

## 1 Who Is Jesus?

### (What Was His Self-Awareness)

- Module: Jesus
- Lesson 41

## 2 Some Recommended Sources

- C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity
- William Lane Craig, On Guard and Reasonable Faith
- Douglas Groothuis, Jesus in and Age of Controversy
- Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, Jesus and the gods of the New Age
- Ben Witherington, The Self Understanding of Jesus, video lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6wfjctiubc> (last accessed 6/27/20)

## 3 Jesus' Self-Awareness

- How did Jesus think of himself, and did he claim to be...
- Israel's Messiah?
- Divine?

## 4 Jesus' Teachings—Two Categories

- His ethical teachings.
  - Many people are happy to acknowledge his ethical teachings as good and wise, whether or not they actually live by them.
- His claims about himself.
  - Many are offended by them, deny that he made them, reinterpret them to fit their own worldview, or simply choose not to believe them.
  - Yet it is this aspect of his teachings that are truly unique, and the crux of Christianity.

## 5 C. S. Lewis' Trilemma

- Liar, Lunatic, or Lord of All

• "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. 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 the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. ...

## 6 C. S. Lewis' Trilemma

- ...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."

(from Mere Christianity)

## 7 **The Trilemma In The Gospels**

- The religious leaders:
  - Jesus was a blasphemer and was demon possessed. (Lk. 7:34; Matt. 12:24; Jn. 8:48)
- Jesus' family:
  - Jesus was mad, and an embarrassment to the family. (Mk. 3:20, 21)
- Jesus' disciples:
  - Jesus was Lord of all. (Jn. 20:28; Matt. 14:33)

## 8 **Jesus' Implicit Claims**

- His preaching re: the Kingdom of God. (Mk. 1:14, 15; Lk. 11:20)
- His use of the "amen" (truly). (Jn. 5:24; Matt. 5:18) (Teaching w/authority. See also Matt. 7:28)
- Exorcisms. (Authority over the spiritual realm.) (Matt. 8:28-34)
- Prayer life. (Jesus addresses God as his Father in a way distinct from others. Jn. 20:17)
- People's destiny is up to him (e. g. Lk 23:43).
- Forgiving sins. (Mk. 2:5-7)
- Triumphal Entry. (Riding on a donkey. Matt. 21:4, 5; Zach. 9:9)
- Receiving the worship of his followers. (Matt. 28:9, 17; 14:33 )

## 9 **Jesus' Explicit Claims**

- To be the Jewish Messiah.
  - Peter's confession. Matt. 16:15-17; "You are the Christ, the son of the living God." (which Jesus emphatically affirms)
  - Jesus' answer to John the Baptist. Matt. 11:2-6; Lk. 7:19-23; Jesus cites his Messianic miracles and teachings.
  - Jesus' answer to Ciaphas. Mk 14: 61-62; "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed One? And Jesus said, "I am."
- Jesus' use of the ego eimi (I Am.), e.g. Jn. 8:58; Using Yahweh's self-identification Yahweh used with Moses (Exo. 3:14-15); "Before Abraham was, I Am."
- Claims to be the Lord of the Sabbath. Matt. 12:8; "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

## 10 **Jesus' Explicit Claims**

- To be the "Son of God."
  - The voice from heaven. Mk. 1:11; "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."
  - Parable of the wicked tenants. Mk. 12:1-9; Isa. 5:1-7; "He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"
  - Answer to Caiaphas. Mk. 14:61-62; "'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' And Jesus said, 'I am.'"
- To be the "Son of Man."
  - Jesus' most commonly repeated self-reference. (e. g. Matt. 16:13, 17:9, etc.)

#### 11 "Son of God" and "Son of Man"

- Mark 14:62: Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" And Jesus said, "I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."
- Daniel 7:13, 14: "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.  
And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed."

#### 12 "Son of God" and "Son of Man"

- Jesus' self references as the Son of Man must be understood in the context of his stated mission to usher in the Kingdom of God.
- Daniel 7:13, 14 explicitly links the Son of Man with the Kingdom of God.
- The "Son of Man"—
  - Receives an everlasting dominion.
  - Receives an indestructible kingdom.
  - Receives worship of all nations, peoples, and languages.

#### 13 "Son of God" and "Son of Man"

- The term "Son of God" refers to the king whom God anoints over his kingdom. (See Psalm 2, David's coronation Psalm.)
- In Second Temple Judaism (including first-century Judaism), Son of God was understood to refer to Israel's future king of the Messianic kingdom, i.e. to the Messiah.
- The Messiah was not necessarily expected to be divine, but would be a human king.
- Hence, the term, Son of God, is a reference the human king of the Messianic kingdom.

