

# What Did Jesus Really Say & Do —“According to” *Matthew*?

- \* March 12 - April 16, 2019
- \* 10:00am - 11:30am
- \* ~4 chapters/week

# Check-in

What have *resonated* most with you: excited or disturbed?

- \* “Aha moments”
- \* Questions
- \* Comments
- \* Reflections

# Conflict Management: “Avoid Triangulation”

## (Matthew 18)

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- 15 “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.
- 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.
- 17 If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector.
- *[Keep your eye on those ancient interpreters: this isn't just about Matthew's community—there are lessons for today.]*

# Other references to needing more than one person or “where 2-3 are gathered”

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- Deuteronomy 19:15, which says, “A *single* witness is not sufficient to convict a person of any crime or wrongdoing... Only on the evidence of *two or three* witnesses can a charge be sustained.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:29, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”
- 2 Corinthians 13:1, “Any charge must be sustained by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”
- 1 Timothy 5:19, “Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.
- Hebrews 10:28, “Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy ‘on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”

# Jewish Precedents in Mishnah

(Final form c. 200 CE, but oral tradition centuries before)

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- “If *two* sit together and words of the Torah (are spoken) between them, the Divine Presence rests between them...”
- “If *three* have eaten at one table and have spoken over it words of the Torah, it is as if they had eaten from the table of God.”
- “If *ten* men sit together, and occupy themselves in Torah, the Divine Presence rests among them, for it is written, God stands in the congregation of God.” [minyan/quorum]
- But, “What if we have only *five...three...two?*” (Affirmative)
- “What about whenever there is only *one* person?” Yes: “Because it is written, ‘In every place where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.’” [*Worry: does God hear me if alone?*]

# Jewish Precedents in Mishnah

(Final form c. 200 CE, but oral tradition centuries before)

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- “What about whenever there is only *one* person?” Yes: “Because it is written, ‘In every place where I record my name, I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.’”
- Worry: does God hear me if alone?
- Point: lean in to *community* instead of atomized individualism.

# Rich Young Ruler

## (Matthew 19)

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- **16** Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"
- **17** And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."
- **18** He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; **19** Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **20** The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?"
- **21** Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."
- **22** When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. **23** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

# Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19)

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- Plain meaning: eye of a sewing needle (that's why RYR went away depressed)
- Myth: special, smaller-than-usual ancient gate called something like the “Eye of the a Needle”
- Stephen Colbert: “If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that he commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it.”



# Greatest Commandments: Love God/Neighbor (12th-century French abbot St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

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1. Love *ourselves for our own sake* - paradoxically still the love of God because God is in, with, and beyond all things. (Augustine: “God is closer to us than we are to ourselves” / “*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*”)
2. Love God for *our sake* (mystics: “purgation”)
3. Love God for *God’s own sake* (“illumination”)
4. Love *ourselves for God’s sake* (“union”/nondual)

Bruteau’s “Holy Thursday Revolution” of love our neighbors *as ourselves*.



[youtube.com/watch?v=BjKgWI0g7f0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=BjKgWI0g7f0)

- There's a neon cross on a mountain, saying "Sinners Best Beware." That means that somebody went to the trouble to run power way up there.
- These mountains speak to my spirit. I guess it kind of blows my mind to think that someone could look at the vista. And think God needs a neon sign
- The old man asked me if I was saved, and I turned to check his eyes. Well, I didn't see any concern there, and it's sad that I wasn't surprised.
- No, he was just trying the secret handshake, where you push until push comes to shove. His hands were deep in his pockets, and his eyes said nothing of love.

*Sing me a song about Jesus, but please don't sing about the poor. It's already been a long day; I really don't want to hear anymore.*

*Sing me a song about Jesus that will make me feel happy inside. Sing me a song about forgiveness that will make this lifestyle feel justified. Sing a song about Jesus.*

- Ran into Jesus this morning. He was down on Butler Street. He was carrying his bedroll. He was standing in line for something to eat. He got splashed by the muddy water, when the shiny hubcaps rolled by.
- He brushed himself off and chuckled and looked over at me, and said, "There but for the grace of God go I."

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers, (Matthew 20)

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- **1** "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.
- **3** When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; **4** and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went.
- **5** When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.
- **6** And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" **7** They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers, (Matthew 20)

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- **8** When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first."
- **9** When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.
- **10** Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. **11** And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, **12** saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."
- **13** But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? **14** Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. **15** Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers, (Matthew 20)

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## Form Criticism

Fairy tale: “Once upon a time,”

Kingdom Parable: “The kingdom of God is like....”

- Matthew: uses “kingdom of God” a handful of times
- but six times more frequently Matthew’s Jesus uses “kingdom of *heaven*”—which is unique to Matthew’s Gospel.
- Other Gospels: “kingdom of God” exclusively, as did, in all likelihood, the historical Jesus.
- Gospel According to Matthew: most ‘Jewish’ of the four canonical Gospels, so prefers to avoid invoking the word “God” so directly (//: “Adonai”/lord in place of Hebrew “YHWH”)

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers, (Matthew 20)

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v. 20:

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”

- “The Parable of the Generous Landowner”
- “The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard.”
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# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: Recapitulation of 1 Samuel?

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- As David rose to power and eventual kingship over the United Monarchy of Israel, he fought many battles.
- **1 Samuel 30:10** that, “David went on with the pursuit, he and four hundred men; two hundred stayed behind, too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor.” [*Wadi: Arabic - “valley”*]
- Some of David’s soldiers didn’t have the stamina to continue through one more valley into yet another battle.
- Ten verses later: David and the four hundred men returned from victory over the Amalekites and united with the two hundred of their brethren who had stayed behind to rest and guard the supplies.

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: Recapitulation of 1 Samuel?

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- verse 21: “When David drew near to the people he saluted them.”
- In contrast to David’s generous greeting, the victorious foot soldiers, “who had gone with David said, ‘Because they did not go with us, **we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered....**’”
- David, shocked at their selfishness, reiterates his original position: “You shall not do so, my brothers, with what God has given us; God has preserved us and handed over to us the raiding party that attacked us. Who would listen to you in this matter?”
- In the wake of a victory which, in David’s opinion, God helped them win — refused to show the same generosity to their brothers that God had showed to them. [*Deuteronomic History*]

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **Recapitulation of 1 Samuel?**

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- verse 24: David says, “For the share of the one who goes down into the battle *shall be the same* as the share of the one who stays by the baggage; *they shall share alike*.”
- Verse 25“From that day forward he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel; it continues to the present day.”

**Jesus may well have heard this story growing up.**

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: Parallels

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- Day labors hired at 5:00 p.m.: full day's wage for only working one hour
- Hired at dawn (long, hard, 12-hour day): suddenly expected they would get much more than simply's a day's 'minimum wage.'
- Equivalent pay: *four times more* for *four times* as many hours
- [Side note: Although this parable only in Mt & Zacchaeus story only in Luke, interesting intertextually that, "If I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much" (19:8).]

