

## Dialogue Question V: **Who Is Jesus?**

### **“Who do people say I am?”**

In Mark 8:27, Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say I am?” The disciples answered, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Throughout history, many have regarded Jesus as a great moral teacher, prophet, or religious leader—much like John the Baptist, Elijah, or the other Old Testament prophets. Some superstitious people have seen him as sort of a good luck charm. Others have used his name as a means to economic profit or appealed to him as a champion for socio-political reform. Still others have even used his name to kill, stage military conquests, enslave, and persecute.

So who is right? Jesus made it clear that each person’s concern is not with what the masses think by turning to the disciples after hearing their reply and asking, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” It is each of our responsibility to sift through public opinion and the pages of history to personally deal with the question, “Who is Jesus?”

### **Jesus on Jesus**

In Luke chapter 5, a known paralytic is brought before Jesus. Jesus tells him, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” In the Jewish culture of the day, it was well known that only God could forgive sins. In fact, Luke writes that the religious leaders present were thinking, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Knowing what they were thinking, Jesus didn’t retract his statement or back down. Instead he said, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” He then healed the paralytic, told him to get up, and the man walked away. The explanation that Jesus gave for healing the man was “that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” This is an implicit but unmistakably clear claim to deity on Jesus’ part, but he doesn’t stop there.

In other places he explicitly claims to be God. Take John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” He not only claims to be God, but also the exclusive way to God: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

### **No doubt about it**

The fact that Jesus claimed to be the one true God is difficult to dismiss. It is exactly this claim that made enemies for him among the Jewish religious elite. And these enemies seemed to be very clear on what Jesus was claiming. When Jesus said, “I and the Father are one”, they “picked up stones to stone him...‘for blasphemy, because you [Jesus], a mere man, claim to be God.” (John 10:30-33) If he was not claiming to be God, he had no option at that point but to set them straight. But instead he rebuked them for not believing him and showed how his claims lined up with the scriptures. More than that, Jesus was tried and executed exactly for claiming to be God incarnate, the promised Messiah.

### **Who is Jesus not?**

Throughout his ministry, Jesus consistently claimed to be God Himself. How can a man who made such an audacious claim be considered a prophet or a great moral teacher? A moral teacher would disqualify himself from being considered a sane person, much less one to learn from, respect, and emulate while claiming to be God. Likewise a prophet, one who speaks truth, would disqualify himself from being considered a prophet if he falsely claimed to be God. As the English scholar C.S. Lewis wrote,

*“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a*

*great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. 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”<sup>1</sup>*

You may say “Fine. Jesus is more than a prophet, teacher, or good man. He is God. But He is one of many manifestations of God, one of many ways to God.” But Jesus has not left us that option any more than the option to believe he was merely a great man. Recall his statement, “No man comes to the Father except through me.”

Besides, Jesus’ death logically negates that possibility. The Bible teaches that Jesus is and has always been God; that Jesus humbled himself to become a man, live a life without sin, and die a horrific death by crucifixion to take on the penalty that we deserve for our sin; and that Jesus resurrected from death to life. (See Philippians 2:5-11) Consider God the Father. In his love, He desires to reunite man with himself and give man eternal life. If there were any alternate way to do that, would He not spare his own Son from having to undergo humiliation, pain, and death?

### **Scripture on Jesus**

Jesus’ claims are consistent with prophecies of the Old Testament and are substantiated by the New Testament. Consider the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, written over 700 years before Christ’s birth:

*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering...He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all...He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. (From Isaiah 9 and 53)*

Now consider the New Testament. John writes:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (From John 1)*

And the apostle Paul:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether*

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York. MacMillan Publishing Company. 1952. p56.

*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)*

### **Talk is cheap.**

Clearly neither Jesus' followers nor his enemies had any doubts that he claimed to be the One True God. Did His life accurately reflect his claims? Do historical and biblical evidence back it up or refute it?

