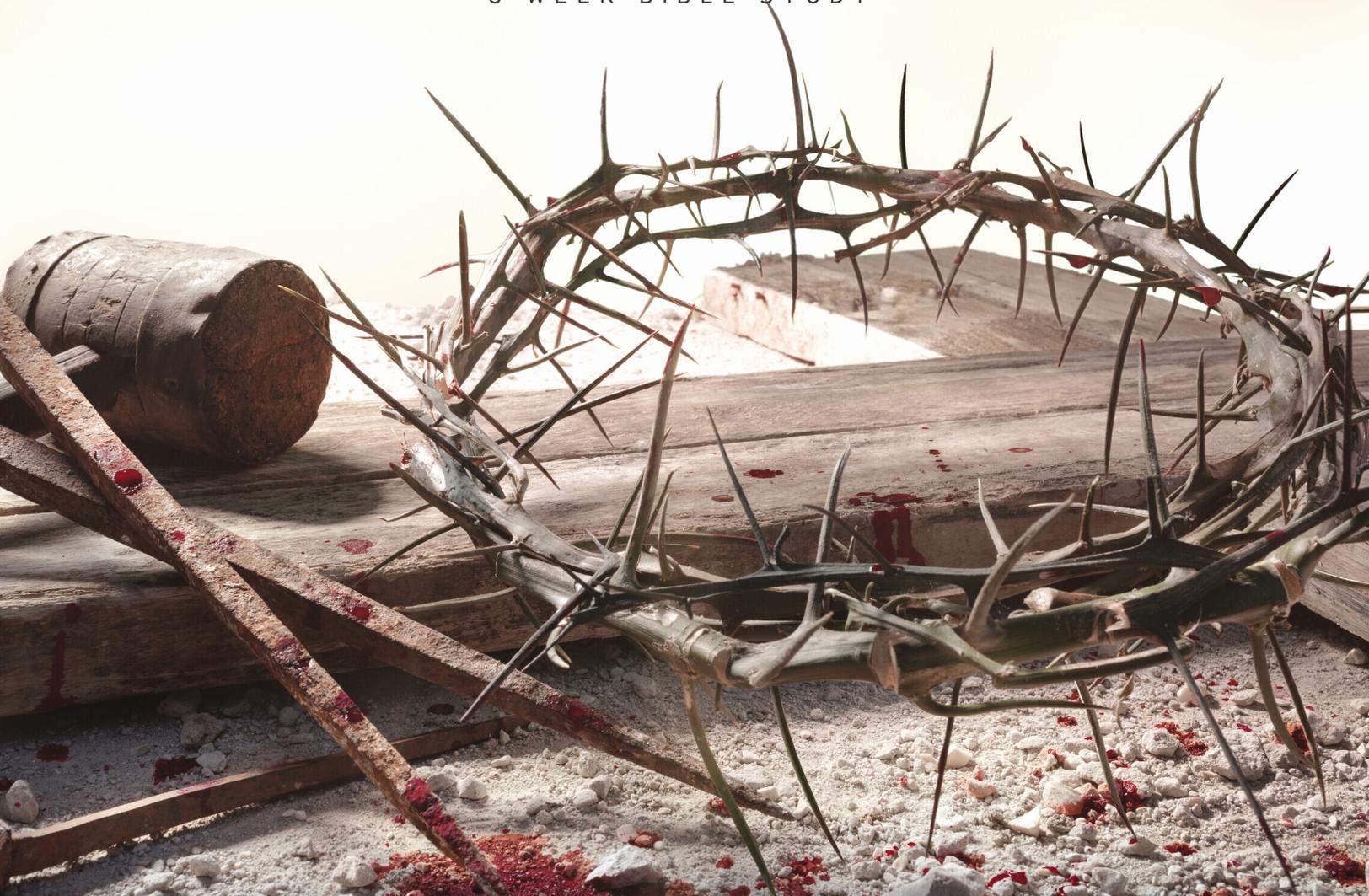


COLLEGE GOLF FELLOWSHIP

Who Do You Say That I Am?

8 WEEK BIBLE STUDY



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Who Do You Say That I Am?

8-Week Bible Study: Leader Guide

INTRODUCTION

What is the most important question anyone could ever ask? Is there a God? Who made the world? Why do I exist? What happens after I die? These are certainly some of life's big questions, and all of them are very important. But there is one question that is even more important than these. It is a question that Jesus asked His disciples while He was with them (Matt. 16:15). And it's a question that when rightly answered, unlocks the answer to just about every other big question in life. You see, the man Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Northern part of Israel in the first century AD, and the Bible that is written about Him, claims to have the answers to these big questions and many more like them. This Jesus, whoever He was, (and you must ultimately decide), and those who wrote about Him, make some extraordinary claims concerning His identity and purpose.

CONSIDER SOME OF THE CLAIMS THAT JESUS MAKES OF HIMSELF:

Jesus claims to be the Eternal God.

John 8:58— Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

“I AM” was the name God used to reveal Himself when He appeared to Moses in the Old Testament. This became the Israel's special covenant name for God. As a result, when Jesus makes the statement above, He is clearly claiming to be the eternal God.

Jesus claims He is the only way to a relationship with God the Father.

John 14:6— Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Jesus claims that He is the way to only way escape God’s judgment.

John 3:36—Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Jesus claims that faith in Him is the only way to salvation and eternal life.

John 3:14-17— And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Jesus claims that the satisfaction and fulfillment we crave is ultimately found in Him.

John 6:35— Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

John 10:7a,10b— So Jesus said again to them... “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

These claims and many others like them came off of the lips of Jesus and continue to come out of the pages of Scripture. These claims are so weighty and controversial that they cannot be ignored. But it is not only Scripture that should cause us to ask the question: Who is this Jesus? History demands that we consider Him as well.

One anonymous poem clearly articulates the significance of this unique man:

*He was born in an obscure village,
The child of a peasant woman.
He grew up in still another village,
Where he worked in a carpenter shop
Until he was thirty.*

*Then for three years
He was an itinerant preacher.
He never wrote a book.
He never held an office.
He never had a family or owned a house.
He didn’t go to college.*

*He never visited a big city.
He never traveled two hundred miles
From the place where he was born.
He did none of the things
One usually associates with greatness.
He had no credentials but himself.*

*He was only thirty-three
When the tide of public opinion turned against him.
His friends ran away.
He was turned over to his enemies.
And went through the mockery of a trial.
He was nailed to a cross
Between two thieves.
While he was dying,
His executioners gambled for his clothing,
The only property he had on Earth.
When he was dead,
He was laid in a borrowed grave
Through the pity of a friend.*

*Twenty centuries have come and gone,
And today he is the central figure
Of the human race,
And the leader of mankind's progress.
All the armies that ever marched,
All the navies that ever sailed,
All the parliament that ever sat,
All the kings that ever reigned,
Put together have not affected
The life of man on Earth
As much as that
One Solitary Life.*

It's certainly true. No one has impacted life on earth more than this one man, Jesus Christ. The human calendar is crafted around His life. And even today, roughly 2 billion people from nearly every nation around the globe claim allegiance to Him and worship Him on a weekly a basis.

So who is this Jesus? It's a question He asked His first disciples— **“Who do you say that I am?”** And it's a question that we all must ask and ultimately answer. Who do you say that He is? There is no more important question than this. The Bible says your eternity depends on it.

In order to answer that one question, over the next eight weeks we will ask eight smaller questions about Jesus that together will help us to answer to this one big question. The studies in the weeks to come are as follows:

- WHERE WAS JESUS BEFORE HE CAME?
- HOW DID JESUS COME INTO THE WORLD?
- WHAT WAS JESUS LIKE?
- WHAT DID JESUS DO?
- WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?
- WHY DID JESUS DIE?
- DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?
- WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH JESUS?

