

The Jesus I Never Knew Study Guide

The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey

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Plot Summary

Yancey begins his book with a look at the Jesus he learned about in church in his childhood years. He then describes how his view of Jesus changes over the years as he matures and as he has different experiences with Jesus and the people who claim to be Jesus' followers. It is a result of these confusing experiences that Yancey decides to try to strip away all the layers of bias that the church and the followers of Jesus add to His life and message.

Next, Yancey continues with a study of Jesus' message to His followers. He concentrates mainly on the message of the Sermon on the Mount, hoping to dispel some confusion found in Jesus' teachings. Yancey also studies Jesus' lessons on love as well as His demonstrations of grace. The miracles of Jesus are another topic Yancey attacks. In his discussion, Yancey hopes not only to properly describe what a religious miracle actually is, but to also explain why Jesus stopped performing miracles.

Yancey also addresses the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. While Yancey acknowledges the historical meaning of these happenings, he also admits it is these occurrences some find hard to believe and even turn away from Jesus on account of their confusing nature. In his straightforward way, Yancey explains why each step is included in the end of Jesus' time on Earth and why the end has to be played out as it is.

Finally, Yancey discusses the effect the life and death of Jesus should have on the lives of believers today. He explains that by ascending to heaven, Jesus left the Earth in the hands of humans and we are to carry on His message. Until the time He returns, as He has promised He will, Christians are simply waiting in expectation of that day.



Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 1, The Jesus I Thought I Knew

Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 1, The Jesus I Thought I Knew Summary and Analysis

The book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, is an attempt to present an unbiased, facts-only look at the person of Jesus Christ. Yancey, the book's writer, studies various aspects of Jesus' life including His birth, the message He came to bring, and the reasons behind His death, resurrection and ascension. Several times during the course of the book, Yancey asks himself if he had been alive during the time Jesus lived, would he have believed the message Jesus brought?

In this opening chapter Yancey describes his preconceived notions of who Jesus Christ is. He begins with his earliest memories of Sunday School where Jesus was conveyed as a comforter and teacher, somewhat like Mister Rogers. Next, Yancey moves forward to the time he spent studying in a Bible college. While the Jesus Yancey grew to know while in college seemed more concerned with the universe as a whole, Yancey admits he actually grew distant from Jesus during this point in his life.

This distance between Yancey and Jesus broadens in the 1970's when a new generation of radicals enters the worship scene. With Jesus no longer reserved for middle class America, a whole new line of questioning grows in Yancey's mind based on the characteristics of Jesus he has learned so far. The questions Yancey struggles with during this time in his life, including the paradox of the cross, are questions that frequently confound the minds of even the most well taught Biblical scholars.

In 1971 Yancey first views the film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. This film, which was made by a man known at the time as a homosexual Marxist, used only the text of the Gospel of Matthew as its script. In addition to turning the religious and film world upside down, the film awoke new questions in Yancey about who exactly Jesus is and what he stands for. It is while watching this film that Yancey realizes that the Jesus that appears in Matthew and the Jesus he grew to know in Sunday School are totally different people. As a result of this realization, Yancey finds himself questioning his faith. Even while working as an editor of a Christian magazine, Yancey says he wrote about Jesus as little as possible because of this crisis of faith.

After this brief introductory section, Yancey moves on to demonstrate how impossible it is to separate ourselves from Jesus. For instance, all of history is divided into two sections, that which happened before Christ was born and that which happened after. Even confessed atheists will acknowledge the impact Christ had on history. However, Yancey stresses it is because of the impact that Jesus had on Yancey's own life that he decided to write about the man.



Yancey admits there are times he has doubted the claim that the decisions he makes about Jesus will affect his life through all eternity. He recalls a time when he was snowbound and had time to read the Bible though carefully. Yancey recalls identifying with Bible heroes such as Moses and Job who stood up to God, asking Him boldly if He knew how bad things were on earth.

Next, Yancey discusses how difficult it is for modern men to get an idea of who exactly Jesus is. He compares it to a man standing in a building observing others who are witnessing something happening in the sky. As the man's view is blocked by the overhang of the building, he cannot see exactly what is going on, he can only see how others are reacting to what is happening. Although there are many books written about Jesus, they give only one person's view of Jesus, and each view is distorted by the writer's perspective. Yancey comes to the conclusion that there is no dishonor in asking questions about the person of Jesus. Yancey believes this is actually God's design when He sent Jesus to earth—that He be analyzed and scrutinized.

It is only after Yancey teaches a Bible class at LaSalle Street Church that he gains an understanding of who Jesus actually is. During this class, Yancey uses a series of 15 different films to teach the class. On each aspect of Jesus' life, he shows the students clips from several of the films, then compares these clips with the same occurrence in the Gospels. These Gospels include the chapters of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible. They are accounts of the life of Jesus written by men who lived in Biblical times.

It is during the time Yancey is teaching these classes that he becomes acquainted with the real person of Jesus disclosed in the gospels. He finds that many of the troubles he has with getting to know the real Jesus come when he tries to study Jesus with others' ideas of Jesus in his mind. Yancey attempts to write this book strictly from the viewpoint of the Gospels, leaving out all preconceived notions.



Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 2, Birth: The Visited Planet

Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 2, Birth: The Visited Planet Summary and Analysis

The story of Jesus' life begins with his birth. For those familiar with the Christmas story, they know that Jesus was born of a virgin, miraculously impregnated by the Holy Ghost. Yancey begins his study of the birth of Jesus by noting how far modern Christmas cards have taken us away from the scene of the first Christmas. While these Christmas cards show a serene scene of angels and shepherds, Yancey finds the account of the first Christmas as told in the Gospels is not peaceful or serene at all.

First, in the eyes of the people of her time, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was carrying an illegitimate child. According to the rules of her time period, this supposed infidelity was punishable by death. Joseph, who is Mary's fiancé, is visited by an angel who tells him the baby that Mary is carrying is indeed the Son of God. Had Joseph chosen not to believe this angel or discredit its message, Mary would have been ostracized by her entire community. Yancey admits he wonders at a God who would have placed the fate of the world, Jesus, in the hands of two unsophisticated teenagers, Mary and Joseph. He goes on to write that it surprises him that God would choose such humble and scandalous circumstance under which to introduce His Son to the world. However, Yancey states he is impressed by God's willingness to follow the rules of the world, and allow His Son to be the center of such unholy circumstances. By Mary's response to the angel who tells Mary of her pregnancy, Yancey notes that is Mary who was the first to accept Jesus unconditionally.

Next, Yancey considers the way in which modern Christianity has not only cleaned the scandal out of Christmas, but has also denied its relationship to Calvary, the place where Jesus is put to death as a result of His preaching and miraculous works. In fact, Yancey notes that the only person in the birth stories as they are recorded in the Gospels who fully comprehends the meaning of the birth of Jesus is Simeon. According to the Gospel of Luke, Simeon is an old man who has been promised by God he will not die before he sees the Son of God. As soon as Mary and Joseph bring Jesus into the temple where Simeon is worshiping, Simeon recognizes the baby Jesus as the Son of God. Yancey notes, however, that the ruling powers of the time as well as the historians generally ignore the birth of the Savior of the world.

Herod the Great, who is the king of Judea at the time of the birth of Jesus, is the only person who seems bothered by the birth of the baby Jesus. According to the Gospel of Matthew, three wise men, or Magi, travel to Bethlehem about the time of the birth of Jesus to bring gifts to the baby whom they believe to be the next king of the Jews. When Herod learns a child has been born who will one day overthrow his power, Herod commands that all male children under the age of two be killed. An angel warns Joseph



that the baby Jesus is in danger and instructs him to take Mary and the baby and flee to Egypt where Jesus will be safe.

