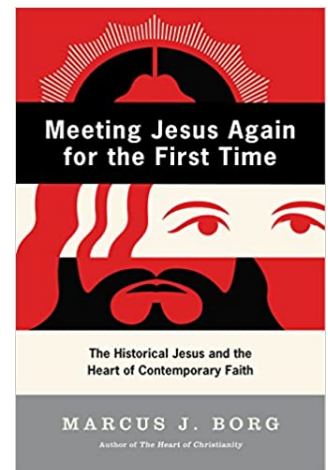


Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time

by Marcus Borg

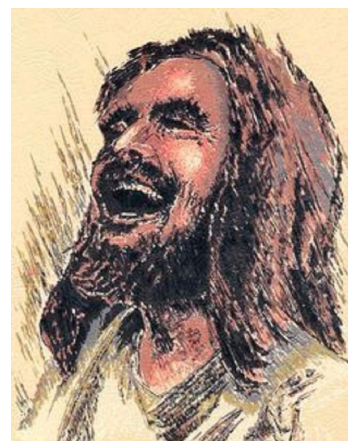
Study/Preparation Guide: Session 2



1. Read the following pages from *MJAFT*
 1. Chapter 2: What manner of man? The Pre-Easter Jesus” (pp 20-45)
—or—
 2. Summary on reverse – if you don’t have the book
2. Check out this on-line reference for a biography of Borg, a list of his books, as well as some supplementary information for our discussions:
<http://www.aportraitofjesus.org>

Focus Questions for our discussion:

1. Are you comfortable with the separation of two voices in the gospels? [pp 20-22]
2. How much weight do you give to the Jewishness of Jesus? [p 22]
3. How do you view the birth stories? [pp 23-24]
4. What strikes you in Borg’s presentation of Jesus’ socialization? [pp 25-28]
5. What do you make of Borg’s two negative claims in his sketch of the adult Jesus? [pp 28-29]
6. What do you make of Borg’s four positive strokes in his sketch of the adult Jesus? [pp 29-31]
7. How do you related to the image of Jesus as a Spirit Person and Mediator of the Sacred? [pp 31-36]
8. How do you view the implications for the life of the church? [pp 37-39]



Summary: Chapter 2

From the Gospels to Jesus

Gospels not straightforward historical documents; early Christians adapted the traditions about Jesus to new circumstances, and continued to experience Jesus as living reality after his death.

Two layers of material in the Gospels-two voices:

- the voice of the pre-Easter Jesus
- the voice of the community in the post-Easter setting

Getting to Jesus means separating the two

Jesus Seminar

- red = very close to pre-Easter Jesus
- pink = voice of Jesus still present, but affected by community voice
- gray = more the voice of the community than Jesus
- black = voice of the community (almost entirely)\

Sources: the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and the Gospel of Thomas (114 sayings of Jesus). Almost ALL of John would be “black” in the schema above.

The Jewishness of Jesus

“Jesus was deeply Jewish”. He saw his mission within Judaism. “Any faithful image of Jesus must take with utmost seriousness his rootedness in Judaism” (22).

Jesus’ opponents were not “Jews” but “a small but powerful elite whose power derived from the Romans.” (22)

Stories of Jesus’ Birth

Most scholars agree there is no historical basis for stories of Jesus’ birth and childhood

Birth of Jesus only in Matthew and Luke (written between 80 - 100). Neither Mark (written about 70), nor Paul (letters from 48- 60) mention any special birth. Nor does John.

Stories in Matthew and Luke differ from one-another:

- Genealogies differ
- Place of birth differs
- Question of the star
- Who were witnesses, wise men or shepherds?
- Slaughter of innocents

Stories represent themes important to each evangelist. Matthew emphasizes Jesus’ kingship (e.g., wise men seeking “King of Jews”); Luke emphasizes Jesus as radical social prophet (e.g., marginalized shepherds)

Birth stories make use of primal religious imagery (birth “of God”; light into darkness)

Birth stories tell us Jesus “was such an extraordinary person that these kinds of stories were told about him. . . . But how did it happen that such stories were told about a marginalized Jew from Galilee?” (24).

Jesus’ Socialization and Early Adulthood

Missing years of Jesus = non-historical – but assign extraordinary powers to child

What can we know?

- Born at end of reign of Herod the Great, i.e., before 4 BC
- Parents were Jewish, Mary & Joseph
- Had four brothers, and several sisters
- Joseph died before Jesus’ public ministry began
- Grew up in Nazareth (four miles from Sepphoris, pop. 40K)
- Jesus did grow up in relatively cosmopolitan situation; Galilee not a rural backwater. Lots of Gentiles. Lots of Greek spoken.
- Probably grew up to be wood-worker, lower end of peasant class (no land!)
- Participated in practices of “common Judaism” – holidays, etc.
- At some point he became a “religious seeker”; something led him to become a follower of John the Baptist

The Adult Jesus: A Sketch

Historical reconstruction; like detective work
“Quest for the Historical Jesus” (Schweitzer and beyond!)

Two Negative Claims

- Self-understanding and message of pre-Easter Jesus, probably *nonmessianic*; pre-Easter Jesus pointed away from self to God
- Pre-Easter Jesus probably not *eschatological*, i.e., he did not expect a supernatural coming of the Kingdom of God as a world=ending even in his own generation” (29)

Four Positive Strokes

Based on “typology of religious figures”

- spirit person
- teacher of wisdom
- social prophet
- movement founder

Some Impressions of Jesus

- Verbal gifts were remarkable

- Dramatic public actions
- Radical social and political edge to his message
- Remarkable healer
- He was young

Jesus as Spirit Person and Mediator of the Sacred

“Jesus was one of those persons in human history to whom the Spirit was an experimental reality” (32).

- Spirit persons are known cross-culturally – “people who have vivid and frequent subjective experiences of another level or dimension of reality” (32).
- have strong sense of there being more to reality than the tangible world
- “the *sacred*” refers to the other reality; religions name it, e.g., “God”
- Spirit persons mediate the sacred – by speech, healing, charismatic leadership
- Jesus used spiritual practices: fasting & prayer
- Addressed God in intimate terms
- Jesus spoke with authority, flowing out of his own spiritual experience.
- Jesus’ spirituality can be located in the Jewish mysticism of his day.
- **“At the center of Jesus’ life was a profound and continuous relationship with the Spirit of God” (36).**

Implications for the Life of the Church

Image of Jesus presented in this chapter suggests “the pre-Easter Jesus was not God” (37).

Jesus knew God – he did not just “believe strongly”
 Jesus in the lens of spirit person (cross-cultural view)

This makes Jesus less unique

But it makes Jesus a bit more accessible

Challenges ideas about God

No longer “deist” – God is not “out there”, or separate from the world

God, through Jesus, becomes an experiential reality; we *know* God intimately and directly

“The pre-Easter Jesus becomes a powerful testimony to the reality and knowability of God” (38).

This shifts how we think of Christian life – away from ‘believing in Jesus/God’ to being in relationship with the same Spirit that Jesus knew (39).