunner of Jesus actually have authority over Jesus to baptize? That was offensive to Christians. Ludemann argues, “From the beginning it was changed in various ways or passed over completely in silence or rejected by Jesus in the Gospel Himself.” Therefore he is willing to take the baptism of Jesus as authentic. If you can find things that cohere with that baptism narrative, it can be authentic as well. You can bring in other stuff through the back door. That is how it works. There is one chapter that is 15 pages in Ludemann, and it is very helpful to give you a feel for what he is interested in.

Let us talk about the trial of Jesus. Coming after the *Passion of the Christ* movie recently, there were a number of articles about why the *Passion* got things historically wrong and why the Gospels are wrong as well. If you go back and read some of the *Newsweek* articles and see some of the television interviews, you will see that the Gospels themselves were challenged. Mel Gibson said that he accepted

the Gospels as authentic, and he followed them as source material. But people said he could not do that.

That is what you see in the popular press, especially issues that revolve around Jesus' trial. For instance, Pontius Pilate is treated in the Gospels and in the *Passion* movie as someone who really does not want to see Jesus go to the cross. He sees someone who is innocent, and he does not want to send an innocent person to the cross. If you read the narratives in Josephus and Philo about Pontius Pilate, the guy was an absolute cur, the biggest cad this world has ever seen! The guy did not care about what Jewish people thought. He would bring offensive religious materials into the heart of Jerusalem, and he almost started revolt after revolt in the 10 years that he was prefect over Jerusalem. In the process, he alienated the Jewish people. He did not care. Then you get to the Gospels, and he is a Gentile leader standing up for Jesus.

The accusation is that the Gospels are written that way in order to make the religion of Jesus more palatable in the Roman world. The Gospel authors play down the aspects of Roman participation in the crucifixion of Jesus. They make the Jewish people responsible for it all, and the governor Pontius Pilate wants to stand by Jesus. That makes it sound better. That is the claim that is made against the Gospel narrative, and there are others. For instance, there are some passages that indicate that the Jewish rabbis believed that crucifixion was not something they should participate in. It is not what is taught in Deuteronomy. They do not practice suspension as the Roman people do. We talked about this earlier. Therefore if you take that as your starting point, it is impossible for the Jewish leaders to have wanted Jesus to be crucified. What is more, the crowds would not have been standing outside, saying, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" They did not believe crucifixion was acceptable.

There are five major issues with the trial accounts. I use this as an example of historical Jesus scholarship because its advocates are basically using other sources. It might be Jewish rabbinic teaching or their own logic. They might think about how these things would have been received in the Roman world and play down Roman participation in the crucifixion of Jesus. They use their own logic, presuppositions, and other materials to critique whether the Gospels are accurate or not.

Let me give an example of one of their critiques. The question is whether the Sanhedrin were capable of capital punishment. Some say that they were capable of capital punishment, so they would not have had to deliver Jesus to the Romans. My response is that the Sanhedrin apparently lost the right of capital punishment just prior to Jesus' death. The Talmud mentions that 40 years before the destruction of the temple, the Sanhedrin lost the right of capital punishment. We know that Stephen was stoned, but that example represents a populous stoning without the completion of the trial. There was not a complete trial or official judicial verdict. People just started picking up stones and letting him have it. Other examples that we have from Acts or Josephus also indicate that there were specific extenuating circumstances with regard to the right of capital punishment there.