Next, Yancey considers what can be learned about the personality of God from the events of the first Christmas. Yancey concludes that God shows characteristics of being; humble, approachable, underdog and courageous. While Yancey admits it is an oxymoron, he notes that the way in which He introduces Himself to the world indicates God is a humble god. The humbleness of God is spelled out in the way He sends His Son to be born as a helpless baby. Yancey also notes the only people to witness the miracle of the birth of the Son of God are shepherds, a people not thought of highly in that day. Unlike the God of the Old Testament who rulea His people with fear and trembling, Jesus enters the world in a form of which few people could be afraid. Yancey notes that is only through this incarnation, or the act of God becoming human, through which He can become approachable. While Yancey does not consider Jesus to be an underdog, he notes that Jesus' actions are turned toward helping those who appear to be underdogs. Jesus is not concerned as much with the rich and powerful, as those who are poor and oppressed. Finally, Yancey credits God with courage for allowing His Son to be born into a world known for its doubt and cruelty.

To finish the chapter, Yancey presents the picture of the Christmas story as it is told in the chapter of Revelation in the Bible. This view connects the story of the birth of Jesus on earth with the beginning of the struggle between good and evil in the universe. Yancey believes it is at the point of Jesus' birth that the parallel universes of heaven and hell, and earth intersect. The idea of the creator of the earth visiting the planet as a human being is an awe inspiring and unique story, Yancey notes.



Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 3, Background: Jewish Roots and Soil

Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 3, Background: Jewish Roots and Soil Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Yancey seeks to reunite Jesus with His Jewish roots. He notes that American readers of the Bible often try to separate Jesus and the Jews. These American readers, Yancey states, also do not fully appreciate the impact of Jesus' being a Jew. Yancey insists that to properly know Jesus, one must study His background and culture.

While Jesus' genealogy is long and even includes royalty, Jesus Himself is seen as just an ordinary man by the people of His day. Even the name Jesus is a common name for boys at that time, a fact which must have grated on the nerves of the high Jews. How could a man with such a common name associate Himself with a God whose name most Jews did not even dare to speak? Yancey notes that Jesus lives His life as a Jew, following the Jewish customs. He also states that it is unusual; however, that so few Jews follow the teachings of Jesus. Yancey wonders what caused Jesus to not be recognized by His own people.

Yancey explains that the Jews were expecting a Messiah who would be a political leader and restore the nation of Jerusalem. The Messiah who came, however, was anything but a political leader. The crucifixion of Jesus changes everything for the Jews. The temple in Jerusalem is destroyed and the most honored Jewish customs are set aside. It is at this point the Jews begin a crusade against Jesus, claiming He is not the Messiah at all.

Next, Yancey writes of a meeting he once had with a group of Jews, a group of Muslims and a group of Christians. They meet to observe each other's religious services and see if they can find any common ground among them. Yancey states that while the services of all three religions are similar, the dividing point is the Christian belief in the crucified Christ, made obvious by the observance of the Lord's Supper. The Jews present at Yancey's meeting admit that a Messiah who is killed at a young age after which the Jewish community crumbles, does not appear to them to be what they expect of a Messiah. However, Yancey notes that many Jews are now turning back to the idea that Jesus may indeed be the Savior of the world.

Yancey next attempts to explain why Jesus is born into the world at the particular time He is, instead of a different era. In doing so, Yancey describes the political and religious atmosphere of the area of Rome and Palestine.

Despite pressure to conform to Greek customs and religions, the Jews in Palestine remain true to their Jewish beliefs. Jesus is born into this volatile environment. Yancey



also describes the landscape of the area where Jesus grows up. This landscape includes things which Jesus will later use to illustrate his teachings. Also, Yancey stresses how strongly the general populous felt about Jews from the area of Galilee. These Galileans are thought of as lower class citizens, another reason why the Jews do not believe Jesus, who is a Galilean, is the Messiah.

Yancey goes on to explain that as a result of the fighting and immense turmoil in Galilee, the Jewish people split into several different facets, or groups, each with their own agenda. These groups include the Essenes, the Zealots, the collaborationists, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees. Becoming introspective, Yancey decides that if he lived in the time of Jesus, he probably would have followed the Pharisee beliefs. Yancey wonders if, from his standpoint of a Pharisee, Jesus would have won his allegiance. Although Yancey admits he wishes that answer would come easily, Yancey confesses if he lived during that time period, he would probably have had the same doubts about Jesus all the other Jews had.



Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 4, Temptation: Showdown in the Desert

Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 4, Temptation: Showdown in the Desert Summary and Analysis

In the fourth chapter of the Book of Matthew in the Bible, Matthew records a period in Jesus' life before Jesus begins preaching and calling disciples when He is tempted by the devil. According to the Bible, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the desert where He fasts for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation. In his fourth chapter, Yancey discusses the importance of this meeting with Satan.

First, Yancey points out that this encounter with Satan is Jesus' chance to take the "easy way out." Yancey says these tests are perhaps the most important character test Jesus faces in His lifetime. Yancey also notes that since there is no one else present at the temptations except for Jesus and the devil, Jesus must feel the occurrences are important enough to tell someone else about them.

Yancey begins his study of the temptations by first determining there is nothing sinful about the things Satan is asking Jesus to do. Satan is simply trying to get Jesus to act like the miracle worker He will later turn out to be. Instead of bowing to Satan's commands, however, Jesus keeps His composure and will not allow Himself to be swayed by the devil's promptings.

The way in which the devil tempts Jesus, Yancey determines, is that the devil tempts Jesus to be the kind of Messiah people hope for instead of the humble, self-sacrificing Messiah He is intended to be. The devil offers Jesus a quick, easy and painless way of becoming the Messiah people want. This path, however, goes against the way God intends for His will to be carried out. While Satan, like the rulers of the former communist Russia, has the power to force people to do as he wants, the Lord's power comes from the inside, because a person wants to. Yancey explains the reason why Jesus makes Himself so easy to deny is so that people are free to decide exactly what they think of Him.

In the next section, Yancey ponders why God, and Jesus during His time on earth, do not act miraculously when they have a chance to do so. Again, Yancey concludes that it is because God does not want to force anyone to come to Him, He wants them to come of their own free will. The power that God chooses to exercise is the power of love. Yancey next talks about the ways in which not bowing down to the devil in the wilderness costs Jesus. First, it allows Satan to continue to play by his own rules. By not bowing down to Satan's temptations, Jesus is also, in a way, putting the reputation of God at risk. Is Jesus not responding to the temptations because He does not want to or because He cannot? However, this issue of Jesus' restraint despite what it costs Him portrays how strongly He feels about not forcing His people to come to Him.



Finally, Yancey writes that it is through the temptation of Jesus that His followers are able to connect most intimately with His humanity. Yancey admits that Yancey himself is often tempted to take the quick, easy way out instead of following the path God would have him to follow. He also states that by reading the temptations of Jesus, and studying His restraint and composure, Yancey is able to find and exercise his own restraint and composure.



Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 5, Profile: What Would I Have Noticed?

Part 1, Who He Was: Chapter 5, Profile: What Would I Have Noticed? Summary and Analysis

In an attempt to portray who Jesus actually is, Yancey pretends he is a journalist in the time of Jesus. He seeks to bring the personality and person of Jesus to his readers. In this role, Yancey wonders what exactly would strike him most strongly about Jesus. He starts his description by pondering what Jesus looked like. A perfect, handsome man? Most likely not, Yancey says, quoting scripture from Isaiah that describes Jesus as being "disfigured beyond that of any man." Beyond this quote, the Bible gives no clues as to what Jesus looked like. It is for this reason, Yancey says, that man cannot say he is attracted to Jesus because of his appearance, since we do not know what He looks like.

