

# Our Faith In Jesus Christ

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One day, a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest were having a heated debate over theology. Each obviously felt the other had made a wrong choice when it came to religion. After a while, the Catholic priest got so exasperated with the rabbi that he said, “Rabbi, what’s gonna happen when you get to heaven? You are not going to be met at the pearly gates by Moses. You are going to see St. Peter standing there.”

The old rabbi thought for a minute and said, “Hmm. If I am met by St. Peter, I will say, ‘I guess I gave up lobster for nothing.’ But when you get to the pearly gates, good father, if you are met by Moses instead of St. Peter, you will have to say, “Huh! I gave up marriage for nothing.’”

Religion is a choice.

Not many people have rightly chosen to worship God in spirit and in truth by being obedient to His Laws regarding the 10 Commandments, the annual high days, clean and unclean, etc. And each one of these people in the Church of God has acknowledged that our eternal salvation rests on the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Our premise is that, if Jesus is **not** the savior of mankind, then we’re all lost. And if we now believe in this first century messiah, none of our doctrines matter in the slightest. We can throw all of it away because, without Jesus Christ, our faith is meaningless.

This article will discuss the historical perspective of Jesus and how understanding it properly can strengthen our faith.

## **The Scholarly View of Jesus**

The problem with modern scholars and historians is that they try hard to appear magnanimous in their treatment of Jesus. As a result, they patronize us and condescend to us because they feel that we are limited in our collective, faith-based intelligence. They do this by placing all religions on a table for the world to see. They say about Jesus the exact same thing they say about all other founders of religion.

They say that Jesus was a good and wise teacher, but that, just like Mohammad, Buddha, or Confucius, Jesus certainly wasn’t God.

We run into a problem with this assumption when it comes to Jesus of Nazareth. Let's analyze this problem by understanding the difference between two concepts: a continuum versus either/or.

A continuum is a line with an infinite number of points on the line. A continuum represents infinite degrees. If I were to draw a line on a piece of paper and someone asked me how many points are on that line, the answer would be that I cannot count all the points on the line because there are an infinite number of points on any line. An example of a continuum would be my performance as an employee at the company where I work. You can measure my performance on a continuum. I can be an excellent employee or a very bad employee or I can be any number of places in between those two extreme evaluations. When rating a movie, it is also either very good or very bad or any number of places in between.

But then we have the concept of either/or. This is not the same as a continuum. For example, you can ask the question: Is that woman pregnant? She either is or she isn't. There is no in-between. There is no evaluation. There is no rating. There is no such thing as being partially pregnant. She either is or she isn't. It's either/or. Another example of either/or is whether or not a person is a Christian. Either a person is a Christian or he isn't. It's either yes or no. There is no in-between.

When scholars and historians want to evaluate Jesus, they want to put Him on a continuum where good is at one end and bad is on the other. They say, If you want to believe in most things about Jesus, you must put Him on this point of the continuum. But if you want to believe in just certain things about Jesus, you can put him on that point of the continuum. They say that your opinion of Jesus determines where you put Him on the continuum.

But here is where the problem comes in. When you evaluate the life of Jesus of Nazareth, there are four sources and four sources ALONE that you can go to. You cannot go to the apocryphal gospels because they aren't reliable. And you certainly can't go to the writings of Josephus about Jesus because what's in Josephus' account was probably a forged insertion.

So, if you want to learn about Jesus, you have to go to the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And here's the kicker. If you use these four Gospels as your sources, you find Jesus making statements about himself that PRECLUDE His being good and wise...UNLESS He is God!

## **Where Did Jesus Get His Authority?**

Let's demonstrate this by asking the question, "Where did the other founders of religion get their authority?"

Mohammad had visions. His authority was based on these visions.

Buddha had an experience which he offered to his disciples and told them that if they followed his way, they'd achieve ultimate happiness.

Confucius offered his disciples a logical analysis of society in the form of his writings on how to co-exist with one's fellow man.

