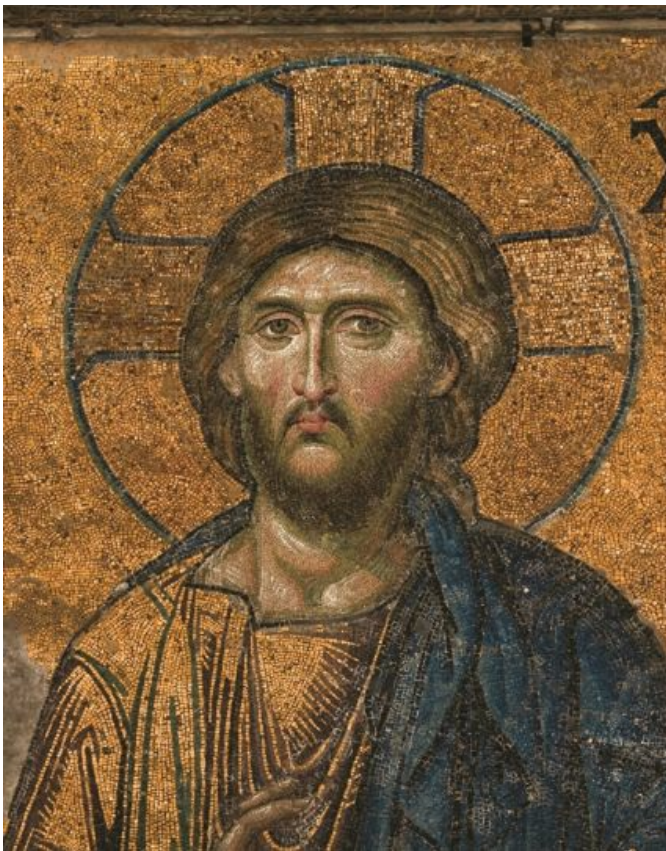




Chapter 4: Who Is Jesus?

If you want to create an awkward silence at a business lunch or dinner party, ask the question, “Who is Jesus?” Mention God and you’re within most social boundaries. But, Jesus, He provokes intense reactions. What is it about God’s Son that triggers that kind of response? Could it be that Jesus causes people to examine their lives with more honesty? If Jesus is the flashpoint, does that mean our feelings about Him must be examined as well? Are we free to be bored with Him or to embrace faith in Him disinterestedly?



What do we label a person who is so bound to strict religiosity they can’t see past their rules? Someone so enamored with their own picture of how things are supposed to be they can’t entertain different options? A close-minded person? A legalist? We call such people Pharisees.

The Pharisees began as the elite, the respected leaders of their day. Today the term Pharisee is instantly understood as a parody of righteousness. A caricature of uppity religion.

For two millennia the designation has served as a byword for spiritual blindness. But in the beginning they were the insiders. If God were to show up, surely they would be the first to recognize Him.

But they didn't.

The Pharisees—who had memorized their Bibles—not only missed the truth about Jesus, they rallied their entire political machinery against Him. Here's why: He didn't fit their preconceived notions. Everything they assumed the Messiah would be, Jesus was not.

And that's the danger we face today. Our ideas about Jesus get in the way of our understanding of Him. The challenge is to allow Jesus to speak for Himself. Instead of confirming or refuting our concept of Him, allowing Him to define Himself.

That's What They Say?

"I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as an historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history."

H.G. Wells, British author (1866 - 1946)

"As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene....No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."

Albert Einstein, mathematician

"I know men, and I tell you, Jesus Christ was no mere man... Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and, at this hour, millions of men would die for him."

Napoleon, at his defeat at Waterloo

"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus by the Supreme Being in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

*Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to John Adams,
April 11, 1823*

"As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet."

Kenneth Scott Latourette, historian

WHICH OF THESE THOUGHTS CAPTURES YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF JESUS?



What Do People Think about Jesus' Existence?