Yancey then moves from the personal appearance of Jesus to the personality of Jesus. Unlike the flat, emotionless, calm Jesus portrays in many films, Yancey argues Jesus is a man of great emotion and personality. He has the strength to admit His weaknesses and sufferings; and He makes others feel good about themselves. In short, Yancey says it appears in the Gospels that Jesus is a person others want to be around. Next, Yancey makes the point that although Jesus lives on the earth and is a part of the human race, He is not at home on the earth. Although Jesus could take control of everything on earth from the weather to the behaviors of other people, He chooses not to do so. The only exception is the one time He quiets the seas when a storm threatens to capsize the boat He and His disciples are riding in.

Yancey next turns to the miraculous healings Jesus performs. In spite of all the great things He does, Jesus never makes a show of His abilities. He chooses to stay in small cities, and often commands the healed person not to tell anyone how his healing came about. However, Jesus does use His miracles as proof of who He actually is. When John the Baptist doubts Jesus is really the Son of God, Jesus sends word to John of the great many miracles He has performed. For Jesus, this is the only proof He needs that He is indeed the Son of God.

Yancey then turns back to his journalistic review of Jesus. He asks himself what one word he would use to describe Jesus and comes up with the word rabbi. A rabbi is simply a Jewish term used to describe a teacher. Yancey says Jesus has the art of teaching down perfectly. Jesus answers questions with questions, making His accusers think about what they have just asked Him. He also teaches the people in parables, short stories that illustrate the moral principle or ideal Jesus is trying to portray. These parables are all told using imagery that the people encounter in everyday life and can remember quickly and easily. Jesus' message, Yancey says, is full of "grace and truth."



Jesus speaks of God's unconditional, all-encompassing love, but at the same time sets forth moral truths that no man can hope to achieve.

In the next section, Yancey explores the effect that Jesus' habit of pointing to Himself as the Messiah has on other people. One modern Jewish rabbi admits that he is attracted to Jesus' teachings, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, but turned off when Jesus moves the emphasis of salvation away from the Jewish community and onto Himself.

Next, Yancey turns his attention to the crowds of people who surround Jesus. These crowds include curious people, somewhat like Yancey who are trying to figure Jesus out, there are also Jewish patriots with the ears open to any sign of a revolt on the Roman government by the followers of Jesus. Finally a small band of sincere followers, including the twelve disciples, surround Jesus as he preaches to them how they must take up their cross to follow him. Considering that crucifixions are an everyday occurrence in this time period, these words must be difficult for the followers to hear and accept. However, in their naiveté, they accept the challenge.

Finally, Yancey discusses the twelve disciples Jesus chooses as His inner circle. While this group of bumbling, faithless men may seem extremely dense, to Jesus they are some of the most important people in the world. These twelve disciples are the men with whom Jesus chooses to spend His time and share His emotions. This should give us hope that Jesus still wants to spend time with bumbling, faithless people. These twelve men are also the vehicle by which Jesus plans to spread His message to the entire world. Even though they may seem incapable, these men apparently do as they are supposed to since the Church has been going strong for nineteen centuries.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 6, The Beatitudes: Lucky are the Unlucky

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 6, The Beatitudes: Lucky are the Unlucky Summary and Analysis

Yancey admits his own struggle with the proper way to interpret the beatitudes. These sayings of Jesus can indeed be a puzzling message; however, they reveal the heart and purpose of Jesus' ministry. Yancey begins his study of the beatitudes by recalling the time he is teaching the film-based class. As he cues his video tapes to the proper places, Yancey passes the time by watching coverage of the 1991 Gulf War on CNN. As he listens to Norman Schwarzkof's address to the nation concerning the military triumph, and then returns to watching clips of the Sermon on the Mount, Yancey realizes the message in Schwarzkof's address is exactly the opposite of that given by Jesus. While Schwarzkof, and the rest of the world, praises the lucky, the strong, the fast and the winner, Jesus praises those who, in essence, are unlucky.

Because of the great void of difference between what the Beatitudes teach and what the world teaches, Yancey seeks to determine the true meaning of these sayings of Jesus. Although Yancey admits he may never fully understand the complete meaning of the Beatitudes, he finds they apply on one of three levels. These levels include dangled promises, the great reversal, and psychological reality.

Yancey describes his first level of understanding as that of dangled promises. In this stage he views the Beatitudes as pretty phrases Jesus offers to make those less fortunate feel better about their position. As Yancey grows in his faith, however, he begins to realize these promises are not just for the here and now, but for eternity. Jesus can make these promises because He knows what heaven is like, and knows those who persist will eventually earn a reward.

Next, Yancey speaks of the great reversal. In this view, Yancey notes that while the world views those who are rich, famous and healthy as fortunate, God sees things differently. Those who are in need and are hurting are those most likely to cry out to God for help. It is in the times people depend on God that they are truly blessed. In fact, Yancey arrives at the conclusion that in God's economy it is actually better to be poor because it allows one to be open to God.

Finally, Yancey believes that the Beatitudes also address a level of psychological truth. Often, it is those who are rich and famous who are also the most unhappy, Yancey notes. He says that in his studies he finds that those who are servants, who work for long hours with low pay in a field where they are serving to meet other's needs, are often the most happy, well-adjusted and blessed people he meets. Likewise, those who keep themselves pure will be rewarded by seeing God. The punishment for allowing impurity to enter a life is separation from God. A similar blessing is found for those who



choose to be merciful. A man's life is not fulfilled by the great things he creates or thinks into being, but by his ability to love. Those who love and show mercy to those who are less fortunate are among those who lead blessed, happy lives. As evidenced by the crusade of Martin Luther King, Jr., peaceful forms of confrontation are more effective than the use of violence and force. It is proven that peaceful protests can be more successful in gaining the protestors' desires than those filled with violence. Likewise, those who mourn often find comfort for their grief by helping those who suffer with similar circumstances. In all examples, those who actively seek God, will be rewarded by finding Him.

Yancey concludes that Jesus knows life both from a temporal as well as a heavenly view. Jesus knows that while these principles seem backward and lacking in sense, they are the keys to a full and blessed life. More than anything else, Jesus lives these principles as much as anyone He preaches them to.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 7, Message: A Sermon of Offense

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 7, Message: A Sermon of Offense Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Yancey seeks to make sense of the remainder of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, a sermon which Yancey says is full of extremism and wonders if anyone can live up to the high standards presented therein. Yancey begins his study by recalling an experience a friend of his has when she asks her college students to write an essay on the Sermon on the Mount. Most of the students react to the sermon either in disgust of its high, unreachable standards or in anger that anyone could expect a mere person to live up to these standards. Yancey concludes the reaction of these students is probably quite like that of the people who listened when Jesus first spoke the words of the Sermon on the Mount.

As Yancey reviews each of the high commands made in the Sermon on the Mount, he wonders how God expects Christians to live their lives in this world, yet not break any of these rules. Next in his study, Yancey looks at ways other scholars and religious leaders view the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. He concludes that few actually strike the true meaning of the sermon, but instead seek a way to "get around" the rules set down in the text. Using examples of those who follow these easy interpretations of the scriptures, Yancey concludes Jesus intends no easy way out of His commandments.

Yancey then points to Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy as one of the people who inspire Yancey's personal view of the Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy seeks to live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. No matter how hard he tries, however, Tolstoy finds he cannot live up to the expectations listed in the Sermon on the Mount. Tolstoy is generally an unhappy man and leaves his family and those around him feeling unloved. However, Yancey notes that Tolstoy is one of the few people who can adequately portray the heart of God in his writings. Tolstoy follows the law, but forgets to figure in grace.

