

# Is Jesus the Son of God?

## A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

It happened on a day when Jesus and his 12 disciples were at the northernmost point of his public ministry. Apparently, being at Caesarea Philippi allowed them some time alone to deal with a most important matter. Taking advantage of the privacy this trip afforded, in an exchange recorded in Matthew 16:13-20, Jesus asked his disciples,

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They knew he was speaking about himself, because Jesus had applied the title "Son of Man" to himself numerous times. They replied,

"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Then Jesus asked the all-important question,

"Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered,

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

No question is more important than the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Is he who he claimed to be? Is he, indeed, the Son of God? If he isn't, then he simply becomes just another in a long line of egomaniacs who have claimed to be, in some way, divine. But if he is who he said he is, then Jesus immediately becomes the most important man who ever lived and the most important person in your life! Consequently, "Who is Jesus?" is a question that everyone must answer.

## THE CLAIMS OF JESUS

We begin our search for the identity of Jesus by looking at what he said about himself. Though in the Gospels he primarily let his actions do his talking for him, Jesus made very clear that he viewed himself as the divine Son of God. For instance, on one occasion, his opponents took exception with something Jesus said about Abraham. In response, Jesus said,

"I tell you the truth...before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58).

In this, Jesus was claiming that he had existed since before the time of Abraham (2,000 years earlier!) and that he was deserving of the divine name "I Am" (Exodus 3:13-14).

Perhaps Jesus' clearest declaration of his identity came on the night of his trial. After Jesus had frustrated his critics by remaining silent, the following exchange took place between him and the high priest:

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62).

C. S. Lewis (Mere Christianity) clearly saw the implications of these bold claims of Jesus:

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.... 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.

### **THE LIFE OF JESUS**

Jesus lived a real life in the real world, facing real problems and struggling with real temptations. Yet, the Gospels reveal that he lived life better than it has ever been lived by anyone else. He was the perfect blend of compassion and courage, strength and gentleness, holiness and service. He was sinless (Hebrews 4:15), and yet he was often criticized because he was a good friend to sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Even during the agony of the Cross, at a time when most of us would be consumed with our own suffering, he demonstrated a remarkable concern for his executioners, a repentant thief and his mother. Never was a life so well lived. In Jesus we see the full potential of person, and we realize that this was no mere man.

### **THE PROPHECIES ABOUT JESUS**

Another category of evidence for the divinity of Jesus comes from Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in his life. Writing hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, the prophets had said that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7), that a powerful prophet would prepare the way for his public ministry (Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 3:1-12), that Jesus would be rejected (Isaiah 53; Luke 23:21), and that his executioners would gamble for his clothes (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24). Repeatedly, the Gospel writers noted that many events in the life of Jesus were done "to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophets" (Matthew 1:22; 2:23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56). Fulfilled prophecy points toward the divinity of Jesus.

### **THE MIRACLES OF JESUS**

Near the close of his Gospel, the Apostle John wrote,

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31).

The miracles that Jesus performed indicate that God was with him in a special way. Nicodemus understood this. One night, this Jewish leader came to visit Jesus and said,

"Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 3:2).

Many miracles are described in the Gospels. In the Gospel of John, for instance, seven miracles, or "signs," are mentioned. They include turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), restoring the health of the son of a royal official (John 4:43-54), healing a man who had been lame for 38 years (John 5:1-15), feeding 5,000 people with only five loaves and two small fish (John 6:1-13), walking on the sea (John 6:16-24), giving sight to a man born blind (John 9:1-7) and raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-45). John believed that the miracles of Jesus were a powerful testimony that he is, indeed, the Son of God.

### **THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS**

At the close of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount," (Matthew 5-7), Matthew records,

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed

at his teaching... (Matthew 7:28).

Even those who resist the idea that Jesus is the Son of God admit that he was a phenomenal teacher. His remarkable ability to handle hostile questions, his lofty instruction on love and forgiveness, his brilliant directions on ethics and morality, his timeless stories that still leave us examining our souls – these are the things that made Jesus truly a master teacher. Was he merely a genius, or does the quality of his teaching indicate that he is nothing less than the Son of God?

### **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS**

The greatest evidence of the divinity of Jesus is found in the resurrection. If Jesus died and three days later arose from the dead, then it is all true. If, on the other hand, the bodily resurrection of Jesus never occurred, then the Christian faith is all a grand hoax. Concerning the importance of the resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus:

...through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:4).

The earliest Christian preaching was a proclamation that Jesus had risen from the dead (Acts 2:32). To have stopped this new movement dead in its tracks, all its opponents would have had to do was to produce the corpse of Jesus. Yet, they couldn't, and hundreds of people claimed to be eyewitnesses to the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). The empty tomb, the testimony of eyewitnesses, the changed lives of the disciples and the inability of the opponents to produce a body all point to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

### **WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?**

We conclude this study back at Caesarea Philippi. This time, however, the question is not being asked to those first century disciples; it is being asked to you. Jesus of Nazareth, a man who walked on this earth 2,000 years ago, asks you to consider all of the evidence and then to answer his timeless question: Who do you say I am?

Written by **Bruce McLarty**

712 E. Race Ave.

Searcy, AR 72143