So who is Jesus Christ? It's time to find out!

**This material has been largely influenced by the book, "Who is This Jesus," by Michael Green, Thomas Nelson Publishers 1992.*

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 1: Where Was Jesus Before He Came?

INTRODUCTION

For many people, when they first consider Jesus, their thoughts of Him begin in a manger in Bethlehem. Or perhaps, their thoughts may go back just a little bit further to His miraculous conception when the angel Gabriel appeared to His virgin mother Mary. But the Bible takes us back much further than this. When it comes to Jesus, the Bible takes us back to the very beginning. It tells us that Jesus has always been there; that He always was.

Today, by looking at four separate passages, we will consider where Jesus was and what He was doing long before He ever came into the world.

BEFORE HE EVER CAME

1. Present in the Beginning

Genesis 1:1—In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:26a—Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

According to Genesis 1, who did the creating in the beginning?

God.

What do you notice about the pronouns in Genesis 1:26?

The pronouns are plural.

What does this imply?

This implies that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were together at the creation of the world.

What was implicit in the Old Testament becomes explicit in the New Testament.

2. The Word: With God, Was God, Creator of All, Giver of Life

John 1:1-4— In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 1:14— And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

What is the first phrase of this passage and what does it draw our attention to?

“In the beginning...” This also is the first phrase of the entire Bible (see Genesis 1:1), and it draws our attention to the creation of the world.

According to John 1:1, who was at the beginning?

The Word.

What does John say about “the Word”?

He was with God, and He was God. Further, it says that all things were made through Him, and without Him, nothing was made. Life itself was in Him.

Who is this Word?

Jesus! (See also John 1:14, Revelation 19:13.)

Why would John call Jesus the Word?

Words send a message. They communicate. Jesus, the Word, is God’s primary communication to humanity. He reveals what God is like. (See also John 1:18.)

After reading just five short verses, John 1:1-4 and 14, summarize what John has written about where Jesus was and what He was doing before He came.

- He has always existed.
- He was with God, but different than God the Father.
- He was God.
- He is Himself divine.
- He made everything.
- He is the source of all life.
- He came to communicate the glory of God to us; to show us what God is really like.

3. Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, Heir of All Things

Hebrews 1:1-3a— Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Similar to John 1, this passage communicates that through Jesus, God spoke to the world. This passage though, does not call Jesus “the Word” but instead, the “Son”. If Jesus always existed with God, indeed, if He was God, as John 1:1 states, why would Jesus be called the Son of God?

In the same way that a human son has a unique and special relationship with his father, and in the same way he knows his father’s heart and desires, and in the same way that he is very much like his father, and will one day inherit all that belongs to his father, so Jesus, the Son of God shares a unique relationship with God the Father, knowing His heart, and communicating to the world what He is like.

As a son reminds us of a father, so Jesus is the “radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” To put it in slang, He was the spitting image of His Father. Further, He is appointed “the heir of all things.” According to Hebrews 1, everything ultimately belongs to Jesus. (See also Colossians 1:16.)

What does this passage say about what Jesus did before He came?

He is the One “through whom also (God) created the world.” (See also Colossians 1:16.)

According to this passage, what has Jesus been doing since the creation of the world?

“... uphold(ing) the universe by the word of His power.” (See also Colossians 1:17.)

4. The Praise of Heaven

John 12:37-41—Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their

eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Explanation: Verses 38 and 40 are quotes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 53 and chapter 6 respectively. Isaiah was written roughly 700 years before Jesus came. John, however, says in verse 41 that “Isaiah said these things because he saw (Jesus’) glory and spoke of Him.” This has enormous implications, especially when we look at what occurred in Isaiah 6, which is what John was referring to.

Isaiah 6:1-5—In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

How would you describe the events of Isaiah 6?

Isaiah had a vision of the throne room of God where the greatest of angels worshiped and honored the Lord, crying day and night, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Yet they were unable to look at the Lord because of His remarkable holiness. Isaiah himself, the great prophet, was shockingly aware of his weakness and sinfulness in the presence of the Lord.

According to the Gospel of John quoted above, who was it that Isaiah was seeing?

Jesus.

What does this imply about where Jesus was and what He was doing before He came?

This implies that Jesus had always been the object of heaven’s praise, even before He ever came to Bethlehem (Isaiah 6:1-6, John 12:40-41, John 17:5.)

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Where was Jesus and what was He doing before He ever came?

- He was with God (Genesis 1:26, John 1:1)

- He was God (Genesis 1:26, John 1:1)
- He made everything (Genesis 1:26, John 1:3, Hebrews 1:2)
- He was upholding the universe (Hebrews 1:3)
- He was the Object of heaven's praise (Isaiah 6:1-6, John 12:40-41, John 17:5)

All this, the Bible claims, before He ever came to Bethlehem.

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about Jesus before He came?

Would it make sense, based on what that Bible says about who Jesus is and where He was before He came, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Colossians 1:15-19

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 2: How Did Jesus Come Into the World?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?" we began last week by asking the question "Where was Jesus before He came?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, before Jesus ever came:

- He was with God (Genesis 1:26, John 1:1)
- He was God (Genesis 1:26, John 1:1)
- He made everything (Genesis 1:26, John 1:3, Hebrews 1:2)
- He was upholding the universe (Hebrews 1:3)
- He was the Object of heaven's praise (Isaiah 6:1-6, John 12:40-41, John 17:5)

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "How did He come into the world?"

THE PROMISES WITH THEIR FULFILLMENT

1. The Offspring of Abraham and David

Genesis 17:3-7— Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you." (Abraham lived almost 2000 years before Jesus came.)

Samuel 7:5a,12-13-14a— "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord:...When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his

kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.’” (David lived about 1000 years before Jesus came.)

What can we conclude about the coming Messiah through these passages?

He would come from the line of Abraham and David.

Matthew 1:1—“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

2. The Virgin Birth

Isaiah 7:14—Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (The Book of Isaiah was written over 700 years before Jesus came.)

What can we conclude about the Messiah’s birth and identity from this passage?

He would be born of a virgin and called Immanuel.

Matthew 1:18, 22-23—Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit... All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).”

3. A Son Who Would Reign

Isaiah 9:6-7— For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

What can we conclude about the Messiah from this passage?

He would come as a Son, a child, who would reign on the throne of His father David forever.

Luke 1:30-33—And the angel said to (Mary), “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

4. Born in Bethlehem

Micah 5:2 —But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

What can we conclude about the Messiah from this passage?

He will be born in Bethlehem.

Luke 2:4-7— And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

5. The Conception with Its Implications

Luke 1:26-35—In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”

According to this passage how would the conception of Jesus happen?

The Holy Spirit would come upon Mary and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, and she would become pregnant.

What would be the identity of the One who Mary would give birth to?

He would be named Jesus. He would be great, and called Son of the Most High. He would have the throne of His father David and would reign over Israel forever, with an everlasting kingdom. He would be holy, the Son of God!

What are the implications of Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin?

He would be fully God and fully man.

Why is this important?

As God, He is both eternal and perfect, without any sin.

As man, He could fully identify with us and take the penalty that we deserve for our sins.

As a result, when Jesus died for us, His sacrifice would be sufficient for all who would believe in Him. Remember, this is why He came (Matthew 1:21).

6. The Understated Birth

Luke 2:1-7— In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

What can we learn about the birth of Jesus from these verses?

First, the birth of Jesus happened at a specific time in history, most likely 7 BC. Second, He was born outside, likely in a barn or cave, and placed into a feeding trough. This is how Jesus came into the world.

How would you have expected Him to come?

7. The Worshipping Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12— Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ...After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

What did the wise men do in the presence of Jesus, only a baby at this time?