Another Russian novelist who inspires Yancey's view of the Sermon on the Mount is Fyodor Dostoevsky. At a young age, Dostoevsky has a near death experience at the hands of a firing squad. After that experience, Dostoevsky learns how precious life is and that everyone is capable of love. Unlike Tolstoy, Dostoevsky focuses not on the law, but on grace.

A combination of the view points of these two writers allow Yancey to see that the Sermon on the Mount must be viewed with a combination of legalism and grace. A person cannot live up to the high standards set out in the Sermon on the Mount. When grace is added to the equation, Yancey realizes people are not judged by their own righteousness, but by the righteousness of God.



Yancey concludes the chapter by deciding that the standards of the Sermon on the Mount are set forth not only as a mark which people should strive for, but also one which they should realize they cannot reach. These principles, Yancey says, serve to illustrate the great void between the righteousness of God and the goodness of people. No one can ever measure up to the goodness of God; therefore, God offers His grace to make up the difference.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 8, Mission: A Revolution of Grace

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 8, Mission: A Revolution of Grace Summary and Analysis

Yancey opens this chapter by comparing the reaction of sinners to the person of Jesus, with the reaction of sinners to the modern day church. Sinners flock to Jesus and feel comfortable around Him while those who are thought well of by the world's standards shun and scorn Him. The church Jesus starts has become quite a different place. Now, it is sinners, the people who need Jesus most, who stay away from church and are turned off by the idea of church. Yancey seeks to find why this strange twist has occurred.

Yancey explains this principle by saying Jesus has a way of forgiving sins that were clearly presented to Him. With those who choose to hide their sins, however, Jesus has a way of uncovering these hidden sins and leaving the person uncomfortable in his sinfulness. The concept of grace, a means by which all sins are forgiven, however, is very difficult for most people to grasp. Most would rather be given a strict list of rules to follow than to simply know that their salvation rests solely on belief and faith. In light of God's grace that forgives all and loves all, Yancey wonders if behavior matters at all. He concludes that it does, however, Yancey also states that men should realize the vastness of God's ability to forgive.

In a story of a Japanese friend, Yancey states the friend is rejected by his own country because he is Christian. The Japanese man then goes to France hoping to find spiritual fulfillment there, however, he is met again with rejection. While struggling with this rejection, the man realizes Jesus is also rejected by the people of His time. However, Jesus does not run from this disgrace, He welcomes it and loves those who are disgraceful.

Yancey concludes that as a church, people must learn again to love like Jesus did. The church must relearn how to welcome sinners and those of ill repute. All sin. It is Christ's love, and nothing else, that makes us acceptable.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 9, Miracles: Snapshots of the Supernatural

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 9, Miracles: Snapshots of the Supernatural Summary and Analysis

The term miracle is defined as an act that goes against the laws of nature, such as a person being raised from the dead. It is recorded in the New Testament that while on earth, Jesus performs a variety of miracles ranging from changing water into wine to healing the sick. In this chapter, Yancey studies the miracles of Christ. Yancey deals with the hard questions of why some prayers are answered and other are not, why Jesus chooses not to make a spectacle of His miracles, and also why Jesus performs miracles at all.

In Jesus' first miraculous work, He turns water into wine at a Jewish wedding feast. Yancey states the knowledge that the wedding host had run out of wine presents a quandary for Jesus: He could either ignore the situation and allow the host to be embarrassed, or He can step in and start a work that will end with His death at Calvary. In His nature of grace, Jesus commands the jugs be filled with water and then be poured out. Instead of water, however, the servants pour the finest wine out of the jugs. Only Jesus' mother Mary, his disciples and the servants know of this miraculous work. However, it strengthens the disciples' faith. Yancey writes that he believes the act, which involves the jugs used for ceremonious washings, symbolizes the throwing out of the old legalistic ways of belief and the ushering in of a new, joyous time of religion.

Next, Yancey explores Jesus' healing of the blind man. Religious scholars of the time claim sickness and troubles are the result of sin and wrongdoing in one's life. When these scholars are asked what the man, who has been blind since birth, has done wrong, the scholars blame the defect on the sins of the parents. Jesus, however, makes the claim that the disability is not the result of sin at all. As He heals the man, Jesus explains the blindness is not a result of sin, but simply a way for Jesus to show His grace and love to the man by healing him. This public act, which occurs on the Sabbath, is one of the miracles Jesus is most scorned for. Even those who see the healing do not develop faith, they cling to their legalistic ways.

Jesus' next miracle, the healing of the man with leprosy, teaches the Church to care for those who are sick. At the time those with leprosy are forced to keep their distance from everyone. They even have to call out to those passing a warning that they are unclean. When Jesus reaches out His hand to touch and heal the leper, He turns all views of the sick upside down. Instead of shunning the sick, He teaches Christians to love and respect those who feel forgotten and unloved.

For His next miracle, Jesus is in a crowded meeting. A paralyzed man hears Jesus has come to town and convinces his friends to take him to the healer. Once they arrive, they



cannot enter the house where Jesus is because of the crowd. They make a surprise entrance through the roof. Yancey believes Jesus welcomes the intrusion and finds joy in healing the man. Jesus attributes the healing to the faith of all five men, even those who carry the man to Jesus. In this scene, Yancey discovers Jesus comes not just to heal people's bodies. These bodies will eventually die. Jesus comes to heal people's souls.

In His next miracle, Jesus finds himself in an uncomfortable situation. He is teaching a multitude of people, when the disciples suddenly realize the people need to eat. Instead of sending the people away hungry as the disciples suggest, Jesus finds a small boy with a lunch of fish and bread. As Jesus blesses and breaks the small lunch, there is suddenly enough to feed everyone, with a good deal left over. At this point, the people attempt to force Him to be king, believing He is the Messiah they are looking for. However, Jesus sees into the hearts of the people, realizing they are only hoping for lives full of miracles, lives He cannot give them. When the people realize He will not become their king, they leave. Many of Jesus' closest followers, with the exclusion of the twelve, leave Him also. It is the price Jesus pays for not deviating from God's plan and becoming the earthly ruler the people want.

Yancey notes Jesus' final miracle, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is the one that turns the opinion of Roman government completely against Him and fixes His fate at Golgotha. Unlike His other miracles, Yancey writes this miracle almost seems scripted, as if Jesus uses it to make a point. Yancey believes Jesus is deeply moved by the scene not only because of His grief at having to bring Lazarus back from heaven, but also because He knows the same fate awaits Him.

Through his study of the miracles, Yancey comes to believe these miracles are not the magical acts he saw them as in his childhood, but instead signs. Signs that God is no more happy with the world than the common person. These miracles are simply signs that point to what God plans to one day do about the condition of the world.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 10, Death: The Final Week

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 10, Death: The Final Week Summary and Analysis

The death of Christ receives more attention than the death of most any other person before or since. Yancey suspects this is because the people of Jesus' time hope Jesus is the Messiah they are looking for. Jesus' unexpected and unexplainable death on the cross seems to prove to these people He is not the one they are looking for. After all, how can God die? Although he admits he cannot adequately describe the death of Christ from a non-biased point of view, Yancey tries to give a true-to-fact view of each facet of Jesus' trial and death.

The first stage in Holy Week, as some call the week of Jesus' death, is His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. During this entry into Jerusalem, crowds which are still excited about the resurrection of Lazarus hail Jesus as He rides into the city on the back of a donkey. Yancey admits there is a form of humor in the spectacle. While normal entries of this type occur with great fanfare and show, Jesus is quiet and meek.

