Review: Jesus the Great Philosopher

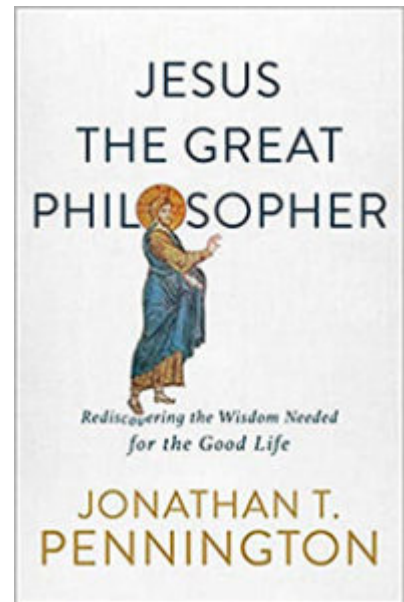October 12, 2020

Jesus the Great Philosopher: Rediscovering the Wisdom Needed For the Good Life

By Jonathan T. Pennington (Brazos Press)

Don't be put off by the title. Some readers may expect a liberal look at Jesus of Nazareth as *just* a great teacher and moral philosopher. Have no fear: Jonathan Pennington, associate professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is thoroughly biblical, evangelical and orthodox. Other readers may anticipate the kind of incomprehensible gobbledygook a boring professor attempted to force-feed them in a college Philosophy 101 class. On the contrary, this book is accessible, down-to-earth and even—more often than not—fun.

Pennington makes the compelling case that Jesus was a true philosopher in the ancient classical sense—not to be confused with a philosopher in the modern sense. Much of modern philosophy falls into one of two categories, the author observes. Some schools of thought offer a thoroughly useless abstract and depersonalized examination of deep questions that provide no meaningful answers. Others peddle self-help platitudes drawn from the shallow well of pop psychology.

Jesus the Great Philosopher examines the teachings of Jesus in light of competing and complementary ancient philosophies, particularly the Western philosophical traditions that shaped the Greco-Roman culture. Pennington explores how Jesus challenged his disciples to consider Life's Big Questions—what is good, what is right, what is beautiful, and where to find lasting happiness and hope. And he points out how Jesus did it in ways that were both thoroughly grounded in day-to-day life and that pointed to transcendent truth in the kingdom of God.

Read this book and get acquainted with Jesus the great philosopher who taught his followers the kind of whole-life wisdom that leads to flourishing—not only in the sweet by and by, but also for the living of these days.

Ken Camp, managing editor

Baptist Standard.