

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Christmas Messages		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	3		Gary L.W. Johnson
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He Who Was Sent

Just in time for Christmas, a new group of self-proclaimed *unbiased* historians, biblical scholars, and theologians has embarked on the quest for the historical Jesus to objectively determine what can be “reliably recovered” about him, his life, his teachings, and his activities. “Jesus remains after 2,000 years the most fascinating figure of Western civilization,” notes James D. Tabor, one of several scholars participating in The Jesus Project. The author of *The Jesus Dynasty* says scholars today are uniquely positioned to examine the issue of who Jesus was in new and challenging ways. “Scholars now at the beginning of the twenty-first century are able to take advantage of a plethora of new texts, sources, and methods, including the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, various lost Gospels that are not in our New Testament, and a rich archeological record,” says Tabor. Tabor, as many of you will remember, was a consultant for the highly controversial and widely rejected documentary “The Lost Tomb of Jesus.”¹ The fact that he is involved in this project speaks volumes about this group agenda. The mainstream media has already begun to give this group high profile coverage. Earlier this month, scholars behind The Jesus Project gathered for three days in Amherst, N.Y., for the effort’s inaugural meeting. Among those who have been drawn to the project are Tabor, who serves as the chair of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; Paul Kurtz, founder and chairman of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry; religious skeptic Robert Price, a professor of Theology and Scriptural Studies at the Johnnie Colemon Theological Seminary in Miami Gardens, Fla.; archaeologist and biblical scholar Robert Eisenman, who is most famous for his controversial work on the Dead Sea Scrolls and the origins of Christianity; and Bruce Chilton, a professor of Religion at Bard College who specializes in early Christianity and Judaism. In case you didn’t notice, conservative New Testament scholars are conspicuous by their absence. Though a similar effort, called The Jesus Seminar, has been seeking the historical Jesus for more than two decades, organizers of The Jesus Project say their effort is different from The Jesus Seminar as it is not largely theologically driven. This is pure posturing. This group is every bit as driven by a theological agenda as was the infamous *Jesus Seminar*. “The Jesus Seminar had difficulty separating itself from the faith commitments of its members,” says R. Joseph Hoffmann, a historian of religion and chair of the Project and the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion – the secular think tank sponsoring the project. “Its conclusions and methods raised more questions than they answered,” he adds. At the session this past weekend, participants agreed that a rigorous scientific inquiry was needed, and that the project would be committed to a position of neutrality towards the sources used as “evidence” for the Jesus tradition. During the closing conference round-table, Tabor was quick to emphasize that “the Jesus Project repudiates any theological agendas, special pleading, or dogmatic presuppositions.” All members of the project are said to share a common commitment to the importance of applying scientific methodologies to the sources used to construct the Jesus tradition. The results of this *new* quest for the historical Jesus are predictable. Their *Jesus* will not be the Christ of orthodox Christianity. Their *Jesus* will not be the One who *came* in the fullness of time, born under the law in order that He might redeem those who were under the curse of the law.²

What does Advent mean? It refers to the advent (from the Latin *adventus*, to approach, to come) of Christ into the world. It is a term that historically was used to mark the liturgical season of preparation for Christmas. It thus marks the start of the Christian liturgical calendar.³ *Advent* proclaims that there has been a divine breaking into human history and this should bring us great comfort (Isaiah 40:1, 2) because the Lamb of God has come to accomplish redemption. He is God’s dear Son, His envoy, messenger sent on a mission

by the Father. Over and over again in John's gospel we read of the Father sending the Son (3:17, 34; 7:16; 8:26; 12:49; 14:24; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 18; 20:21).⁴ Hebrews 3:1 calls Jesus the "*Apostle...of our confession.*" This is the only place in the New Testament that refers to Jesus as an Apostle. What is an Apostle? How is Jesus an Apostle?

I. GOD SENDS THE SON INTO THE WORLD

The text tells us that Jesus is really an Apostle. The APOSTOLOS refers to one who is commissioned and sent for a specific task. The Son did not come of Himself, but was sent by the Father (John 8:42; 7:28).

A. The Son was set apart for this task by His Father

He declares that the Father had sanctified Him for this purpose (John 10:36). Jesus *knew* that He had been sent by the Father (John 7:29) and that the Father was always with Him (John 8:29). The very works which Jesus performed bore continual witness to the fact that the Father has sent Him (John 5:36).

B. The Son was sent to accomplish the Father's will

He was sent to be the Savior of the world (John 3:17; I John 4:14). He was sent to gather the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24) and to bring in the lost sheep from among the nations (Acts 28:28).

C. The Son was sent to deal with sin

He was sent in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering (Romans 8:3) and to turn His people from their wickedness (Acts 3:26). The Son was sent to bring all of the elect to salvation (John 6:44). All that the Father has given Him will come to the One the Father has sent (John 6:37, 65). "The Son was sent not only to proclaim the truth but also to manifest it (Hebrews 1:2, 3)."⁵ He was sent to form or establish a *house* or household, a redeemed family (Hebrews 3:6).