Scholars today who treat the gospels as credible historical documents do so in the full light of the [stringent analytical study for the past 200 years], not by closing their minds to it. A problem arises in this television age from the exposure of the public to a bewildering variety of opinions about the gospels in particular and the New Testament in general, including both the current scholarly consensus (if such a thing exists today) and every sort of way-out interpretation of the data, with little or no guidance being given about the criteria by which competing views are to be assessed and a reasonable conclusion reached.

F.F. Bruce,

Forward to *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, by Craig Blomberg

WHICH POINT OF VIEW ABOVE DO YOU MOST DISAGREE WITH?



IN YOUR OPINION, WHO IS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON ALIVE TODAY?




WHO WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON OF THE LAST 100 YEARS?



THE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN ALL OF HUMAN HISTORY?



A number of historians would say that Jesus, who lived for about 30 years, has had the most profound  influence on our world, even though He lived a simple life, had no possessions and little influence, as an adult never traveled outside his own country or wrote a word.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT JESUS?

Jesus' Humanity

Jesus claimed to be both fully human and fully God. Let's examine these claims:

Did Jesus experience normal human feelings? What about boredom or confusion? What about temptation, even lust? Did he grow weary? Get hungry?

The Bible describes Jesus in physical and emotional terms:

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” *Luke 2:52*

“Early in the morning, as He was on His way back to the city, He was hungry.” *Matthew 21:18*

“Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour.” *John 4:6*

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” *Hebrews 4:15*



“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.” *Hebrews 2:14*

“For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” *Hebrews 2:17,18*

“Jesus wept.” *John 11:35*

WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY TO YOU ABOUT HIS HUMANITY?



SO WAS JESUS HUMAN? WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO THE HUMAN RACE? TO INDIVIDUAL HUMANS?



"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin." *Hebrews 4:14-15* ☆

ACCORDING TO *Hebrews 4:14-15*, WHAT DID JESUS SHARE IN COMMON WITH US?

IN WHAT PRIMARY WAY WAS HE DIFFERENT? ☆

Jesus' Deity

"[Jesus] asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'" *Matthew 16:13-17*



IN GENERAL, WHAT DID JESUS' DISCIPLES BELIEVE ABOUT HIS IDENTITY? ☆

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT PETER'S ANSWER? WHAT MIGHT HAVE PROMPTED HIM TO GIVE THAT RESPONSE? ☆

WHAT DID JESUS CLAIM ABOUT HIMSELF AND WHAT WAS HIS PURPOSE FOR COMING? ☆

"'I and the Father are one.' Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, 'I ☆ have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?' 'We are not stoning you for any of these,' replied the Jews, 'but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.'" *John 10:30-33*

WERE THE JEWS JUSTIFIED FOR BEING OFFENDED BY JESUS' WORDS IN *John 10:30-33*?

"Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, ☆ while he dismissed the crowd... During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid. Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' 'And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"

Matthew 14:22, 25-33

WHAT EVIDENCE OF JESUS' DEITY IS PRESENT IN THIS STORY?

The Take It Further section is to help you go a little deeper through challenging questions, audio recommendations, and reflective exercises. This section is optional for use in your study. You may do all, one, or none of the suggestions.

Take It Further



WATCH: WATCH THE *JESUS* FILM ON WWW.JESUSFILM.ORG. WATCH THE FIRST HALF OF THE VIDEO FOR THIS SESSION. (WWW.4TRUTH.NET. *CLICK ON THE LINK TO JESUS.*)



CONSIDER:

"Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence obtained by education, he spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times."

Philip Schaff, German-American theologian and church historian

CONSIDER "GIVE ME JESUS" BY FERNANDO ORTEGA. HOW DO THE FACTS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST INTERSECT WITH THE LONGING OF THE SINGER'S HEART IN THIS SONG?

THINK: IF JESUS CLAIMED TO BE GOD, WHY DIDN'T HE DEFEND HIMSELF AGAINST MEN?



LISTEN: *THE HUMANITY AND DEITY OF CHRIST* BY KEN BOA



LISTEN: *WHO IS JESUS?* BY STEPHEN DAVEY