

## Who is Jesus?

### Answers from history, religions, and the Bible

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#### Our view of Jesus defines us

- “Show me your Christology and I will tell you who you are.” Karl Barth
- Everybody has a view of Him ranging from a myth, a good man, to God in human flesh and the only Savior.
- Christianity is not the only religion that believes in him
  - Hindu, Buddhist, all Eastern
  - Islam and Mormons
  - All have a place for Jesus in their religion
- The Christian View however, as you will see is unique and
  - John 17:3 is a good summary of it: Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.
  - Another key Christian viewpoint is in John 14:6, where Jesus himself says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”

#### Why do Christians say that about Jesus?

- Christians believe it’s true based on what we read in the Bible and how that is verified through history.
- Let’s now look at why we believe that.

#### Why we believe the Bible is a true record of Jesus life

- Please listen to previous podcasts where I defined truth and went into great details on why we can trust the Bible, but here is a little review:
- Truth—that which agrees with reality
- History helps us determine reality through
  - Archeology, coins artifacts, other writings
- Reliability of the history of the texts of the bible
  - Massive amount of textual support, more manuscripts than any other ancient texts
  - And the manuscripts agree over time
  - Some say, “changed, corrupted” but didn’t happen—
  - Dead Sea Scrolls—great evidence to that fact
  - \*\*\*NO objective, scholarly basis for “corruption” of texts
- Based on the reliability of the textual documents, scholars believe they are credible records of what happened
- That doesn’t mean you believe in God
- To be a Christian requires more, but not less than agreement with history

#### How do we know what do we

#### know about Jesus from the historical texts about Him?

- History about him was written in what we know as the New Testament Gospels within the lifetime of those who knew him—by people who were eye-witnesses of the events
- They are not fanciful stories made up hundreds of years after his death
  - Based on Manuscript dating, we have fragments from 100’s that talk about Him
  - And complete and thousands of manuscripts of the entire New Testament not much later
  - Also listen to previous podcast about the New Testament
- But that’s not all!
- Other Historical comments about Him, historical figures of the first 2 centuries after his death including:
  - Pliny the Younger
  - Josephus
  - Tacitus
  - Various Roman leaders
  - Christian writers
  - Critics of Christianity
  - Let’s look at some of them now

#### Letters of Pliny the Younger to

#### Emperor Trajan (ruled AD 98-117)

- Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan’s advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians. Pliny says that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity.
- Even though they were supposed to be punished he couldn’t find a reason to do that, as he said about them:
- ***They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.***
- A reference of course to the idea that they weren’t cannibals as some accused them of being because they partook of the “body and blood”

Josephus, AD 37-101, Roman Historian, who lived

## during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and was able to research what was going on in Israel

- Jewish, Wrote in his *Antiquities*
- “About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man [if indeed one ought to call him a man.] For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [He was the Christ.] When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. [On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him.] And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.”
- Some debate on this passage, but really no more evidence than some think he couldn't have written it.

## Tacitus, AD 56 – AD 117, was a senator and a historian of the Roman Empire

- In the *Histories of Tacitus, reporting on Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in 64 AD.*
- **Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.**
- **Note: Apostle Paul killed in this persecution, therefore all his books written prior**

## 3 more Emperors of Rome, second century talked about Christians

- As one historian said, “Trajan, Hadrian, and Marcus Aurelius. They all deal with the persecution of Christians.
- Trajan was relying to Pliny's letter, telling him that the Christians were “not to be hunted out” and if the accused Christian would sacrifice to the gods, they were to be acquitted (19).
- Hadrian, around 122-123, was likewise writing about how to handle accusations against Christians (20).
- Marcus Aurelius (161-180) was concerned with philosophical rather than legal issues. He did not believe the Christians laid down their lives nobly

and for the right reasons, but out of “sheer opposition” and with “histrionic display” (21). From his perspective, all the Christians had to do was go through the motions of sacrificing and they would escape death. Their deaths must have seemed unnecessary and fanatical.”

