

Title: “#6 – Who was Jesus: Mad, bad or something else?”

Purpose: To consider all the possible options that present themselves and to see which holds the most water.

INTRODUCTION

We all go to parties, at the office and socially and we frequently ask people and get asked “What do you do?”. It is an identity question.

One of the most important things that we own is, in fact, our IDENTITY.

I guess this is seen to some measure in the great increase, these days, in what they call "Identity Theft".

But there is a deeper IDENTITY QUESTION which we are usually too afraid to ask which is "Who are you?"

I want to play you a brief clip - based around this question:

***** PLAY VIDEO CLIP - Who are you, really? (Dr Who theme) *****

Jesus divides opinion

I think that it would not be very contentious to say that "Jesus divides opinion".

If you were to go the Caribbean amongst Rastafarians - they would hold Jesus as one worthy of some respect.

If you were to go into Muslim countries - they would have even more respect - they would hail him as a great prophet (and for them not the greatest and not the latest either).

If you were to go into Communist Russia - then you might meet the viewpoint which is recorded in one of their dictionaries which says that "Jesus is a mythical figure who never existed."

Coming closer to home let me tell a story to illustrate the point of view of many:

A women was out driving alone in her car with a big Christian fish sticker on the back. Unfortunately her husband had been the one to last use the car and he had forgotten to tell her that it was virtually out of fuel and so after 20 minutes of driving it literally ground to a halt.

Now fortunately for the women, where the car stopped was in sight of a petrol station. Looking into the boot she could see that there was no canister for her to get fuel with - however, undaunted and being a typically inventive mother - she took her daughter potty that was sitting in the back seat.

On returning to the car with one potties worth of fuel - she duly began carefully emptying the contents into the fuel tank.

Well just at this point a man drove up and noticing the fish sticker pulled alongside and wound down his window and said: "Dear woman, even though I admire your religion, I sure don't share you faith!!"

For so many in the West - they are happy to accord Jesus the title of a great teacher BUT for them it simply goes nowhere and bears no further reflection.

Our choices

Q. So what are our choices?

Well logically there are FOUR possibilities:

And just to line these up and make them reasonably memorable - we can make them all start with the letter L:

- He's a LEGEND
- He's a LIAR
- He's a LUNATIC
- or He actually is the LORD God that He claimed to be:

So we'll work through them one by one to see how much "true fuel" they hold, to see which ones "truly are potty"!!

#1. Jesus didn't exist, he is the stuff of LEGEND - a Communist Russian line:

CS Lewis, the writer of many well-known children's stories, was for many years an atheist truly believing that Christianity was simply the stuff of legends, not really any different from any other religion or from perhaps some of the Norse legends that, as a literary critic, he loved to read.

However, when challenged by his good friend and fellow literary critic **JRR Tolkien** (who wrote the Lord of the Rings trilogy and who was a Christian) he proceeded to read them through with a more open mind - this is what he said:

"I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste. And yet the very matter that they set down in their artless, historical fashion...was precisely the matter of the great myths. If ever a myth had become fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. ...Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man."

To be honest - this point is the simplest of all to dispense with because you only need to go to the secular skeptics of Jesus day and they will tell you that he existed.

Q. What people are these? Well - Josephus, the Jewish historian OR Tacitus, the Roman historian OR Suetonius, another Roman historian

If you want to go a bit more modern you could pick some of the most liberal scholars of our day, people like **Bart Ehrman** or **John Dominic Crossan** (of the highly controversial "Jesus Seminar") and they would concur that Jesus definitely existed there in 1st century Palestine, although they would very comfortably go on to say that the Resurrection appearances were nothing at all – just fully explainable as "Visionary experiences".

#2. Jesus as a LIAR

With this option what we are saying is that Jesus made a whole load of REMARKABLE CLAIMS - however, he himself knew that they weren't actually true.

Now to be a good liar - you actually need to be very clever - certainly if you want to remain believable.

SHOW VIDEO CLIP – Lying is hard to do

Does it not seem rather strange, at least incredibly ironic, that Jesus a compulsive liar should cause people to become scrupulously truthful. Committed Christians across the centuries have been known to tell the truth at great cost to themselves - even some being burned at the stake, when a simple retraction from the truth would have saved their skin within moments.

#3. Jesus as a LUNATIC

Here what we are saying is that NOT ONLY did Jesus make a whole bunch of really INCREDIBLE CLAIMS but also he himself BELIEVED these claims to be true.

The story is told of a man, in a certain institution, wearing a French tricorne with one arm inside his jacket. On being asked who he was - he replied "Napolean Bonapart - Beinsure!"

On being further asked how he knew - he replied: "God told me" - at which another man interjected: "No I did not!!"

The thing with Jesus is that not only did he make outrageous claims, he also did outrageous things to back them up.

Having one without the other, is simply asking to be called a LUNATIC.

And anyhow:

Q. Can we give a good explanation as to how lunacy from Jesus can transform people so that the weak become strong, the poor become rich, the despairing full of life-long joy?

We have spent just very cursory time looking at the logically possible alternatives of LEGEND, LIAR or LUNATIC but really so much of it hangs on whether we can do any effective substantiation of the CLAIMS of Jesus to show that He must be LORD, just as He said, Son of God and God the Son.

#4. Jesus as LORD

So let us look at the claims of Jesus and thus of Christianity.