They fell down and worshiped Him and offered to Him their most valuable gifts.

Why do you think the wise men would honor a baby in this way?

It appears that they were convinced that He was, at the very least, the rightful and promised King of the Jewish people (see verse 2). But more likely, they thought much more of Him than this, since they were willing to worship Him (see verses 2,11).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

How did Jesus come into the world?

- His birth was the fulfillment of multiple prophecies, hundreds and even thousands of years before He came (Genesis 17:3-7, 2 Samuel 7:12-14a, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2, etc)
- He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a Virgin (Luke 1:30-33)
- He was born in time and space in history— 7 BC in the city of Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7)
- He was born outside and placed into a manger (Luke 2:6-7)
- Not long after His birth, wise men came to worship Him and lavish Him with extravagant gifts, convinced of His unique identity. (Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about how Jesus came into the world?

Would it make sense, based on how Jesus came into the world, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Matthew 1:1-2:12

Luke 1:1-2:38

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 3: What Was Jesus Like?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", last week we asked "How did Jesus come into the world?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, when Jesus came into the world:

- His birth was the fulfillment of multiple prophecies, hundreds and even thousands of years before He came (Genesis 17:3-7, 2 Samuel 7:12-14a, Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2, etc)
- He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a Virgin (Luke 1:30-33)
- He was born in time and space in history— 7 BC in the city of Bethlehem (Luke 2:1-7)
- He was born outside and placed into a manger (Luke 2:6-7)
- Not long after His birth, wise men came to worship Him and lavish Him with extravagant gifts, convinced of His unique identity (Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12)

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "What was Jesus like?"

WHAT WAS HE LIKE?

1. He Was Utterly Unique—Jesus is more unique, more set apart, than anyone who has ever lived.

Mark 1:9-11— In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

What happened at the baptism of Jesus?

The heavens were torn open and the Spirit of God descended on Jesus like a dove.

According to Mark, what did God say to Jesus at His baptism?

He said that Jesus is His beloved Son, and that He is well pleased with Him.

What are the implications of this?

According to Mark, Jesus is utterly unique among humanity. He is God’s own beloved Son, His representative to the world.

2. He Was Intrinsically Authoritative— Jesus is more authoritative than anyone who has ever lived.

Mark 1:21-22, 27— And they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes... And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority!”

What does this passage say about Jesus’ teaching?

“He taught them as One who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

How did people react to His teaching?

“They were astonished...” “They were amazed...”

There are two kinds of authority, delegated authority, and intrinsic authority. Delegated authority is authority that is given to someone based on their position. When authority is delegated to someone, they have authority in their position, but not in themselves. Intrinsic authority, on the other hand, is authority that comes from someone’s nature, from who they are. This is how it was with Jesus. When He spoke and taught, there was such a weight and authority to it, that people were amazed and astonished. He taught them with power.

3. He Was Powerful yet Compassionate— Jesus is more powerful and more compassionate than anyone who has ever lived.

Mark 1:29-34— And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.

Mark 1:40-42— And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

What did Jesus do in these verses?

In the first set of verses, when Jesus heard about the sickness of Simon's mother-in-law, He immediately went and healed her. That evening, He healed many more who were sick with various diseases, and He cast out many demons. In the second set of verses, Jesus had great pity on a man with leprosy. A leper, under Jewish law, was ceremonially unclean. This meant that he would have been an utter outcast to society, financially and socially isolated, and completely dependent on charity for his survival. Further, no one could come into contact with them without becoming unclean themselves. Yet Jesus felt compassion toward Him and healed Him.

How did Jesus heal Simon's mother in law and the leper?

With a word and touch.

How would you describe Jesus' disposition towards these who were in need?

He was deeply compassionate toward them. And His compassion moved Him to exercise His power for their good.

4. He Was Genuinely Welcoming—Jesus is the most welcoming person who has ever lived.

Mark 2:13-15— (Jesus) went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

Who did Jesus call to follow Him?

Levi, the tax collector.

What was the deal with tax collectors in first century Judea?

A tax collector in 1st century Judea was viewed as a slimy traitor. He was viewed as slimy because he would charge more than was required and pocket the difference in order to make a buck. He was viewed as a traitor because, often times, he was a Jew who was working for the Romans. Faithful Jews at this time hated being under Roman rule; they wanted to govern themselves. Tax collectors, then, not only charged more than the required amount, but they did it on behalf of the oppressors of their own Jewish people. As a result, they were viewed as slimy traitors, some of the most looked down upon people in society.

What ensues after Jesus called Levi?

There was a party at Levi's house.

Who was there?

Tax collectors and sinners. All throughout the Gospels, these were the kinds of people that Jesus attracted and welcomed. It was not generally the religious who were drawn to Him. It was far more often the questionable characters. They saw in Him something different, something real, something they wanted. And when they came to Him, He welcomed them.

5. He Was Intellectually Brilliant— Jesus is the most brilliant man who has ever lived.

Mark 6:1-3—He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?”

What is the reaction of the people to Jesus' teaching?

Astonishment.

What was it that astonished them?

His wisdom and works. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is unrivaled in wisdom. Time after time, He leaves the smartest men in Israel baffled and silenced by His brilliance (see for example Mark 2:23-28, 11:27-33, 12:13-27).

6. He Was Deeply Humble— Jesus is the most humble man has ever lived.

Mark 10:35-37, 42-45— And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory”... And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

What did James and John want?

They wanted positions of power and fame.

What does Jesus say about true greatness?

It is found not in positions of authority but in service.

Why did Jesus say He came?

Not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

What does this mean?

Jesus, who we learned in Week One is the Maker and Sustainer of all things and the praise of heaven, came to earth to serve. He not only served people in His life, but He served them in His death, in order to set us free from our sin.

7. He Was Morally Perfect— Jesus is the only perfect man who has ever lived.

Matthew 5:17— “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Hebrews 4:15— For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

What do these verses say about Jesus with regard to sin?

Jesus was tempted, but He never sinned.

What do these verses say about Jesus with regard to righteousness?

Jesus fulfilled God's law, obeying it perfectly.

What conclusions can be made when these two things are put together?

Jesus lived a life of sinless obedience. He was morally perfect.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What was Jesus like?

- He was utterly unique (Mark 1:9-11)
- He was intrinsically authoritative (Mark 1:21-22, 27)
- He was powerful yet compassionate (Mark 1:29-34, 40-42)
- He was genuinely welcoming (Mark 2:13-15)
- He was intellectually brilliant (Mark 6:1-3, see also Mark 2:23-28, 11:27-33, 12:13-27)
- He was deeply humble (Mark 10:35-37, 42-45)
- He was morally perfect (Matthew 5:17, Hebrews 4:15, see also 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about what Jesus like?

Would it make sense, based on what the Bible says Jesus was like, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 4: What Did Jesus Do?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", last week we asked "What was Jesus like?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, Jesus was:

- Utterly unique (Mark 1:9-11)
- Intrinsically authoritative (Mark 1:21-22, 27)
- Powerful yet compassionate (Mark 1:29-34, 40-42)
- Genuinely welcoming (Mark 2:13-15)
- Intellectually brilliant (Mark 6:1-3, see also Mark 2:23-28, 11:27-33, 12:13-27)
- Deeply humble (Mark 10:35-37, 42-45)
- Morally perfect (Matthew 5:17, Hebrews 4:15, see also 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5)

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "What did Jesus Do?"

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

It is impossible to summarize what Jesus did in just a few paragraphs. The gospel of John says it best— "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). The categories below are an effort to summarize some of the most important things that Jesus did, especially as it relates to who He is.

1. Jesus Exercised Power Over Nature

Mark 4:35-41— On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

How would you describe what Jesus did in this account?