From:

<https://malcolmnicholson.wordpress.com/second-century-pagan-writers-knowledge-of-christianity/>

## Christians also wrote extensively at this time,

**Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, was martyred in 155-167, at 87 years old**

***A direct line to someone who knew Jesus—the Apostle John***

***His writings answer the challenge that the idea that Jesus was God was a later development in the Christian faith, because again, his life was a direct link to one of Jesus' disciples and he repeated an early agreed core of beliefs.***

***Letter to the Philippians:*** “I have greatly rejoiced with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, because ye have followed the example of true love [as displayed by God], and have accompanied, as became you, those who were bound in chains, the fitting ornaments of saints, and which are indeed the diadems of the true elect of God and our Lord; and because the strong root of your faith, spoken of in days long gone by, endureth even until now, and bringeth forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sins suffered even unto death, [but] “whom God raised froth the dead, having loosed the bands of the grave... . But may the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *Jesus Christ Himself, who is the Son of God*, and our everlasting High Priest, build you up in faith and truth, and in all meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, forbearance, and purity.

## More Testimonies of Early Church Writers, as to the deity of Jesus

- ***The Epistle of Ignatius to the Church at Smyrna (where Polycarp was Bishop), written AD 108***
- “. . . In very truth, with respect to our Lord Jesus Christ, that He was the Son of God, “*the first-born of every creature,*” *God the Word, the only-begotten Son, and was of the seed of David according to the flesh, by the Virgin Mary; was baptized by John, that all righteousness might be fulfilled by Him; that He lived a life of holiness without sin, and was truly, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch, nailed [to the cross] for us in His flesh.*”

## An enemy of the faith records early beliefs—Celsus

- <https://malcolmnicholson.wordpress.com/second-century-pagan-writers-knowledge-of-christianity/>
- “Around 177-180 Celsus wrote *The True Word*, an attack on Christianity, parts of which were

preserved in quotations in Origen's *Contra Celsum* written in the mid-third century. As far as know, this was the first time an entire pagan work had been devoted to Christianity, rather than passing references in other works.

- Celsus knew more about Christianity than any previous pagan writer. He was the first to refer to the founder of Christianity by his name, Jesus, rather than Christ. He knew many details which Christians believed about the life of Jesus, his virgin birth (39), the visit of the magi (40), the massacre of the innocents (41), his baptism by John (42), his disciples (43), miracles (44), his betrayal (45), crucifixion (46) and resurrection (47).
- Celsus reasoned that if Christians worshipped Jesus, they could not be true monotheists (49), and understood that if he could discredit Jesus, he could discredit Christianity (50). He wrote that the virgin birth was made up and Jesus' real father was a Roman called Panthera (51), that there were no reliable witnesses to the dove descending at Jesus' baptism (52), and that Jesus' miracles happened, but were magic (53). He dismissed the resurrection as a hallucination and wishful thinking (54).
- Though he didn't agree with the Christian belief system, his words again show the core of beliefs and by his very writings show that it was a belief system well-known enough to be worthy of a scholarly attack.

#### **Summary of the historical facts about Jesus**

- Based on the repeated, early witness about Jesus, they are unanimous on the core events of his life, his good deeds, his miracles, his death, resurrection and the change in the disciples
- Whether you believe the Bible is a divinely inspired document or not specifically the New Testament, is a credible historical source for the life of a historically verified Jesus of Nazareth
- Regardless of who you attribute them to (Whether to God or other sources) the historical record shows his miracles did take place, his resurrection was a historical fact
- KEY: as verified by history, his followers were so changed by the reality of his resurrected life, the belief He was God and the source of forgiveness of sins and eternal life that fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah that they completely abandoned their previous Jewish system of sacrifice and way of worshipping God.
- Thousands of years of persecution (from Egypt through Babylonian captivity to wars of the Maccabees to the current occupation by Rome)

could not destroy this way of worship and within a few months of the resurrection of Jesus everything changed.

- Because of Jesus—his followers declared He was the fulfillment of all the religious history that had gone before and that by his resurrection, he validated all his claims and showed, He was the only way to God
- Since the reality of a person called Jesus is verified historically, other religions can't and don't try to deny He existed, but they have a vastly different ways than Christianity does for how they explain Him.
- YOU must understand these differences because salvation in Jesus is only possible if you know the real Jesus, not simply someone with the same name
- So let's now look at how other religions define Jesus.

#### **Eastern Religions, New Age**

##### • **Hinduism**

- Jesus Christ is a teacher, a guru, or an avatar (an incarnation of Vishnu). He is a son of God as are others. His death does not atone for sins and he did not rise from the dead.

