

Who Do You Say I Am?: apocalyptic Preacher

Mark 13:1-23

February 28, 2010 2nd Sunday of Lent

As Maxwell Smart might say, "Oooh, I missed it by that much."

Or, Albert Schweitzer in his 1905 book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, would say, "Jesus missed it by -- a lot."

Schweitzer was right that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher, but Schweitzer it appears also missed it by just that much when he said what kind of apocalyptic preacher Jesus was.

For ol' Albert, Jesus was an "end of the world" preacher but, according to Albert, Jesus kind of missed the end date by a whole lot.

So far, he's missed it by over a couple thousand years, according to Schweitzer.

Schweitzer wrote that Jesus and his followers expected the imminent end of the world.

He noted that in the gospel of Mark, Jesus speaks of a "tribulation," with nation rising against nation, false prophets, earthquakes, stars falling from the sky, and the coming of the Son of Man "in the clouds with great power and glory."

Jesus even tells his disciples exactly when all this will happen:

"Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done." (Mark 13:30)

Mind you that generation passed over 2 thousand years ago.

Even St. Paul, (at least when he began his ministry) believed these things, and Schweitzer concludes that Christians of the first century theology literally believed in the imminent fulfillment of Jesus' promise.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Quest_of_the_Historical_Jesus

While many of Jesus followers believed that Jesus would return to finish what seemed to be unfinished business, that didn't necessarily mean that the world was going to end and the problem Schweitzer's position is that the end of the world's not really what Jesus preached about.

I suppose one could say he preached about the end of the world as we know it, but it wasn't a violent destruction of the planet or of humanity.

Jesus preached a different kind of apocalyptic message.

Before we get to the Apocalypse of Jesus – let's define apocalypse.

Apocalypse comes from a Greek word which meant to -- uncover; or to reveal.

An apocalypse is a revelation and for religious purposes, it is **an uncovering or revealing of God's ultimate plan for the world.**

Hence, the last book of our Bible is the *Apocalypse of John*, which came to be known as the *Revelation of John*, and is then shortened to the title the *Book of Revelation* or shorter yet – *Revelations*.

The writer of *Revelations* was a Jewish Christian by the name of John who wrote around 70 years after Jesus death and who was exiled for his faith to an island called Patmos.

The Apocalypse of John is John's transcription of what he says Jesus revealed to him in a vision. What is revealed in the Apocalypse of John is a violent, vengeful, hateful, annihilating, working out of God's plan that results in the total destruction of the cosmos and ends with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth where the few people who John liked, and believed what John believed, got to live in eternal bliss.

This understanding of a violent, cataclysmic end to the world is where we get the common understanding of the word "apocalyptic."

But this revelation of John's is radically opposed to the revelation of God's plan that Jesus gives us in the Gospels; unless you read it as a metaphor, but that is for another sermon.

So there are two kinds of Apocalypse.

The first is the cataclysmic end of world kind.

But as I said, there is another kind of apocalypse a different revelation of God's intended plan for the world and it is this kind of apocalypse that Jesus reveals to us in the Gospels.

Jesus revelation of God's plan in the Gospels is not about the destruction of the world, but rather about the beginning of a new world – the establishment of the Kingdom of God or God's Empire.

So what is the gospel's version of the Apocalypse of Jesus?

We say it every Sunday –
“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done ON EARTH (this earth) as it is in heaven.”

And what are the characteristics of this Kingdom or Empire.

God's Empire is diametrically opposed to the values and practices of the Roman Empire.

God's Empire is founded on LOVE.

God's Empire is characterized by mutual respect and egalitarian socio-economics.

God's Empire is about healing the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked.

God's Empire is including all those who the political and religious power brokers insisted on excluding.

Most importantly, then and now, God's Empire is about repentance, moving beyond the current unloving ways of the world and moving forward into the loving Empire of God that is here and now.

This entails, not waiting on God to come violently force it upon us, but rather waiting for us to lovingly and compassionately bring it forth.

Of course Jesus isn't blind to the real world around him.

He clearly sees that there will be blood.

But this is not violence at the hand of God.

So let's take a closer look at one of the most emphasized passages for saying that Jesus is an apocalyptic preacher of the first type, the type Schweitzer proposed.

It is what we have heard already this morning. It is known as the "little apocalypse."

Let's take it from the top.

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him,

"Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"

Then Jesus asked him,

"Do you see these great buildings?

Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

Later, when he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately,

"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?"

Ok, first of all, let's stop right here.

What are the disciples asking Jesus?

What was it that Jesus said was going to happen?

The destruction of the Temple.

And so what are the disciples asking?
When is this destruction of the Temple
going to happen?

All the rest is Jesus' answer.
But it's not an answer to the question of
"when the world is going to end?";
but to the question of "when will the Temple
be destroyed?".

Now Jesus was so right on about it being a
cataclysmic event for the Jews that many scholars
believe that this was not a prediction of Jesus, but
rather a latter addition of Mark's, following the actual
destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. and the
destruction of Israel; a destruction that lasted until it
was re-constituted in the 20th century.

**But it was an apocalypse in two very important
ways.**

First, it was the end of the age of Israel.
Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple were gone.

Second, and even more importantly, the destruction of
the Temple was seen by Jesus as a necessary
ingredient to the establishment of the Empire of God.

You see, the Temple was the primary symbol of an age when people had to go through the Temple and a priest to have a relationship with God.

The destruction of the temple was a very real metaphor for the ending of one age and the beginning of a new age, when people no longer needed the Temple; because in God's Empire people would relate directly to God.

And it wasn't just the rich, or the select few, or the powerful, who could relate to God, as was the case in Temple worship; but rather everyone, the most excluded, the poorest, the least powerful, the most sinful, could have a direct relationship to God.

The poorest of the poor who had no way of being able to purchase an animal for sacrifice, who didn't have a coin to take to the money changers – even they, in God's Empire, had a direct relationship to God.

Yes, the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of Israel, would be a horrific event, but it would also be the occasion of the Son of Humanity, coming from the clouds to establish God's Empire here on this earth.

And mind you, this was all something that did happen within the generation of Jesus' disciples; as it is quite likely that some of Jesus younger disciples were still alive when Rome began its obliteration of Jerusalem.

Sorry Dr. Schweitzer, Jesus didn't miss anything.

Jesus apocalypse, his revelation of God's plan for the world, the establishment of God's Empire of love was right on.

**And you know what, it's still happening today, right here in this room, right here in this community, and all around the world, where the second coming of Jesus, the Body of Christ, the Church, is alive and well and working daily to establish God's Realm of Love. THANKS BE TO GOD.
AMEN!**