



## introduction: jesus through the ages

### Active Listening Concepts and Vocabulary:

Imperial model: \_\_\_\_\_

“Praxis” vs. Belief: \_\_\_\_\_

Original Blessing: \_\_\_\_\_

“We’re at it again...” \_\_\_\_\_

The “jail of modernism”: \_\_\_\_\_

Mystery with a capital “M”: \_\_\_\_\_

### Hebrews 13.8 (NRSV)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

### Orientation Readings

A more metaphorical reading of the Bible is one way of thinking about the many kinds of interpretive lenses that people bring to scripture. Once you have kind of gotten over the hurdle of saying, “Well, there might be something to scripture other than what the words seem to say on the page, maybe I should ask some questions about who wrote it, who the audience was, how it has been interpreted over the years, and have a sense of the kind of evolving meaning of scripture.” Once you get over that first hurdle then there are lots of different ways that people look at what the scripture is about.

-- Nancy Ammerman, *Living the Questions*

When I say, “The Bible is a human product” I mean it is not a divine product. And when I say, “It is a human product” I mean, simply and obviously, that it is the product of two ancient communities. The Hebrew Bible is the product of ancient Israel, the Christian Testament, the New Testament, is the product of the early Christian movement. And as the product of these two ancient

communities, the Bible tells us not how God saw things or see things, but tells us how these ancient people saw things. Now, immediately I go to the second half of this statement, “and a response to the experience of the sacred.” The Bible is the product of a response to the experience of God.

So to say, “The Bible is a human product” does not in any way deny the reality of God. It simply says, “The Bible is made up of human culturally-conditioned words, which is the only language we as human beings have.”

--Marcus Borg, from *Living the Questions*

“The Bible is an act of faithful imagination. It is not a package of certitudes. It is an act of imagination that invites our faithful imagination that makes it possible to live faithfully. The Bible is an act of imagination that is rooted in memory but that presses always toward new possibility that is still in front of us.”

-- Walter Brueggemann, *Countering Pharaoh's Production Consumption Society Today*, forthcoming from LtQ

The number of Gospels produced by the early church is evidence of Jesus being interpreted in a multitude of ways from the very beginning. Even the four Gospels that “made the cut” into the canon represent not only significantly different political and theological agendas, but very different chronologies and opinions about who Jesus was.



The later you get after 70 C.E. \*, the Church becomes more apocalyptic and those titles (for Jesus) start to become literal. Jesus becomes a literal “lord” who will come and destroy all of his enemies, who will come and judge. So he starts to look more and more like a Caesar.

-- Bernard Brandon Scott, *Saving Jesus*

There's no orthodox doctrine of salvation. There are lots of different understandings of salvation of which atonement is one option. Atonement has been the prevailing one in the Western church but there was no official council that decided this had to be the only way you could believe in salvation.

--Rita Nakashima Brock, *Saving Jesus*

The centrality of this dynamic of sin, guilt, and forgiveness in the Christian tradition is really remarkable when you think about it. The central purpose of Jesus' life for this older understanding is: “He came to die for our sins.” I have no elusions about us being perfect. I think the human predicament, the human dilemma is very serious indeed -- and we need deliverance in lots of ways. But I also think talking about it primarily as sin and the need for forgiveness is kind of strange.

--Marcus Borg, *Living the Questions*

### Questions for Personal Reflection

What do the inconsistencies between the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life suggest about the way we should interpret not only the text, but the meaning of Jesus' life?

What's your understanding of our need for "salvation" and its relationship to the doctrine of "original sin?"



How might reading the Bible metaphorically and understanding the Bible as a human product work together in interpreting Jesus for today?

### Discussion Questions (following each DVD chapter or entire program)

#### Chapter 1

What are some of the traditional titles used for Jesus?

How is the use of the title "Lord" (*kyrios*) ironic?

Why is an emphasis on believing the right things a distortion of what Jesus was on about?

#### Chapter 2

What are some of Augustine's theories that continue to burden the Western church today?

According to Sister Prejean, what would truly "upholding the traditions" entail for Christians today?

#### Chapter 3

How do some of the metaphors Aquinas uses for Jesus in his Christology change the purpose of who Jesus was?

How does the “tendency to excessive certitude” cripple the spiritual enterprise?

**Additional Questions:**

How has your own understanding of who Jesus is/was changed over the years?

Describe a doctrine or other element of traditional Christianity you’ve given up on.

Despite efforts to the contrary, Christianity has always been a fluid tradition influenced by its surrounding culture. Where can you see elements of post-Theistic thought, Buddhism, Sufi-ism, or other Spiritual paths making a positive influence on Christianity today?

**Saving Jesus Theme Question:**

What element or learning from today’s session will be most important in “Saving Jesus” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Contributors in DVD Session 1**

Rita Nakashima Brock: Director of Faith Voices for the Common Good, co-author of "Proverbs of Ashes"  
John Cobb: Internationally renowned process theologian, author of "Christ in a Pluralistic Age"  
Marcus Borg: Jesus scholar, author of "Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time" & "The Heart of Christianity"  
Matthew Fox: Episcopal priest, author of "Original Blessing," "Creation Spirituality" & "The Coming of the Cosmic Christ"  
Lloyd Geering: Religious Studies scholar, author of "Christianity without God"  
Hans Küng: Internationally known Roman Catholic theologian, author of "On Being a Christian"  
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Helen Prejean: Roman Catholic Sister, author of "Dead Man Walking"  
Bernard Brandon Scott: New Testament professor, author of "Hear Then the Parable"



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\* Note: *B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) are the non-Christo-centric alternative designations for B.C. and A.D. often used by scholars.*