Jesus calmed an overpowering thunderstorm with His Word.

According to the Old Testament, who has power over nature, especially storms?

Psalm 89:8-9— O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as You are, O LORD, with Your faithfulness around You? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them.

Psalm 107:28-29— Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so-subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

2. Jesus Exercised Power Over Satan

Mark 5:1-20— They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him. And crying out with a loud voice, he said, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.” For he

was saying to him, “Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!” And Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” He replied, “My name is Legion, for we are many.” And he begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him, saying, “Send us to the pigs; let us enter them.” So he gave them permission. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the pigs; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea.

The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it described to them what had happened to the demon-possessed man and to the pigs. And they began to beg Jesus[d] to depart from their region. As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

How would you describe what Jesus did in this account?

Jesus delivered a crazed, demon possessed man, restoring him to his right mind.

How did the demon-possessed man refer to Jesus?

“Jesus, the Son of the Most High God”.

Why would the enemies of Jesus refer to Him this way if this was not who He is?

Enemies desire to make their opponents out as less than they are, but never as more than they are.

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so-subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

3. Jesus Exercised Power Over Sickness

Mark 5:21-34— And when Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered about him, and he was beside the sea. Then came one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name, and seeing him, he fell at his feet and implored him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come

and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well and live.” And he went with him.

And a great crowd followed him and thronged about him. And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and who had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, “If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.” And immediately the flow of blood dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone out from him, immediately turned about in the crowd and said, “Who touched my garments?” And his disciples said to him, “You see the crowd pressing around you, and yet you say, ‘Who touched me?’” And he looked around to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling and fell down before him and told him the whole truth. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.”

How would you describe what happened in this account?

By simply touching the hem of Jesus’ clothes, a desperately sick woman was healed.

According to the Old Testament, who has power over sickness?

Exodus 15:27— ...For I am the Lord, your healer.

Exodus 23:25— You shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will take sickness away from among you.

Psalms 103:2-3— Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases...

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so-subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

4. Jesus Exercised Power Over Death

Mark 5:36-43— While he was still speaking, there came from the ruler's house some who said, “Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?” But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, “Do not fear, only believe.” And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had

entered, he said to them, “Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, “Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.” And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

How would you describe what Jesus did in this account?

Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from death, restoring her to life.

According to the Old Testament, who has power over death?

Deuteronomy 32:39—“See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal, and there is none that can deliver out of My hand.”

1 Samuel 2:6— *The Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so-subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

5. Jesus Forgave Sins

Mark 2:1-12— *And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, “Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.” And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”*

How would you describe what Jesus did in this account?

Not only did Jesus heal this man, but more importantly, He forgave his sins. According to Jesus, to forgive sins is more difficult than physical healing because it solves a much bigger problem.

According to the Old Testament, who alone can forgive sins?

Psalm 103:2-3— Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases...

Psalm 130:3-4— If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

Why is this the case?

God alone can forgive sins because sins are primarily committed against God not man.

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

6. Jesus Accepted Worship

Matthew 2:10-11— When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Matthew 14:33— And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Matthew 28:18— Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

How would you describe what Jesus did in these accounts?

Jesus accepted and received worship.

According to the Old Testament, who alone can receive worship?

Matthew 4:8-10— Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Be

gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.”

In verse 10, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:13, saying that God alone should be worshiped. Yet, on multiple occasions, Jesus received worship.

What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

This is a not-so-subtle claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What did Jesus do?

- He exercised power over nature (Mark 4:35-41)
- He exercised power over Satan (Mark 5:1-20)
- He exercised power over sickness (Mark 5:21-34)
- He exercised power over death (Mark 5:36-43)
- He forgave sins (Mark 2:1-12)
- He accepted worship (Matthew 2:10-11, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:18)

According to the Old Testament, these actions were reserved for God alone.

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about what Jesus did?

Would it make sense, based on what Jesus did, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

The Gospel of John (See especially John 20:30-31)

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 5: What Did Jesus Teach?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", last week we asked "What did Jesus Do?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, Jesus:

- He exercised power over nature (Mark 4:35-41)
- He exercised power over Satan (Mark 5:1-20)
- He exercised power over sickness (Mark 5:21-34)
- He exercised power over death (Mark 5:36-43)
- He forgave sins (Mark 2:1-12)
- He accepted worship (Matthew 2:10-11, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 28:18)

According to the Old Testament, these actions were reserved for God alone.

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "What did Jesus Teach?"

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

In the same way that it is impossible to include all that Jesus did in a few paragraphs, so it is equally impossible to summarize all that Jesus taught in a few paragraphs. The categories below are by no means exhaustive, but they are an effort to summarize many of the main points of His teaching, especially as it relates to who He is.

1. That the Kingdom of God Has Arrived with Him

Mark 1:14-15— Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at

hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Luke 4:16-21— And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

What does Jesus communicate in these passages?

In the first passage, Jesus communicates that the kingdom of God, that is God’s direct rule and reign over His people, has arrived, and that people should repent and believe this good news.

In the second passage, which happened at the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, He stood up at a synagogue and quoted a passage from the book of Isaiah. The passage that He quoted was a prophecy about the coming Kingdom of God. That passage describes what happens in God’s kingdom: good news is proclaimed to the poor, captives are liberated, the blind receive sight, and the oppressed are set free. Jesus then said that He was the One who fulfills this passage.

Together, these passages show that not only has the Kingdom of God arrived, but that it arrived with Jesus Himself. He is the One who ushers in God’s Kingdom.

2. That Love for God and Others Is of First Importance

Matthew 22:34-40—But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

According to Jesus, what are God’s most important commandments?

To love God with all that is in you and to love others in the same way you love yourself.

Why is this significant?

At this time in history, Judaism was characterized by three things: obedience to the commands of the law, temple worship, and keeping the Sabbath. Jesus, without dismissing these, transferred the focus from outward obedience to the heart— love for God and neighbor. This, He taught, is what God desires.

3. That God Is His Very Own Father and That God Worked Directly Through Him

John 5:19-21, 23b—So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

John 14:11—Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Why is it significant that Jesus called God His own Father?

At this point in history, it was not only rare, but in the minds of the Jewish people, it was blasphemous to call God “Father”. But by teaching that God was His own Father, Jesus was putting Himself on the same playing field as God. He was teaching that He came directly from God and was God’s own representative. He even taught that God was working directly through Him. In the view of His opponents, He was making Himself equal with God (see John 5:18).

4. That the Scriptures Are Ultimately About Him

John 5:39-40—You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Luke 24:44— Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

What does Jesus teach in these verses?

In John 5:39-40, Jesus teaches that the Scriptures ultimately bore witness about Him. (Keep in mind that when He said “the Scriptures”, He would have meant the Old Testament, since the New Testament had not yet been written.)

In Luke 24:44, Jesus taught that His life, ministry, death, and resurrection was a fulfillment of everything that was written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, which made up the entirety of Old Testament teaching.

In these verses then, Jesus was teaching that the Old Testament bore witness to Him and was ultimately about Him.

5. That God Requires Moral Perfection

Matthew 5:20—For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:48— You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

What does Jesus teach in these verses?

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus says that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, one’s righteousness must exceed to the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were viewed as the most righteous people in society.

In Matthew 5:48, Jesus goes a step further, saying that perfection is the standard. Further, the verses in between Matthew 5:20 and Matthew 5:48 hammer this home, saying that to be angry with someone is the same as murder, or to lust after someone is the same as adultery. Jesus taught that God’s standard is perfection.

6. That Heaven and Hell Are Real and that Eternal Life Depends on Our Response to Him

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46—When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be

gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’...And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

John 3:16—For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:36—Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 6:40—For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

According to what Jesus taught the first passage above, what are the two eternal destinies await each person?