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: Parallels

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- verse 2: early laborers receiving precisely what they signed-on for at dawn: “*After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.*”
- verse 11, “grumbled...” These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.”
- Landowner: “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?”
- King David (1 Sam): “The share of the one who goes down into the battle *shall be the same* as the share of the one who stays by the baggage; *they shall share alike.*”

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **CONTEXT**

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- Day laborers picked first: usually the *youngest workers*. For these workers in their prime, the landowner paid “the usual daily wage.” (*supply and demand*)
- To enlist those workers in greatest demand, you have to pay the standard rate.

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **CONTEXT**

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- *“When the landowner went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace.”*
- Perhaps the landowner did not go out intending to hire more workers. **Likely had hired all the workers he needed for the day three hours earlier at dawn.**
- But upon seeing these workers still standing around three hours later hoping to be hired, he said, “You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you **whatever is right.**”
- Doesn't agree with these less desirable laborers for the usual daily wage as he had with his first round draft picks.
- Nor do the laborers haggle with him over a rate. They are eager to be paid “whatever the landowner deems right” when the alternative is spending the rest of the day waiting in vain and returning home to their families with no paycheck at all.

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **CONTEXT**

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*When the landowner “went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.”*

- Most shockingly: one hour before the end of the 12-hour workday, “he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’”
- Alternative Title: **“The Parable that All People Who Want to Work Should Be Given a Job and Paid a Fair Wage.”**
- Or: Parable of Universal Basic Income



# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **CONTEXT**

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- Lest we deem the “Job Creator” too generous, consider:
- first-century Greco-Roman usual daily wage for manual labor:  
Denarius, a Roman silver coin= ~ same value as Greek drachma....
- **Neither generous nor miserly:** pays perhaps enough for a subsistence existence, if the day laborer could not find regular daily work.
- [KJV: translates “usual daily wage” as, “a *penny a day*” to communicate that not a lot.]

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: **CONTEXT for Day Laborer Rates**

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- In 2008, the World Bank estimated that **1.4 billion people were living the equivalent of less than \$1.25 a day.**
- Peter Singer: extreme poverty by an absolute standard tied to the most basic human need.
- Likely to be hungry for at least part of each year.
- Even if they can get enough food to fill their stomachs, they will probably be malnourished because their diet lacks essential nutrients.
- In children, malnutrition stunts growth and can cause permanent brain damage. The poor may not be able to afford to send their children to school.... This kind of poverty kills.
- **[Parable: whether day laborers were hired really mattered.]**

# Parable of the Job Creator & the Day Laborers: One Level Deeper

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- Perhaps Jesus told this parable precisely to those day laborers who were standing around at 9:00, Noon, 3:00, or 5:00 still hoping to be hired and had the time to listen.
- Such an audience would have had ‘ears to hear’ a story with the opening line, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.”
- Such an audience of looked-over, would-be day laborers would have been captivated by the idea that the “kingdom of God” is like a generous landowner [*who really owns the land?!*]*—*or a universal basic income for all who want to work.
- Also ‘eyes to see’ between the lines of this parable’s implicit critique of the low minimum wage, which you’ll need again the next day. [*//: manna...and Jesus’s Plan A to not take anything with you.*]

# Jesus Threw out the Moneylenders for a Reason (Matthew 21)

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- 12 Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.
- 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers.'"



# Jesus Threw out the Moneylenders for a Reason (Matthew 21)

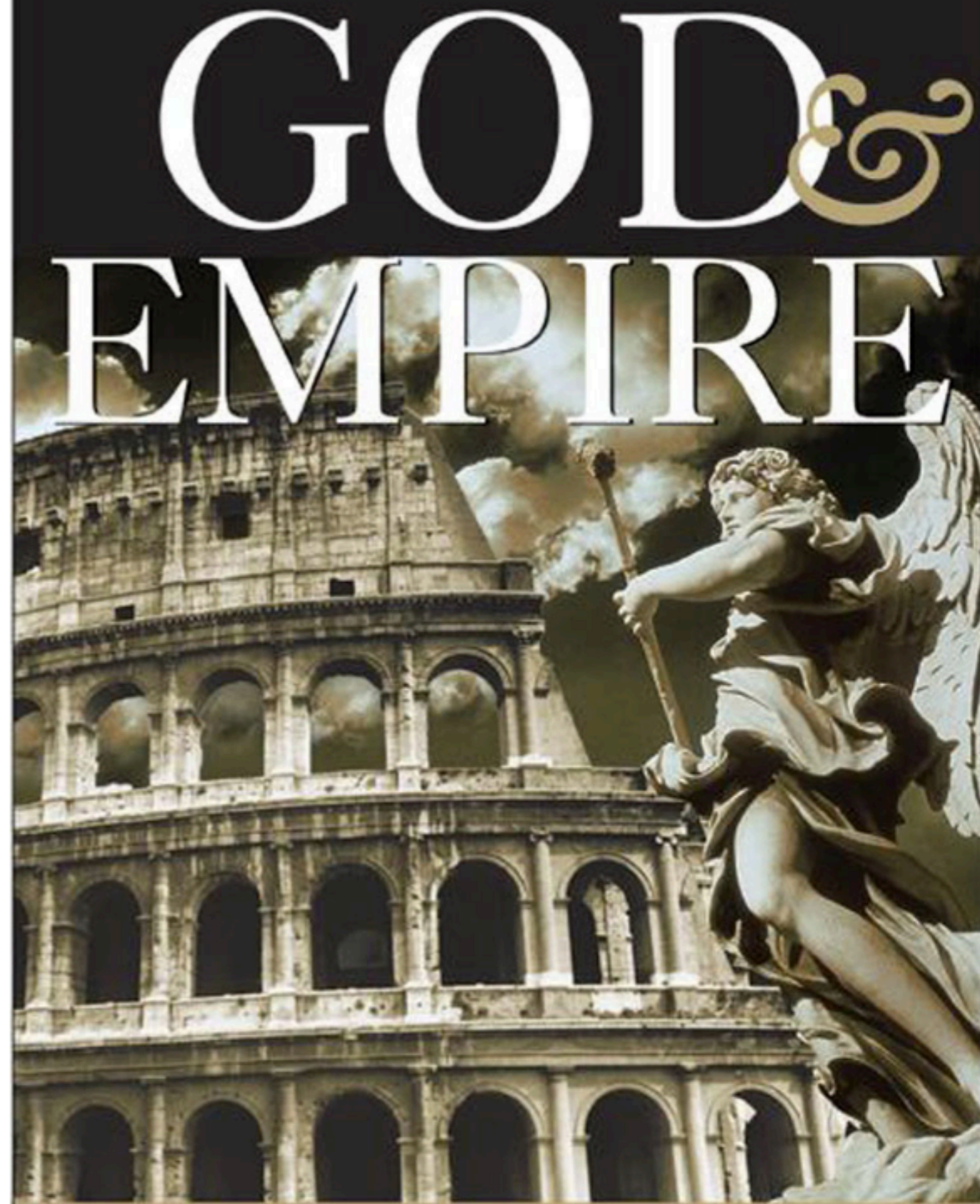
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- Anger is not necessarily a sin.
- You should be angry at injustice
- Problematic to be *apathetic* toward injustice.
- “Harness the Power of Anger in the Work of Love” - Beverly Wildung Harrison