The next occurrence, the Last Supper, is the stage where Jesus gives His final instructions to the disciples. He first tells the disciples to continue the practice of baptism. He also tells them to continue the practice of observing the Lord's Supper as He has laid out for them. Jesus also commands the disciples to wash each other's feet, a command as confusing to the disciples as it is to modern Christians.

Next, Yancey addresses the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. Judas is apparently trusted by the other disciples as he is chosen as their treasurer. However, the Bible simply states the devil enters Judas, causing him to betray Jesus. Yancey contrasts Judas' betrayal of Jesus with that of Peter. While Peter feels remorse, repents of his betrayal and goes on to lead a great revival in the kingdom of God, Judas never repents of his sin and in his remorse, Judas takes his own life.

Gethsemane is a garden where Jesus brings his disciples to watch over Him while He prays to the Father. Wishing not to be alone, He asks the disciples to watch with Him. However, they fall asleep, causing Jesus additional pain. It is in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus deals with the problem of the unanswered prayer because it is here that Jesus' own request to His Father, the request that He be spared the coming agony of the cross, goes unanswered. During this time, Jesus also relives the temptation of Satan to call down angels and save Himself. Despite the temptation, however, Jesus remains true to His Father's plan.

Next in the timeline comes the trial of Jesus. As most know, this trial is a mockery with no witnesses coming forward to speak on Jesus' behalf. It is only in this shamed and



lonely state that Jesus at last admits He is the Son of God. Yancey believes this is because there is no longer any threat of the people being able to force Him into being king; He has come to the end. Jesus is accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death simply because the Romans believe He is capable of leading the people in a revolt.

Following the trial, the Roman soldiers decide to have a little fun with Jesus. They torment Him with whips and a crown of thorns, all the while mocking Him and making fun of His claims. While the death that awaits Jesus is by far one of the most painful and torturous in the history of man, even while He suffers, Jesus thinks of others. He begs His Father to forgive those who hurt Him so badly. Jesus also arranges for John to care for His mother, Mary, after His death. Finally, Jesus forgives the thief on the cross next to Him, telling the man that on that day he will be in paradise with Jesus. It is also during Jesus' time on the cross, that He is most vulnerable. Though none can fully explain the effect that day has on the relationship between the Father and the Son, Yancey writes that it is clear Jesus feels abandoned by His Father while on the cross.

Yancey concludes that modern religion has become obsessed with the cross. What was once a means of execution has become a treasured piece of jewelry, a lucky charm and even a sacred motion. However, Yancey explains, the significance of the cross is not so much what Jesus did, but what each person decides to believe about Jesus.



Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 11, Resurrection: A Morning Beyond Belief

Part 2, Why He Came: Chapter 11, Resurrection: A Morning Beyond Belief Summary and Analysis

Yancey begins his chapter on the resurrection of Jesus by recalling a time, during his childhood, when his kitten is killed. He remembers learning death is irreversible. The same is true, Yancey writes, when people die. Only Christ makes death reversible. According to Christian beliefs, after Jesus is crucified, He is buried in a tomb. Three days after His burial, Christ rises from the dead. The Bible states specific examples of encounters the disciples and others have with the risen Jesus. Later, Jesus ascends to be with His Father in heaven.

Understandably, many people try to discredit this story of resurrection. Yancey notes these doubters either dub the disciples as gullible followers who believe in ghost stories, or schemers trying to find a way to start their new religion. Yancey discredits both these theories. First, he points out examples in the Bible where the disciples themselves ask the risen Jesus for proof He is who He says He is. Next, Yancey discredits the conspiracy theory by pointing out that the disciples who are too afraid to even attend the crucifixion and burial of Jesus could hardly work up the courage to risk their lives by stealing His body. Also, had it been a conspiracy, Yancey believes the disciples would concoct a better resurrection story. Women are the first to see the risen Jesus, an unhelpful detail because the testimony of a woman is seen as useless in Jewish culture. Next, the resurrection stories are fragmented and non-congruent. Yancey believes the only conspiracy is on the part of the Roman soldiers. The men who are guarding the tomb are the ones required to concoct a story to explain the missing body as well as the open tomb.

It is after the time of Christ's resurrection and before His ascension that He makes the biggest impression on the disciples, Yancey says. It is during this time period Jesus is seen at least 12 times by His disciples and other close followers. Yancey takes an effort to note Jesus, during this time, never appears to any unbelievers. Yancey believes this time period is important because it is during this time Jesus secures His identity for the rest of eternity. During the days between the resurrection and the ascension, Jesus also has the job of transforming His disciples from cowardly witnesses to evangelists willing to lose their lives for their beliefs.

Next, Yancey seeks to discover why he believes the Easter story. He first admits he wants the story to be true. Next, Yancey acknowledges the general population's love of fairy tales. In these stories, the characters have troubles, but generally finish their stories with smiles on their faces. Finally, Yancey writes that he believes the resurrection story because he has come to know God and believes the death and resurrection of Jesus is how God intends things to happen.

Yancey believes it is this realization of how God treats people that causes the transformation in Jesus' disciples. Even though life for the disciples does not change and they are still faced with problems, they can look at the reality of life differently knowing God treats those He loves well.



Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 12, Ascension: A Blank Blue Sky

Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 12, Ascension: A Blank Blue Sky Summary and Analysis

Yancey begins this chapter by detailing how Jesus and the disciples' lives would have been different had Jesus not been resurrected. Yancey admits it would be easier to ignore the claims of Jesus had He not actually come back from the dead. Yancey also ponders the ascension of Christ—that while the disciples focus on the resurrection of Christ, the ascension is the high point of Jesus' time on earth.

Yancey next discusses Jesus' intention never to stay on the earth. From the beginning, Jesus plans to leave His ministry in the hands of His disciples. In their grief, however, they do not fully accept this knowledge at first, even after Jesus tells them plainly during the Last Supper. Yancey also touches on the idea that as God is incarnate in Jesus, so He is in every believer today. Each of us has the opportunity to make the world a better or a worse place to live.

Yancey then addresses the idea that by ascending, Jesus takes the risk of being forgotten by His people. Although Yancey admits there is the idea of being forgotten in Jesus' mind, He knows it is for greater good that He turns the spread of Christianity over to the inhabitants of the earth. Jesus even gives instructions through His parables how people are to act until He returns. Be kind, take care of the sick and hurting. If Christians do these things for others, we do them for God. Also, Yancey says it is possible to find God's presence on earth, and if we cannot do so, we are looking in the wrong places.

As Jesus ascends, He leaves humans in charge of His Church, a charge humans generally do a poor job of. Why, Yancey asks, does God entrust us with His people? He gives three options. First, along with her failures, the Church has also had great successes. Second, Jesus takes full responsibility for us. Although we may disappoint Him, hurt Him and betray Him, He still loves us. Third, just as God loves and accepts each flawed and sinful person, God accepts the flawed and sinful Church.



Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 13, Kingdom: Wheat Among the Weeds

Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 13, Kingdom: Wheat Among the Weeds Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Yancey hopes to clear up misconceptions about the kingdom of God. The people in Jesus' time expect the Messiah to be a thundering political leader who will right the wrongs of the physical world. In fact, many turn away and deny Jesus is the Messiah when He does not appear interested in worldly leadership. However, Yancey notes Jesus continuously refers to the Kingdom of God, a phrase as confusing to modern Christians as it was to those in Jesus' time.

To help describe the Kingdom of God, Yancey turns to the stories Jesus tells about this kingdom in the Bible. The images He uses are homey images of farming, not the powerful images of armies and warriors the modern Christian brings to mind when thinking of a kingdom. Yancey argues Jesus' kingdom gets its power from love, not sheer physical strength or coercion.

In a striking contrast, Yancey compares and contrasts the kingdoms of Herod, the king who oversees Jesus' trial, and that of God. While Herod has unspeakable power, he uses it only to benefit himself and chooses to hurt and abuse others. Jesus, on the other hand, chooses not to call upon the angels to whisk Him out of His painful scene. He instead suffers and uses the power he has to love and to help others in need. So it is with the modern Church. When the church uses worldly power, or becomes involved in the politics and procedures of this world, respect for the church is lost. When the Church concerns Herself with the kingdom of God, however, she becomes the effective church God intends her to be. The greatest thing God wants the Church to do is to love sinners.

Yancey also comments on the Christian's desire to make the country in which they live pleasing to God, a goal which Yancey does not believe God has in mind at all. Just as the political climate and leaders of Rome during the time of Jesus' life has little to do with Christianity, so is the political atmosphere today. It is a losing battle to try to save an entire country. Christians should instead seek to advance the Kingdom of God.

As Yancey continues his study of the Kingdom of God, he again makes reference to the Jews' disbelief that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. The Jews' reason for their disbelief is that they expect the Messiah to redeem the world. The world, most obviously, has not been redeemed. Yancey explains, however, Jesus' coming to earth does not end anything. It is simply the beginning of the end. The true end of the earth will occur when Jesus comes back to earth to gather His people together. It is then that the true power of Christ will be seen. Until then, the Kingdom of God is in its developing stages, as the Church grows, and learns to use the power of love.



Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 14, The Difference He Makes

Part 3, What He Left Behind: Chapter 14, The Difference He Makes Summary and Analysis

Yancey admits at the end of his study, he still has perhaps the same number of questions, if not more, about who Jesus really is. While he states he believes efforts to "box Jesus in" or sum up His personality in a nutshell always fail, Yancey does come away from his work with a few impressions of who Jesus actually is.

First, Jesus is the sinless friend of sinners. Yancey explains that Jesus lives the perfect example of what the Church today should be, however, Yancey feels the Church becomes too involved in politics and moralizing the entire world to correctly follow the example of Christ. Modern Christians have trouble striking a balance between grace and morality as well as love for the sinner and dislike for the sin.

Second, Jesus is the God-Man. Yancey writes it is this quality of God that most people find hardest to make sense of. Although hours of study have been dedicated to how Jesus could be both divine and human, the concept is still difficult to grasp. Yancey says the choice is either to accept Jesus as being who He says He is, or brush Him off as a lunatic or demon. This has been the challenge facing Christians for hundreds of years.

Third, Jesus is a portrait of God. Jesus is, in effect, a replica of God sent to Earth. Unlike the God of the Old Testament who is feared by His people, Jesus comes to Earth to share with people the love of God. Jesus makes religion a personal, joyful experience instead of a legalistic and tense experience.

Fourth, Jesus is the lover. Unlike the Gods of other religions, God is not full of vengeance and spite. He will not strike down those who do not believe in Him or follow His ways. God is instead a loving God. He is patient with His people, allowing them to approach Him at their own pace. In fact, God loves humanity enough that He sent His Son to die for the sin that separates humanity from God, a sacrifice never before made by any God figure.

Fifth, Jesus is the portrait of humanity. Yancey writes that Jesus primarily comes to earth in order to offer an example of how human beings should act and should treat one another. Ultimately, however, Jesus' time on earth is also a learning experience for Him. It was during His time on earth that Jesus learns first hand about the pain of suffering and death, the disappointment felt when friends betray and abandon and the other difficulties this life offers. When he becomes a human, Jesus truly understands and empathizes with the plight of humans.



Finally, Jesus is the wounded healer. When viewed as what it really is, Yancey says, the cross is simply a means of execution. In light of this, Yancey wonders why so many Christians use the form of the cross to symbolize their religion. In the end, Yancey decides it is because the cross designates the turning point in the life of Christ, and also in our lives. It is through Jesus' wounds that others have a chance to be healed. Had it not been for the crucifixion, this healing would never have had a chance to take place.

In conclusion, Yancey determines we are all playing a waiting game. Like the disciples who lived through the literal three days of Easter, we now live through Easter on a grander scale. We are stuck at the point of the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. We are simply waiting for Jesus to return and His promise to be fulfilled.



Characters

Phillip Yancey

Phillip Yancey is the author of the book seeking to describe the person and personality of Jesus without depending upon the preconceived notions most religions teach. Yancey serves as editor of a Christian magazine and uses his skills as a journalist to present an unbiased look at the life and times of Jesus Christ. Yancey is raised in a Christian context. He uses examples of the way Jesus is presented to him as a child and young adult to illustrate the way the Church as well as Biblical scholars present a biased view of Jesus.

Yancey's confusion concerning the person of Jesus continues through his years in college, and even follows him as he begins his career writing for a Christian magazine. He admits that he does not fully begin to understand who the person of Jesus is until he begins teaching a Bible study class at LaSalle Street Church in Chicago. It is during this time that Yancey teaches a Bible class using movies that depict the life of Jesus. Using these movies and the text of the Gospels, Yancey begins to develop a picture of the person Jesus truly is.

Jesus Christ

The man whom Philip Yancey seeks to describe. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten by the Holy Spirit in a young Jewish girl named Mary. During His short time on earth, Jesus performs many miracles, teaches basic life principles to anyone who wants to listen and becomes close to a group of twelve men called His disciples. Fearing that He will cause the people to rebel against the Roman government, Jesus is put on trial and accused of blasphemy. He is executed by crucifixion at the age of 33. Three days after His death, Jesus rises from the dead and after visiting with His disciples, ascends into heaven. Christians today still wait for the day when Jesus will return to Earth as He promises to take those who believe in Him with Him to heaven. At this same time, the devil will be vanquished and all evil put to an end. Jesus is the central figure of the Christian religion, and his death and purported resurrection are the defining acts for millions of Christians worldwide.

God

God is the father of Jesus and creator of the world. God has been present since before the beginning of the world and will exist forever. By allowing Jesus to be born into the world, God learns what it is like to be truly human. Instead of being angry or spiteful, God is a loving God who desires to have a relationship with the people whom He creates.



Mary

Mary is the virgin mother of Jesus. She is a Jew. At the time of her conception of Jesus, scholars suggest Mary is at most fourteen or fifteen years old. She is present at His first miracle of turning water into wine. Mary is also present at the crucifixion of her son. Near the point of death, Jesus leaves John, one of His disciples, in charge of caring for Mary after His death. Due to her unquestioning faith at being chosen as the mother of Jesus, some view Mary as being the first Christian.

Joseph

Joseph is Jesus' earthly father and Mary's husband. After the point at which Mary, Joseph and Jesus returned to Judea from Egypt, there is little said in the Bible about Joseph's role in Jesus' life. It is assumed, however, that he is a faithful, forgiving and loving man as he heeds the angels' warnings not to shun Mary and also to protect the baby Jesus.

Judas

Judas is the disciple who betrays Jesus. Although it is obvious the disciples trust Judas because they vote him to be their treasurer, little else is known about him. The Bible simply states that Judas is entered by the devil at the time of the betrayal. Judas sells information about Jesus' whereabouts to the Jews who wish to deliver him to the Roman government. Later, when he realizes what he has done, Judas kills himself.

Peter

Peter is another disciple who betrays Jesus. Unlike Judas, however, Peter repents of his sin when he realizes what he has done. Peter asks for and receives forgiveness from Jesus and goes on to lead a revival of Christian beliefs. Peter is dubbed by Jesus as "The Rock" and is told that it is upon the beliefs and faith of Peter that Jesus will build His Church.

