

No Mere Man

Why did Jesus of Nazareth have to die at the peak of His career? Was He just another great teacher or religious leader? Presenting the uniqueness of Jesus...

Some time ago a young medical student from another country, who was a devout follower of one of the world's great eastern religions and a friend of mine, came to see me. I asked him three questions.

I asked, "John, who in your opinion is the greatest leader the world has ever known?" After a moment of hesitation, he replied, "I am sure that Jesus of Nazareth has done more good than anyone who has ever lived. I would say that He is the greatest leader."

Then I asked, "Who do you think is the greatest teacher?" No doubt he must have thought of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato and the other great philosophers of ancient and modern times. But he answered, "The greatest teacher is Jesus of Nazareth."

Finally I asked, "John, in your opinion, who in the entire history of man has lived the most holy life?" Immediately he answered that there has never been anyone like Jesus of Nazareth.

I have asked these questions to men of all religions, even atheists and communists. The answer from knowledgeable people is always the same: "Jesus of Nazareth."

If you removed Jesus of Nazareth from history, history would be a completely different story. One writer described His influence in this way: "Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth."

Wherever Christ has gone, the sacredness of marriage and of women's rights has been acknowledged; institutions of higher learning have been established; child labor laws, abolition of slavery and other changes have been made for the good of mankind.

I have talked to many thousands of men and women about Jesus of Nazareth. And naturally, I have met those who are militantly antagonistic toward Christ. Another skeptic was C.S. Lewis a professor at Oxford University. For years as an agnostic he denied the deity of Christ. Then he

became a devout follower of Christ and wrote many books advocating his belief in Him as Savior.

In his famous book *Mere Christianity*, he makes this statement: "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 a 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...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."

There are men who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, among them some of the world's greatest scholars. But I am appalled to discover that almost always they are ignorant of the basic truths of the gospel. Have you ever read any of the writings of Ingersoll, Thomas Paine or other well known skeptics? You would be amazed to discover these men are taking issue with something they do not fully understand. They have created straw men and have proceeded to destroy their own creations.

I have yet to meet a man who has honestly considered the evidence for the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, who does not admit that He is the Son of God. I meet some who say they do not believe, but as we talk and reason together, they honestly confess, "I have not taken the time to read the Bible or consider the historical facts concerning Jesus."

There is indeed no one quite like Jesus Christ. In fact, I want to emphasize here four specific things Jesus can do for us that no one else can do.

1. PARDONED FOR LIFE

Jesus is the only one who can pardon man from his sin. Sin is not necessarily a matter of lying, stealing or immorality. Basically sin is an attitude. Sin is going one's own independent way. It is a lack of relationship or fellowship with God. If you are saying, "I am the master of my life; I will do as I please," then you qualify as a sinner.

Jesus Christ paid the penalty (eternal separation from God) for your sin and can bring you back into a relationship with Himself. As you study the 11 popular religions of the world, you will see that no provision for pardon from sin is made apart from the cross of Jesus Christ.

After I finished speaking at a Midwestern university, a group of students asked how they could become Christians. Among those who remained to talk with me was an angry young Hindu professor from India. He said, "I resent the arrogance with which you say that you have the only way to God. I believe that Christianity is one way, but only one way. Hinduism is another. Buddhism, Shintoism and others are all ways to God."

As we talked he learned how Christ had made the provision for man's basic need, which is forgiveness of sin. I explained to him, "You can take Buddha out of Buddhism, Mohammed out of Islam, and the founders of the other religions out of their religion, and little would be changed. But take Christ out of Christianity, and there is nothing left."

Finally this young Hindu understood the great truth of pardon for sin through our Savior's sacrifice on the cross. He prayed that Jesus of Nazareth would come into his heart. You see, there is salvation in no one else! Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me."

2. PURPOSE TO LIFE

Jesus gives a purpose for living to men and women who know and obey Him. Men who do not know Him are like ships upon a rough sea without rudder and without sail, drifting with the tide. No matter how brilliant you might be or how successful as a professional person, mother or student, unless you know Jesus Christ, you will never know real purpose in life.

Ralph Barton, one of the nation's top cartoonists, left this note pinned to his pillow before he took his life: "I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up of inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day." Blaise Pascal, the French physicist and philosopher, put it this way, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which only God can fill through His Son, Jesus Christ."

You see, God made us for Himself, and we can never be fulfilled or complete until Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives.

3. A LIFE OF PEACE

Jesus of Nazareth is the only one who can give you peace. Jesus says, "Peace I leave you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." He also says, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest...For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

Perhaps you are now experiencing the fears and frustrations of life. Perhaps you are worried about your finances, family, social life or grades. You say, "Of course. Everyone has these problems." Yes, and the Christian is not exempt. Becoming a Christian does not mean that you will suddenly be ushered into a utopian situation, but rather that you will have with you one who said, "Peace, be still. Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."

Jesus is the only one who can give you power to live a new life. Frequently men and women will say to me, "I would like to become a Christian, but if I do, I am sure I will never be able to live the life. You don't know the mistakes I've made, the resentments I have."

But as they have given their lives to Christ, they have discovered that the Christian life is a supernatural life-you and I cannot live it, no matter good we are. But Jesus Christ literally comes to live within us, living His life in and through us. Therefore, it is no longer what we do but what He does, because He is the one who provides the power. We are merely the instruments through which He releases that power.

There is a throne in every life. If you are on that throne-if you are deciding what to do with your life-it is quite likely that you are not a Christian. Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door (the door of your heart, your will, your intellect, your emotions) and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me."

Commitment to Christ involves the surrender of the intellect, the emotions and the will - the total person. Suppose you are engaged to marry a certain young man or woman. Intellectually, you believe that he or she is the most wonderful person in all the world. Emotionally, your heart beats twice as fast when you are together. But are respect, admiration and strong emotions enough to build a marriage on? No. Something else very important must also take place.

As you stand before the minister to exchange your vows, you commit your wills one to the other. The marriage is not a true marriage if there is no mutual giving of one to the other.

The same is true in becoming a Christian. One must give himself wholly-intellect, emotions and wills-to Christ.

At this moment, if you have not already received Christ as your Savior and Lord, Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart. Will you surrender your will to Him? Invite Him to come into your life to live His life in you, to pardon your sin, to give purpose to your life, to give you His peace and power to be different.

As you receive Christ into your life, you begin the great adventure for which He created you. As you continue in obedience to His commands, you will experience the fulfillment of His promise of an abundant life.