

Weekly Grace — (compiled by your Chaplain)

## Why Should We Take Jesus of Nazareth Seriously?

Have you heard something like ‘all religions are the same’? Or ‘all religious roads lead to god (or to some spiritual goal)’? People sometimes tell me “Oh, you’re *religious*, good for you!”. What they politely mean is “I’m not interested”. Well, if we keep talking, they’re usually surprised that *I’m* not interested in religion either! I’m captivated by a *person*. (We might think about what *church* is in a later Weekly Grace, but for now, lots of religious activity is not it). So, what about this person? Why should anyone take Jesus of Nazareth seriously?

Luke was a first century medical doctor and historian. He meticulously interviewed eyewitnesses of Jesus of Nazareth and recorded Jesus’ own words about himself: “*He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*” (Luke 24:25-27)

So, Jesus of Nazareth tells us that *he* is the point of the whole sweep of the Bible. But why should we have confidence in his story?

Read any of the four biographies of Jesus (called ‘gospels’ in the New Testament) and you’ll see that Jesus is one-of-a-kind. He is *surprising*. No, he is *shocking*. He is *utterly unique* in five main ways (after Nigel Lee, Keswick 2005):

- 1) ***Jesus’ teaching***. Especially the attention he gave to those who broke the rules, the outcasts and the guilty, the ones who couldn’t live up to the Pharisees’ strict codes for being good. Jesus offers *rescue* for those who know they are morally bankrupt. But he reserves harsher words for those who think they are good enough for God by their own efforts. Even his enemies marvelled at the authority of his teaching.
- 2) ***Jesus’ claims about himself***. Things like ‘*If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father*’ (referring to God); or ‘*I’ve been given authority to judge every person who ever was, or is or is to be*’; or ‘*Before Abraham was even born, I AM*’. In fact, over the four biographies, Jesus claimed to be *God* 180 times! It’s why the authorities killed him. He’s either a liar, seriously deluded, or exactly who he claims to be. In light of Jesus’ claims about himself, each of us needs to decide which of these three is true.
- 3) ***Jesus’ power***. Jesus could control the weather – a number of witnesses saw him wake up from sleeping in the back of a fishing-boat that was being swamped by a fierce storm. He calmed the storm with a simple ‘Shush’! Jesus attended three funerals, then ruined all of them by raising the dead

person back to life! He also healed people with chronic and life-threatening illnesses, relieved people of evil spirits and fed 5,000 people with a small boy's packed lunch. Not even Jesus' enemies disputed that he did these things.

- 4) ***Jesus' death.*** Other religious leaders have lived, then died, and they remain dead. Jesus was betrayed by more than one of his followers. He was formally declared 'not guilty' *three* times at a trial, but he was still executed. He was innocent. Jesus said of himself that he freely gives his life as a 'ransom', that is a payment, for others' guilt, for our guilt. He lived the morally perfect life that none of us can, then died on behalf of the morally imperfect to give us his righteousness. That Jesus died on a Roman cross and was buried even his enemies agreed.
- 5) ***Jesus' resurrection.*** No other religious leader has risen from the dead to prove the claims about themselves to be true. There are many reasons to take the accounts of the first century eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection seriously. These reasons are not historically trivial – even main-stream historians take the accounts seriously. They are not religiously naïve or superstitious – even his own followers were surprised. Anyone can check the claims of Jesus rising from the dead for themselves. If you want to, perhaps read the Gospel accounts for yourself. Or let professional historian Professor John Dickson lead you through the historical evidence. Search "Dickson" and each of "*The Christ Files*", "*The life of Jesus*", and "*A Doubter's Guide to Jesus*" for videos and books.

Whatever you might think you know about Jesus of Nazareth, I challenge you to not simply believe what you might have heard. Read one of his biographies for *yourself*. If you don't know where to find one, I have some copies you can have for free!