



THE PASTOR'S PEN

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Jesus Christ: Many Things to Many People

Jesus Christ has been called many things by many people, including a great man, a great teacher, and a great prophet. There is no legitimate scholar today that denies that Jesus is a historic figure that walked on this earth about 2,000 years ago, that he did remarkable wonders and acts of charity, and that he died a horrible death on a Roman cross just outside Jerusalem. The only dispute is whether Jesus was God incarnate who rose from the dead three days after His crucifixion. These are all matters of historical record. They can be researched and historically tested. Aside from that, Jesus told us who He was – He didn't mince words. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by Me." (John 14:6).

Even though Jesus Christ declared "I am the Way," not everyone believes Him. Even Christians will sometimes allow the critics of the Christ to silence them on this point. So, what are we all afraid of? The evidence for Jesus and His great works are well documented both in and out of the Bible. The evidence for His crucifixion on the cross, the empty tomb three days later, and His appearances to over 500 eye-witnesses after his resurrection is very compelling. Jesus fulfilled over 300 messianic prophecies written in the Old Testament scriptures. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the reliability of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, both of which have been proven to exist prior to the time Jesus walked on the earth, you can be assured that these prophecies were not "conspired" after-the-fact. They were truly fulfilled by the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Actually, if you look at the polls, most people aren't afraid of Jesus at all. They're afraid of Christians. Look at the way many Christians act, and you can see why many fear. Arcane rituals, flamboyant preachers, the focus on money, power, hypocrisy – Do these present a real picture of who Jesus is, and who He wants us to be? No. However, Jesus did not ask us to follow men and manmade religions, He asked us to follow Him.

Jesus Christ declared "I am the Truth," but clearly, many of us have followed the world's standards and created our own concepts of truth. Moral relativism and religious pluralism pervade our culture and we have allowed it to creep into our own lives. The result is that truth is redefined daily in light of what the world says. However, Jesus, through His Word -- the Bible -- gave us the absolute truth. A truth that does not change based upon the whims of society. With today's archaeological, historical and manuscript evidence, there's far less reason to deny the origin of the Bible and its divine authenticity than to deny the legitimacy of works by Caesar, Homer, Plato, Aristotle or Shakespeare.

What about your own pursuit of the truth? Is it even a priority in your life? How do you discover Christ's truth, you might ask? He tells us in Matthew 7:7, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Jesus Christ said that He is the only way. Jesus is unique. Looking at this statement we have only three real possible conclusions. He was either telling the truth, He was insane, or He was a liar. But since everyone agrees that Jesus was a good man, a great teacher or a prophet; how then could He be both a great teacher and crazy, or a good man and a liar? There is only one logical, consistent alternative - He must have been telling the truth. Jesus is who He said He was – that He is the Son of God and the only way to salvation!

Yes, as hard as it is to hear in our pluralistic world community, Christianity is different than all the others. That may sound terribly dogmatic and narrow-minded, but the simple truth is that Christianity **is** the only true religion. Christianity is not based upon evidence...but it is backed by evidence. Obviously anyone could "claim" to be God. The difference with Jesus is that His life completely backed those claims. Check out the history, check out the claims – it's an absolutely phenomenal study.

The primary focus for your study is that Jesus fulfilled over 300 messianic prophecies written in the Old Testament scriptures. Examine the probability of one man fulfilling just a handful of the most specific prophecies, and you'll be amazed. Another focus for your study is to understand what Jesus said and did as a historical figure. No legitimate scholars today will deny that Jesus lived about 2,000 years ago, was a great teacher and doer of good works, and that he was crucified on a Roman cross for the crime of blasphemy among the Jews. The only dispute is whether Jesus rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion and that He was, in fact, God incarnate. This is where everyone must test the evidence for the resurrection, examine their hearts, and make that decision about who Jesus really was and really is today.

Jesus said that He alone was the way to the Father (John 14:6), that He alone revealed the Father (Matt. 11:27; Luke 10:22). Christians do not go around saying Christianity is the only way because they are arrogant, stupid or judgmental. They do so because, based on the evidence, they believe what Jesus said. Christians believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the one who claimed to be God (John 8:58; Exodus 3:14), who forgave sins (Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20; 7:48), and who rose from the dead (Luke 24:24-29; John 2:19f).

Compared to other world religions, Buddha didn't rise from the dead, nor did Confucius or Zoroaster. Muhammad didn't fulfill detailed prophecy. Zeus nor Odin didn't raise the dead or heal the sick. Though there is far less reliable information written about these religious leaders, they are believed in and followed by millions. Jesus said that He was the only way. Jesus is unique. He claimed to be God and proved it by the power of His resurrection.

Because Jesus is unique, many do not know what to do with Him. How do you respond to the Son of God? The answer here is one that each of us must make for ourselves. It comes down to believing and acting on that belief by entering into a relationship with God, by being obedient to His commands (Acts 2:37-38), trusting in Jesus and what He did on the cross for you (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) and not on what you can do for yourself (Ephesians 2:8-9). Christianity is not about ornate buildings, flamboyant preachers, or traditional rituals. Christianity is about truly accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior and then living for Him each day.

So what do you believe? How are you going to live? It is not what you say that matters, but what you actually do that counts.

Believing and living in Him.

James