**IF YOU'RE NOT  
OUTRAGED,  
YOU'RE NOT  
PAYING  
ATTENTION.**

*“Protest from the legal and prophetic heart of Judaism,”*

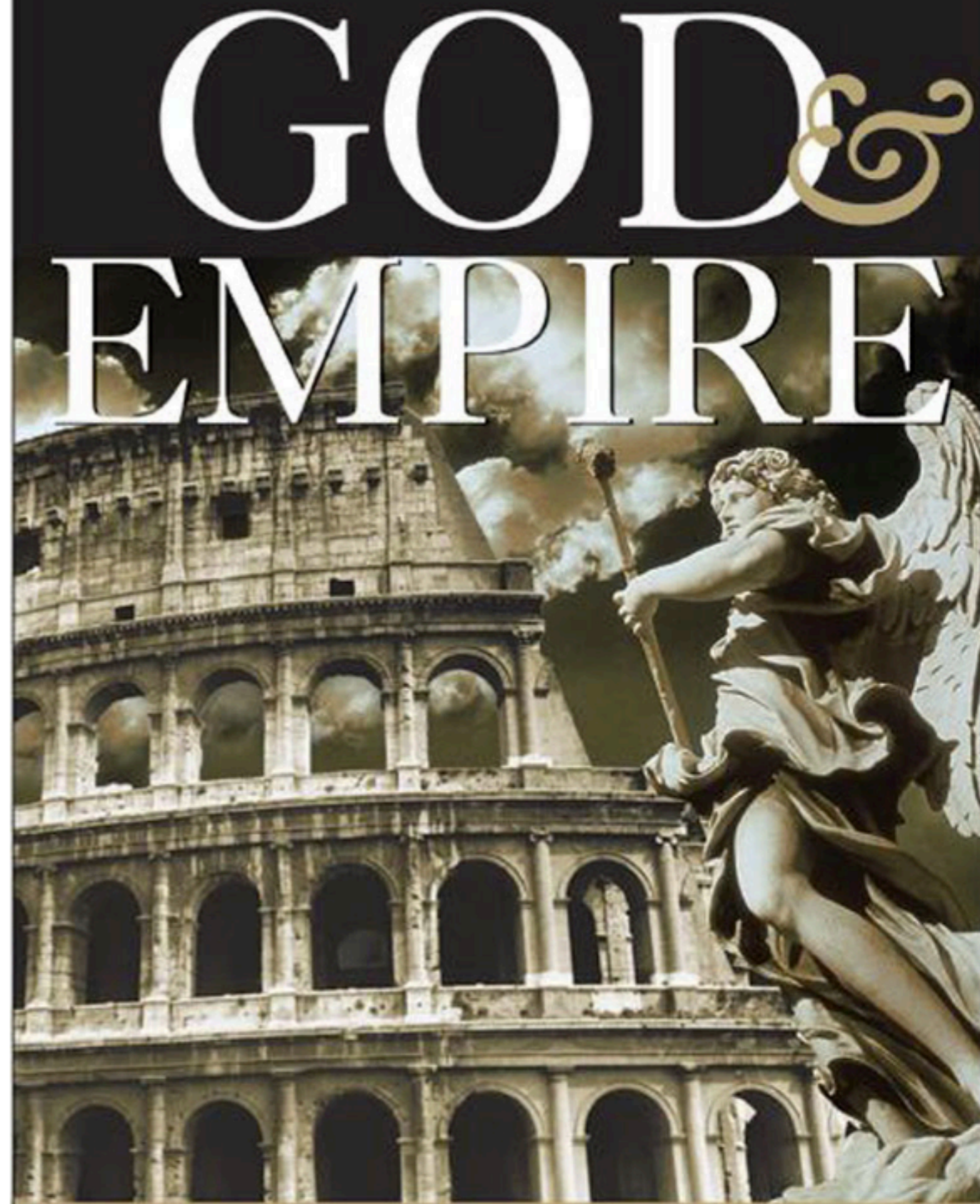
- **Torah** is replete with the theme that the Land is ultimately God’s, and we are but stewards.
- **Psalm 24:1**, “The earth is God’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”
- Jesus explicitly quotes **Isaiah 56:7** to emphasize that he is influenced by the tradition of the Hebrew prophets. God’s desire has long been for “a house of prayer for all the nations,” not a corrupt religious institution that is complicit with or oblivious to the plight of the poor and marginalized.



JESUS AGAINST ROME, THEN AND NOW  
**John Dominic Crossan**

*“Protest from the legal and prophetic heart of Judaism,”*

- **Amos 5: 21** I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. **22** Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. **23** Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. **24** But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- 700 years before Jesus: If God has to choose between worship and justice, then God chooses *justice*.

