

Who is Jesus? February 9th 2020.  
Matthew 16:13-26; Acts 10:34-end.

*This talk follows the content and shape of the Alpha Course talk 'Who is Jesus?'*

Jesus asked Peter. Who do the people say the Son of Man is?  
Down through the ages, people have said many different things about Jesus.

2,000 years ago one man got nailed to a tree for saying how great it would be if everyone was nice to each other for a change."  
Douglas Adams who wrote Hitchhikers guide to the galaxy.

Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that men can understand. "SD Gordon."

"Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind." - Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet Leader

Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him. "Napoleon".

Who is Jesus? Our Emmaus group is using Youth Alpha. It remind us, that Jesus is so famous that sadly his name is often a swear word? People don't use anyone else's name as a swear word. A man bangs his head - ah - Taylor Swift! Road rage - ah, Elvis Presley; she hits her hand with a hammer - Ahh Spongebob SquarePants.

Who is Jesus? We have a few lawyers at All Saints. They would say evidence is crucial. It enables you to argue your case with the

strongest basis, it asks people listening to take that step of faith necessary.

So what evidence is there that Jesus existed? Well there is evidence outside of the Bible – from Roman Historians Tacitus and Suetonius and a Jewish historian Josephus – men with no reason to twist facts or create fiction. For example: Josephus wrote – in the same century as Jesus : “Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it is lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles.” So there is historical evidence for Jesus from outside the Bible.

There is also plenty of evidence in the Bible itself – which of course may be no surprise.. Well how can we trust the Bible, it was written centuries ago and so lots could have been changed to what we have now. Or perhaps the Church changed things over time to support their views. It is helpful to think as a historian would looking at ancient events...

To look at an ancient document, you have to ask two questions – first, when was the original written and how long was it before the first copy appeared; and second how many copies are there – so you can be sure of what the original writing was – the more copies which were consistent, the more you know, yeah that is what the writer etc wrote.

So for example Herodotus, ancient Gk Historian, wrote in c5th BC, first copy was AD900 – so 1300 years later. Caesar’s Wars 58-50BC, earliest copy again AD900, 950 years later. No classical scholar would doubt the authenticity of those works despite the gap in time.

The New Testament. The Books of the NT were written between 40-100 AD. The earliest copies of the text begin in AD 130 and we have full manuscripts by AD350 – so you could say a gap of only 300 years or perhaps only 30 years...

The number of copies? Herodotus Histories, 8 copies.  
Caesar's Gallic War, 9-10 copies; and the New Testament – 24300 copies...

As scholar (Hort) put it : "In the variety and fullness of evidence on which it rests, the text of the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone amongst ancient prose writings."

So, Jesus existed.

**But who was he?** The crowds Peter said, thought he was a prophet - Elijah, John the Baptist.

Firstly we know that Jesus was *fully human*. The Bible shares with us that he was fully human – he ate, he was hungry, he got tired; he was someone who got angry at injustice, someone who went through sadness and grief. He was tempted to do wrong, he grew up learning about obedience to his parents! And he worked, a carpenter, a job most likely learned from his father.

Probably many people would accept that. The issue is – was he something more?

Scottish comedian Billy Connolly said this:

*"I can't believe in Christianity, but I think Jesus was a wonderful man. He was a great religious teacher." ...*

But there are other views of this man Jesus...

An interviewer asked the Irish singer Bono of the band U2

*“Christ has his rank among the world’s great thinkers. But Son of God, isn’t that far fetched?”*

*Bono replied,*

*“No it’s not far fetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christian story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy... But actually Christ doesn’t allow you that. He*

*doesn’t let you off that hook. Christ says “I am God incarnate”... So what you are left with is either Christ was who he said he was or a complete nutcase.*

*I’m not joking here - the idea that the entire course of civilisation for over half the globe could have its fate changed and turned upside down by a nutcase, for me that’s far fetched.”*

Therefore, it makes us ask – what evidence is there to suggest he was more than a great religious and moral teacher... and who did Jesus think he was?

What did he say about himself?

Three parts of evidence. Firstly his teaching centred on himself.

Other religious teachers say ‘look to God’ they point away from ourselves. Yet when we read Jesus life, we see a humble, loving, good hearted man, who when he pointed people to God, pointed people to God and also often to himself. “It is through me that you come into a real relationship with God.”

Jesus said “I am the bread of life.” – for the spiritually hungry;  
For those who are in emotional dark places,  
"I am the light of the world"

Many people are afraid of death. Jesus said – I am the resurrection and life

‘Mother Teresa when asked shortly before her death – are you at all afraid of dying? And she said : “How can I be? Dying is going home to God. I’ve never been afraid. No, on the contrary I am looking forward to it!”

