

I have mentioned one of the intriguing traditions found in the now-lost Exposition of the Sayings of the Lord by the early second century proto-orthodox church father Papias (his account of the death of Judas). Here is another one.

In this one Papias is relating what he has heard that Jesus taught. As you'll see, it is not a teaching that is found in the New Testament Gospels, or in fact in any other Gospel source we have.

What is most striking, in some ways, is that Papias claims that he has a clear line of tradition going straight back to Jesus to confirm the reliability of the saying: he learned this from "elders" (that is, senior Christians) who heard from John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus' closest disciples, that this is something Jesus used to say. So this is not an "eyewitness" account (or, rather, not an "earwitness" account) - it is an account that we get from Papias who got it from others who got it from John who got it from Jesus. At least that's what he claims. As a result, we're getting it fourth-hand. But still, that's pretty good: probably for most sayings of Jesus we are at a further remove than that.

Even so, there seems to be no one today (at least no one I have ever heard of) who thinks that Jesus actually said this. Certainly most of the church fathers, such as Eusebius, did not believe it. And the reasons are clear. It is such a fantastic (in the somewhat negative sense) saying, that, well, it's hard to believe (or at least it was for people like Eusebius) that Jesus would say any such thing. The saying is about what the future Kingdom of God would be like, when there is a "new creation" and this world of pain and misery passes away, leading to a utopian kingdom. And what will that kingdom be like? This is what Papias claims Jesus said about that:

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