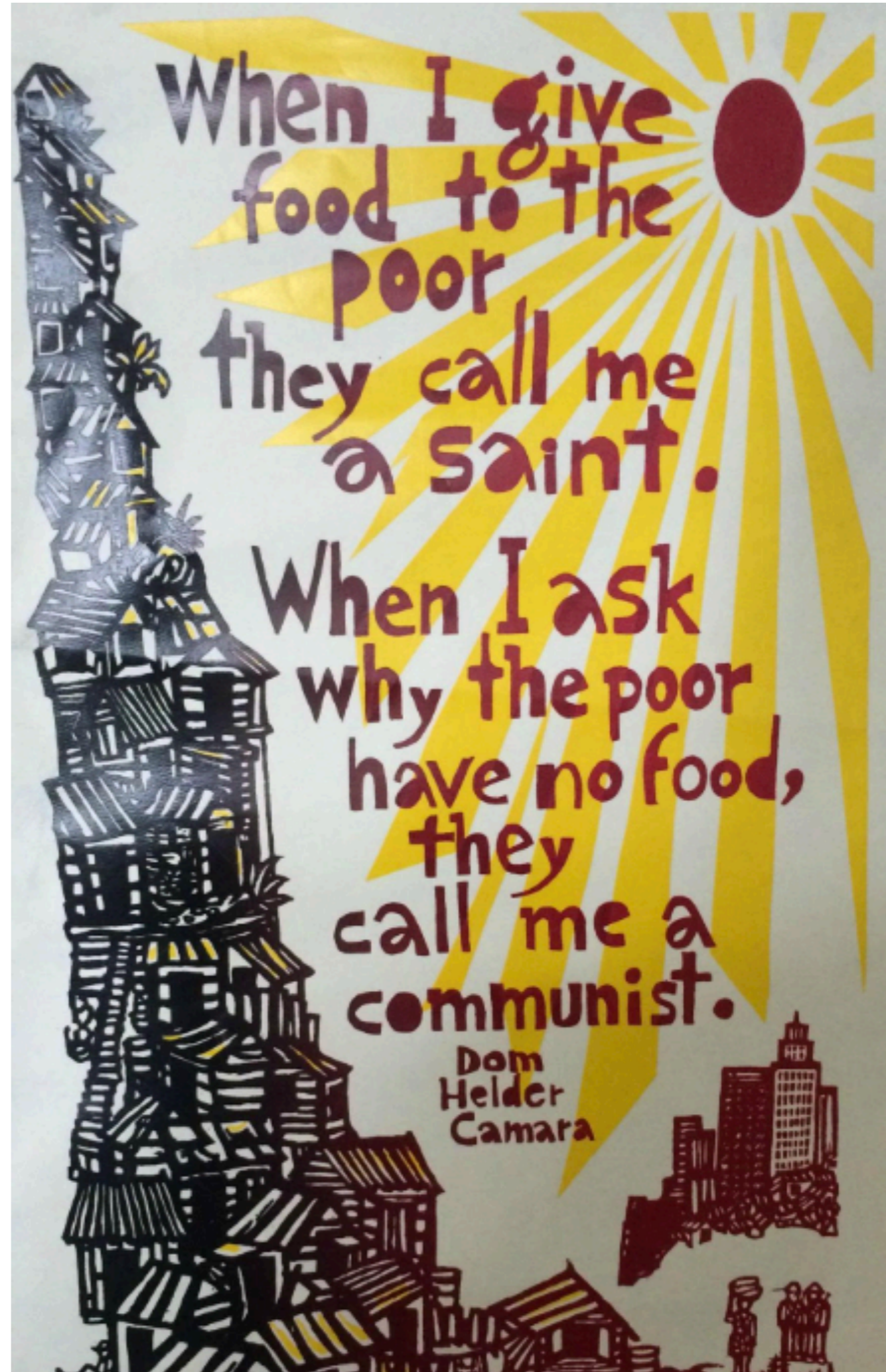


JESUS AGAINST ROME, THEN AND NOW  
John Dominic Crossan

# Individual change (*follow me*) to Systemic Change (*Temple*)

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- *from* inclusive table fellowship *to* action against the Temple, Jesus shifted *from* the controversial (but more acceptable) practice of eating with others across diverse socioeconomic boundaries *to* **confronting the institutional system that create and entrench unequal and unjust socioeconomic boundaries in the first place.**
- **Jim Wallis:** “You can’t just keep pulling people’s bodies out of the river without sending somebody upstream to see what or who is throwing them in.”
- **Crossan:** “Those who live by *compassion* are often canonized. Those who live by *justice* are often crucified.”