Jesus, on the other hand, seeded absolute authority in Himself! He said, "You have heard it said such and such. But I say..." Then He would go on to expound his point. For example, we read that the Old Testament prophets said, "The Lord rebuke you or the Lord forgive you." Jesus said, "I forgive you."

When a guy is asked to preach to the Church of God, he typically is given us a lot of latitude on what he says. The quickest way he could lose this latitude would be if he were to say,

“All authority in heaven and earth is given unto me. If you build upon what I say, you build on a rock. If you build on what others say, you build on sand.” We don’t respect and exalt people who place such authority in themselves. We ask them, “By what basis do you claim this authority?” Yet Jesus placed it in Himself!

Another problem the world has with Jesus is that He said He was perfect. No MORTAL man can ever be respected for making the claims Jesus made about Himself. One theologian has said, “The greatest asset of mortal man is the repentance of sin and the greatest sin is to be conscious of none.”

We don’t like people who have no awareness that they make mistakes. Of those people who are the most repugnant is the person who thinks he’s never wrong. Those kinds of people drive us up the wall. We make saints of people who are AWARE of their faults and admit them.

But notice what Jesus did in Matthew 5:27-28. He defines the law as something from which nobody could escape: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time that you shall not commit adultery. But I say unto, that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Jesus is saying that you don’t have to DO it. Just THINK it and you’re guilty. That convicts everybody. But notice what He had just said before in verse 17. He said, “I’ve not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it.” He says, “You want perfection? Here it is. You’re looking at it.” Jesus carried with Him a sense of moral perfection.

### **Didn’t Jesus Admit Fallibility?**

Now the scholar and historian is going to say, “Ah. But doesn’t your Jesus say in your Bible, ‘Don’t call me good’?”

Let’s look at that verse. “And behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God...” (Matt 19:16-17).

People are always bringing up this scripture as “proof” that Jesus was not perfect. But this Scripture states the contrary. It says that Jesus was indeed perfect. It’s just muddled by the King James language of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Living Bible says, “When you call me good, you are calling me God, for God alone is truly good.”

Jesus says, “If you’re going to call me good, then recognize that I’m also God because only God can be good.” In this verse, Jesus was not admitting fallibility. He was claiming perfection!

Jesus was the only founder of religion who did not himself pray the model prayer that He gave to His followers. We know that the so-called Lord’s Prayer is not the Lord’s Prayer. It’s the disciples’ prayer. In Matthew 6 where Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray, He says to pray, “Forgive us our trespasses...” But Jesus never prayed that prayer!

We find Jesus’ prayer in John 17. We read every year at Passover where Jesus said, “Father, I have GLORIFIED you.” This prayer exudes the absolute, presumptive, self-confidence of perfection! No other religious leader dared to have that quality.

Jesus also set himself up as having an inside view of eternity. Remember how He drove the Pharisees to madness by saying, “I existed before Abraham.” You can almost hear the Pharisees saying, “Oh? You were around 3,000 years ago?” Jesus replies, “How about 3 MILLION years ago. You heard about Satan being cast out of heaven? I was there **and I’m older than that.**” Jesus talked about heaven and the eternal world the same way I talk about my

home in Big Sandy, Texas. Jesus made it clear that He was ALWAYS there and that His existence in Palestine 2,000 years ago was only a temporary thing.

We don't make saints and heroes out of people like that. We put them in an institution.

Jesus said:

*I am the light—follow me.*

*I am the bread—eat of me.*

*I am the water—drink on me.*

*I'm the door—you get in through me.*

*I am the rock—build on me.*

*There's no other way but me. You've got to make me your master and no one else.*

What other founder of religion dared to take such a stand?

Christianity is a cold turkey religion. By that, we mean that there is no middle ground. It's either this or that with no in-between. It's either/or. There is no continuum when it comes to accepting Jesus. Either Jesus was a fraud and a madman... Or He was God! There's nothing in between as the scholars and historians would have us believe.