Either eternal life in the kingdom of God prepared from the foundation of the world or eternal punishment in the fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

According to what Jesus taught in John 3:16, 3:36, and 6:40, what is the only way for someone attain eternal life?

Believing in Jesus, the Son of God.

7. That He Must Die for Sins and Rise Again

Mark 8:31—And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:30-32—They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Mark 10:32b-34—And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to

death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.

What did Jesus teach on these three different occasions?

That He must be delivered into the hands of the Jewish leaders, condemned to death, mocked, beaten, and then killed. Then, on the third day after His death, He would rise again from the dead.

Next week, we will see that His death took place just as He had taught.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

What did Jesus teach?

- That the Kingdom of God arrived with Him (Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:16-21)
- That love for God and others is of first importance (Matthew 22:34-40)
- That God is His very own Father and that God worked directly through Him (John 5:19-21, 23b, John 14:11)
- That the Scriptures are ultimately about Him (John 5:39-40, Luke 24:44)
- That God requires moral perfection (Matthew 5:20, Matthew 5:48)
- That Heaven and Hell are real and that eternal life depends on our response to Him (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46, John 3:16, John 3:36, John 6:40)
- That He must die for sins and rise again (Mark 8:31, Mark 9:30-32, Mark 10:32b-34)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about what Jesus taught?

Would it make sense, based on what Jesus taught, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FURTHER READING

Matthew 5-7

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 6: Why Did Jesus Die?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?", last week we asked "What Did Jesus Teach?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, Jesus taught:

- That the Kingdom of God arrived with Him (Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:16-21)
- That love for God and others is of first importance (Matthew 22:34-40)
- That God is His very own Father and that God worked directly through Him (John 5:19-21, 23b, John 14:11)
- That the Scriptures are ultimately about Him (John 5:39-40, Luke 24:44)
- That God requires moral perfection (Matthew 5:20, Matthew 5:48)
- That Heaven and Hell are real and that eternal life depends on our response to Him (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46, John 3:16, John 3:36, John 6:40)
- That He must die for sins and rise again (Mark 8:31, Mark 9:30-32, Mark 10:32b-34)

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "Why Did Jesus Die?"

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

In the same way it is impossible to put into one lesson all that Jesus did and taught, so it is impossible to put into one lesson the many reasons why Jesus died (for a more extensive look into this check out *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* by John Piper). But it is certainly possible to articulate the primary reasons why He died. In this lesson, we will look at five reasons why Jesus died, moving from the most human of those reasons to the most divine.

1. He Was Unjustly Accused, Tried, and then Killed by His Opponents

John 11:45-53— Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him, but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.” He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

According to these verses, what happened to Jesus?

Humanly speaking, the religious leaders who held the power in first century Judea became jealous of and threatened by Jesus and His influence among the people, so they decided to kill Him.

You can read about His false trial and subsequent crucifixion in the final pages of each of the four gospels. But what is clear in each account is that His opponents, the Jewish leaders in conjunction with the Roman officials, unfairly put Jesus to death, even though Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, pronounced the innocence of Jesus multiple times (see Luke 23:14,22).

Acts 2:22-23— “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”

In the first Christian sermon ever preached, who did Peter charge with the death of Christ, humanly speaking?

The Jewish people in Jerusalem that Peter was preaching to. “You crucified and killed (Him),” Peter said. So yes, Jesus was unjustly accused, tried, and then killed by His opponents.

But there was more going on than that. Acts 2:23 tells us that this was “the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” This leads us to our next reason why Jesus died.

2. He Was Fulfilling Scripture

All throughout the Old Testament, there were indicators that a death was necessary in order to atone for sins. Nowhere is the death of Jesus more clearly predicted than in the Old Testament passages Psalm 22, which was written about 1000 years before Jesus, and Isaiah 53, written about 700 years before Jesus.

Psalm 22:1a, 6-8, 14-18—My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

How does Psalm 22 begin and why does it ring a bell?

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus quoted this exact verse from the cross (Matthew 27:46). By saying this, not only was He making it plain that He was receiving God’s judgment, He was drawing the attention of the onlookers to the contents of this psalm. It was as if He was saying, “Psalm 22 is what is happening right before your eyes.”

What stands out from Psalm 22 that points us to the crucifixion of Christ?

“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me...” Compare this to Matthew 27:27-31.

“For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet...” Compare this to Luke 23:20-21. Keep in mind that crucifixion had not even been invented when David penned this Psalm.

“...they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Compare this to John 19:23-24.

Isaiah 53:4-6— Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have

gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

According to these verses in Isaiah 53, what would be happening when Jesus died?

On the human side, He would be esteemed as a failure or reject. But in reality, He would be in the place of sinners, dying for our sins, being chastised and punished so that we might be healed.

We could have easily read all twelve verses of Isaiah 53, and they would just as compellingly point toward the death of Christ as verses 4-6. But here is the point, Jesus wasn't simply unjustly accused and tried and then killed by His opponents. This was the plan of God. It always had been. His death was a fulfillment of Scripture.

3. He Was Voluntarily Laying Down His Life

Even though Jesus was unjustly accused, and even though this was the eternal plan of God as expressed in the Bible, Jesus willingly chose to lay down His life.

John 10:14-15, 18— I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep... No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.

Matthew 26:53-54— Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?

John 15:13—Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down His life for His friends.

What is clearly communicated in the verses above?

Jesus chose to lay down His life. In the end, Jesus wasn't simply being killed, He was laying down His life. This becomes even more clear during the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. As the mobs surrounded Him, Peter began to defend Jesus with the sword. But in that moment, instead of thanking Peter, Jesus rebuked Him.

These passages make it clear that Jesus didn't simply die at the hands of an angry mob or even solely at the hands the Sovereign God, He willingly laid down His life.

4. He Was Meeting the Requirements of God's Justice and Putting God's Righteousness on Display

So humanly speaking, Jesus was killed by His enemies. Divinely speaking, it was God's plan. From Jesus' standpoint, He was laying down His life. But why? Well, one reason was to put God's righteousness on display and to meet the requirements of His justice.

Romans 6:23a— The wages of sin is death...

According to this verse, what is the fair penalty for our sins?

Death.

Romans 3:22b–26— For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

What is a propitiation?

A propitiation is the satisfaction of God's wrath or judgment through the means of a sacrifice. To say that God put forward Jesus as a propitiation means that Jesus fully took on Himself the penalty for our sins, satisfying God's anger toward our sins and meeting the demands of His justice.

Verse 25 says that the putting forward of Jesus as a propitiation shows God's righteousness or justice. How so?

The sacrifice of Jesus for sin shows that God is just or righteous in that He will not tolerate sin. God takes sin extremely seriously. He must punish it. In this way, the death of Jesus is God's public declaration of how serious sin is and how righteous He is. He cannot and will not tolerate it.

“Before we can see the cross as something done for us, we must see it as something done by us.” – John Stott

5. He Was Securing Our Acceptance with God

So humanly speaking, Jesus was killed by His enemies. Divinely speaking, it was God's plan. From Jesus' standpoint, He laid down His life. He did this to meet the requirements of God's justice and to put God's righteousness on display. But perhaps most importantly for us, He did this to secure our acceptance with God for eternity.

Romans 3:22b–26— For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

What does it mean to be justified?

To be justified is a legal term that means to be forgiven of all sins and declared righteous in God's sight.

How do these verses say that someone is justified?

By faith in Jesus as our propitiation. This means that we believe that what Jesus did, He did for us. When someone believes this, immediately in God's sight that person is completely forgiven of all sin— past, present, and future— and declared righteous before God for eternity.