People perhaps realise more and more that material things cannot help. Jesus declared he offered people values, purpose, confidence after death and meaning in their lives –he offers people a value system – he is the way, he offers people *meaning*, I am the truth, what is the *real purpose* of things, Jesus says I am the life. At different times, politicians thinkers have said - *that* is the way, *that* is the truth, *that* is the life – but Jesus said: I am the way the truth and the life.

*So, his teaching centred on himself.*

Also, there are his indirect claims, the things he did or said.

He taught in a way which regarded himself as in the same position as God. 'You have heard it said, but I say to you...'

He showed his authority over sickness, over death, over the demons, he commanded the creation - the storm to be still. If he spoke today, this storm would have stopped... He declared his authority to forgive sins. In Mark 2, he said to the paralysed men "Yours sins are forgiven". Yes we can forgive people who sin against us; but Jesus forgave all the sins the man had ever done! Only God surely can forgive those who have hurt others – and the religious leaders there accused him of blasphemy.

He shared how he would judge the nations and peoples of the world at the end of time; and the key issue would be how they

responded to him. Surely these are not the kind of thing simply a 'great religious teacher' would say?!

Then there was Jesus direct claims.

There was a five year old child who was drawing a picture. And her mother said to her – what are you doing? The child said : I am drawing a picture of God! Her mother looked at her and said, don't be silly, you can't draw a picture of God, no one knows what God looks like? The child said – they will when I finish my picture!

John 20:20-26. It is the evening of first Easter, Jesus had appeared to a group of disciples, followers of Jesus and Thomas was not there. They told him they had seen Jesus – but he wasn't convinced, and so he said, he wouldn't believe it unless he saw the nail marks in his hands and put his finger into his side.

He had questions, doubts, wasn't sure... yet Jesus then lays some evidence before him...

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas called Jesus 'My Lord and God' – Jesus didn't go 'now hang on there, you have gone too far' – nope, Jesus reply is more like 'I'm glad you've got the point' – v27. 'Blessed are you who believe.'

This was not the only occasion when Jesus so dramatically pointed to himself...

Jesus said to receive him was to receive God. (John 13:20)

He said to welcome him was to welcome God (Mark 9:37)

He said to have seen him was to have seen God (John 14:9)

Yet Jesus didn't keep these claims for his disciples – the people around him heard about them.

John 10: Jesus says "*I and the Father are one.*" Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "*I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?*"  
"*We're not stoning you for any of these,*" replied the Jews, "*but for blasphemy, because you, a mere human being, claim to be God.*"

Jesus of Nazareth, in his own words and actions claimed to be God among us.

*But that's not the end of the argument.*

This needs testing as people can say all sorts about themselves – some say 'I'm Elvis Presley back from the dead' etc.

How do we test it? Jesus claims leaves us with three basic ideas: 1) it wasn't true and He knew it was untrue – so he was fraudster, and an evil one at that. 2) Second, it wasn't true, but he didn't know it – he genuinely thought he was God – but he was deluded or insane 3) Only other logical possibility is – that it is true.

Arthur Conan Doyle creator of Sherlock Holmes has Holmes say once: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

What evidence is there to support what Jesus said??

First area to look at would be his teaching.

An actor when preparing for a film once said about Jesus:

*“We looked for comedy in the gospels...we looked to poke fun at Jesus for the things he said....but we couldn't...we found that Jesus' teaching was brilliant...it all seemed to make sense...”*

We make progress in many fields, science, medicine technology, but no one has improved on Jesus moral teachings. To be honest, wouldn't these be the words we would expect God to speak to people and we would want him to.

His lifestyle (works and character)?

**Time Magazine** said: “Jesus, the most persistent symbol of purity selflessness and love in the history of Western humanity.” Acts 10 says : "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power and he went around doing good and healing ..." (v38).

As we read the accounts of his life, we think of miracles, of lives freed and healed, we see his time with the outcasts, the picked upon, the rejected, the religiously unpopular.. He gave value and he gave life. And his dramatic death laying down his life for his friends. And when he was being tortured : he said: “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing.”

Some people call Christianity boring? You can’t imagine following Jesus to have been boring – to be a Peter, James or John, it must have been a bit like waking up and wondering – what’s going to happen today!

