

Who is Jesus?

By Les Norman

"When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi,
He asked His disciples, saying,
"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah,
and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
He said to them, **"But who do you say that I am?"**
Matthew 16, 13-17, The Bible

We live in an age where there is considerable spiritual hunger, all the more so as perplexity, hardship and injustice increases worldwide and provokes intense feelings of powerlessness in the face of sudden changes in every direction from the family nearby to the affairs of nations far away. The hunger for explanation and the longing for a super-hero from outside normal life manifests itself in many unusual ways, just for example:

In the rise of New Age philosophies which allow people to believe more or less anything and everything about the god or force of their choice. Traditional Christianity is far from dead as many have declared, as evidenced by the startling fact that a CD of prayers and Catholic worship made by Pope John reached number one in the UK classical music charts on the first week of its release. A closed Carthusian monastery opened a website for Easter and received one million visitors in its first week on-line on the Internet, and every Christian retreat centre in so-called secular, post-Christian Britain was at capacity in Holy Week.

Meanwhile Islam draws millions to daily worship and vies with a plethora of Hindu deities for the hearts and souls of half a world of people, whilst Westerners do almost anything to satiate or sublimate their inner hunger by the pursuit of sensuality and material abundance rather than seeking spiritual riches to feed their souls. Not surprisingly, within days and sometimes hours they hunger again.

In the midst of this fast moving world of multiple options and many gurus offering advice of all kinds, one man time-travels down two thousand years of history with a question that has to be answered. He is Jesus Christ and he stands at the doorway to every cathedral, to every temple, to every mosque and to every shopping mall and looks into the eye of every passer-by to ask,

"Who do you say I am?"

When he first asked that question in Caesarea Philippi nearly 2,000 years ago some people thought he was John the Baptist. Others thought he was Jeremiah, one of the prophets of old or even Elijah. Which is strange because John the Baptist had been executed some weeks previously, Jeremiah had died some 600 years earlier and Elijah more than 900 years earlier. The crowds had seen many unusual and wonderful things taking place as Jesus passed by but clearly were at a loss to explain them, so they reasoned that someone had come back from the dead with supernatural powers.

Almost in the same way many people today will concoct any number of explanations, however unlikely rather than believe in the gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. Yes, there is a longing to believe in God and millions appeal to Him under their breath every day without knowing Him or anything about Him, but they find many problems which reinforce their doubts or unbelief. Maybe you feel the same?

"Well," they say, "the miracles can be explained medically."

"How can a man dying on a Cross affect me?"

"No-one comes back from the dead, so Jesus must have been in a coma."

"I can't understand how can Jesus be alive today and working miracles."

"If he is coming again, why doesn't he. Look at the world !"

There is an answer and that answer will satisfy the most demanding intellect and the most cynical of minds, but that answer will never be grasped by human understanding or logic. You see when Jesus originally put that question to followers, his friend Peter had something to say in return and did not need take a second to weigh his thoughts.

Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

What did Simon Peter mean by that? For long centuries the Jews had been expecting the coming of a Messiah, for that is what the word Christ means, the anointed son of God who would rescue them, but their anticipated Messiah was to be human. On the other hand the advancing Greek thought of the day embraced countless myths and legends which focused on the gods coming down and carrying off beautiful women. Their semi-divine offspring were the superheroes much like 'Superman' is today and they were known to all as the sons of gods.

Peter though was thinking neither of the Jewish messiah nor of the sons of Zeus, Hermes or Apollos. Peter in fact was not thinking at all for what he said came straight from the heart, the home of living truth and faith rather than from the mind which is the home of cold logic and wishful fantasy. Simon Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not **revealed** this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

In other words Jesus recognised that Peter had not learned his response from text books, temple lectures or street corner gossip, but he had received a revelation from out of this world, from out of this life, from God. Peter believed that Jesus was the Son of Living God, the real and unexpected Messiah, God himself come to rescue His children. This conviction was so firm that later Peter preferred cruel execution rather than deny the revelation given to him.

It is that same revelation that God is willing to give to any man or woman who enquires of Him to this very day. It is by revelation alone a man or woman can unhesitatingly answer the demanding spiritual question that Jesus still asks of all those on the highway of life en route to eternity.

"Who do you say that I am?"

Who does the Bible, the word of God say that Jesus is? Is he John the Baptist returned to haunt an unjust humanity? Is he Jeremiah returned to prophesy doom to another wicked age? Is he Elijah returned to call fire down on the false prophets of today?

Who is Jesus?

The following is part of the first chapter of John from the gospels, said by unbiased scholars to be the highest and most profound work of literature in the human experience. In these concise words we will find our answers concerning Jesus, or as John describes Him in Jewish thought, the Word.

"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 nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is eternal, for 'in the beginning,' before the first minute of the first day, He already was, for He exists outside of time and space.

Jesus is personal, for He was 'with God,' which means that He as a person not as a force, was in a personal, close relationship with God.

Jesus is divine, for He 'was God,' as much God and as wholly and perfectly God as the Father, only distinct in role.