Because Jesus died as our propitiation, as our atoning sacrifice, God is both just and justifier. God is just— He punishes sin in Christ. And He is the justifier— He forgives sinners who put their faith in Christ.

Romans 6:23— The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why would God do this?

Romans 5:8— ...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

John 3:16—For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 John 4:10— In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

According to these verses, what is God's motive for sending His Son to save us?

Because He is loving and He has set that love on us.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Why did Jesus die?

- He was unjustly accused, tried, and then killed by His opponents (John 11:45-53, Acts 2:22-23)
- He was fulfilling Scripture (Psalm 22:1a, 6-8, 14-18, Isaiah 53:4-6)
- He was voluntarily laying down His life (John 10:14-15, 18, Matthew 26:53-54, John 15:13)
- He was meeting the requirements of God's justice and putting God's righteousness on display (Romans 6:23a, 3:22b-26)
- He was securing our acceptance with God (Romans 3:22b-26, 6:23)
- Why did He do it?
- Because God loves us (Romans 5:8, John 3:16, 1 John 4:10)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about why Jesus died?

Would it make sense, based on what the Bible teaches about the death of Jesus, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FURTHER READING

Isaiah 53

Romans 5:1-11

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Colossians 1:15-23

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 7: Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", last week we asked "Why Did Jesus Die?"

Here's what we found. According to the Bible, Jesus died because:

- He was unjustly accused, tried, and then killed by His opponents (John 11:45-53, Acts 2:22-23)
- He was fulfilling Scripture (Psalm 22:1a, 6-8, 14-18, Isaiah 53:4-6)
- He was voluntarily laying down His life (John 10:14-15, 18, Matthew 26:53-54, John 15:13)
- He was meeting the requirements of God's justice and putting God's righteousness on display (Romans 6:23a, 3:22b-26)
- He was securing our acceptance with God (Romans 3:22b-26, 6:23)
- Why did He do it?
- Because God loves us (Romans 5:8, John 3:16, 1 John 4:10)

Today, we want to learn more about Jesus by asking "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?"

DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?

To put it bluntly, if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, Christianity is worthless. This was the apostle Paul's reasoning in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19: "... And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." His logic was simple. If Christ didn't rise from the dead, our greatest enemies— sin and death— have not really been dealt with at the cross. If Jesus

is still in the grave, what proof is there that our sins have been paid for? Without the resurrection, of all people, we Christians would be the most pitiful of all. Unless of course Jesus really did rise from the dead.

But did He? What does the evidence say? Today we will look at seven commonly known facts surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus as well as the most common explanations of His empty tomb and missing body. Then, based on the information, you can decide which explanation makes the most sense of the evidence.

1. Jesus Died by Crucifixion

John 19:31-34— Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

According to this passage (not to mention the other Gospel passages, Matthew 27:45-50, Mark 15:33-39, Luke 23:44-49) what happened to Jesus on the cross?

He died. This is clearly accepted both inside and outside of Christianity (see Jewish historian Josephus and Roman historian Tacitus for a non-Christian perspective). The Romans were professionals when it came to capital punishment. The first Christians proclaimed this in the presence of those who killed Him within only weeks of His death (see Acts 2:22-23). Further, according to scholar Michael Green, “As it was, an eye witness, probably His friend John himself, tells us that out of the wound came blood and water. This is a totally prescientific description of what the mixture of dark blood and translucent serum would have looked like. And the separation of blood from serum is one of the strongest legal and medical proofs of death.” It is clear that Jesus died.

2. Jesus Was Buried Securely

Matthew 27:57-61— When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body

and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

According to these verses, what happened to the body of Jesus after He died?

He was buried in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and a great stone was rolled over the entrance to the tomb.

Matthew 27:62-66— The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last fraud will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

According to these verses, what happened to the tomb?

It was sealed shut and guarded by soldiers.

Putting the first two facts together, what can we say with certainty?

Jesus died and was buried. And His tomb was sealed and secured by guards.

3. On the Third Day After Jesus’ Death, His Tomb was Empty

Mark 16:1-8— When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?” And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Regardless of whether or not you accept the appearance of the angel included in these verses, what basic fact is clear from this passage (as well as by secular historians)?

The tomb was empty and the body was missing.

Matthew 28:11-15— While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

In addition to the followers of Jesus testifying to the empty tomb, according to this passage, who else affirmed that the tomb was empty and Jesus’ body was missing?

The Jewish religious leaders who were the enemies of Christianity. Whether or not Jesus rose from the dead is yet to be determined, but what is certain is that on the third day the tomb was empty and His body was missing.

Further, who were the first witness at the tomb and why is this important?

Women were first to the empty tomb. This is important, because in first century Judea women were not credible witnesses in the court of law. If this was a man-made fabrication, it would have been damning to include that detail.

4. The Eleven Disciples Were ALL Either Killed or Exiled for Their Allegiance to Jesus

The night of His betrayal, consider Jesus’ words to His disciples.

John 16:32— Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.

According to this verse, what did Jesus say would happen to His disciples?

That upon His betrayal and arrest, the disciples of Jesus would abandon Jesus in self-protection and retreat to their own homes. This is exactly what did happen later that very night.

According to Scriptural evidence (see Acts 7, 12:1-2, Revelation 1:9) and Church history, all eleven disciples were either martyred for their faith in Christ, or tortured and exiled late in their life. What do you think changed?

What is the Biblical explanation for this?

1 Corinthians 15:3-5— For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

(You can read about these appearances in Matthew 28:16-20, John 20:19-29).

5. The Conversion of Paul

Acts 8:1-3 (This passage picks up immediately after the first Christian was killed)—And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Who is Saul?

The apostle Paul (see Acts 13:13).

How would you describe Paul's relationship to Christians in these verses?

He was hostile in his opposition to Christianity.

Not long after this, and throughout the rest of the New Testament, how would you describe Paul?

He became perhaps the greatest Christian missionary ever. He wrote nearly half of the books of the New Testament. He was, humanly speaking, more responsible for the spread of Christianity in the first century than anyone else. Further, he suffered a great deal for his allegiance to Jesus, and went on to be killed for His sake. (For more on the apostle Paul, read Acts 13:1-28:31.)

What is the Biblical explanation for this?

Acts 9:1-22 records Paul's encounter with the risen Christ where Jesus not only rebuked Paul for his opposition to Christianity, but also called him to become His messenger.

6. The Leadership of James, the Brother of Jesus

John 7:2-5— Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are

doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” For not even his brothers believed in him.

When we first meet James in the Bible (the younger half-brother of Jesus), how would you describe his attitude toward his brother?

He was skeptical of Him and didn't believe in who Jesus claimed to be.

The next time we see James he is the leader of the Church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:12-21). What is the Biblical explanation for this?

1 Corinthians 15:3-4,7— For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...Then he appeared to James...

7. The Global Spread of Christianity

Acts 1:15— In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120)...

According to Acts 1:15, how many believers were there shortly after the death of Jesus?

After Jesus died, there were 120 people who followed Him and remained devoted to Him through His betrayal and death (see Acts 1:15).

One generation later, despite the absence of money, real estate, or leadership training, there were tens of thousands of believers, if not more. The number reached into the millions within a couple of more generations. In 325 AD, Christianity had become so widespread that it became the official religion of the Roman Empire, and yet it has survived long since the fall of the Roman Empire. Today, over 2 billion people all over the planet profess faith in Christ.

What is the Biblical explanation for this?

The risen Christ is at work in the world by His Spirit and through His people. Apart from His supernatural work, how can this be accounted for?

These are seven basic facts surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus. These facts (not necessarily their explanations) are widely accepted by Christians and non-Christians alike.

ALTERNATIVE VIEWS

So what are the possible explanations that have been put forward by secular opponents?