And it's not just agnostic scholars and historians who have a problem with Jesus. The churches of this world sometime don't seem to have the *slightest* understanding of Jesus either. A recent Dallas Morning News article describes the problems the Presbyterian church is having with Jesus. The article says:

“The nation's largest Presbyterian denomination wrestled Thursday with what used to be a no-brainer for Christians—Is Jesus the only way to salvation...

“(The General Assembly) ...struck down a proposal that said Jesus is the one vehicle of salvation...

“(One delegate asked), ‘...if (salvation) is plural, who are the other deities we are talking about...’

“Another delegate said, ‘I don't have the right to say that other people can't find God in other ways...’”

When I talk to some of my friends, I tell them, “I'm sorry if you are offended by this, but there is only one way to eternal life. I say, with apologies to Plato, the ancient Egyptians, and the churches of the world today, you find eternal life ONLY through Jesus. There is no other way. All other roads lead to eternal death.”

## **Jesus' Resurrection is Unique**

Jesus' resurrection is what makes Christianity totally different from other religions and what makes the middle ground view an impossibility. As followers of Jesus, we can either believe or disbelieve that He rose from the dead just as He said He would. But if we don't believe in the Jesus' Resurrection, we might as well all never attend church services again, it wouldn't matter any more.

And, again, here is where the scholars and historians think they have us. They ask, “What PROOF is there that He really rose from the grave after three days and three nights?” When I was a boy in a Protestant church, I was taught to answer this question by saying, “Because He lives in my heart.”

And that answer is all right. But there's much more to it than that. We know Jesus lives today because as intelligent, thinking people, our logic dictates there is NO OTHER ANSWER.

Proof of Jesus' resurrection starts not only with the eyewitness accounts mentioned by Peter in the book of Acts and by Paul in his writings, but it goes further than that. And here's where we come to another one of those either/or crossroads we've been talking about.

Either the apostles were liars or they were honest reporters telling the truth when they reported Jesus' resurrection. And, in fairness to the scholars and historians, let's look at their five main arguments as to why they believe there was no resurrection of Jesus after three days and three nights.

First, they say that the Romans could have taken Jesus' body out of the tomb and hid it. Now I've got a brother-in-law in Oklahoma who likes to use the phrase "educated idiot." We in the Church of God are not anti-scholarship or anti-research. We know the value of scholarship and research.

But I've got to admit my brother-in-law is right when he says there are people in this world who have college degrees, but don't have enough sense to pour rain out of a boot. Why would the Romans want to steal the body of Jesus? But suppose they made a mistake and stole it. After this crazy religion took hold (based on an absent corpse), why didn't the Romans simply produce the body and prove once and for all that Jesus was a hoax. This act would have immediately destroyed Christianity right after its inception.

Second, they say that the Pharisees could have taken the body of Jesus from the tomb. Our answer? The same as #1 where the Romans might have taken the body. Why would the Pharisees take it? And, if they did, why not produce it later and show Jesus to be a fraud?

Third, they say the disciples were suffering hallucinations and only thought that they saw the resurrected Christ. Again, the authorities only had to produce the body of Jesus and it would have destroyed the whole game.

Fourth, they say the disciples could have taken the body. Now we're getting somewhere. Maybe the disciples were charlatans from the beginning. That would explain a lot. But it wouldn't explain the following:

After Pentecost there was **great change** among the disciples.

Peter, who had been the epitome of instability, becomes a rock.

John, who had been a son of thunder wanting to bring fire and brimstone down on a village—wanting the best seat in the house—becomes the epitome of love.

Thomas, who had doubted everything which such a negative attitude. John 11 shows how he was so depressed after the death of Nazareth he wished he were dead too. Thomas was so cynical that he had to actually put his fingers in the side of Christ in order to believe in the resurrection. Tradition says that Thomas held up in the faith even to being slaughtered in India for preaching the Gospel.

Previously, the disciples had been a bunch of whiners and crybabies. But then we see them transformed into men of power and strength and resolve.

Another reason it can't be claimed that the disciples were hoaxsters is the simple principle that *nobody suffers persecution for a lie*. After Jesus' death, we see the disciples continually tortured and slaughtered like animals in a butcher shop. John was the only exception, but the rest died for what they believed. Nobody would suffer such persecution for a lie.

