

## Jesus is God

How would you react if a person came up in front of all of you and claimed to be God? I'm sure at first you'd probably think it were a joke, but what if you came to realize that this person was serious in what he was saying? I think at this point you'd start to wonder about this person's mental health. If it were me, I'd probably watch every move he made to see if there was even the slightest fault in what he did or said just to prove that he wasn't what he claimed to be.

The majority of scholars believe that a man named Jesus lived 2000 years ago. In fact the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth has long been established and is not seriously contested by scholars. What is contested is who he was. If you asked a Muslim scholar, they would see Jesus as being a Prophet of God who was born of a virgin, performed miracles, but did not die on the cross because they believe a replacement was provided. If you asked a Jewish theologian, they would probably claim Jesus was a rabbi or Jewish teacher who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but not God. If you asked a secular historian they would see him as one of the most influential figures in all of recorded history considering how Christianity has shaped the world we know today.

Even while Jesus was alive there was confusion as to who he was. Some thought he was a prophet, possibly even the man prophesied in Jewish scriptures as being the Saviour of the Jews. This man was also known as the Messiah or the Christ which translates as the "Anointed One". Even today Jews wait for him to arrive. Some thought Jesus was just a wise moral teacher. Others still saw him as a demon, and a threat to their way of life. So with all these different views, how do we know who Jesus was? I guess the real question that we need to address first is this: Who did Jesus himself claim to be? The answer is Jesus claimed to be nothing less than God in human form. His critics at the time came to realize this. That's why they on multiple occasions tried to kill him (John 5:18, 10:33), and eventually had him crucified on the cross.

In John 10:30, Jesus said "I and the Father are one." By saying this, Jesus was claiming to be nothing less than God. The response of the crowd when he said this can be found immediately afterwards:

*<sup>31</sup>Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup>but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" <sup>33</sup>"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

There was no misunderstanding. Everybody knew Jesus was claiming to be God. His disciples who had followed him around during his earthly ministry knew this because that is what they wrote about him when they recorded many of the books of the Bible. Those who didn't believe him tried to kill him for this, and eventually succeeded.

By declaring he was God, Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or God. With his claims to deity in mind, it should make you view these varying opinions of who Jesus was in a different light. I think C.S. Lewis said it best when he wrote:

*"You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."<sup>1</sup>*

So why the various opinions of who Jesus was? Same reasons today as it was 2000 years ago... and it's not because of a lack of evidence. For one thing, they couldn't accept the fact that they were being called sinners on the path to destruction because they felt they were living pretty good moral lives. What they didn't realize was that morality is relative to God's perfection, not each other. Secondly, people couldn't accept the fact that Jesus, a human being, could be God. They couldn't wrap their minds around that concept because it didn't make sense to them. Anything else seemed more plausible to them, regardless of the evidence. What they didn't think about is the fact that God is greater than we are, and we can't expect to fully understand everything. That's why He's God and we aren't. This however does not take away from what we do know and the evidence which supports Jesus' claims to deity.

Now that we've established that Jesus claimed to be nothing less than God, the next question is, why should we believe him? I told you before, if somebody were to claim he were God, most of us would scrutinize everything he did to find any evidence to show his claim was false. That's exactly what Jesus' critics did. They did their best to trap him, and find even a single fault... they were unable to. In fact, even the Roman authorities could find no basis for a charge and tried to free him (Luke 23:1-23). In the end, the Romans bowed to public pressure and allowed Jesus to be crucified simply because of his claims to be God.

One way Jesus backed up his claims to be God was by having the power and authority of God. Let me give you an analogy. If I were to stand before you and claim to be the President of the United States, you'd all think I was nuts. I couldn't ask the secret service to guard me, and I couldn't take trips on Air Force One. I'd have no Presidential authority to back up my claims. On the other hand, if the real President got up in front of people and claimed to be the President, we would have reason to believe his claim because he would have the authority and power to back this up. In the same way, Jesus claimed to be God, but backed up his claim with the authority of God. He gave the blind sight, he healed the lame (Matt 15:29-31), he healed leprosy (Matt 8:1-4), he calmed storms by just telling them to be still (Matt 4:39), and even raised people from the dead (John 11:1-44, Matt 9:18-26). He himself overcame death through his resurrection. In addition, the vast majority of these miracles were done in public in front of many witnesses, and a lot of these witnesses were far from being loyal to Jesus. His critics couldn't deny it, and could only respond by calling Jesus a demon because they refused to call him God.