II. GOD SENDS THE SON (BY THE SPIRIT) INTO OUR HEARTS

What is our response to this glorious good news? We should *receive* Him; those who do, receive the Father (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; Luke 9:48; John 13:20) and cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). If we would know the Father aright, we must first know the Son (John 12:45; 14:9).

A. The Son was sent that we might have life

The Son has come forth from the Father in order that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

B. The Son was sent that we might see

He was sent that people should not remain in darkness (John 12:44-46). Those who live in darkness hate light (John 1:5). They do not know the One that sent the Son (John 15:21). The Son was sent in order that people might believe (John 6:29). It is only true faith that receives, knows and beholds the Son (John 12:44, 45). The Son was sent to bring the elect to a unity of faith in order that the world might believe that the Father sent the Son (John 17:21, 23, 25).

C. The Son was sent and He sends His own into the world

We read in John 17:18 these words of Jesus: "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." Note this emphasis on sanctification as it relates to Jesus and His disciples. This does *not* mean that Jesus is increasing in personal holiness (an aspect of sanctification that is properly spoken only of believers). Rather, in this context it refers to being set apart unto a specific mission. "In John's Gospels, such 'sanctification' is always for mission."⁶ The Lord Jesus dedicated Himself to accomplishing the Father's will. To Him the Father entrusted the task of bringing in God's Kingdom (His saving reign) and He serves in a unique sense as God's priest (i.e., His mediator, cf. Acts 4:12; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 12:24) and prophet (Hebrews 1:1-2), but, as Carson notes, "the

purpose of this dedication is that his followers may dedicate themselves to the same saving reign, the same mission to the world.”⁷

CONCLUSION: “Herein is love,” writes the beloved Apostle John, “not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I John 4:10). The Son came to accomplish the Father’s will (Psalm 40:7, 8 and Hebrews 10:5-10). Now consider Him that was commissioned by the eternal Father and was sent into this fallen world to save lost sinners—sinners like you and me, standing desperately in need of redemption.

John Murray made this important observation. “The word ‘advent’ is an appropriate term to identify what we often speak of as ‘the second coming.’ Though the New Testament does not use this latter designation in so many words, yet the idea is present in Hebrews 9:28 when it says that Christ ‘will be manifested a second time without sin for them that look for him unto salvation.’ And since Christ came into the world and then ascended into heaven, his coming again to the world can properly be distinguished as his second coming, though in a different manner and for different purposes. It is significant, however, that, in respect of the term in Greek that corresponds to our word ‘advent,’ the New Testament never speaks of the second advent. It speaks of ‘the advent.’ This is true also of other terms that are synonymous with the advent as far as event is concerned. This is all the more remarkable when we find Peter using this same term ‘advent’ with reference to Christ’s first coming: ‘we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty’ (2 Peter 1:16). We are compelled to ask why New Testament writers, when they refer to the second advent, do not need to specify it as the second but simply as ‘the advent’ of Christ. One thing we can say is that New Testament believers were so intently occupied with the second coming of Christ, so absorbed were they with the hope it entailed and the consequences involved, that they did not need to characterize it as we do, but spoke and wrote of it as ‘the coming’ of the Lord. The identity implied in his titles ‘the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ could not be conceived of apart from his first coming and all that this involved. So, when they spoke of ‘the coming,’ it was the advent in glory that was in view. It is a pertinent and searching question: do we share the outlook that constrained this manner of speech? If not we have diverged from apostolic example.”⁸

ENDNOTES

¹ This same group has re-appeared in the four-part series *Biblical Conspiracies* which aired on Sunday night (Dec. 14, 2014) on the Science Channel. Following the lead of Dan Brown’s *The DaVinci Code* these clowns claim to find that practically every piece of art that Michelangelo did contained *hidden* clues i.e. the statue of Jesus and his mother Mary, the Pieta, is really that of Jesus and his wife, Mary Magdalene! Philip Jenkins has written a very funny parody of this kind of nonsense. See his *The Jesus Identity* www.patheos.com/blogs/anxiousbench/2014/12/the-jesus-identity.

² Cf. <http://www.christianpost.com/article/print/20081210/new-quest-for-historical-jesus-draw...> 12/16/2008

³ The Christian calendar, as it is often called, dates in its present form to the fourth century. Cf. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (IVP, 1988), p. 119.

⁴ Altogether there are 46 references in the Gospel of John and First John that speak of God sending His Son. Cf. H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth* (Bagster, 1977), p. 1. This is a very helpful study tool and one that has proved very useful in this particular study. However, it must be used judiciously, e.g., his understanding of propitiation is seriously flawed.

⁵ R. Brown, *Christ Above All: The Message of Hebrews* (IVP, 1982), p. 76.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991), p. 566.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Collected Writings of John Murray I* (Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 88.