## **The Disciples Were Genuine**

Another reason it can't be claimed that the disciples were hoaxsters is that, as the years went by, they were alone and they still stuck to their stories. We know they were scattered all

over the civilized world with virtually no communication with each other—no phones, no e-mail, no satellite transmissions, no air traffic, almost nothing. After 45 A.D., they didn't even know who was and who wasn't still alive in the group. Each man found himself in a position at the time of his death where all he had to do was say, "Time out. Wait a minute, folks. It was all a trick." He would then go free. None of his friends from the old days would know. They might have all been dead by then or maybe they all recanted too.

We can understand the concept of group hysteria in the Coliseum where one is about to die with a bunch of other people. In such an environment, each individual has a tendency to reinforce his peers in a spiraling wave of hysterical self-justification. These things have been studied and documented in the urban riots of our country where people who participated in a violent situation convinced themselves that they were all involved in a crusade for justice when actually they were just a bunch of thugs bent on looting for color TVs and microwave ovens.

But there was no group hysteria among the disciples when they died. Each was alone. No one recanted. If it were a hoax, one of the liars had to break. Almost all conspiracies have a rat. Give him immunity and he'll rat on the others. If the resurrection 2,000 years ago was a conspiracy, it was the most successful conspiracy in history.

The fifth argument against Jesus claims that the New Testament is not a reliable source of historical information. Proponents of this view start with the premise that Ezra not only had the authority to modify the Old Testament (supposedly to make it more readable for Jews), but that he actually DID modify the Old Testament. These people then reason that the Catholic church fathers (who set the New Testament canon) would then use Ezra's actions as justification to modify the New Testament text.

Now, there are several major problems with this teaching that Ezra tampered with the Old Testament and that his tampering then inspired the Catholic church to tamper with the New Testament:

- 1) There is nothing in Scripture that gives Ezra the right to change words written by prophets such as Moses and Samuel. Even if Ezra was descended from Aaron and served as a prophet, there is nothing in Scripture that says he had the authority to change words written by Moses and Samuel and Isaiah and Jeremiah.

- 2) There is nothing in Scripture or history that proves Ezra made modifications to the texts. Yes, the Jews have a tradition that Ezra set the final Old Testament canon, but that proves nothing. The last few paragraphs in the Torah regarding Moses' death might well have been added by Ezra. But, again, this is not proof that Ezra monkeyed with the Old Testament Scriptures to make them more readable for the Jews.

- 3) The Catholic church did not set the New Testament canon, nor was it the entity that determined which books would be in the New Testament. The Catholic church simply put its stamp of approval on what was already established by the Churches of God that existed at that time. None of these churches was under the authority of Rome.

- 4) If the Catholic church were going to change the text of the New Testament, they could have done a much better job of changing the New Testament to make it agree with their doctrines such as the immortality of the soul, the Trinity, the authority of the bishop of Rome, etc. There is nothing in the New Testament to back up Catholic teachings in these doctrines. But the Catholic church could NOT tamper with the New Testament Scriptures because these texts were already set in

canon as the accepted writings of all of "christendom" long before the church at Rome gave them their stamp of approval.

This discussion leaves us with only one possibility regarding Jesus' resurrection. Jesus is God. Logic dictates that Jesus rose from the dead after three days and three nights, that He ascended to heaven to be at the right hand of the Father, and that He is our King and Savior. No other approach makes sense.

We worship Jesus with all of our hearts, our souls, and our minds. We believe on Him and obey Him. We look forward to the day He returns. Oh, do we look forward to the day He returns to straighten out the mess which man has made of this earth!

We know that, unlike the rabbi and the priest in our opening story, the Kingdom of God will see no regret from us that we accepted Jesus as Savior. Our faith is rock solid and our choice to obey Jesus of Nazareth was the right choice.

So, let's continue to worship God in spirit and in truth. Let's always keep our eyes on the prize. And let's pray every day, "Thy Kingdom come."

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