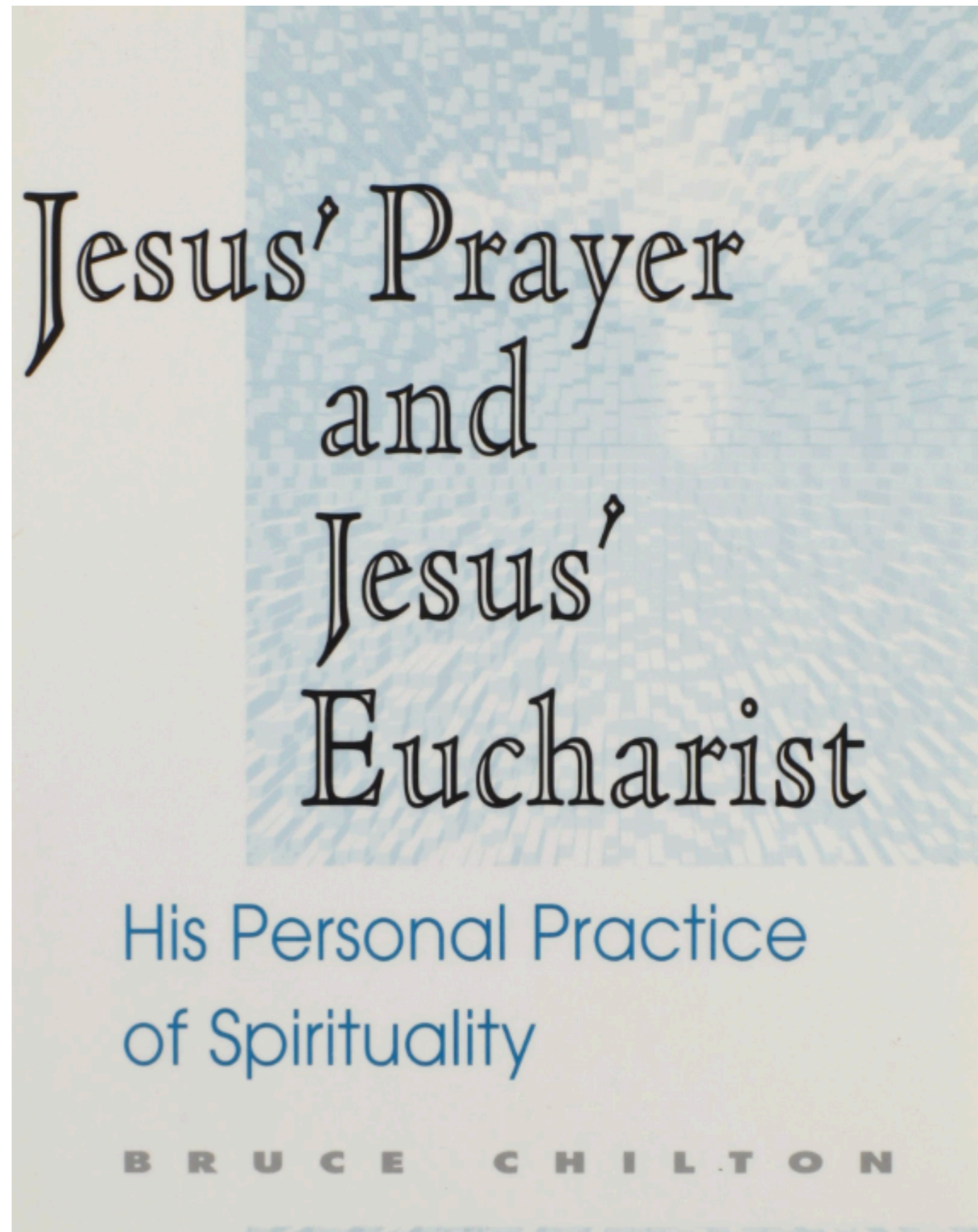




Didn't want to die, but willing to **risk** being killed

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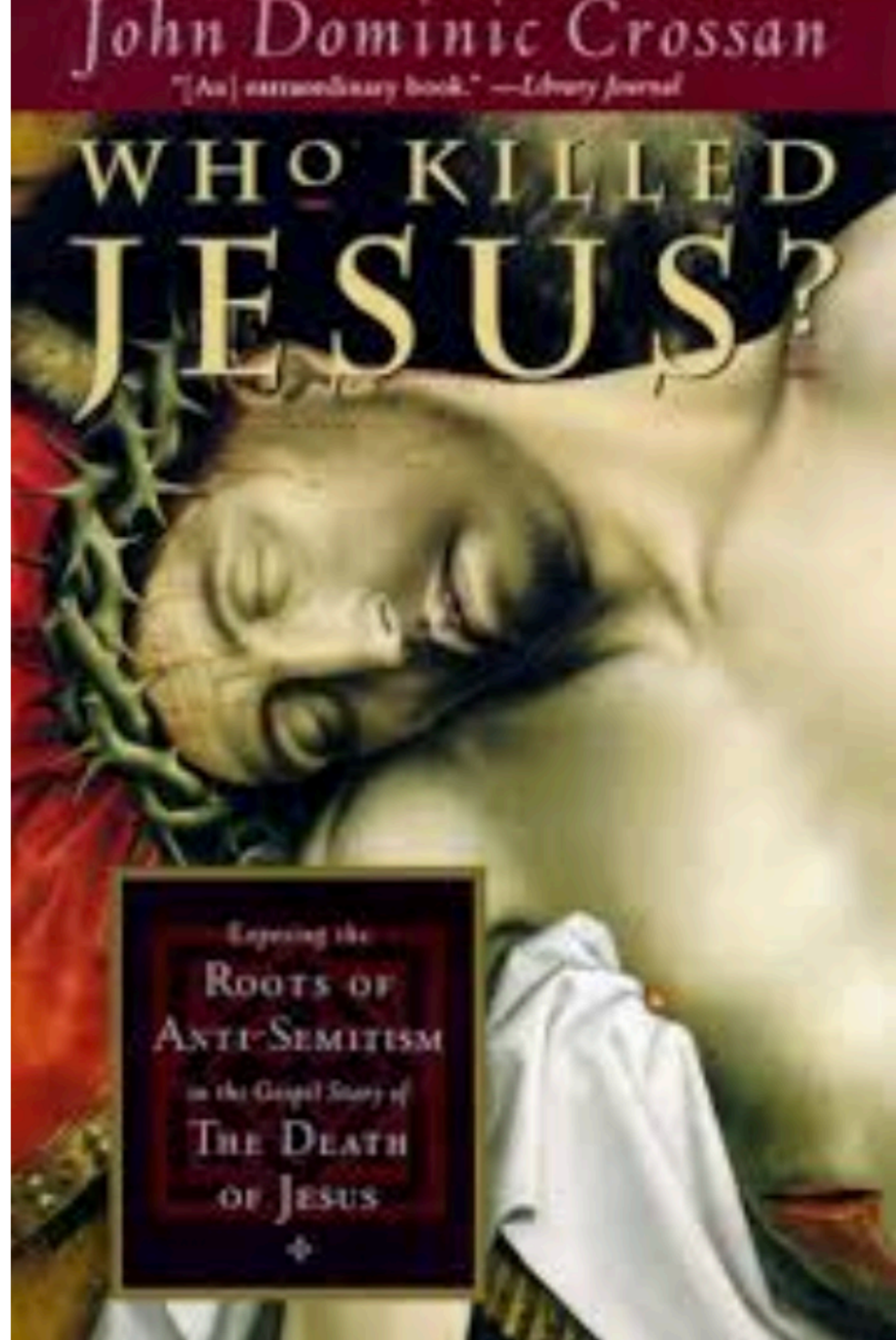
- Jesus' teaching in regard to the kingdom and its purity, including his communal meals as enacted parables, **might have been continued indefinitely outside of Jerusalem.**
- Sporadic, local controversy was involved, but it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus and his disciples, in their travel from place to place, were able to find enough of a welcome to keep their movement going.
- But Jesus then sought to influence practice in the Temple....



# Symbolic Act

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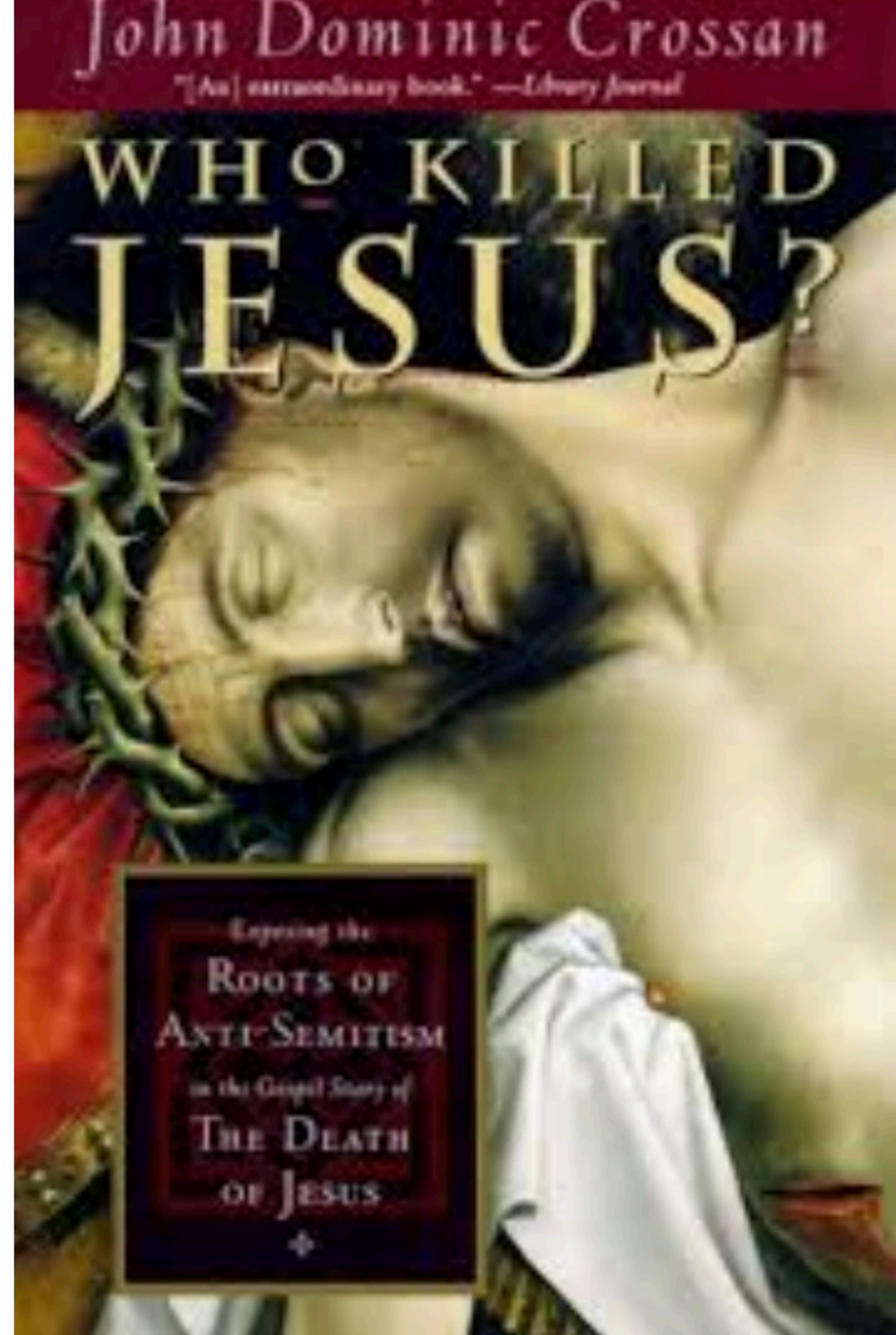
- **//: overturning tables in a draft office during the Vietnam War.**
- Does not stop the war.
- Is a symbolic negation of all that office (or Temple) stands for.
- ‘Civil disobedience’ or *holy obedience!*
- Delores Williams: avoid asking “‘What we [would] die for...?’” If we ask that question, somebody will be quite willing to oblige us and kill us, especially if we belong to a marginalized or oppressed group.... Our question should be ‘**What are we willing to live for?**’”



# Symbolic Act

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- Jesus had been in the Temple before, but did not turn over the tables immediately.
- “Plan A” of going in twos to knock on doors eventually includes acts of justice.



