

1. Who Was Jesus (2Q 2008—The Wonder of Jesus)

Biblical material: Matt. 16:13-16, John 20:26-28, 1 Cor. 1:18-27, 15:3-7.

Quotes

- As for myself, I do not believe that such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed; but as the people are inclined to superstition, it is proper not to oppose them.
Napoleon Bonaparte
- If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not even crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, and hear what he had to say, and make fun of him.
Thomas Carlyle
- The story of Jesus is very fascinating. It still has such a tremendous power, even after 2,000 years! We don't really know if he existed as a historical figure. *Bjorn Ulvaeus*
- 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*

Questions

Why is it important to ask, 'who was Jesus?' How can we answer such a question? If you were explaining Jesus for the first time, what would you say? Why did God choose to come in this way—was there no other way? If you had lived in Nazareth, what would you have said in response to Jesus' claims?

Discussion/ Comment

Ever since his birth people have been arguing over Jesus. Why is there so much argument? Couldn't Jesus have made it clearer? And if so, how?!

The real question is how you make up your mind. Is it because the concept is appealing? Is it because that's what you've been taught? Is it because of feelings? How do you decide your own answer to the question, "who was Jesus?"

How would you answer the four quotations listed above? What issues of the debate do they reveal? And how would you explain your own perspective?

As the lesson points out, Jesus invited answers to the question himself. The responses ranged from John the Baptist resurrected to the Prophet (of Deuteronomy) or a prophets generally. But Peter's response is the one that comes from revelation coupled with demonstration—Peter has seen, and he is convinced. The belief is based on evidence, and this is as true today as it was then.

The lesson also relates the experience of “doubting” Thomas. But even there, Jesus did not make any appeal to “unreason” or blind faith—he specifically invited Thomas to examine the evidence. Jesus’ comment too must not be seen as an abdication of examination, but rather the confidence we can still have even though at a long distance in time and space from the original evidence.

It’s important to understand what’s being said in 1 Cor. 1:18-27. This is not a dismissal of wisdom, or of examination and determination. It is a rebuttal of supposed wisdom, that in reality is based on pure speculation or assumption. Undoubtedly some believe that they are wise because of their education or their ability to amass information. But what God wants is clear thinking and logical analysis. This is not the same as what we call wisdom and knowledge from a humanistic perspective. God is not anti-reason, though we may not always understand. It is simply a question of capacity, not of a different methodology.

Paul goes on to stress the importance of evidence, citing the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. In fact he gives us details not in the gospels, such as the fact that Jesus appeared to more than five hundred at once, and of whom most are still alive to corroborate his story.

Yet from today’s perspective, it still depends on what weight you give to the evidence. “Who was Jesus?” remains a matter of conviction, having reviewed the data. In the same way that God does not demand acceptance of his existence, Jesus does not demand acceptance of his divinity. He simply demonstrates, and through the testimony of both friends and enemies, he leaves us to make our decision.

Ellen White Comments

By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,—God’s thought made audible. In His prayer for His disciples He says, “I have declared unto them Thy name,”—“merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,”—“that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which “angels desire to look,” and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song. approach unto. {DA 19-20}

In all the gracious deeds that Jesus did, He sought to impress upon men the parental, benevolent attributes of God. . . . Jesus would have us understand the love of the Father, and He seeks to draw us to Him by presenting His parental grace. He would have the whole field of our vision filled with the perfection of God’s character. . . . It was only by living among men that He could reveal the mercy, compassion, and love of His heavenly Father; for it was only by actions of benevolence that He could set forth the grace of God. Christ came to manifest the love of God to the world, to draw the hearts of all men to Himself. . . . {AG 99}

In His life Jesus of Nazareth differed from all other men. . . . From the beginning of His ministry men began more clearly to comprehend the character of God. . . . Christ’s mission on earth was to reveal to men that God was not a despot, but a heavenly Father, full of love and mercy for His children. {HP 14}

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