

Who Did Jesus Think He Was Anyway?

By Matthew Tague

Jesus is clearly one of the most awe-inspiring men who ever lived. More has been written about him than any other person on the planet, past or present. But many people today question whether he was really God's son. Most vary between believing that he was some sort of really special spiritual person, an avatar as the Hindu's like to put it, and just a good teacher. To set forth the case that Jesus was actually God in the flesh we must present a twofold argument:

Who did Jesus think he was? (Traditionally called the self-understanding of Jesus.)
Did Jesus really rise again from the dead?

Both of these questions have tremendous importance. The first, because if Jesus didn't believe that he was uniquely God's son, then the Christian message about him is wrong. The second question is important because if Jesus didn't rise again from the dead, there is no hope for the Christian of rising from the dead either (1 Corinthians 15:14). In this article we proceed to answer the first question. A future article will address the subject of Jesus rising again from the dead.

Who did Jesus think he was?

In this day and age it is very popular to believe that during the silent years of Jesus, (the period of his life between 12 and 30, in which nothing is written about him) he traveled to Asia. Most likely Jesus settled in India and learned the secrets of eastern thought before returning to his homeland in Palestine. Unfortunately, this theory has absolutely no basis in fact. The first record that can be found supporting this view comes from a man named Nicholas Notovitch who published a book in 1894 called *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*. During his day, there was a movement to try and synthesize the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity, and his work helped to spur that movement on. Notovitch claims that his book was written while he was traveling in Tibet. Through various circumstances, one of the chief Lamas at a Himi Monastery informed him of a secret manuscript about Jesus' life and travels in the east. The Lama then had it read aloud through a translator for Notovitch. There are numerous problems with Notovitch's story itself, but the biggest is that the manuscript he claims to have gotten his story from has never been found, (oops!). There are also numerous inconsistencies within his own book that led the credible scholars of his day to renounce his book. Nevertheless, his theory has been recapitulated through the years by other authors who use his work as a reference or claim similar stories about Jesus. It is an interesting point that most people are willing to believe the work of one man from 1894 rather than 5366 New Testament manuscripts written before 500AD. The sad part is that if you were to ask most people on the street which idea is more ancient, the biblical account of Jesus or the one proposed by Notovitch, some would pick the one by Notovitch. This underscores the sway that the popular media has on the minds of our society. This idea about Jesus has circulated through the mass media in waves over the last hundred years and the result is that a significant portion of our society believes that there may be some truth in it.

As an aside, just notice how each year the major news magazines, Time, Newsweek and U.S. News and World Report, all do a major cover story on some "new" aspect of Jesus' life. They all claim that "modern research is re-thinking the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth." But the next year they are on to some new theory of Jesus' life that contradicts last year's theory. It is all done to sell magazines. This is not an entirely bad thing. It shows that even in modern society, people love to read about Jesus. Christians must use this to their advantage to present the traditional and factual story of Jesus' life and ministry.

Since the idea that Jesus traveled to India cannot be considered as a credible option, we must return to the gospel accounts. There has been a movement of liberal scholars in the past ten years called "The Jesus Seminar" that has sought to re-evaluate the gospels and "re-determine" what Jesus really said. The Jesus Seminar places the apochrypal gospel of Thomas as a better historical source than the traditional

gospels. Time does not permit a detailed account of the gospel of Thomas, but needless to say, it was written much later than the four gospels and by a person who was not an eyewitness. The Jesus Seminar teaches that Jesus never stated that he was the sole means to salvation or that he was God incarnate, (incarnate means "in the body" or "in the flesh"). In fact the results of the Jesus Seminar research stated that Jesus only really said about 20% of what the traditional gospel's of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John claim that he said. The rest is Christian tradition and myth. There are numerous problems with their research and their conclusions, but on an ironic note, evangelical scholar William Lane Craig took the 20% that the Jesus Seminar said was authentic and he still proved conclusively that Jesus believed that He was God. If you ever get a chance, please look up Will Craig's stuff. He is a master debater and thinker for the cause of Christianity. His web site can be found on my "favorite web sites" links up above.

Good research regarding the reliability of the New Testament-(NT), discounts much of what the Jesus Seminar has to say, as well as those who believe that Jesus traveled to India. However, we will now study the evidence in the gospels themselves to see what Jesus believed about himself and what the earliest Christians believed about Jesus.