The Church

The Church simply refers to the body of Christian believers without regard to denomination. Since Jesus refers to the Church as a bride waiting for her groom, the Church is generally referred to in feminine terms.

Satan

Satan, also referred to as the devil, is known as the father of evil. He is the exact opposite of God. While God is the leader of the forces of good, Satan is the leader of



the forces of evil. Before Jesus begins His ministry on earth, Jesus is tempted by Satan. During this temptation, Satan's intent is to persuade Jesus to stray from God's plan for His life and ministry.

John the Baptist

John the Baptist is a prophet know as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist baptizes Jesus. Shortly after he baptizes Jesus, John is imprisoned by King Herod and then beheaded.



Objects/Places

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is basically the Jewish Bible. It contains the history of the earth and God's peoples, the giving of the Ten Commandments and writings by many godly people in the time before Christ. Many Jews do not believe the message of Jesus because of His claims that He came to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. The Jews expect the Messiah to be a worldly leader who will lead a revolt against the Roman government and free the Jews once and for all.

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament practiced by nearly every Christian religion in some form. It is believed Jesus commands this sacrament be followed when he breaks bread for His disciples at the last supper. This last supper occurs during the Passover, the night before Jesus is crucified. Jesus and the disciples gather for a final meal. During this meal Jesus breaks bread, calling it "His body" and serves wine, calling it "His blood." He commands the disciples to follow His example in remembrance of Him.

Bethlehem

At the time of Jesus' birth, Bethlehem is a small town of about 500 people located in Judah near the Dead Sea. Jesus is born in Bethlehem to fulfill a prophesy found in the Old Testament chapter of Micah that a baby will be born in Bethlehem that will be the ruler of Israel.

Judea

A territory located in the land of Israel. This territory includes the Biblical cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem as well as the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

Sermon on the Mount

Although it is uncertain exactly where this sermon given by Jesus took place, it is considered the cornerstone of modern Christian beliefs. Contained in the passages of the sermon, which are found in the book of Matthew in the Bible, are the beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, as well as Jesus' version of the Golden Rule and interpretation of the Ten Commandments. Some scholars believe the Sermon on the Mount is a mirror image of the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses.



Galilee

Galilee is the immediate area where Jesus lives during the majority of His time on earth. Most of His miraculous works are performed in this area.

Palestine

The area which is Palestine in Biblical times is currently known as Israel and Jordan. The Palestinian Jews under Roman rule hope Jesus will be a political ruler who will free them from the Romans.

The Gospels

The Gospels include the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The books tell the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Golgotha/Calvary

Golgotha, also known as "the place of the skull," is the place where Jesus is crucified.

The Cross

Crucifixion on a cross is how Jesus is executed. Although the cross is a symbol of death, Christians prize replicas of the cross as pieces of jewelry and even home décor. The cross has become one of the symbols of Christianity.



Themes

Why do People, Specifically the Jewish people, Reject Jesus

The idea of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, the one these people wait so expectantly for, is a theme that Yancey addresses often in his book. There are two main reasons given why Jews do not accept Jesus as the Messiah. First, they expect a worldly leader who will overthrow the Roman government and bring peace to the earth. However, Jesus has no intention of ever making His kingdom here on earth. His thoughts are focused on the Kingdom of God in which there is no place for rule by force or violence.

Second, the Jews cannot envision that any Messiah would ever be killed in the manner in which Jesus is. Even though the Bible states Jesus is resurrected from the dead, and wins a victory over death, the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah does not fit the picture the Jews have in mind for their Messiah. It is to Jesus' scandalous and unfair death many Jews refer when they denounce Jesus as a false Messiah.

The Temptation of Jesus by Satan

Another theme visited by Yancey often is that of the temptation of Jesus by Satan. In the fourth chapter of the book, Yancey discusses this temptation in depth. He describes the nature, cause and outcome of each of the temptations. While none of things Satan asks Jesus to do are sinful in themselves, Yancey implies the sin would be Jesus willingness to go against the will of His Father.

Later, throughout Jesus' life, Jesus battles times when He could quickly fix things or get Himself out of a bind, such as during the time of His trial and crucifixion, by going against the will of His Father. As He overcomes the devil's temptation in the desert, however, Jesus continues to overcome temptation throughout the rest of His life. Yancey labels Jesus' day-to-day temptations as a continuation of His temptation by Satan in the desert.

The Discovery of the Real Jesus

The overall theme of Yancey's book is the search for the real person and personality of Jesus. In order to find the real person of Jesus, Yancey tries to separate the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels of the Bible from the person modern Christianity portrays. By returning to the basics of the Gospels, Yancey determines that the real Jesus is much different from the Jesus portrayed in modern art, the Jesus Yancey met in Sunday School and the Jesus portrayed in modern movies.



In order to determine the real person of Jesus, as well as His reasons for coming to earth, Yancey studies the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection as they are portrayed in the Bible. Yancey also looks and interprets the meaning of these milestones in Jesus' life against the cultural and political background of that time period. Along with determining who the real person of Jesus is, Yancey also challenges the reader to determine who he thinks Jesus is along with how he will respond to the person of Jesus.



Style

Perspective

Yancey is a Christian journalist with a long background in religion. Throughout the book, Yancey shares memories of his childhood in church where he grows up relating Christ to a Mister Rogers type person. He admits the misconceptions he learns in his childhood became even more confused as he grows older and meets others with different perspectives of who Jesus is. It is from this confusion of whom exactly Jesus is that Yancey decides to use his journalistic skills to write an unbiased view of Jesus based solely on the information about Him contained in the Gospels.

The material in the book is not given a religious slant. Yancey does not intend to form anyone's view of Jesus, only to encourage them to consider the information about Jesus found in the Gospels and come to their own conclusion about Jesus. Yancey also does not pretend to already know the true person of Jesus. He, like his reader, is learning and coming to his conclusion as the information unfolds.

Although one might expect a book with this title to be aimed at a religious or Christian audience, Yancey directs his book to the common man. Both believers wishing to gain a better understanding of who Jesus is, as well as unbelievers who are simply curious about the person of Jesus, will gain a better understanding of the person of Jesus by reading this book.

Tone

Overall the tone of the book is objective. Although it is clear from his background and employment that Yancey is a believer, he does not allow his beliefs to bias his study. Since Yancey is also attempting to act as journalist in the time of Jesus, it makes sense he would portray his information with an objective tone, the tone of journalism.

Generally religious literature strongly encourages the reader to come to some sort of decision about what they will do about the person of Jesus. In fact, there is generally a sense of pressure that the reader will be missing out on a great gift if they choose not to accept Jesus. Instead of applying religious pressure, Yancey simply lays out the facts for the reader and then allows the reader to make up his own mind.

Structure

Yancey divides his book into three main parts. The first part discusses who Jesus is. Included in this section are a chapter about Yancey's preconceived notions of Jesus, a chapter describing the details of Jesus' conception and birth, and a chapter discussing the religious and political atmosphere in which Jesus grows up. The second section tells why Jesus comes to Earth. In it, Yancey discusses the message Jesus hopes to teach



and the mission He hopes to begin. In this second section, Yancey also writes about the miracles of Jesus as well as His death, burial and resurrection. In the final section, Yancey discusses what humanity is to do until Jesus returns again. He writes about the meaning and purpose of the ascension, the kingdom of God, and the difference Jesus makes in the world. This book has a very clear and easy to understand format. The format leads the reader through the life of Jesus, discussing the facts and impact of the important occasions of His life.



Quotes

"Looking in retrospect on my years at Bible college, I see that, despite all the devotional intimacies, Jesus grew remote from me there. He became an object of scrutiny. I memorized the list of thirty-four specific miracles in the Gospels but missed the impact of just one miracle. I learned the Beatitudes yet never faced the fact that none of us—I above all—could make sense of those mysterious sayings, let alone live by them," Chapter 1, p. 14.