# John Mabry

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- Rosa Parks is an imitator of Christ, not because she suffered for taking her stand (or keeping her seat, in her case),
- but because she had the courage to believe in her own dignity and fought for it in spite of the conflict that resulted.
- Nelson Mandela is an imitator of Christ, not because he suffered in prison,
- but because he held out for peace and justice, and led a nation to resurrection.
- In each case **it is not the suffering that is redemptive, but the courage to pursue justice in the face of pain and evil.**



# Further Commentary

## “Tables of the Money-changer”

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- **Exodus 30:11ff**, God instructs Moses that each (adult, male) Israelite is to pay “half a shekel” to the “sanctuary,” which is later incorporated as the center of the Temple.
- This was an annual fee from that time on in order to provide *communal* atonement throughout the year.
- These Temple workers also served the purpose of exchanging the pilgrim’s foreign currency, which often had idolatrous symbols.
- **Jacob Neusner** echoes the Mishnah that all of these were essential services necessary for the running of the Temple.

# Further Commentary

## “Tables of the Money-changer”

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- It is possible that there was abuse (purification theory)
- But it is far from explicit in the text that the money-changers were cheating their customers.
- It is also possible that the money changers were Jesus’ target because they were the most *visible* and most *accessible* (in the Court of the Gentiles).
- It would have been much more difficult to make a conspicuous scene (and to get access to) to restricted Court of the Priests.
- Perhaps Jesus also would not have wanted to profane the Court of the Priests, especially given the respect he expressed for the altar in some scriptures.

# Further Commentary

“Seats of those who sold pigeons”

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- As with money changers, the pigeon-sellers provided a vital service for the survival of the Temple system.
- Doves were the cheapest animal for getting individual atonement, but they blemished easily.
- It made sense for pilgrims to buy the doves in Jerusalem instead of bringing them from home, when the **doves would get blemished during travel.**

# Further Commentary

“House of Prayer” (Isaiah 56:7)

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- Some scholars doubt about its authenticity
- OtoH: Jesus would have been immersed in scripture. It is conceivable that he would have combined this scripture on the spot with Jeremiah 7:15 about the “den of robbers.”



# Further Commentary

“den of robbers” (Jeremiah 7:3-11)

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**Jeremiah was also standing in the Temple when he says,**

- “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place [the Temple]. Do not trust in these deceptive words: **“This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.”** For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place....
- Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, “We are safe!”—only to go on doing all these abominations? **Has this house, which is called by my name, become a *den of robbers* in your sight?”**
- Surface meaning: finances
- Deeper meaning: justice, cheap forgiveness, idolatry

# Further Commentary

“For all the nations”

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- Only the Gospel of Mark extends the Isaiah quote to include the words, “a house of prayer *for all the nations*.”
- Anti-Gentile passages are more likely to be original to Jesus because the *anti*-Gentile passages would be embarrassing to the increasingly-Gentile early church.

# Further Commentary

## “Vessels” (Mark 11:16)

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- This passage is only found in Mark:”16 and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.”
- Matthew and Luke do not include this for an unknown reason.
- Parallel to this passage in Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.106 (37-100 C.E.): “no vessel whatever might be carried into the temple, the only objects in which were an altar, a table, a censer, and a lampstand.”
- This seems to reflect a desire to “purify” the Temple.

# Anti-King Parable Co-opted as a Kingdom of God Parable: Empire-Critical Reading of the Parable of the Wedding Feast

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- Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.
- He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.
- Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’
- But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.
- The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

## Stephen King or Jesus?

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- Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.
- Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.” Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.’
- But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

# Structure of a Three-Act Play:

## **(1) Set-up**, (2) Confrontation, (3) Resolution

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- Meet the main characters and learn about the basic situation.
- *Act 1, Scene 1*: “a king gave a wedding banquet for his son.”
- Imagine: castle’s banqueting tables are resplendent with the best silver, the finest china, and goblets of the best wine. Brightly lit candelabras and torches cast a warm glow, and a blazing fire in the hearth further sets the mood.
- Festive streamers hang above. Family members are wearing their best robes, and the servants all stand at attention. The scent of oxen and fatted calves roasting over spit wafts into the room. Everything is ready.
- Twist: no one who was invited to the scion’s wedding has responded to the king’s invitation. All those preparations and expenses could be for naught.







# Structure of a Three-Act Play:

## (1) **Set-up**, (2) Confrontation, (3) Resolution

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- *Act I, Scene 2*: cue the slow-building, ominous soundtrack of a B-grade horror film: “Again the king sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited....’ But those who had received invitations made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized the king’s slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.”
- Twist: maudlin to homicidal.
- Turn from callous rejection of the king’s invitation to the torture and murder of the king’s slaves raises the question of how this king rules his kingdom.
- Notice: not servants, but *slaves*.
- Less benevolent philosopher king of Plato’s *Republic*. More: tyrant,
- But the torturing and murdering of the king’s slaves is not the end of the story, only the end of Act I.

# Structure of a Three-Act Play:

(1) Set-up, **(2) Confrontation**, (3) Resolution

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- Continue to imagine the story in your mind.
- The king and his family are waiting expectantly and impatiently in that empty, but resplendent, banquet hall, likely discussing the rudeness and ingratitude of their subjects, when the news arrives of the slaves' gruesome deaths.
- Matthew's Jesus tells us that, "The king was enraged."
- Can you picture his blood boiling, his eyes narrowing, and his voice angrily summoning his troops to "destroy those murderers, and burn their city"?

## Structure of a Three-Act Play:

(1) Set-up, **(2) Confrontation**, (3) Resolution

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- Ethic of an “eye for an eye,” which contradicts Jesus’ teaching from the Sermon on the Mount: *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you....”*
- Fifteen chapters later: parable of vindictive king that begins by telling us that, “the kingdom of God may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.”
- The kingdom of Gaddafi, sure. The kingdom of Saddam Hussein, okay. But the kingdom of God?

# Structure of a Three-Act Play:

(1) Set-up, (2) Confrontation, **(3) Resolution**

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- Climax—and outcome is revealed.
- King, having slaughtered the villagers who dared resist his tyranny, “said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were *not worthy.*’”
- Blames and dehumanizes the victims.

## Structure of a Three-Act Play:

### (1) Set-up, (2) Confrontation, **(3) Resolution**

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- Hoping to redeem the wedding, while the food is still salvageable and the candles are not all burned down, he orders his slaves, “Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’
- Slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.”
- King: noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe.”
- Remember slaves invited both “good and bad.”
- King: “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?”
- understandably speechless under the king’s wrathful gaze.

