

## **Jesus Who?**

David Morris

### ***Jesus. What image does that name bring to your mind?***

Looking back to my younger years, I have come to realize that my image of Jesus was wrong but maybe not uncommon. I grew up with an image of Jesus as a sticky-sweet, wispy, frail being who skipped across the countryside patting little children on their heads and promising love, love, love. Physically, I envisioned a 98-pound weakling He looked as if a strong wind might dry Him up and blow Him away. I'm not sure where that image came from; maybe from Franco Zeffirelli's 1977 miniseries, *Jesus of Nazareth*, which portrayed Jesus as frail and sickly and having the most depressing demeanor of anyone I had ever seen on television.

Maybe it was the artwork down through the centuries that portrayed Him in a similar vein, as if Jesus somewhere back in time sat down for a portrait, and everyone followed suit. That Jesus appeared to be a sickly, gloomy wimp. Hardly a King. Hardly Divine!

Then something amazing happened. I re-introduced myself to the Jesus of historical record and my view of Jesus was transformed.

How many people in the world today worship a Jesus who isn't the real thing? We've all seen the popular false versions –

- The “love only” Jesus who never condemns and is open to opinions that directly contradict Scripture.
- The mere mortal “Great Teacher” Jesus, the favorite of television channels, who lacks true authority and power.

For someone familiar with the Biblical Jesus, these versions are frustrating because they are so widely accepted. Our task as Christ-followers is to be re-introduced to the most dynamic, life-changing individual who ever lived.

### ***The Real Jesus Was an Actual Historical Person.***

Despite media efforts to marginalize Jesus through caricatures, Jesus was a real person with a real personality and real opinions. Jesus is not some mythological cartoon character that people created in order to justify their own selfish desires or give comfort to the weak-minded. What sets Jesus and Christianity itself apart

from the other world religions is its basis in history. Jesus did exist; and we know more about Him than any Palestinian Jew before 70 A.D.

The New Testament documents themselves are reliable historical records that testify to His life. We can collect the basic information about Jesus from the writings of ancient historians like Tacitus, Josephus, Lucian, and Julius Africanus. He was not the “buddy” Christ. He was a real prophet with a real personality who pronounced real blessings and woes.

***The Real Jesus Was Gentle, but also Strong and Tough.***

Many have an effeminate view of Jesus. They think that since Jesus was gentle, He was also weak. But if we are to embrace the biblical Jesus we must realize He was a Being of limitless power. The same God who empowered Samson with his super-human strength is the same God who left Heaven to become a human being.

**That same strength was at the command of Jesus at any moment.**

Jesus worked as a carpenter (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3), most likely a stonemason. He carved out wood and chiseled into stone. He became calloused. He climbed and hiked hundreds of miles during his ministry. No doubt, Jesus’ physical appearance was rugged as a result. Jesus was not only strong, but He knew how to get tough. The most famous example was when He called upon His Godly strength to separate the moneychangers from their profits (John 2:14-16) because they were cheating the people. You don’t separate someone from their money, especially not a group of people, unless they simply cannot do anything to stop you!

No one disputes the fact that Jesus was gentle. The compassion He showed for the hurting (John 11:34-36) and the warmth He displayed to children (Matthew 19:13) was without measure. But the idea of Jesus as weak and frail is false. His power was limitless.

***The Real Jesus Believed in Laughter, not Depression.***

Many false images of Jesus depict Him as miserable and sad. But Jesus believed, taught, and was an example of Proverbs 17:22, “A joyful heart is good medicine” (ESV)

Jesus had a keen sense of humor. His sarcasm would have brought smiles to the faces of His listeners. But, Jesus’ humor was used to make profound points (Matthew 7:3, 6; 9:15; 19:24; 23:24).

Jesus loved children, and few people can be around children and keep a sour demeanor for long. Jesus knew when to be serious (Matthew 23), but He also knew how to enjoy the friendship of others (Mark 14:26; John 15:15). The real Jesus lightens our burdens (Matthew 11:28-30).

Too many Christians have no joy in their lives to share with others. The stereotype from our culture is that Christians are killjoys. But God invented joy! The more Christians exhibit the joyful attitude of Jesus, the more the world will want to follow the One who models that joy perfectly.

### ***The Real Jesus Told the Truth about Salvation.***

To say that another person's belief-system is mistaken is to be called intolerant in our society. The popular view of today is, "All roads lead to Heaven." Yet, Jesus was not afraid to be politically incorrect when He told the Samaritan woman that the syncretistic religion she was practicing was misguided (John 4:22). He was kind, but He was truthful, and He spoke very openly about those who broke God's Law.

Each religion claims to be the only way to God. The way of Jesus is no exception (John 14:6). Jesus never says, "As long as you are sincere, you'll be saved." Never. He was very blunt about the way of salvation (John 3:5, 18). No one has the right to say what God wants us to do except the Son of Man who has come down from Heaven (John 3:13). The wise thing to do would be to follow the words of the **real** Jesus and not what our culture believes Jesus **should** have said. Jesus told the truth about salvation because He **is** the Truth, and no one can come to the Father except through Him.

### ***The Real Jesus Had a Love Built on Convictions.***

The cultural Jesus overlooks all sin. He condemns nothing and condones everything. He accepts any excuse one may have for engaging in sinful activity. But this is perhaps the greatest inaccuracy about Jesus today.

The love of Jesus has never been a blank check to engage in whatever activity our hearts may desire (Romans 6:1-2). **The cross forever proves that God does not accept excuses for sin.** He only accepts sacrifice for sin.

Furious in His heart over the seriousness of sin, cut to the very core of His soul over being treated as sin itself (1 Peter 2:22, 24), though He himself knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), Jesus sacrificed Himself for us – in our place. Luther wrote, "We carry the nails in our own pockets."

### ***The Real Jesus Demands that We Follow Him.***

Many in the world are lukewarm about the cultural Jesus. This is amazing because the real Jesus never left anyone indifferent. People either loved or hated Him.

In reality, the real Jesus has little patience for those who are lukewarm about Him (Revelation 3:16). Like a Father guiding His children to become the best and most faithful children they can be, He asks us to be like little children clinging to the Father's leg in absolute trust (Matthew 18:3,4).

The story of Jesus is more than just a story of the offer of God's forgiveness. It is a demand for Jesus to be your Lord or to be rejected. He offers grace. In return, He demands loyalty.

### ***The Real Jesus IS.***

He **still lives on** today. He "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Remember that the disciples were told "Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11, ESV). **The real Jesus is the one that is going to return.**

In his *Chronicles of Narnia* trilogy, C.S. Lewis' famous character Aslan the lion represents Jesus. Throughout the books, children gather around this lion, trusting him and loving him absolutely. We recognize that lions are fearsome creatures that have the power to devour us. Yet, if we are the children of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5), we have no need to fear.

Maybe you are like me. Maybe you grew up with the wrong idea of Jesus. The very Earth trembled in His presence. And one day, it will tremble again. He has the power to **transform your life**, and He has the power to **devour you**. Mercifully, He invites you into His presence.

Unlike the false views of Jesus today, the **biblical** Jesus is worth living for and dying for. The more I learn about the real Jesus, the more I love Him. And the more I love Him, the more I want to learn about Him--the **real** Him.