##### • **Buddhism**

- Jesus Christ is not part of the historic Buddhist worldview. Buddhists in the West today generally view Jesus as an enlightened teacher, while Buddhists in Asia believe Jesus was an avatar or a Bodhisattva, but not God.

##### • **New Age of various kinds today**

- Jesus as a good teacher, god in all, he had god in him as we all have god in him

#### **Islam—describes him as a prophet**

- But not THE Prophet
- Jesus (Isa in Arabic) was not God or the Son of God. His virgin birth is likened to Adam's creation. He was sinless, a worker of miracles, and one of the most respected prophets sent by Allah.
- He was not crucified or resurrected. They believe it was a hoax
- He, not Muhammad, will return to play a special role before the future judgment day, perhaps turning Christians to Islam.

#### **Historical Comments on Islam**

- **Muhammad,**  
570 – 632 AD
- Born into a polytheistic culture
- Exposed to monotheism and Christianity, but not in

depth

- No historical basis for assertions about Jesus
- Very respectfully, we are not talking about the same Jesus
- To describe him as a Prophet is not enough
- He is the eternal existing son of God who came to earth and took on a body and who was crucified, buried, and rose again.

#### **Mormon**

- Founder Joseph Smith, 1805-1844, some of the later comments built upon his works:
- "The first spirit born to our heavenly parents was Jesus Christ."  
*Gospel Principles*
- "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the worlds was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the savior of mankind."
- "God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; He was born in the same personal, real and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about this paternity; He was begotten, conceived, and born in the normal and natural course of events. --Mormon theologian Bruce McConkie
- Also believe that if you are a good Mormon, you too can have your own world like Jesus did. "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."
- **Do not deny person but give Biblical facts a totally different meaning; history added to in Book of Mormon, no factual basis outside it**

#### **Of these views of various religions**

- **All these completely ignore history—and the historical record of what Jesus said about himself.**
- **He claimed to be God; he forgave sins, he said he was one with God the Father**
- **He stated He was the only way to God**

#### **Why all these different views?**

#### **We have been warned this would happen**

- **2 Corinthians 11:3-4** But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the Spirit you received, or a different gospel from

the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. . . .<sup>13</sup> For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ.<sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

- Warned there will be "false Jesus" preached and so we must be ready
- \*\*\*ALWAYS clarify which Jesus you are talking about, especially with groups such as Mormons and other cults
- Our duty to know the truth and to be able to share it with "gentleness and respect."
- Also we need to know for the "dark nights of our souls"—we need to know who we've believed – and remind ourselves –sometimes truth of history helps...but also

#### **What the Bible says about Jesus—key passages to memorize/know well**

- Jn. 1:1-18<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning.<sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. . . .<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- Col. 1: 15-20<sup>15</sup> The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.<sup>16</sup> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.<sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

#### **Useful summary statement:**

Buddha never claimed to be God. Moses never claimed to be Jehovah. Mohammed never claimed to be Allah. Yet Jesus Christ claimed to be the true and living God. Buddha simply said, "I am a teacher in search of the truth." Jesus said, "I am the Truth." Confucius said, "I never claimed to be holy." Jesus said, "Who convicts me of sin?" Mohammed said, "Unless God throws his cloak of mercy over me, I have no hope." Jesus said, "Unless you believe in me, you will die in your sins." –Unknown,

### **C.S. Lewis summary of who Jesus is**

- A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. 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 with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. --C.S. Lewis

### **Back to the most important question**

- Who do you say that I am?
- Who is Jesus to you?
- If you are not a follower of His, explore further—***The Case for Christ*** is an excellent book, where a sceptic, who also happened to be a crime reporter searches for the historically, verifiable truth about Jesus and after a 2-year search decided that what the Bible said about Him was true
- If you are a follower of the true Jesus...
- Recognize what a wonderful, solid foundation you have for your faith—learn the facts of the history of it, what the Bible says about Jesus so you can share it with others who don't have the joy of knowing the REAL Jesus and the promise of forgiveness of sins, real meaning in life now and an eternal life that C.S. Lewis describes in this way “where every chapter is better than the one before and that goes on forever.”