



The Culture Behind the Bible

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Session 5

Recap of the Series

- . All of us have a unique "social location." However, by broadening the criteria, we can make general statements. The more general, the more likely some will be left out.
 - . Ethnocentricity: "our" way is how things "ought to be."
- . Our social location is very different from the social location of the biblical authors.
- . AMC is a culture acutely aware that they live in a world of "limited goods."
 - . Question: Do we? Myth vs. reality. Does excess come at someone else's expense?
- . It is a "high context" society. Little is explained, much is assumed.
- . The key values of AMC are honor and shame.
 - . No identity outside of community.
 - . Interrelationships govern all aspects of society. No "impersonal" contracts.
 - . Ascribed honor vs. acquired honor.
 - . Rigid social order.
 - . Challenges to honor are frequent and must be responded to.

Jesus: Cultural Rebel

- . Jesus redefines the values of his culture "from within."
 - . Love is the only unlimited good.
 - . God's love raises everyone's ascribed honor, which can never be lost. Radical equality. Jesus does not define himself by his ascribed honor or the opinion of others.
 - . The "honorable" way to live is to try to love as God loves.
 - . Denial of the self = denial of honor interests.
- . This redefinition has religious implications:
 - . Mosaic Law is good, but love is a higher value than the Law:
 - . The Law should not be used to make another "other;" no one should ever be cut off from community.
 - . Forgiveness should never be withheld:
 - . "Love your enemy"
- . This redefinition has political implications as well, but Jesus does not address this directly.

Jesus as Rebel: Examples

- . Sermon on the Mount: Not only the Beatitudes, but a series of statements.
 - . "You have heard that it was said...But I say to you that..." - Matt 5
 - . Jesus speaks to the spirit of the Law - requires a conversion of heart, not outward compliance.
- . Jesus brings healing and wholeness even to the "unworthy": Gentiles, Romans, tax collectors, adulterers, etc.
- . Jesus treats women as equals: he speaks with them, even banters with them.
 - . Ex. The Syro-Phoenician Woman. (Mark 7:25-30, Matt 15:21-28)
Jesus appears to appreciate her cleverness.
 - . Ex. The Samaritan Woman at the Well. (John 4:1-42)
Jesus has a theological discussion with her.

Jesus' Way Not Unprecedented

- . False dichotomy between "vengeful God" of Old Testament and loving "Father" of the New Testament.
 - . The earlier the text, the more likely the portrait of God will be a cultural projection. God is not above honor/shame but participates in it.
 - . The earlier the text, the more likely the relationship between God and humanity will be cast in patron/client terms.
 - . God must avenge insults to honor, such as disloyalty, unfaithfulness. (The worship of false gods, trust in political alliances.)
- . Concern for the weak, marginalized runs through the Old Testament alongside honor/shame concerns.
- . God is seen as faithful, merciful, and loving.
 - . "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning: great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" Lam 3:22-24.

The Reign (Kingdom) of God

- . A term with undeniable political implications. The Israelites were under the "Reign of Caesar."



Augustus is called "Son of God" who brings peace to the whole world.

The Reign (Kingdom) of God

- The use of the term "Reign of God" invites comparison to the reign of Caesar and implies a new social order.
- It uses the term "Reign" or "Kingdom" in a way that undercuts and subverts its usual meaning.
 "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you' but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." - Mark 10:42b-45
- The Reign of God is a reign of reversals.

The Reign (Kingdom) of God

<p>"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort those who mourn..." -Isa 61:1-2</p> <p>[Jesus reads from Isa 61] "Then he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" -Luke 4:16-21</p>	<p>"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant..." His mercy is for those who fear him in every generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the ground in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and has sent the rich away empty..." -Luke 1:46-55</p>
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Jesus Rejects an Overtly Political Approach

- The Question about Paying Taxes:
 "Bring me a denarius and let me see it.' And they brought one. Then he said to them, 'Whose head it this and whose title?' They answered, 'The emperor's.' Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's' And they were utterly amazed at him. - Mark 12:13-17, also Matt 22:15-22
- The Arrest at Gethsemane:
 "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.'" -Matt 26:52
- Feeding the 5,000:
 "When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself." - John 6:15
- Jesus before Pilate:
 "Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world...'" - John 18:36

The Implications for Us

Early Christians domesticated Jesus' message fairly early:
"For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of emperor as supreme, or governors, as send by him to punish those who do wrong and praise those who do right." - 1 Pet 2:13-14

"Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over by their wives' conduct, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. It is in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. Thus, Sarah obeyed Abraham, and called him lord." - 1 Pet 3:1-6a

The Implications for Us

How have we domesticated Jesus' message?

How have we conformed his message to fit into our own culture?

What does "Thy Kingdom come" mean in our own time?