<sup>1</sup> *Mere Christianity* [Macmillan, 1952], pp. 40-41

So what other reasons do we have to believe Jesus' claims were true? We could go through a process of verifying the historical accuracy of the Bible to see where it came from, how reliable it is, and how it compares to non-Biblical references and archeology. What you will find is it is extremely accurate to the detail, but I'm not going to talk about that today, nor do I claim to be any authority in this area. There are plenty of leading authorities who have spent their lives studying these things and have many degrees to prove it. Their faith was either established or strengthened by their research. Although I won't go into that today, I want to shift to one piece of evidence most people aren't aware of.

Interestingly enough, the life of Jesus was prophesied throughout Jewish scripture which was written centuries before Jesus was even born. These prophecies were written so that Israel would be able to rule out imposters and validate the credentials of anybody claiming to be the Messiah. It's also important to note that Jewish scripture (Hebrew Bible – Torah, Nevi'im, and Kethuvim) is identical to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. It is well established and believed to be God's Word by Jews and Christians alike. What is incredible to see is how well the Old and New Testament (the books that were written after Jesus' ministry) give such strong support to one another. In the case of prophecies about Christ, it talks about the fact that the Messiah will be born in the small town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), be a descendent of King David, and be born of a virgin just to give you some examples. I've also heard that the mathematical probability for one man to accidentally fulfill just 16 of the Jewish prophecies about the Christ the way Jesus did is 1 in  $10^{45}$ . That's when the Engineer in me concludes that the probability is essentially zero. Also keep in mind that there are 48 major prophecies about the Christ in the Hebrew Bible. I'll give you some specific examples:

In the book of Isaiah, written approximately 700 years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

#### **Isaiah 7:14**

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

#### **Isaiah 9:6**

*<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

That child who would be called "Mighty God" was Jesus, born of the virgin Mary. He literally was Immanuel which means "God is with us."

One passage in particular that describes the purpose of Jesus coming as well as some of the details surrounding his death and resurrection can be found in Isaiah 53. It's also important to note that this is a passage that early Jews believed was a prophecy for the Christ.

**Isaiah 53:2-12:**

- <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot,  
and like a root out of dry ground.  
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.  
Like one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.
- <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
and by his wounds we are healed.
- <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.
- <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted,  
yet he did not open his mouth;  
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.
- <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away.  
And who can speak of his descendants?  
For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
for the transgression of my people he was stricken.
- <sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
- <sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.
- <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

First of all, this passage is explicit that Christ would die. That can be seen in verses 7, 8, 9, and 12. Incidentally this is also why the Muslim belief that a substitution was provided by God on the cross does not make sense considering they believe Jesus was the Messiah. It also indicates that he would be pierced in verse 5 which describes the Messiah's method of death when he was nailed to the cross and later pierced by a spear to confirm his death (John 19:34).

This passage also describes that while he was being oppressed and afflicted, that he wouldn't open his mouth to defend himself (v7). This came true when Jesus was before Herod (Luke 23:9) as well as the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:3-5) shortly before Pilate sent him to be crucified.

This Isaiah passage indicates that the Christ would be assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death (v9). This happened when Jesus was crucified as a criminal, but buried in the tomb of a prominent man, Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:42-47). This passage also describes that after his suffering and death, the Christ would see life again, which describes his resurrection (v10-11).

This passage describes the character of Christ. In verse 9 it says "he had done no violence [*definition: abusive or unjust exercise of power*], nor was any deceit in his mouth." This also showed that he did not deserve the punishment he was given. Throughout the Gospels we see that Christ lived up to this. In fact the Bible says he was completely without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

My intention is not to do an in-depth study of this passage, I'm simply pointing out how fully Jesus satisfies this Messianic prophecy. Now I'd like to focus on the reason Jesus suffered and died on the cross, which is described in this passage and is echoed throughout the rest of the Bible. It describes the very essence of Christianity. In verse 6 it says "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." This is the very definition of sin: That all of us without exception have rebelled against God in favour of our own selfish desires. The passage continues in verses 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, and 12 to describe the purpose of Christ's death: To bear our sins, to take the punishment we deserved, to suffer in our place, to forgive us, and to ultimately give us peace through his sacrifice.

Now at this point, you may not completely understand why Jesus had to suffer and die in order for us to be forgiven for our sins. I will talk about this in future devotionals. In the meantime, I encourage you to ask questions. If you've never known Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour, I urge you to give it careful thought. If you still wonder about things like the evidence to support Jesus' claims to be God, or the accuracy of the Bible, then I challenge you to look it up. Study the history, the archeology, and of course the Bible itself and do it with an open mind. Christianity isn't a blind faith because there is a wealth of evidence to back up its claims. However, ultimately it is still a faith, and it is up to you to decide for yourself if it's true. So who is Jesus Christ? I know him to be my Saviour and my God. I hope that by the end of this season, all of you will see that this is not a delusional belief or wishful thinking, but one that is reasonable, logical, and very real.