"A recent Gallup survey revealed that 84 percent of Americans believe Jesus Christ was God or the Son of God. Overwhelmingly Americans believe that Jesus was sinless, brave, and emotionally stable. By lesser margins they regard him as easy to understand (!), physically strong and attractive, practical, warm, and accepting," Chapter 1, p. 19.

"In this book I attempt to tell the story of Jesus, not my own story. Inevitably, though, a search for Jesus turns out to be one's own search. No one who meets Jesus ever stays the same," Chapter 1, p. 25.

"In contrast to what the cards would have us believe, Christmas did not sentimentally simplify life on planet earth. Perhaps this is what I sense when Christmas rolls around and I turn from the cheeriness of the cards to the starkness of the Gospels," Chapter 2, p. 30.

"Today as I read the accounts of Jesus' birth I tremble to think of the fate of the world resting on the response of two rural teenagers. How many times did Mary review the angel's words as she felt the Son of God kicking against the walls of her uterus? How many times did Joseph second-guess his own encounter with an angel—just a dream?—as he endured the hot shame of living among villagers who could plainly see the changing shape of his fiancée?" Chapter 2, p. 32.

"Nine months of awkward explanations, the lingering scent of scandal—it seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance, as if to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God became a human, he played by the rules, harsh rules; small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity," Chapter 2, p. 32.

"And so, Jesus the Christ entered the world amid strife and terror, and spent his infancy hidden in Egypt as a refugee," Chapter 2, p. 35.

"Unimaginable, the Maker of all things shrank down, down, down, so small as to become an ovum, a single fertilized egg barely visible to the naked eye, an egg that would divide and redivide until a fetus took shape, enlarging cell by cell inside a nervous teenager," Chapter 2, p. 36.



"Among people who walled off a separate sanctum for God in the temple and shrank from pronouncing or spelling out the name, God made a surprise appearance as a baby in a manger. What can be less scary than a newborn with his arms wrapped tight against his body? In Jesus, God found a way of relating to human beings that did not involve fear," Chapter 2, p. 38.

"It took courage, I believe, for God to lay aside power and glory and to take a place among human beings who would greet him with the same mixture of haughtiness and skepticism that I felt when I heard about Rabbi Schneerson of Brooklyn. It took courage to risk descent to a planet known for its clumsy violence, among a race known for rejoicing in prophets. What more foolhardy thing could God have done?" Chapter 2, p. 42.

"As a Christian I believe that we live in parallel worlds. One world consists of hills and lakes and barns and politicians and shepherds watching their flocks by night. The other consists of angels and sinister forces and somewhere out there places called heaven and hell. One night in the cold, in the dark, among the wrinkled hills of Bethlehem, those two worlds came together at a dramatic point of intersection. God, who knows no before or after, entered time and space. God, who knows no boundaries took on the shocking confines of a baby's skin, the ominous restraints of mortality," Chapter 2, p. 45.

"Alone of all people in history, he had the privilege of choosing where and when to be born, and he choose a pious Jewish family living in a backwater protectorate of a pagan empire," Chapter 3, p. 50.

"What divided us from the others was the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "This is my body, broken for you," our leader read, before distributing the bread—Christ's body, the divergence point," Chapter 3, p. 54.

"If you are God, said Satan, then dazzle me. Act like God should act. Jesus replied, Only God makes those decisions, therefore I do nothing at your command," Chapter 4, p. 71.

"People liked being with Jesus; where he was, joy was," Chapter 5, p. 89.

"Moreover, the Son of God was, but for this one instance of miracle, one of its victims: the creator of rain clouds was rained on, the creator of the stars got hot and sweaty under the Palestine sun. Jesus subjected himself to natural laws even when, at some level, they went against his desires ("If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me"). He would live, and die, by the rules of the earth," Chapter 5, p. 91.

"I now view the Beatitudes not as patronizing slogans, but as profound insights into the mystery of human existence. God's kingdom turns the tables upside down. The poor, the hungry, the mourners, and the oppressed are truly blessed. Not because of their miserable states of course—Jesus spent much of his life trying to remedy those miseries. Rather, they are blessed because of an innate advantage they hold over those more comfortable and self-sufficient," Chapter 6, p. 116.



"Jesus came, he told us, not to destroy life but that we may have it more abundantly, "life...to the full." Paradoxically, we get this abundant life in ways we may not have counted on. We get it by investing in others, by taking courageous stands for injustice, by ministering to the weak and needy, by pursuing God and not self," Chapter 6, p. 125.

"Absolute ideals and absolute grace: after learning that dual message from Russian novelists, I returned to Jesus and found that it suffuses his teaching throughout the Gospels and especially in the Sermon on the Mount," Chapter 7, p. 142.

"Jesus went out of His way to embrace the unloved and unworthy, the folks who matter not at all to the rest of society—they embarrass us, we wish they'd go away—to prove that even "nobodies" matter infinitely to God," Chapter 8, p. 159.

"Jesus never met a disease he could not cure, a birth defect he could not reverse, a demon he could not exorcise. But he did meet skeptics he could not convince and sinners he could not convert. Forgiveness of sins requires an act of will on the receiver's part, and some who heard Jesus' strongest words about grace and forgiveness turned away unrepentant," Chapter 9, p. 175.

"At its core Gethsemane depicts, after all, the story of an unanswered prayer. The cup of suffering was not removed," Chapter 10, p. 195.

"Power, no matter how well-intentioned, tends to cause suffering. Love, being vulnerable, absorbs it. In a point of convergence on a hill called Calvary, God renounced the one for the sake of the other," Chapter 10, p. 205.

"Easter hits a new note of hope and faith that what God did once in a graveyard in Jerusalem, he can and will repeat on grand scale," Chapter 11, p. 211.

"I find it much easier to accept the fact of God incarnating in Jesus of Nazareth than in the people who attend my local church—and in me," Chapter 12, p. 229.

"By ascending, Jesus took the risk of being forgotten," Chapter 12, p. 230.

"Although Jesus did not use the title himself, he accepted it when others called him Messiah, and the Gospels show a gradual dawning on his disciples that their teacher was none other than the long-awaited King," Chapter 13, p. 241.

"Brilliant, untamed, tender, creative, slippery, irreducible, paradoxically humble - Jesus stands up to scrutiny. He is who I want my God to be," Chapter 14, p. 265.



Topics for Discussion

Consider the ways in which the birth of Christ has impacted the world. How many reminders of Jesus are encountered on a daily basis?

Consider the reasons why the Jews do not accept Jesus based on his claims. Are they correct in their beliefs? Explain why or why not.

Explore the idea of Jesus' humility and desire to stay out of the spotlight. Had he been more greedy for fame, how would this have affected his ministry? Explain your answer.

From this study of Jesus, how has your opinion of him changed? If you had no opinion before reading this book, what are your thoughts about him now? Is he who he said he was?

Consider the lives of one of the people whom Yancey uses to illustrate the principles of the Beatitudes—Mother Teresa, or Martin Luther King, Jr., for example. How does the truth of the beatitudes play out in their lives? Use specific examples and explain your answers.

Explore the idea of miracles, both modern and those in Jesus time. Do you agree with Yancey's view of miracles? Why or why not?

Consider how easy Jesus makes it for people to reject both him and his message. What is your opinion of this strategy? Explain why it is or why it is not a good stance to take.

Compare and contrast the modern church of your choice with the guidelines of religion presented by Jesus during His time on earth. Are modern Christians missing the mark? Why or why not?