

The real question is not, "Did Jesus exist?" but "Who was He?"

Written by Bob Stone

A recent survey by the Barna Research Group of Glendale, California, reveals how confused people are about who Jesus was. According to the survey, traditional Christian beliefs are in decline:

- While 88% believe Jesus Christ was a real person, what they believe about Him differs sharply from Scriptural teaching.
- 42% of those surveyed believe that while He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins, just like other people.
- Even among born-again Christians, one-quarter believe Jesus sinned during His time on earth. (From a news release by the Barna Research Group, Ltd., Nov. 2, 1994.)

"Who is Jesus?" That survey proves a lot of people don't get their information from the Scriptures. If we randomly asked, "Who is Jesus?" the most popular answers could be summarized by three responses. Jesus was:

1. a good man,
2. a great teacher, or
3. a moral leader

The problem is that Jesus Himself claimed to be a whole lot more than any of these.

- In different places and in different ways in the New Testament, Jesus actually identified Himself with none other than God. John 14:8-9—"Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' 9] Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father: How can you say, show us the Father?'"

- In John's gospel Jesus said, "Before Abraham was born, I am"—John 8:58. Not only was Jesus claiming to be around before Abraham, who lived about 1,900 years earlier, but "I Am" was the special Jewish name for God.

- Later on Jesus said, "I and the Father are one"—Jn. 10:30. As a result, the Jews around Him picked up stones to stone him saying, "We are not stoning you for any of these [i.e., miracles]... but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God"—John 10:33.

It is clear that those present with Jesus understood what He was saying. But there is further evidence Jesus claimed to be more than a good man, teacher and leader.

- Jesus allowed His followers to worship Him—Jn. 19:34-40. This would have been the ultimate blasphemy for a Jew, because it breaks the first and second commandments which state that only God should be worshiped. That Jesus allowed this to happen at all points directly and unmistakably to His belief that He was God.

- When Jesus was put to death by crucifixion, it was for blasphemy, because the Jewish religious leaders were convinced that His behavior amounted to a claim to be God. At His trial, they specifically asked Him, "Are you the Son of God?" And Jesus went on record as saying, "You are right in saying that I am"—Luke 22:70.

In the light of this kind of claim, the view that Jesus was nothing more than a good man, a great teacher, or a man who may have sinned a few times, just is not logical.

- Jesus had to be very much less, or very much more than good, because a mere man who claimed the sorts of things Jesus did about Himself could never be regarded as good.

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- He would either be a lunatic with delusions of grandeur on a galactic scale, or a very bold con man.

But think about it.

- If Jesus was a lunatic, why do the rest of His actions seem so consistent and sane?
- If He was a con man, why is the rest of His teaching so morally powerful and He so commonly acknowledged as an honest and great teacher?

We can deal with Jesus by calling Him a great teacher or a good person, but the problem is that it is so illogical.

- Jesus claimed He was God, and if He was lying about this, He was hardly good at all.
- To trivialize Jesus as just a good man might be more comfortable for us, but it does not fit with the facts.

Perhaps you believe that Jesus was nothing but a fool; or you think that He was a fraud. But if neither of these answers satisfies you, I would say you are left with only one other logical conclusion: He was what He claimed to be...God.

- When we reach the conclusion that Jesus is God, then we should realize there are huge implications for the way we should live.
- We need not only to pay attention to His teachings, but to worship and follow Him as well.

Many people cannot worship and follow Jesus because the state of the world bothers them.

1. "Why is the world in such a mess?"
2. "Why doesn't God do something about it?"
3. "If God really was there, He'd stop people from fighting."

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4. "Why doesn't He just make people do what is right?"

5. "What about earthquakes and floods...God could stop those if He wanted to."

6. "God loves the world?... you must be joking."

There is no getting away from it. The world is not what we would like it to be. In fact, it is in a real mess, and lots of people blame God. Perhaps you have heard people ask some of the following questions: