

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

Biblical Studies 112 Ladders II

Where is Jesus? There are many churches in our world today trying to sell Jesus to you. They say, "Come over here, we have the Jesus you didn't even know you needed or wanted!", but how does one find the real Jesus? Well, I'll start with a typically Lutheran statement: you do not find Jesus, he finds you! That is all fine, good, and true, but it's not very helpful in responding to the constant barrage of trendy "Jesus marketing". So, let's briefly review the three main marketing tools used to sell you a Jesus who is really more like you than the Savior who came to save you. (therefore, not Jesus at all) That is what marketing naturally does; it appeals to the individual.

The reason for identifying these false Jesus "marketing models" is to help us to see them in a sort of sea of theological positions. Even those of us who hold to sound biblical doctrine sometimes fall into these traps; Luther once compared the Church to a drunken peasant who climbs out of one ditch only to stagger across the road and fall into another. These metaphors may be a bit of an over simplification, but good books have been written to deal with this topic in detail. I would recommend these three: *Broken: 7 "Christian" Rules That Every Christian Ought to Break as Often as Possible* (Dec 5, 2012, by Jonathan M. Fisk), *Spirituality of the Cross Revised Edition* (Feb 1, 2010, by Gene Edward Veith), and *The Quest for Holiness: A Biblical, Historical and Systematic Investigation* (Aug 26, 2004, by Adolf Koberle).

Even if we are aware of the "three theological ladders" the great deceiver does his best to disguise his lies by trying to make them look like what "Jesus" wants you to do. The three "ladders" I refer to are our feelings, our minds, and our works. We are prone to put our trust in any of these things rather than in Jesus. Also, while it is important for us to keep our focus on who Jesus really is, it is also helpful to know who Jesus is not, to avoid putting our focus in the wrong place.

With the eyes of faith, it is as easy to see where Jesus is to be found; just like looking for Waldo on a busy multi-colored page. You know exactly what Waldo looks like; his candy cane shirt and hat, the glasses, and the blue jeans are unmistakable. Science and history are helpful, but those things are not the means by which you may recognize him. You will know him because he is where he says he will be; in his word and sacraments. You can know with absolute certainty that you are a baptized child of God whom he loves more than his own life which he gave on a cross. He regularly nurtures you through his word proclaimed and his body and blood (in, with, and under bread and wine) put in your mouth for your forgiveness. Take comfort in his assurance, "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world." Amen.

As I said earlier, even though we know these truths about Jesus, we will still struggle with the three ladders. The first and most popular ladder focuses on our feelings and invites us to seek him through personal experience apart from his word and sacrament (the theological term for this is "enthusiasm"). This approach may be identified by talking about how Jesus makes you feel. This approach does not discuss what Jesus actually did or does for us or why we are in need. In truth, Jesus does not manipulate our emotions. Our feelings come from ourselves, not Jesus. Emotions are a gift from God, and when we sing his praises and hear his word, it can and should make us feel good, but those feelings are not Jesus, and he is close to you regardless of your feelings. Our feelings are no indication of how close He is to us. The one who bled and died for our sins is always close to us regardless of how we feel. When I do not feel good, or am grieving, hungry, or sick, Jesus is there whether I feel him or not; he suffers with me and tends to my needs through the loving actions of others. Our feelings can fool us into thinking Jesus is not there when we need him most.

When we are hurting, he provides means to assure us of his presence. We don't have to doubt this truth because his word plainly spells it out. He gives us pastors to proclaim absolution to us when we confess. He gives us baptism in which he takes ownership of us by putting his name on us and washing us into his death and resurrection. He gives us bread and wine that is his flesh and blood; forgiveness we can smell, taste and touch. When we need him, he is there providing the peace he promised. So, if someone tries to sell you a "Jesus" based on your feelings, decline, and tell them that you know how to find him in the objective means he has promised,

regardless of your feelings. We will have to address the other two ladders next month; until then have a blessed summer.

In Christ,
Pastor Portier