

How Radical is this Faith of Ours?

Conclusion to the study of the Gospel according to Matthew

What do we get from the gospel of Matthew, and from the context of Jesus' life and sayings? Did he announce to the world that days of comfort and peace were coming, or did he warn of trials and suffering as the kingdom of heaven breaks out on earth? After two thousand years what have we rightly acquired from the life of Jesus and what have we missed?

As the last 6 or 7 decades of social and cultural development in the United States have been woven into the Christian faith, what has been the result? Do we see a dynamic introduction of the kingdom of God into our world, or do we instead see a confusing patchwork of numbing doctrines? Do we have Jesus in America or do we have an American Jesus?

What he said: the radical call

- The blessed life is a struggle: The Beatitudes, ch.5-7
 - Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those with a passion for righteousness, the merciful, and the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. _____
 - Your reward is in heaven. _____
- Not only "don't sin", but "don't think sin," 5:21-48
 - Don't retain anger, v.21-26. _____
 - Don't lust or covet, v.27-32. _____
 - Don't scheme, v.33-46. _____
 - Don't condemn, 7:1-6. _____
- You shall be sheep in a world of wolves, 10:16-23
 - Be shrewd: know your enemies. _____
 - Yet proclaim the gospel. _____
- Love without prejudice, the greatest commandment, 5:44, 22:37
 - Sacrificially. _____
 - All viable law depends on this. _____
- Come die with me, 16:24-26
 - You must give up your life to gain it. _____
 - What "life" do we lose or find? _____
- Go to the back of the line: the last shall be first and the first shall be last, 19:30, 20:16
 - Its not "about" you, basically. _____

What he did not say (but somehow gets credited to him)

- "Follow me and I will make you healthy, wealthy, and comfortable." _____
- "Blessed are the nice." _____
- "Blessed are the good looking." _____
- "Pray fervently and I'll give you what you want." 6:33. _____
- "If you're good you get to go to heaven." _____
- "I came to bring peace." 10:34ff. _____
- "Just believe, say this little prayer, and you're in." _____
- "Any suggestions?" _____

Here's how this appears to break down: Jesus was born in poverty, lived in an insignificant part of his world, spent his first thirty years in relative obscurity, and then spent about three years teaching and performing miracles before his countrymen arrested, tried, and executed him for the primary crime of annoying them. The gospels make the bold declaration that he is the singular genetic son of God, and detail, as much as possible within their short space, his acts and words during this final phase. The most significant event of his life, one that would alter the universe forever, was the crucifixion. By his death we now can live, and if that is so how now shall we live? Do we just need to go to church, tithe, speak nicely, and avoid sin? Or is there something else? Jesus didn't ask for suggestions or recommendations, but what can we best recommend to ourselves?

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Faith is not a hands free operation

Yet he did say, lest we think its all work: *Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . I am gentle and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.* 11:28-29