



INSTITUTE OF
CATHOLIC
CULTURE

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DISCOVERING CHRIST WITH POPE BENEDICT XVI

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SESSION 1 Study Guide: Volume 1, pages 1-63

Overview

Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) invested precious time during his Pontificate to write these three volumes. They must point us to something that Ratzinger recognized to be of urgent importance. Why would the Pope see this project as worth the time and effort? What does he want us to get out of this work?

The central question of the trilogy: Who is Jesus? (41)
And, secondarily: Can we rely on the Scriptures?

Foreword

The foreword lays out the key problem of how to read the Bible, which has appeared more inaccessible to some with the rise of modern methods. Should these methods, which often undermine faith, simply be rejected, or can we use them as believers to help us in our understanding of what we believe?

What is the problem with biblical scholarship he is seeking to address? How did a gap arise between the “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of faith”? How does he propose overcoming this gap? (xi and following)

What is the danger and benefit of modern historical scholarship? Why does Ratzinger see it as essential? (xv)

What is the difference between approaching the Bible as an historical datum and a theological datum? If we do approach it theologically, what principles should we use?

Who are the three interacting subjects of Scripture? (xx)

How does Ratzinger seek to unite history and faith in his interpretation? (xxii-xxiii)

Introduction: An Initial Reflection on the Mystery of Jesus

Ratzinger situates the figure of Jesus within the human longing to know the meaning of our lives. Where have we come from and where are we going? Jesus provides an answer in a way completely different from any other figure.



How does biblical prophecy break from the surrounding nations? (3) How does Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

On page 6, he talks about the central point in our understanding of Jesus. Why is it so crucial? How does this affect our redemption? (8)

Chapter 1: The Baptism of Jesus

We now begin to see Ratzinger's methodology in action, beginning, like Mark's Gospel, with the account of the baptism. It provides a fitting entry point in considering the true identity of Jesus.

How do the evangelists (Gospel writers) indicate that the life of Jesus differs from the myths?

How do the different Jewish sects set the stage for Jesus's ministry and the arrival of John the Baptist?

What does it mean for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness in his baptism? (17) How does that affect our own baptism? (18)

How does the baptism relate to the Passion? How does it reach into the past and the future? (20)

Ratzinger asks if drawing on the Church Fathers and liturgy has taken us too far from the Gospel text. What was your experience of his explanation?

On page 24, Ratzinger points out that some people claim that Jesus came to a new realization of his identity and role in his baptism. What is the risk of making Jesus into an ordinary man?

Chapter 2: The Temptations of Jesus

Ratzinger draws out the deep meaning of the temptations, which could be easy to miss, but they take us into the heart of Jesus's mission.

What does Ratzinger see at the heart of all three temptations? (28-29) How does that make the temptations even more relevant for us?

What is the problem with wanting God to prove himself? (30) And submit to our conditions? (37)

How does Ratzinger connect the first temptation to the multiplication of loaves and the Last Supper?

How does putting secondary things first undermine justice, to the point of ruining everything? (33-34)

At the bottom of page 35, Ratzinger connects the temptations to a modern worldview that limits God. How does he describe this?



How does the second temptation relate to the Cross?

What is the threat from political kingdoms and utopias for the Messiah?

Chapter 3: The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Jesus preached the kingdom, but it can be hard to know exactly what that means. Benedict examines a range of options and connects them to Jesus's identity.

What is the essential content of Jesus's preaching? How is it a proclamation of good news?

Benedict addresses a perceived divide between what Jesus taught and the life of the Church. Have you encountered this concern—that the Church is not really Christian or in accord with Jesus's teaching?

The Church Fathers identify three dimensions of the kingdom: Christological (Jesus is the kingdom in person), mystical (interior), and ecclesiastical (the Church is the kingdom on earth). How does Ratzinger relate these three?

Why does he not see the kingdom as solely in the future or solely in the here and now?

Ratzinger translates the kingdom of God as "God's-being-Lord." How does this help us to understand the relevance of the kingdom in our lives?

How does Jesus make God present? (60)

How does the parable of the pharisee and tax collector help us to understand the demands of ethics in light of the mercy of the kingdom?