Sola Jesus: When it was Over, There was Jesus Only

Third in a five-part series titled, Sola Jesus. Offering alternative to one of the slogans of Protestant Reformation (Luther-Calvin wing)

First, Sola Jesus, like Sola Scriptura is a **slogan**. Not a theory of everything. A slogan is only helpful if it simplifies complexity at a popular level: advantage & disadvantage of slogans. Only make sense when addressing specific concerns. (Sola Jesus is a lousy slogan to address the nature of God who is Father-Son-Spirit.)

Sola Jesus is not an attempt to *diminish* our view of Scripture. Actually, it’s meant to *enhance* our engagement with Scripture. Been reading it almost daily, 46 years. It’s a spooky powerful book, uniquely charged up with Holy Spirit. A God-breathed book unlike any other I’ve ever read. (And I’ve read some WONDERFUL books).

Get excited-enthused reading Scripture (of course, times my mind is dulled to it as well.) My understanding of Jesus is inextricably bound up with Scripture. Notice we are appealing to Scripture to show the limits of Sola Scriptura and elaborate Sola Jesus.

If the effect of this series is to get this church reading Scripture less, loving it less, wrestling with it less, hearing God through it less, it will be most miserable failure of a series in my lifetime.

**Limits of Sola Scriptura:** Sola Scriptura came with 2 **riders** that shaped its meaning. Both contrary to Scripture.

First, rider is **sufficiency**—that Scripture provides us with all the truth we need to know. Not supported by Scripture itself.

**Creation** reveals things about God that Scripture cannot (science). **Wisdom** dwells in all cultures, comes from many sources. Jewish Prophet Daniel trained in all branches of wisdom of Babylon.

Second Sola Scriptura rider: truth of Bible is **clear**. **Perspicuity** is term: ironic, such a befuddling word means “clarity.” But clarity of Scripture isn’t asserted in Bible. Truth of Scripture not always clear.
Divinity of Christ was unsettled until Council of Nicea, 325. Before that, differing views laid claim to Scripture yet unresolved for 200 years. Only resolved by Eastern church fathers, who appealed to their experience of Jesus to argue for his divinity....

But here’s an even deeper problem: Sola Scriptura forged in an authoritarian age when Church claimed absolute authority. Sola Scriptura invested authority, instead, in Bible. But both approaches imported the same assumption: that certainty was possible & necessary to protect us from devolving into chaos.

Bible regards God as a MYSTERY. Mysteries defy human attempts at certainty. Some things can be known about God, but never everything...our knowing is ALWAYS in part, thru a glass darkly.

Primary concern of the Bible is not certainty, but LOVE. LOVE, operating through trust (called faith) is what we need to make our way thru an uncertain world that we can only know in part.

As a result of these limitations, Sola Scriptura has been invoked to support readings of Scripture that violate love, grieve the Holy Spirit, and have been harmful to people.

If truth of Scripture, according to Sola Scriptura, must be clear, it’s a short step to assume any widely accepted reading of Scripture (at least of the people in power) is therefore certain.

If we have an assumption of clarity & certainty about Scripture, (at least in important matters) we will use a widely accepted reading of Scripture as a club, one that serves those who have the most power in the church (often, men), all in the name of TRUTH.
This has led to the abuse of Scripture in harmful approaches to slaves, women, sexual minorities, outsiders, the Jews, and many groups of people. This is no small problem...a BIG DEAL problem.

Now, turn to Scripture for a Sola Jesus approach: Transfiguration of Jesus, in Mt., Mk., Lk. First, the immediate context, which emphasizes importance of what follows: Luke 9: 23-27 (Read)
Things are getting serious at this point as Jesus reveals aspects of his Messianic call that is unappealing to them. A suffering Messiah runs contrary to reading of Scripture by Bible experts of day, who quote chapter & verse to refute. Ends with intriguing promise: "Some here will not taste death until you see the kingdom of God." What could that mean? See what happened next: Luke 9: 28-36.

Any Jew would be reminded of time Moses, in Exodus 24 went up on Mt. Sinai with his disciple Joshua, and they were bathed in God’s glory and received the Law of Moses, heart of Hebrew Bible.

In Luke it says Moses & Elijah were speaking with Jesus about his departure, Greek word for exodus, the book of Moses.

From Peter’s point of view, having Moses & Elijah appear is huge because Jesus has been getting push-back from Bible experts, and here we have Moses & Elijah themselves chatting with Jesus!

What is significance of Moses & Elijah? Represent term for Bible at time: “The Law & the Prophets” (Love your neighbor as yourself for this is the Law & the Prophets.) The Law was Law of Moses and Top Gun prophet was Elijah.