If we investigate the NT we find numerous examples of who Jesus thought he was. There are those who object to using other sources in the NT besides the gospels. They claim that since it is not material in the biography of Jesus himself it should not be used. Those people are forgetting one important fact, that all of the epistles of Paul and most of the NT was written before the gospels. Therefore, they provide an even better source for what the eyewitnesses thought about Jesus. Paul for example was accepted by all of the apostles and Peter himself claims that Paul's writings were to be considered as scripture, II Peter 3:16. So the rest of the NT cannot be discounted as a witness about Jesus. The following are some of the NT scriptures that point directly to Jesus as God.

One Three separate occasions the Jewish leaders sought to stone Jesus explicitly because he claimed to be God: John 5:16-18, John 8:54-58, John 10:29-33.

In various other places, Jesus exhibits the qualities of God, such as omnipotence, an eternal nature and omniscience.

Omnipotence

John 6:40 Jesus could raise the dead.

John 10:17-18 Jesus had the power to lay down his own life and take it up again.

Colossians 1:15-20 Jesus created all things in the universe.

An Eternal Nature

John 1:1-2 The Word always existed.

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today forever.

Omniscience

John 16:30 Lord, you know all things.

Luke 5:21-25 Jesus knew their thoughts.

Luke 11:16-17 Jesus again knew the thoughts of others.

Other scriptures that claim that Jesus is God are:

Titus 2:13-14 the glorious appearing of our great God and savior Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:28 ...of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

II Peter 1:1 Through the righteousness of our God and savior Jesus Christ.

John 20:28 ...My Lord and My God.

Matthew 14:32-33 they worshipped him.

Colossians 2:9 express image of the invisible God.

John 14:7-9 anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

Some claim that Jesus did not believe that he was God because he was constantly referring to himself as “the son of man.” And in fact, they are right in one sense. Jesus did refer to himself more as the son of man than anything else. In our day and culture, if someone were to call themselves the son of man, we would take that as a reference to their human lineage. Jesus however probably meant something else entirely by his use of the term. Our first clue for this is in Daniel 7:13-14 where a divine being that looked like “a son of man” according to Daniel’s words, approaches God’s throne and is given dominion, power and an everlasting kingdom and all the peoples of the earth worshipped him. If you go to Mark 14:60-65 the account Jesus gives of himself to the Sanhedrin is very similar to the one in Daniel. And it was not lost on the Sanhedrin at all. Based upon Jesus’ words in verse 62, they condemn him to death with the charge of blasphemy, (someone claiming to be God).

Another clue is found throughout the gospels, in that Jesus would not publicly be recognized as the Messiah of Israel. John 6:14-15 gives us one of the reasons. The Jews believed that the coming Messiah would be the one to overthrow the Romans and begin Israel’s domination of the earth by a military kingdom. This was in fact their primary interpretation of the ministry of the Messiah at the time Jesus showed up. So if Jesus claimed to be the messiah openly, he would have subjected himself to all their wrongheaded ideas about what the messiah would do. In fact, whenever Jesus did tell one of his followers that he was the Messiah, he also tells them not to say anything about it until after he had risen from the dead. What Jesus did instead, is to point out a divine title without all the excess baggage. Designating himself “The Son of Man” allowed him to still be true to who he was without all the wrong perceptions of the title “messiah”. For he was indeed the figure of Daniel 7, and also the Messiah, but he could not openly recognize himself as the Messiah or it would have been detrimental to his ministry. So, rather than be a claim against Jesus deity, the title Son of Man turns out to be a claim for his deity.

Many people have claimed that they have finally “figured out” Jesus and what he stood for during his ministry on earth. Everything from Time and Newsweek during the holidays of Christmas and Easter to more liberal academic works abound on the subject. Yet for all the volume of work that has been produced about Jesus, the clearest and more significant documents are still the four gospels. In these gospels, Jesus clearly shares the message that He is God’s unique son, and that any person who believes in Him may enter into a relationship with God the world that He gave his only son, that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.”

For more information, please contact info@ranchodelreychurch.com. We encourage you to read other articles posted on the Rancho del Rey web site. In addition, there are some very helpful web sites that you can visit for more information Christianity. www.allaboutgod.com and www.str.org

Bibliography and recommended reading:

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Father. John 3:16 shares this profound truth in the simplest of terms. “For God so loved the