It is not unusual to hear people say things like:

"Well, of course, Jesus never said he was God."

Through long ages people, struggling with the notion of the Trinity, have opted to see Jesus as merely a man or perhaps as some first created being.

So looking at Jesus' own words will help us see whether that is an option that Jesus leaves open for us. (And by the way if you are thinking - well I'm not really sure that the gospels are such that we can take what they say at face value - then I suggest you pick up a DVD at the back during coffee, or alternatively download the talk from last week where we spent some time at a legal level looking at the reliability of the document set for the life of Jesus - those 4 primary sources we know as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.).

It would be quite hard to swing the idea that Jesus contemporaries did not catch on to the very radical nature of what he was saying.

The notion that somehow his statements just went over their heads simply doesn't play true to the facts.

1) Jesus in [John 9](#) healed a man born blind - following this he claimed that he was the Light of the world and the Good Shepherd and to this some people responded by saying that he was:

"demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?".

Others responded back to that assertion by saying (John 10v20-21):

"But others said, 'These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'"

2) Another time, Jesus said (John 8v58) "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

I AM was an OT designation for God - and so in the following verse we can see that they understood full well his meaning - "So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple."

So we are trying to see the sort of claims that Jesus himself made:

Q. Did He, either in word or action, make plain that He was not merely the Son of Man, but the Son of God and beyond that God the Son?

3) Well turning to [John 5](#) - Jesus has just healed a cripple who had been in an invalid state for 38 long years - and He heals him on the Sabbath - this is what we read following on from that:

[\(Verses 16-18\)](#) "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defence Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.' For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

4) Moving on to [Matthew 16](#) we come to the occasion when Jesus disciples come to an understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus actually presses the issue:

[Matthew 16 verses 13-17](#) "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he 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 Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.'

Notice that Jesus does not deny their conclusion - he confirms that it is something revealed from above.

5) Jesus receives worship

We know from [Matthew 2](#) that the Magi "bowed down and worshipped him" – now I know that Jesus was not old enough at that point to stand up or to shout out – "Hold on! Don't do that – you don't think I'm a divine child do you!!".

After Jesus walked on water we read in [Matthew 14 verse 33](#) "those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly

you are the Son of God”

In [Matthew 28 Verse 9](#) we see the disciples recognizing the Resurrected Jesus and they we read that they : “came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him”.

Thomas, that doubting disciple who missed out on the first occasion that Jesus appeared to all his disciples together on that first Lord’s day, meets him a week later and Jesus appears again and invites Thomas to satisfy his own conditions of faith – then Thomas responds (John 20 verse 28) “My Lord and my God!”.

[FJA Hort](#) who spent 28 years in a critical study of the NT text, writes:

“His words were so completely parts and utterances of Himself, that they had no meaning as abstract statements of truth uttered by Him as a Divine oracle or prophet. Take away Himself as the primary (though not the ultimate) subject of every statement and they all fall to pieces.”

Kenneth Scott Latourette a historian of Christianity at the University of Yale writes:

“It is not His teachings which make Jesus so remarkable, although these would be enough to give Him distinction. It is a combination of the teachings with the man Himself. The two cannot be separated...” “It must be obvious” he concludes “to any thoughtful reader of the Gospel records that Jesus regarded Himself and His message as inseparable. He was a great teacher, but He was more. His teachings about the kingdom of GOD, about human conduct, and about GOD were important, but they could not be divorced from Him without, from His standpoint, being vitiated (made invalid).”

The gospel of Mark

Take the gospel of Mark and look at its cumulative message or profile that it gives to Jesus:

READ Mark 1v1

- we see wholesale healings
- we see demons being cast out
- we see storms being stilled
- we see forgiveness being dispensed
- we see a little girl raised up out of death

The gospel of John

Again take the gospel of John and look at its cumulative message or profile that it gives to Jesus:

READ John 1v1-3

The miracles Jesus does in this gospel are called SIGNS and so we are to see their significance and not their WOW factor.

Through the gospel we get a whole series of encounters with Jesus and people getting transformed because of them. They come through to a place where they have settled the IDENTITY QUESTION in their own minds.

We get all these statements where Jesus begins I AM:

- I am the bread of life

- I am the light of the world
- I am the good shepherd
- I am the gate
- I am the resurrection and the life
- I am the way, the truth and the life
- I am the true vine

CONCLUSION

So in bringing this to a conclusion let me read the words of [CS Lewis](#), in his book "[Mere Christianity](#)" who tackles, in his usual perceptive and forceful manner, what is called **the Trilemma of whether Jesus is Liar, Lunatic or Lord** - He says:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. 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 the 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 patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Let me close with a quote from the end of John's gospel, a poem and then a closing video clip:

[John 20 verse 31](#) "But these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name."

A poem by [Max Lucado](#) called:

OUR GREATEST NEED

**"If our greatest need had been information,
God would have sent us an educator.
If our greatest need had been technology,
God would have sent us a scientist.
If our greatest need had been money,
God would have sent us an economist.
If our greatest need had been pleasure,
God would have sent us an entertainer.
But our greatest need was forgiveness,
So God sent us a Saviour!**

I will leave you with a video clip to present one final time – **Q. WHO IS JESUS?**

*****SHOW VIDEO CLIP – Who is Jesus (from Focus on the Family)*****