The British journalist Matthew Parris who describes himself as ‘an avowed atheist’ was writing in the magazine, *The Spectator*, and he said this:

*“I’ve got such huge respect for Jesus because his life was so radical, it was so inconvenient.’ .... ‘If Jesus had not existed, the church most certainly would not have invented him.”*

Could such a person be evil or insane?

#### Fourth piece of evidence is Old Testament prophecy.

Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies spoken by different voices over hundreds of years, 29 of them in one day alone. It could be said – well he was clever, a conman, who set out to fulfill these. Well, there is the problem of fulfilled so many and also those he could not control – for example, where he was born, the exact manner of his death – if he was a conman, he couldn't say 'doh, I was supposed to be born in Bethlehem! – too late'

Fifth, most important, his conquest of death. As we heard Jesus told his disciples: "he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." Next week we will look at Why did Jesus die? But he said "on the third day be raised to life." This is key. The writer and Atheist, Richard Dawkins, said this: "*If the resurrection is not true Christianity becomes null and void*"

Peter Gillies has a really great sermon in much more detail on the evidence for the resurrection. You can find it on our sermon archive. But briefly.

#### Evidence for this resurrection?

1) *Body's Absence from the tomb.* Many reasons suggested why the tomb was empty.

A) First it has been said – well, *he didn't really die* on the cross, he passed out, then recovered in a cool tomb. Well, Romans was a common way of execution. They knew how to do it well. Jesus was on the cross for 6 hours. A stone weighed 1 and a half tons was rolled in front of the entrance – so how did a weak, badly wounded man get out of that.

B) *Disciples stole the body.* And they began a rumour he was alive. And went around telling everyone. Ian Walker, a scientist at Cambridge, became a Christian because he said he could not

believe that the disciples would have been willing to be tortured and die for something that they would have known, if they'd taken the body, was not true.

C) Others said, *well the authorities took the body* – yet, if they had, why not bring it out and prove what these disciples were preaching was wrong?

D) Robbers stole the body? Unlikely, very unlikely. We said Jesus body was absent, but the tomb wasn't empty. When people went into the tomb they found, grave clothes. Yet they were the only valuable thing to take – to take the ointments placed within the clothes.

- 2) Second piece of evidence – Jesus real presence with the believers after that Good Friday. Was it a Hallucination? Jesus appeared on 11 different occasions and most were with other people present, including 500 people at one time. Well, it may be possible for 2 or 3 people have the same hallucination. It is unlikely that 11 or 500 would have the same hallucination. Peter says to Cornelius, he was seen "by us who ate and drank with him, " (v41). Can a ghost eat food?
- 3) The impact on the disciples themselves? Defeated by what had happened to Jesus. Then something changed them that they were declaring in the city where Jesus had been killed, and even declaring to the same Jewish religious leaders who had done it, that He is alive. Peter and others proclaimed they were witnesses not just of Jesus life, death but his resurrection too. And from that point, the Church spread so within 30 –40 years it was established in the capital of the Roman Empire, a message received by Jew and Gentile. It is a story of a peaceful revolution with no parallel really in the history of the world.

#### 4) Christian experiences down through the years.

People of all races, backgrounds, classes, nationalities have the same experience of knowing and have a transforming relationship with the risen Jesus Christ. Many are willing to suffer for his name. People testify their lives have been changed.

From my own experience, when I became a Christian it suddenly pulled things together in me, which still hang today, of purpose meaning to life, and I went to Keele expecting to find it in law, and instead I found something else, in someone else. I saw that Jesus was *the Christ - God's promised King - the Son of the Living God*. I am not totally not perfect . But in that time, since September 1993, I have experienced the faithfulness, closeness, love, power, presence of Jesus to add to the other reasons I've mentioned that he is really alive.

Sherlock Holmes. Holmes once said : “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

You could say, when we look at who Jesus is, his claims, and whether he was deluded or a fraudster, you can rule out them as impossible due to his character, his teaching, his life, his fulfilment of prophecy and his resurrection, to say he was evil or deluded is illogical...

As Holmes put it, whenever you remove what is impossible, what is left. The strongest possible support is given to Jesus own consciousness of a man whose identity was God.

To close with words from C.S. Lewis:

*‘We're faced, then, with a frightening alternative.*

*The man we're talking about was, and is, just what he said, or else insane or worse.*

*Now, it seems to me obvious that he was neither insane nor a fiend.*

*And consequently, however strange, or terrifying, or unlikely, it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was, and is, God.'*

Jesus asked Peter - looking at all they had seen and heard, Who do you say that I am?

Who is Jesus? For us, we respond like Peter.

You are the Christ, Son of the Living God, the one we worship, adore and follow.

Shall we pray?