What an endorsement! Let’s set up 3 shelters indeed! What a timely endorsement, now we can get Bible experts off our backs!

Imagine Bernie Sanders on Mountain glorified before SC primary, lots of African American voters not excited about him…and Spike Lee appears chatting with Bernie. Bernie’s advisors would be like Peter: “Hold it right there! Let’s get a photo, or better yet, shoot an endorsement video!”

But God has an better endorsement planned for Jesus: A cloud came over them, but not just any cloud, a God-cloud.

GOD comes in thick clouds a lot. Hard to see clearly in thick cloud. (Derek P. studies clouds: hard to pin down) Only way to see any-thing is to be right up close to it. Knowledge by intimacy in a context of uncertainty—is the knowing that happens in a cloud.
Great classic of prayer, 14th C., offers a method of prayer that leads to deep intimacy. Guess what the title is? CLOUD OF UNKNOWING. Not cloud of clarity/certainty, cloud of unknowing.

The only way to have this kind of knowing is to be in the cloud when God fills the cloud.

The times I’ve heard God’s voice most clearly—have felt intimacy with God most deeply—have been times when I found myself in a CLOUD OF UNCERTAINTY. When I was in dark, confused, couldn’t find my way to save my life or even find my glasses.

With Jesus saying Son of Man must suffer and die, and they must follow in his footsteps, the disciples entered their own cloud of, uncertainty, of unknowing....now on the mountain, with Jesus, God enters the cloud with them.

They hear a Voice: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!”
But this is not the punch-line. Matthew, Mark, Luke began with baptism of Jesus, where Jesus hears similar words. Now the disciples hear. So it’s dramatic, but not news.

The real punch-line comes next: “When it was over, there was Jesus only.” And then, to emphasize that: “They kept this to themselves during those days.”

What!? You’ve got the critical endorsement of Moses & Elijah, the Law & the Prophets (Bible) and you keep it under wraps? Yes, Sola Jesus was so explosive in a religious setting quickly becoming text-driven, especially among Scribes, Pharisees, experts in the Law.

Jesus movement would be a radically-centered movement. It would not be centered on something as important/sacred/ inspired, as Law & Prophets (Bible.) It would be centered on Jesus.

If we think for a moment this meant they went out and stopped caring what Scripture said, we would be missing the point entirely.

Episode doesn’t diminish Moses & Elijah (and by extension, the Law & the Prophets, the Bible). It elevates them. But it elevates them by subordinating them to Jesus.
We must always remember: in presence of Jesus, Moses & Elijah also appeared in glory. MOSES & ELIJAH became MORE REAL not less, more God-charged not less. When they read Moses-Prophets (Scripture) they listened more, not less.

**But here’s the difference: they listened for the voice of Jesus.** How could they read Scripture again without remembering Jesus, Moses, Elijah, the cloud, the Voice in cloud, “*this is my Son, listen to him!*” and when it was all over there was Jesus only?

They read Scripture from a Sola Jesus point-of-view, and it must have *enhanced* their reading of Scripture!

Because they didn’t just look for the **words** in Scripture, they **listened for the voice** of Jesus in Scripture.

**Sola Jesus challenges our faith.** We are given the Spirit, Spirit of Jesus (Paul: “Spirit of Sonship”).

Through the Spirit we get a feel for the **voice** of Jesus....not just words, the voice infusing the words, which has a huge impact on the meaning and power of the words.

We all know that as we separate words from the voice speaking the words, communication falters. Words are subject to gross misinterpretations. Why email so inadequate, why we get so messed communicating important things—always laden w/ feeling—in a text. [Interesting: often infer anger that isn’t there]

**We get the meaning of the words wrong because we haven’t been listening for his voice, or trusting** his voice, instead dismissing it.

When there is a **disparity** between what we’re told words mean and what we know of the voice of Jesus (“that just doesn’t sound like the Jesus I know”) we need to pay attention! Listen for voice.

Sola Jesus is not about denigrating Scripture. If your take-away is to put your Bibles on shelf with that 20 year-old Italian Renaissance textbook, to be thrown out 50 years from now by your adult children after your passing, saying to themselves, “Why did mom or dad keep all these books they never read for us to have to pitch?”—then, I’ve been a miserable failure!
Sola Jesus is about elevating Jesus, which among other things helps us engage Scripture more profitably. Biblical term for what the Bible is as a spiritual book is “inspired” [God breathed]. Words on a page require ink. A voice requires breath.

Next week we’re going to explore how to listen for the voice of Jesus.

REFLECTION

Take next minute or so to ask the Spirit to remind you of a time when you either sensed the voice of Jesus or felt his presence.