# Structure of a Three-Act Play:

(1) Set-up, (2) Confrontation, **(3) Resolution**

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- “Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”
- Cold-hearted resolution: truly dire.

# Interpretation 1: *Allegory*

“‘Vengeance is Mine,’ Saith the Lord”

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- God is the king: reconcile the bloodshed with Jesus’ teachings on nonviolent activism using a dictum such as, “God can rightly choose violent, but not humans.”
- **Romans:** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- According to this section of Paul, we are to overcome evil with good, but, in God’s hands, the evil of violence is transmuted into ‘divine justice.’

## **John Mabry, *Monster God***

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- I remember counseling a woman who had been extremely wounded by her fundamentalist experience.... Through her tears, she told me how scared she was of being cast into Hell for daring to question her church's theology.
- “Haven't you always been taught that God is your heavenly Father?” I asked her. She nodded and blew her nose.
- “Well, let's say you have a daughter. What if she did something really bad, let's say she killed somebody.” She nodded....
- “Would it be right for her to be punished for her crime?” She nodded that it was.”
- And what would be an appropriate punished be?” She thought about it for a while, “I don't know, maybe twenty years in prison?”



## John Mabry, *Monster God*

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- “Shouldn’t she be tortured for those twenty years?”
- “No! Prison is enough.”
- “But the church says that just punishment for any sin is to be tortured in unthinkable agony, not for twenty years, but for all of eternity. As a mother, would you allow your child to endure that if you had the power to stop it?”
- “Of course not!”
- “How does it feel to be morally superior to God?” I asked.

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

“All Things to All People”

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- We could redeem this parable in a different way using another famous Pauline text. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul confesses (or perhaps boasts) that,
- To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the Torah I became as one under the Torah (though I myself am not under the Torah) so that I might win those under the Torah. To those outside the Torah I became as one outside the Torah (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the Torah. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. (1 Cor 9:20-22)
- To see the relevancy of this passage the story at hand, we can be aided by a way of reading the Bible called Form Criticism.

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

“All Things to All People”

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- **Hermann Gunkel** (1862-1932) - German biblical scholar
- At the time, the primary interpretative approach was Source Criticism, which seeks to determine what *written* sources the biblical authors and editors had on their desk when compiling the various books that were eventually collected into the anthology we call the Bible.
- Following the common human urge to surpass one's predecessors, **Gunkel challenged biblical scholars to push farther behind the text, past written sources to the *oral tradition*** that preceded any written sources.





# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

“All Things to All People”

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- **‘Form Criticism’** - forms (or genres) in which these *units* of oral history would have circulated:
- parables, aphorisms, controversy stories, healing narratives, exorcism tales, natural wonders, calling scenarios, and commissioning scenes among others.
- Various versions of these forms would have been in circulation until they were eventually written down.

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

“All Things to All People”

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- As scholars studied oral history of all types, perhaps the most crucial discovery was that **there is no ‘original’ version to find.**
- As a contemporary example, think of political stump speeches in which politicians weave together and interchange various elements of an ever-evolving speech, depending on the audience.

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

“All Things to All People”

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- Jesus: told the various parables/teachings *many different times*, in *many different locations*, all in *slightly (or significantly) different ways* based on the audience at hand.
- Decades of Oral Tradition after his Death: also would have grouped together his teachings and the events of his life in different ways based on the *needs of the gathering or text* at hand.
- Four canonical Gospels aspects of the oral tradition the gospel (& Q!) writers inherited and the *needs of their communities* at the time.
- Medium & Message: once piece of the oral tradition was recorded into a final form, that form was often seen to apply to *all audiences in all places* and at *all times*.

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

## “All Things to All People”

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- Perhaps Jesus did tell some version of the Parable of the Wedding Feast to those who claimed to be his followers.
- Just as Paul says that he re-calibrated his message to persuade a Jewish audience when among Jews, to target Gentile when facing a Gentile audience, and to focus on the weak when among the weak,
- Jesus may have told our parable for today to those who already claimed to be his followers to encourage discipleship.
- Perhaps his parables of compassion, mercy, and grace were to lure people into the kingdom of God. And his harsher sayings were for those who were already his disciples.
- In this interpretation, Jesus would be the ‘king,’ who invites everyone — the “good and bad” — to the wedding.
- But when someone fails to act in correct accordance with the way of Jesus, then ‘King Jesus,’ says, “Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (that is, sent to Hell for all eternity).



# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

## “All Things to All People”

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- Jesus has come to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.”
- Bonhoeffer similarly warned against “cheap grace” in his book [Discipleship](#).
- But just a few chapters back in Matthew 18:22, Jesus told Peter to forgive, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times,” virtually an infinite number of times.
- But the king in this parable is as unforgiving as Clint Eastwood in the film *Unforgiven*, which is not forgiving at all; his m.o., in military-speak, is “execute with extreme prejudice.”

# Interpretation 2: Form Criticism:

## “All Things to All People”

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- Vagaries of the oral tradition can be seen readily by looking at the Gospel of Luke’s version of this parable in chapter 14:16-24.
- In Luke’s version there is a “**great dinner**” instead of a “wedding” (showing in the first line how details change in the oral tradition as stories are told differently to different audiences).
- Host is merely “**someone**” instead of a “king.”
- Similar to Matthew’s version, however, the invited guests make weak excuses.
- Likewise, the owner of the house is angry when the slaves bring the news.
- But **instead of mass slaughter** ensuing, we merely read that, “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame” are invited in place of the intended guests.

Similar (but also different) version of the parable in Gospel of Thomas 64 (More oral tradition vagaries!)

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- Jesus said, “A **man** had received visitors. And when he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servant to invite guests.
- He went to the first one and said to him, ‘My **master** invites you.’ He said, ‘I have claims against some merchants. They are coming to me this evening. I must go and give them my orders. I ask to be excused from the dinner.’
- He went to another and said, ‘My master has invited you.’ He said to him, ‘I have just bought a house and am required for the day. I shall not have any spare time.’
- He went to another and said to him, ‘My master invites you.’ He said to him, ‘My friend is going to get married, and I am to prepare the banquet. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused from the dinner.’

Similar (but also different) version of the parable in Gospel of Thomas 64 (More oral tradition vagaries!)

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- He went to another and said to him, ‘My master invites you.’ He said to him, ‘I have just bought a farm, and I am on my way to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused.’
- The servant returned and said to his master, ‘Those whom you invited to the dinner have asked to be excused.’
- The master said to his servant, ‘Go outside to the streets and bring back those whom you happen to meet, so that they may dine.’
- **Businessmen and merchants will not enter the Places of My Father.”**

## Interpretation 3: Empire Criticism: From Anti-King to “Kingdom of God”

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- What if this parable originally did not include the introduction, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to....”
- Instead, remember way back in **Matthew 2:16** that, “When [*King*] Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.”
- Sounds like King Herod’s slaughter of the innocents, more than “kingdom of God.”
- Perhaps Matthew’s confusion regarding this matter has to do with the *both* the rise in tension between Christians and Jews in the more than five decades between the historical Jesus and the compiling of Matthew’s Gospel *and* the **constant pressure Christians felt to accommodate themselves to the powerful Roman Empire.**

## Interpretation 3: Empire Criticism: From Anti-King to “Kingdom of God”

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- Jesus would have grown up hearing anti-king scriptural themes such as the **Exodus** story of escape from Pharaoh’s rule or the prophetic warnings against kingship in places such as **1 Samuel 8**:
- **4** Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, **5** and said to him, "You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations." **6** But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to govern us." Samuel prayed to the Lord,
- **7** and the Lord said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. **8** Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you.