#### 14 "Son of God" and "Son of Man"

- So, counter-intuitively—
  - The term Son of God is a reference to the king of the Messianic Kingdom, who was expected to be a human descendant of David.
  - The term Son of Man is a reference to the “one like the Son of Man” of Daniel 7, who was understood to be divine. It is a title of divinity in human form.
  - So... Jesus’ repeated references to himself as the Son of Man, especially in his confrontation with Caiaphas, within the context of Jewish Scripture and Second Temple Judaism, was making an explicit claim of divinity, of an everlasting dominion over all nations, and of being worthy of worship.

#### 15 **Skeptics’ Response to Jesus’ Claims**

- They deny that he made such claims, attempting to discredit the historical authenticity of those passages.
- They acknowledge that he made the claims, but he was seriously mistaken. (Back to Lewis’ trilemma.)
- They attempt to reinterpret the claims in some gnostic or Eastern Pantheistic manner.

#### 16 **To Those Who Deny He Made the Claims**

- Remember the historical authenticity of the Gospels. (A presupposition of their authenticity is warranted over a presupposition of skepticism.)
- His claims are so inextricably intertwined in the historical accounts it is virtually impossible to call into question their historical authenticity.
  - Pervasive.
  - Both implicit and explicit.
  - Unambiguous in a first-century Jewish milieu.
  - Central to his teachings, life, death, and resurrection.
- There is no satisfactory way to account for what we know was the belief of the early church re: Jesus unless he made those claims.

#### 17 **A New Age Attempt to Reinterpret Jesus**

- What is the “New Age”?
  - An ad-hoc mixture of eastern Pantheism, ancient gnosticism, and assorted “new” spiritualities.
  - A major proponent of reinterpreting Jesus are the scholars of the “Jesus Seminar.”
  - Frequent reliance on the Gnostic Gospels (chiefly the Nag Hammadi texts, e. g. “gospels” of Philip, Thomas, Mary, etc.)

#### 18 **A New Age Picture of Jesus**

- Supposedly holds a high view of Jesus.
  - He is considered to be a great teacher or enlightened man or an avatar.

- Yet they discount and/or recast his teachings, especially his messianic and divine claims, to conform to their Eastern monistic worldview.
- Jesus vs. the “Christ”.
  - “Christ” is understood to be an enlightened spirit which came upon the man Jesus at some point, essentially the same as enlightenment in Hinduism.
  - This is often believed to have occurred at his baptism. (He became “enlightened” when the non-personal spirit of enlightenment descended on him.)

## 19 A New Age Picture of Jesus

- Jesus as an Eastern guru.
  - He supposedly traveled to the East (e. g. India, Tibet, etc.) and other places during his early adult years of which the Gospels say nothing.
  - He supposedly returned to Palestine to teach a form of monism or Pantheism.
  - Jesus is not unique—he is among several other enlightened individuals, like Buddha or Krishna.

## 20 Refuting the New Age Jesus

- Trustworthiness of the Gospels vs. the Gnostic gospels.
  - Integrity (Has the text has been faithfully preserved?)
  - Authenticity (Authorship? Is it authentically apostolic?)
  - Veracity (Is the content truthful?)
- The historical/cultural milieu of Jesus and his listeners.
  - Both Jesus and his listeners were immersed in Second Temple Judaism.
  - The meaning of his words must be understood in that context.
  - None of Jesus’ earliest followers understood his teachings/claims in either an eastern Pantheistic or in a gnostic light.

## 21 Refuting the New Age Jesus

- Jesus claimed to be the expressed image of Yahweh, the personal God of Israel (Jn. 14:9), not as some kind of enlightened guru or avatar.
- Did Jesus travel to the East during his “lost years?”
  - The claims were made by a Russian journalist, Nicholas Notovich (1894), and frequently repeated by others.
    - Important parts of Notovich’s account were explicitly denied by other key participants.
  - There has never been any concrete historical evidence of Jesus in the East.

## 22 Refuting the New Age Jesus

- Jesus as the Christ.

- The historical/cultural milieu determines how any text is to be understood. To attach an Eastern concept of an enlightened spirit to the term “Christ” is to uproot it out of its first-century Jewish context and to transplant it into the Far East.
- The concept of the Christ has a specifically Jewish meaning, and refers not to some “spirit” or “enlightenment” but to the anticipated human king of the Jewish Messianic kingdom.
- Jesus did not “become the Christ” or “receive the Christ,” but was born the Christ. (Matt. 1:18)

## 23 Conclusion

- Jesus made numerous implicit and explicit claims to be the Jews' Messiah and to be divine.
- Jesus backed up his claims with innumerable miracles.
  - Healing miracles (authority over disease)
  - Nature miracles (authority over nature)
  - Exorcisms (authority over the spiritual realm)
- Christianity stands unique among all the religions of the world in the claims of its founder.

## 24 Next Week:

- Jesus and Miracles