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Reading the Whole Gospel

Right from the beginning of this book, I was immediately introduced to its central theme, the person called Jesus Christ. In fact, in the first sentence, the outrageous claim is made that he either was or is the Son of God. The author then goes on to quote the words of a prophet named Isaiah. Then the text shifts focus briefly to talk about John the baptizer, who is apparently seen as the messenger sent into the wilderness, spoken of previously by the prophet. This man was a peculiar fellow, of odd dress and diet. He seems to be proclaiming that a powerful man will come after him and perform some sort of ritual called baptism, though judging by the habits of this John, one would question his sanity. Little more is said about him, except that he was arrested and beheaded (6:27).

At any rate, he baptizes Jesus in the Jordan, and a Spirit descends from the heavens to Jesus, and a voice speaks from heaven to him. Okay, at this point, I am wondering what all this is about. Assuming there is some truth to this, something very peculiar is going on. After this voice speaks, the Spirit that descended on Jesus drives him out into the wilderness (1:12). But wait a second; he should have already been out in the wilderness, since that is where John was (1:4). Perhaps the author meant he went further into the wilderness. Anyway, he was there for 40 days, and another character named Satan tempted him while he was among wild beasts. It is unclear as to whether the beasts had something to do with the temptation, but the author does say that angels waited on him.

Now Jesus starts some proclaiming of his own, even telling some fishermen to leave their father's boat and follow him to fish for people (1:17). What is more amazing is that they actually do it. Next, Jesus goes with these guys to Capernaum, where he does something pretty impressive. I guess the Spirit that descended to Jesus is more powerful than

other spirits, because he is able to command a spirit to leave a man. This spirit calls him the Holy One of God, yet he tells it to be silent. Despite his efforts to keep the incident quiet, his fame begins to spread. And so it goes, he continues to go around casting out other spirits, and gathering followers. Yet, as he does so, he orders people to keep it under wraps, which they seldom do. They are so vocal, in fact, that after awhile he could not enter any towns, but stayed in the country (1:45).

He continues to speak to capacity crowds, but his words and actions seem to upset a few groups of people, including some called scribes and Pharisees (2:6, 18). He retorts against their objections by continuing to heal people and by speaking in parables. This seems to generate an even greater following of people. There are now so many that he has to speak to them from a boat while they sit on the shore, to avoid being crushed by them (2:9). He then empowers twelve of his followers, all men from different walks of life, to perform the same deeds he had been doing (2:15). The author mentions that Judas is to later betray him, so that makes me wonder if Jesus had poor judgment. It also kind of ruined the element of surprise in the story. I am not sure why the author revealed that part of the plot so early on.

I was really impressed that according to the author, Jesus walked on water (6:48). He appears to have inexplicable power over liquid, because on several occasions he also calms oceanic storms. Not only that, but if the author's math is correct, Jesus is able to multiply food with little effort (6:30-44, 8:1-10). In spite of these incredible powers, he seems very pessimistic. He keeps telling his followers that he is going to die (8:31-38, 9:30-32, 10:32-34), which they do not seem to believe. It is interesting that though he is able to predict this that he does not seek to stop it. Rather, he tries to prepare them for when it happens. Yet, when one of them says that it will not happen, he calls him Satan. This was confusing to me. I guess Satan can mean someone who is opposing Jesus, whether it is tempting in the wilderness, or adamantly telling him he cannot die.

Well, it is not long before he finds himself in the city of Jerusalem, into which he makes a well-received entrance while riding on a donkey (11:1-10). Jesus continues his teaching and healing tour throughout many different areas, even making a pit stop to curse a fig tree (11:12-14, 20). This guy is very strange. On the one hand, he seeks to teach people, yet performs miracles out of compassion. These people seem to just want handouts though, because all they ask for is food and healing. However, Jesus seems to want to give them something more.

Yet, for all his efforts, the people turn on him. He is betrayed by one of his trusted twelve (14:43-40), then imprisoned and treated like some sort of hoodlum. To add insult to injury, his other hot-headed follower Peter denies him, albeit as was predicted (14:30, 72). Then, for a brief moment the plot starts to look up. The local sheriff named Pilot, who seems like a nice enough fellow, declares him innocent and even gives the populace the option of letting him go. But, the local religious authorities work them into a frenzy, and they called for him to be crucified (15:11-14).

Sadly, he dies a very brutal death, by a process called crucifixion. While the author did not describe the exact method, I gather that it involved being hoisted up some distance into the air. It was it seems that it was both physically painful and emotionally humiliating, as they dressed him up and gave him a sign labeling him *King of the Jews* (15:26). Right before he dies, he asks God why he has been forsaken, no doubt wishing he had been set free earlier. Afterwards, they divided up his clothing, showing no respect for the dead. His followers then bury him and that is where I thought the story would end.

However, to my surprise, it did not end there! His mother Mary and her friend by the same name, go to his tomb to anoint his body with spices, only to find that he was not there (16:6). Instead, there is a young man who tells them that Jesus has risen from the dead, and has already gone to the town of Galilee. After this, the story gets sort of fuzzy, as I have

been told that some people think the story ended there, while others think it continued for a few more paragraphs.

Either way, the end of the story is that he was raised from the dead, and this good news continues to be told by his followers, even to this day. That in itself is pretty amazing. I cannot help but think that if it was made up, someone would have successfully refuted it and/or found his body. So, it must be true. Jesus must have been the Son of God, and is still alive today. This of course means that what he said is true, and that one day he will return. We should believe the good news, just as he instructed (1:15), and continue to tell others the remarkable story.