## Interpretation 3: Empire Criticism: From Anti-King to “Kingdom of God”

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- **9** Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them." **10** So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king.
- **11** He said, "These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; **12** and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. **13** He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. **14** He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. **15** He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. **16** He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. **17** He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

# Interpretation 3: Empire Criticism: From Anti-King to “Kingdom of God”

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- “The Parable of the Wedding Feast”
- *not* about the kingdom of God
- *but* a cautionary tale about kings.



# Jesus' Rant Against Corrupt Religious Leaders (Matthew 23)

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- Revised Common Lectionary: first twelve verses of Matthew 23.
- But Jesus' castigation against corrupt leaders continues at least through verse 36.
- In the lectionary version, you only hear approximately one-third of the onslaught of polemic that constitutes almost all of Matthew's twenty-third chapter.
- Early Christian practice was *lectio continua*, beginning with the first chapter of a biblical book and reading it in course over a period of Sundays....
- As the church year developed, customary readings — *lectio selecta* — began to be associated with each day or season....
- During the Reformation, Luther took a conservative stance, maintaining many of the lections, while Calvin and others rejected them entirely, reverting to *lectio continua* except at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.

# Jesus' Rant Against Corrupt Religious Leaders (Matthew 23)

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- The reviling Matthew's Jesus gives to the religious leaders in chapter 23 is not that new or surprising.
- Jesus' extended invective here is essentially a recapitulation: "All of the major accusations and assertions have already been made. Even the polemical harshness...is...not unique; new only is its concentrated repetition."
- Less likely a transcript recorded by a stenographer
- More likely a collection of independent denunciations that were circulating in the oral tradition. //: Matthew 5-7
- Beware simplistic stereotypes of Pharisees as "Those Bad Guys"

# Comparisons to Greco-Roman polemics

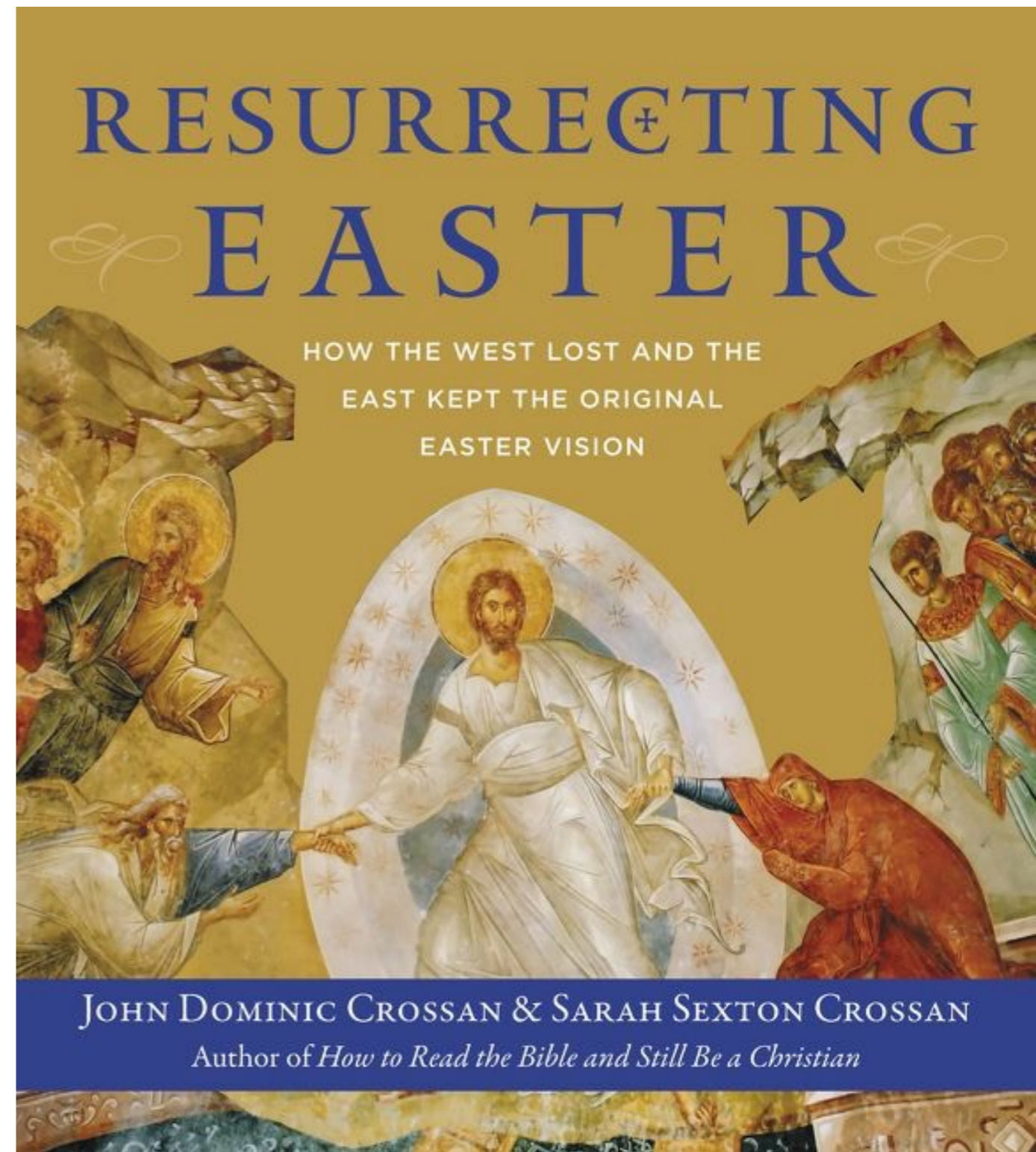
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- Conventional polemical language
- Not careful, ‘scientific survey’ of what these groups were actually like.
- Stereotypical language that says much more about the experience of its users (a small, powerless, marginalized group attacking a larger, more successful group) than the historical and moral/religious reality of the described.
- Lesson: self-examination to warn disciples against condemnation for similar actions.
- Jesus calls us both then and now to “the weightier matters of the Torah: justice and mercy and faith.”

# What is “Resurrection” — & who was raised?

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- **Matthew 27:50** Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.
- 52 The tombs also were opened, and **many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.**
- 53 After his resurrection **they** came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and **appeared to many.**



# Check-out

What have *resonated* most with you: excited or disturbed?

- ✱ “Aha moments”
- ✱ Questions
- ✱ Comments
- ✱ Reflections