Jesus is the creator, for 'all things were made through Him,' from the deepest atomic structure to the furthest reaches of the universe only recently glimpsed in their beauty by the Hubble space telescope.

Jesus is the giver of life, for 'in Him was life,' whatever it is that turns an unborn baby of flesh and blood into a living, thinking, eternal being. Jesus is the source of life not the amoeba chemically forming by coincidence in primeval oceans of chance. In Him was and still is 'life.'

Jesus is the light giver, for 'He gives light to every man coming into the world.' How can life not reflect the giver of that life however scarred, marred and hidden that light might be in a selfish and disobedient world?

Jesus is the Son of God, or if you prefer, God the Son, for 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' and 'the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.'

We will struggle for the length of life to understand these facts with our minds but once we have received a revelation of these absolute and highest of truths in our hearts the problems of believing disappear like the morning mist before the rising sun. How is that?

If we were taking about a man, even a good man, in connection with a virgin birth, miracles, atonement for our sins and a resurrection from the dead then we would truly have problems that are bigger than Mount Everest. Agreed, but if Jesus is truly eternal, personal, divine, creator, life and light giver, indeed God the Son come in the weakness of human flesh, babyhood and childhood, as the Bible says, then ~

Miracles are no problem to do or to understand, for the author and the worker of the extraordinary was and is God, as Jesus.

His death on the Cross on behalf of all men is no problem to believe for it was no mere man that was crucified, for it was God himself as Jesus that we put to death.

The resurrection from the dead is no problem, for it God as Jesus, the giver of life, that death could not hold.

A second coming of Jesus in power to put this world right forever and to punish the wicked and unrepentant is no problem, for it is God who is coming in answer to the thousand, thousand prayers of the poor and pained every day.

And what is the problem with a virgin birth, when it is God who is to be born into humanity and to be named Jesus?

Will you allow the risen, gloriously alive Jesus to look you in the eye and ask you that vital question,

"Who do you say that I am?"

How will you answer him?

Will you say, "I believe that Jesus was a good man, a kind man, a spiritual man amongst men?" But how will you say that?

What would you call a man who claimed that he could give eternal life, that he and God were one and the same, that he was the resurrection and the life and those that believed in him would never die? What would you call a man who insisted that he was the way, truth and the life and no-one could find God except through him, even though attesting miracles of love and compassion confirmed his every word?

The famous Oxford don and writer C S Lewis said something like this, "You could never call Jesus Christ nor anyone else who makes claims like that a good man. That is one thing a man like that is not. Call him a madman, call him a lunatic, call him the worst kind of liar and deceiver, but never, ever a good man. Unless what he says is true. Then he must be God. The worst kind of man or God, he is one or the other ~ but a good man, never."

In the midst of a world hungering for spiritual reality and a way to go, Jesus appears today out of eternity and into space and time at the doorway of your heart and asks you with a tender gentleness to answer the one question that will determine whether your hunger is satisfied and your soul kept safe for eternity:

"Who do you say that I am?"

I am going to ask you to do three things as you answer that question for yourself, for answer it you will one way or another, as we all must.

Firstly, I am going to ask you to believe in God, and that for more most people in the world today, will not be too hard.

Secondly, I am going to ask you, now, to follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth and life. What happened when the eternal, personal, divine creator and giver of life and light came to this world of lost men? John tells us,

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him."

Now here comes the good news, and it is still the best news today, for you as you finish reading this page.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God"

If you will believe in Jesus you will find that you are born of God this very day, in fact born-again as some call the blessed experience. John says, "To those who believe in His name who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

So I am going to ask you to join with Peter, with me and my family, and with millions of men, women, boys and girls the world over and present in every nation and say,

"Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Having done that I will ask you to worship Jesus not as a dead man on an ancient cross but one who is God and gloriously alive today, and near to you. I will ask you to get to know him in His word and in prayer, to hear him and do as He asks you.

Then, as soon as possible, I am going to ask you to dedicate your lives to telling others nearby and even far away this good news of how Jesus, God the Son came in love to embrace the peoples of this world.

To do this you will have to do what Jesus himself did when he left heaven and eternity to enter in a violent, hostile, selfish world of time and space. What did he do? Jesus humbled himself, emptied himself and left behind every claim to power and honour for the sake of men and women. He voluntarily accepted hardship, isolation, misunderstanding, ill-treatment, malice and self-sacrifice in order to bring hope, to bring peace with God, forgiveness and reconciliation and a future for families and nations.

If only we Christians truly, truly believed the truths in this talk then the churches would not be full to overflowing next Sunday, but empty and echoing as believers went out everywhere with a passion for God and for mankind saying, "Do you know?" and "Have you heard?"

That may not happen just yet but if you will believe with all your heart then many more people will ask you why, and as you explain the way and the truth to them, they too will also believe and a movement will begin and the world will begin to get better, one new holy person at a time

God bless you for visiting this page,

Les Norman

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New Kings James Version © 1982, and reproduced from the Online Bible CD.

Recommended reading: Knowing God, J.I.Packer ISBN 0-340-19713-7,
and Mere Christianity by C.S.Lewis, from which © quotations and extracts are gratefully acknowledged.

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