For starters, Jesus fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies—many of which were quite specific. Consider the following aspects of Jesus' life that fulfilled Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah:

- ◆ born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:1-6)
- ◆ descended from David (Jeremiah 23:5, Matthew 1:1-17)
- ◆ grew up, lived, and ministered in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1, Matthew 2:19-23)
- ◆ entered Jerusalem triumphantly on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 21:1-9)
- ◆ betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9, Matthew 26:47-50) for a sum of 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12, Matthew 27:9) which was thrown into the temple (Zechariah 11:13, Matthew 27:5) and used to buy the potter's field (Zechariah 11:13, Matthew 27:6-8)
- ◆ didn't answer or back down from charges at his trial (Isaiah 53:7, Matthew 26:63, 27:12, 14)

Mathematicians and historians have determined that the chance of one man fulfilling just eight of these prophecies without being the Messiah is less than one in 100,000,000,000,000 (That's one hundred quadrillion or  $10^{17}$ ).<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, miracles testified to His supernatural power. Jesus lived in an age without technology to produce illusions or special effects on a grand scale. He performed miracles so irrefutable that his enemies didn't even question them. Instead they questioned the form of power he used to perform them, calling him a demon, among other things. (Matthew 12:24, John 8:48, 10:19-20)

Most importantly, Jesus did the impossible by resurrecting from the dead and appearing alive to many witnesses over a period of forty days after many had witnessed his death. Centuries of speculation that the resurrection was a hoax, that either the disciples stole Jesus' body or that Jesus did not actually die, have proven to be unsubstantiated. In fact, the resurrection was so indisputable that for centuries the leading argument against Christ and Christianity was not that Jesus was not God or that he did not rise from the dead, but that he was not fully human. Every other miracle Jesus performed would pale in comparison to the resurrection. If he did indeed rise from death to life, then every other claim he made has authority and should be trusted.

### **Dialogue Questions**

- 1) Who do people today say Jesus is?
- 2) Is it possible for Jesus to have been only a teacher, prophet, or religious leader?
- 3) Is it possible for Jesus to be one of several ways to God? Why or why not?
- 4) What is the difference between Jesus and other religious leaders?
- 5) What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

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<sup>2</sup> McDowell, Josh. *More Than a Carpenter*. Wheaton, Ill. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1977. p108.

# The Gospel of John

## Chapter 13

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. <sup>2</sup>The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup>Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup>so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup>After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. <sup>6</sup>He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup>Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup>"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." <sup>9</sup>"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" <sup>10</sup>Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup>For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. <sup>12</sup>When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup>"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup>I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup>Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. <sup>18</sup>"I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' <sup>19</sup>"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. <sup>20</sup>I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." <sup>21</sup>After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." <sup>22</sup>His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. <sup>23</sup>One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." <sup>25</sup>Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" <sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. <sup>27</sup>As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, <sup>28</sup>but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. <sup>29</sup>Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. <sup>30</sup>As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. <sup>31</sup>When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup>"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. <sup>34</sup>"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." <sup>36</sup>Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." <sup>37</sup>Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." <sup>38</sup>Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

## Chapter 14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going." <sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup>Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you really knew me, you

would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." <sup>8</sup>Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." <sup>9</sup>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'? <sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. <sup>12</sup>I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. <sup>13</sup>And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. <sup>14</sup>You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. <sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- <sup>17</sup>the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup>I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup>Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup>Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." <sup>22</sup>Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" <sup>23</sup>Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup>He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup>All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup>But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. <sup>28</sup>"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. <sup>29</sup>I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. <sup>30</sup>I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, <sup>31</sup>but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave.

## Chapter 15

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup>"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup>If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. <sup>9</sup>"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup>This is my command: Love each other. <sup>18</sup>"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup>If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. <sup>20</sup>Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. <sup>21</sup>They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. <sup>22</sup>If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. <sup>23</sup>He who hates me hates my Father as well. <sup>24</sup>If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my

1. In Jesus' view, is there any other way than believing and following Him in order for a person to find God?

(14:6)

2. How does Jesus describe His relationship with God the Father?

(14:9-11)

3. What does Christ promise to those who will ask him anything that honors Him?

(14:13-14)

4. What is true of those who truly love Christ?

(14:15,21-24)

5. What does Jesus mean when He says he will leave a helper?

(14:16-26)

Father. <sup>25</sup>But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' <sup>26</sup>"When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup>And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

## Chapter 16

"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. <sup>2</sup>They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. <sup>3</sup>They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. <sup>4</sup>I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you. <sup>5</sup>"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' <sup>6</sup>Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. <sup>7</sup>But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. <sup>12</sup>"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup>But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. <sup>14</sup>He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. <sup>15</sup>All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. <sup>16</sup>"In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." <sup>17</sup>Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" <sup>18</sup>They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." <sup>19</sup>Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" <sup>20</sup>I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. <sup>21</sup>A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. <sup>22</sup>So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. <sup>23</sup>In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. <sup>25</sup>"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. <sup>26</sup>In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. <sup>27</sup>No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." <sup>29</sup>Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. <sup>30</sup>Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." <sup>31</sup>"You believe at last!" Jesus answered. <sup>32</sup>"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

6. Why is it better that Jesus left earth so that the Helper could come?

(16:7-15)