Below is a summary of the six most common explanations or theories that have been given throughout the last 2,000 years by secular opponents.

1. The Disciples Stole the Body

The earliest explanation put forward by the opponents of Christianity was that the disciples stole the body (see Matthew 28:11-15).

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, could the frightened disciples have overtaken the Roman guard and stole the body?

Second, if they had stolen the body, would they all have been willing to be tortured and killed for something they knew was a lie? People die for things that are not true, but rarely will people die for something they know for a fact is not true.

Third, could a stolen body of Jesus really account for the transformation we see in Paul and James.

Facts 4, 5, and 6 all make this explanation difficult to accept.

2. The Jews or Romans Stole the Body

The next common theory was that the Jews or Romans stole the body.

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, if the Jews or Romans had stolen the body, they would have created the exact problem they were trying to avoid (see Matthew 27:62-65).

Further, Jews and Romans both were hostile in their opposition to the spread of Christianity— the Jews for religious purposes and Romans for political ones. Once Christianity began to spread so rapidly in those early days in Jerusalem (see for example Acts 2:41, 4:4), if the Jews or Romans had stolen the body, in order to put an end to Christianity, all they would have had to do is produce the dead body of Jesus.

Last, if the body had been stolen by Jews or Romans, there would still be no way to account for the transformed lives of Paul and James.

Common sense along with facts 5 and 6 make this explanation difficult to accept.

3. The Swoon Theory

This theory puts forward the explanation that Jesus never really died, but was only badly wounded.

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, the Romans were professional executioners, and Biblical and extra-Biblical history communicates that Jesus really did die by crucifixion.

Second, could a badly wounded man have broken out of a tomb sealed shut and secured by soldiers?

Third, would a beaten and bloodied half-dead man really have convinced the disciples to stake their lives on His resurrection? How about His own skeptical brother James?

Fourth, how could Jesus have appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus in a way that would have convinced him to give his life to this?

Facts 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 make this explanation difficult to accept.

4. The Disciples Hallucinated

This theory suggests that those who “witnessed” the resurrected Jesus were actually hallucinating.

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, in order for this explanation to work, the hallucination would have had to have been very wide spread. Jesus appeared to Peter separately from the eleven. He appeared to James separately from the eleven. He appeared to Paul separately as well. Does it really make sense for all eleven disciples, plus converts like Paul and James to all have had the same hallucination and to be willing to risk their lives, to even die for it?

Further, this makes no sense of the empty tomb. Even the enemies of Jesus knew that the body was missing. A hallucination doesn't explain the basic facts of an empty tomb and a missing body.

Facts 3, 4, 5, and 6 make this explanation difficult to accept.

5. A Spiritual Resurrection

This explanation has been most commonly put forward by liberal theologians. This view suggests that Jesus never really did physically rise from the dead. Instead, His resurrection was a spiritual one, not a bodily one.

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, this explanation fails to deal with the basic facts of an empty tomb and a missing body.

Second, how does this account for the disciples going from frightened wimps on the night that Jesus was betrayed to men willing to suffer and die for Him?

Third, could a spiritual resurrection (whatever that means), really change James from a skeptic to the leader of the Church or Paul from a terrorist to a missionary-martyr?

Facts 3, 4, 5, and 6 make this explanation difficult to accept.

6. It Was a Legend

This is one of the more common views today. This theory suggests that Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, but that the legend around Jesus slowly grew over long periods of time to become what it is today.

Why is this theory problematic, considering the facts above?

First, it offers no explanation of the empty tomb or missing body. A denial is not evidence.

Secondly, the disciples preached about Christ's resurrection within weeks of the events. The message didn't develop over time. It was the primary message of the early Church since its very beginning.

Third, this explanation fails to make any sense of the disciples who went on to die for their faith in Christ or for the conversion of Paul and James. Can legend really transform men or give them courage in the face of death?

Facts 3, 4, 5, and 6 make this explanation difficult to accept.

The secular explanations of these facts fail to deal with the actual evidence.

CONCLUSION

According to the Bible, a number of very important realities hang on the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is who He has claimed to be (John 20:24-31).
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that His death in our place was both sufficient and accepted by God— His offer of forgiveness is legitimate (Romans 4:24-25).
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that life after death really is a reality (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is alive and that we can know Him (Revelation 1:18, John 17:3).

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

The facts surrounding Jesus' death are clear:

- He died by crucifixion (John 19:31-34)
- He was buried securely (Matthew 27:57-61)
- On the third day after His death, His tomb was empty (Mark 16:1-8, Matthew 28:11-15)

- The eleven disciples were ALL either killed or exiled for their allegiance to Jesus (Acts 12:1-2, Revelation 1:9, Church History)
- Paul was converted from a persecutor of the Church to its greatest missionary (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-22, 13:1-28:31)
- James went from a skeptic to the leader of the Church in Jerusalem (John 7:2-5, Acts 15:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Christianity spread globally in a very short amount of time (see the book of Acts)

If Jesus rose from the dead, we can be certain of the following:

- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is who He has claimed to be (John 20:24-31)
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that His death in our place was both sufficient and accepted by God— His offer of forgiveness is legitimate (Romans 4:24-25)
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that life after death really is a reality (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is alive and we that can know Him (Revelation 1:18, John 17:3)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about regarding the resurrection of Jesus?

Would it make sense, based on what the Bible teaches about the resurrection of Jesus, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FURTHER READING

1 Corinthians 15

Matthew 28

Mark 16

Luke 24

John 20-21

Who Do You Say That I Am?

Week 8: What Will You Do With Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to honestly consider Jesus Christ so that you can ultimately answer Jesus' question "Who do you say that I am?", over the course of the last seven weeks we have asked many smaller questions to help us arrive at His identity: "Where was Jesus before He came?" , "How did Jesus come into the world?" , "What was Jesus like?" , "What did Jesus Do?" , "What did Jesus teach?" , "Why did Jesus die?" , and then last week, "Did Jesus really rise from the dead?"

Here's what we found. The Bible clearly presents Jesus as the unique Son of God who died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins and who rose again from the dead. Further, the facts surrounding Jesus' death are clear:

- Jesus died by crucifixion (John 19:31-34)
- He was buried securely (Matthew 27:57-61)
- On the third day after His death, His tomb was empty (Mark 16:1-8, Matthew 28:11-15)
- The eleven disciples Were ALL either killed or exiled for their allegiance to Jesus (Acts 12:1-2, Revelation 1:9, Church History)
- Paul was converted from a persecutor of the Church to its greatest missionary (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-22, 13:1-28:31)
- James, the brother of Jesus, was transformed from a skeptic to the leader of the Church in Jerusalem (John 7:2-5, Acts 15:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Christianity spread globally in a very short amount of time (see the book of Acts)

All this is hard to make sense of apart from a literal, physical, resurrection. The secular explanations surrounding Christ's resurrection fail to deal with this evidence.

If indeed Jesus did rise from the dead, the following becomes certain:

- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is who He has claimed to be (John 20:24-31)
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that His death in our place was sufficient and accepted by God— His offer of forgiveness is legitimate (Romans 4:24-25)

- A resurrected Jesus guarantees life after death really is a reality (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).
- A resurrected Jesus guarantees that He is alive and we can know Him today (Revelation 1:18, John 17:3)

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH HIM?

Today, as we close out this study, we want to ask the next logical question—“What will you do with Him?” or, “What does this mean for me?” Now that you have this information, how are you going to respond to it? Coming to a decision about Jesus Christ and considering a relationship with Him is not altogether different than coming to a decision about anything or anyone else. The following three steps provide guidance on how to proceed.

1. Check Him Out

John 1:35–51— The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, “What are you seeking?” And they said to him, “Rabbi” (which means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come and you will see.” So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the

fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

In these verses, Jesus gives an invitation to Andrew and Peter that Phillip also extends to Nathanael. What is it?

Come and see!

In common terms, how would you describe the first steps of these disciples in coming to a decision about Jesus?

The first disciples ultimately ended up as disciples of Jesus by first simply checking Him out. They had heard John the Baptist say that Jesus was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. So they did what anyone else might do who took this claim seriously, they went to see for themselves. And the more they saw of Him, the more they went and found other people and invited them to "come and see" Jesus. When someone hears about Jesus Christ and all that He claims, this is still the first step.

HOW DO WE DO THIS TODAY?

A. Read through one of the Gospels.

Romans 10:17— So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

According to this verse, how does faith in Christ come?

This verse teaches us that faith is the result of hearing about Jesus. One of the best ways to really examine Jesus, to really consider who Jesus is, what He has done, and what that means for you, is to read through one of the Gospels— Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Each of these is a different biographical account of Jesus' life and ministry. They all testify to the same truth, but each one has a unique vantage point. It is as if four people went to the same Super Bowl, sitting in different parts of the stadium, and recounted the events from the game in their own words. Because these books record in detail who Jesus is and what He did and taught, they are still the best way to check Him out. So open one of the Gospels, and before you begin pray a prayer like this: "Lord, if this is true and if Jesus is who He says He is, would you please reveal that to me." Many people have prayed a prayer like this and their lives have never been the same.

B. Spend time with someone who really follows Him.

John 4:39-42— Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

According to these verses, what was the first step for many of the Samaritans who put their faith in Christ?

They heard about and witnessed what Jesus had done in this woman's life.

When you are interested in learning more about someone, some place, or something, what is one of the first steps you generally take?

You ask someone that you know and trust about the person, place, or thing that you are looking into.

If you want to know more about Jesus, then, what is one obvious step?

Go and talk to someone who is following Him. Ask them your questions about Him. Examine if He really has made a difference in their lives. Spend time with someone who truly follows Him, not perfectly, but faithfully.

After doing these two things, if you begin to think that Jesus is who He has claimed to be, you are ready to take the next step.

2. Count the Cost

The next thing someone ought to do after checking Jesus out is to count the cost of following Him. There was a significant cost of following Jesus 2,000 years ago, and there's a significant cost to following Him today.

A. The Cost of Coming

Matthew 16:24— "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

According to this verse, what does Jesus demand of His followers?

That they deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow Him.

What do you think Jesus means by this?

It means that there is a cost of coming to Christ. He demands complete allegiance. Where our desires do not line up with His, from now on, we side with

Him. A life of following Jesus is, at times, a life of self-denial. It's a life of following Him where He leads you. This means that you are no longer in control of your life. It means that He now sits on the throne of your heart. He is not a genie that grants your wishes. He is a Lord and Master that you follow. Sometimes He leads you by way of the cross. Sometimes following Him is painful. Sometimes it's difficult. Sometimes it means opposition from the world. Sometimes it means being left out or written off.

Before anyone comes to Jesus and commits to Him, they should count the cost. Is it worth it? Am I really willing to surrender everything to Him? Am I really willing to put my life, my dreams, my plans, my eternity in His hands? Am I willing to be mistreated because of my allegiance to Him? There is a cost to coming. Anyone who comes after Him must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Him. Following Jesus is not for cowards.

B. The Cost of Not Coming

Matthew 16:25-26—“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

According to these verses, what is the cost of not coming to Jesus?

The one who tries to save his life now, will in the end, lose his life and forfeit his soul.

What do you think Jesus means by this?

These verses make it clear that even though there is a cost to coming to Jesus, there is an even greater cost of not coming to Him. If one does not give his life to Jesus Christ now, if he decides to save his life and live for his own purposes and passions and dreams and plans; if someone lives to be a friend of the world; if someone says, “Jesus is not for me, thanks, but no thanks,” Jesus says that person will lose his life for eternity. That person might gain the whole world here and now, but in the end, when his life is over, he will lose his soul forever.

On the contrary, the one who is willing to give up his life to Jesus Christ now, the one who is willing to deny Himself and take up his cross and follow him, Jesus says that that person will find their life. Their eternity will be sure. What is more, they will find more fulfillment in their life on earth because they will have peace with God and a lasting purpose, not just a temporary one.

3. Commit to Him

Once someone has checked Jesus out and counted the cost of following Him (and of not following Him), there is one final step to take. If you are convinced that Jesus is who He says He is and that He alone can make you right with God and secure your eternity, then the next step is to commit to Him. This includes three simple steps, as easy as A, B, C.

A. Admit your sin to Him

Romans 3:10-12, 20— As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one”... For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

1 John 1:9— “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

According to these verses, what is the first step in committing your life to Christ?

The first step in genuinely coming to Christ is to agree with Him about your sin, admitting that you are a sinner and that there is nothing you can do to make yourself right with Him.

B. Believe that He died for you

Romans 3:23-25a— For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Romans 10:9-10— If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

According to these verses, what is the next step in receiving God’s salvation?

The second step is to simply believe that what Jesus did on the cross, He did for you. The perfect, sinless, Son of God, died to pay the penalty for your sins because He loves you. The way to accept His sacrifice for you is to genuinely believe that what He did, He did for you.

C. Commit your life to Him

Matthew 16:24— Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

According to this verse, what is the final step in coming to Christ?

After you have admitted and agreed with God about your sin and believed that what Jesus did on the cross, He did for you, then you simply commit your life to Him. Confess to Him that He is the Lord of your life and that you intend to follow Him all of your days. He is alive on His throne, and He speaks through His Word. From now on, when He speaks, you intend to side with Him. Where He leads, you intend to go.

A WORD OF ADVICE

These three steps— admitting your sin, believing that Jesus the Son of God died and rose for you, and committing your life to Him— are usually best expressed in an honest prayer to God where you simply tell Him those things, confessing your trust in Him and desire to follow Him. He promises that the moment you do this with genuine faith, not only does He forgive all your sins and guarantee your eternal life, but He also sends His own Spirit to live in you, to comfort you, to help you, to convict you of sin, to aid in your understanding of the Bible, and to give you new desires to love God and others.

If you would like help with this, or if you have put your faith in Christ but have never told anyone, tell a Christian friend or the leader of this study. Jesus has a wonderful promise for you! “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

CONCLUSION

So what will you do with Him?

If Jesus' claims are true—

- That He really is the eternal Son of God, even God Himself (John 1:14, 5:19, 8:58),
- That He really is the only way to a relationship with the Father (John 14:6),
- That He really is the only way to escape God's judgment (John 3:36),
- That He really is the only way to salvation and eternal life (John 3:14-17),
- That a relationship with Him really is the only way to lasting satisfaction and fulfillment (John 6:35, 10:10b)—

Then each person must make up their mind about Him. We cannot remain on the fence. In the end, not to decide is to decide.

Who do you say that He is?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- First, check Him out (John 1:35-51)
 - Read through one of the Gospels (Romans 10:17)
 - Spend time with someone who really follows Him (John 4:39-42)
- Second, count the cost (Matthew 16:24-26)
 - Count the cost of coming to Him (Matthew 16:24)
 - Count the cost of not coming to Him (Matthew 16:25-26)
- Third, commit to Him (Mark 10:28)
 - Admit your sin to Him (Romans 3:10-12,20, 1 John 1:9)
 - Believe that He died for you (Romans 3:23-25, 10:9-10)
 - Commit your life to Him (Matthew 16:24)

TO DISCUSS

What most stands out to you about how to come to Christ?

Would it make sense, based on what the Bible teaches about how we are to respond to Jesus, to conclude that Jesus was simply a good, moral teacher?

FURTHER READING

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts