

I. Quotes

A. Jesus Christ's zeal never degenerated into passion, nor His constancy into obstinacy, nor His benevolence into weakness, nor His tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsociability, His dignity from pride and presumption, His affectability from undue familiarity, His self-denial from moroseness, His temperance from austerity. He combined child-like innocency with manly strength, absorbing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man, tender love to the sinner with uncompromising severity against sin, commanding dignity with winning humility, fearless courage with wise caution, unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness!
Philip Schaff

B. God has, as it were, placed Himself on display in the art gallery of the universe. He beckons His people, you and me, to stand in awe as we behold the symmetry of His attributes, the harmony of His deeds, the glory of His goodness, the overwhelming and unfathomable grandeur of His greatness; in a word, *His beauty*. God is infinitely splendid and invites us to come and bask in His beauty that we might enjoy Him to the fullest.
Sam Storms

C. 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 all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1

II. Introduction

A. Last week's question was: Who is Jesus? Who is this Man? And I argued that he is the most influential person to ever live.

1. I noted that, even though he lived in the fly over region of the Roman Empire, spent his first 30 years in obscurity and died before he turned 34, that he had shaped the world more than anyone else. And I spent my time unpacking three of the ways he did this.

a) He elevated the perceived value of human life – especially for the have-nots: women, children, the sick and oppressed. Doing so in ways that would eventually lead his followers to create hospitals, orphanages, schools, abolish slavery and more.

b) I then argued that his celebration of thinking – his call for his followers to love God with our mind – radically reshaped the world, especially the West. It helped pull Europe out of the so called Dark Ages, launched the scientific revolution and it led to higher education.

c) Finally, we then looked at how he gave us our best moral thinking – moving us away from revenge and promoting humility.

2. I then ended by noting that we seldom talk about these things – how amazing Jesus is, what a profound impact he'd had in these three ways because... there were other things about him are even more amazing!

B. And I said, come back. Bring your friends and come back and we'll look at what Jesus said. That is our assignment today.

III. This week, in your reading, you were expected to read chapter two in the book.

A. In there you read about Christ from before time began through: creation, the Old Testament era, the four hundred years between the Old and New Testaments, the account of his virgin conception, his birth and childhood, right up until the time of his baptism.

B. And in your reading this week you'll look at the three years of his public ministry. We'll pick up with his baptism and move right up to his final march towards Jerusalem. You will cover what are known as the years of his public ministry. And what I'd like to explore is what Jesus said during that time.

C. When Christ emerged from the desert and did so as a Rabbi – a teacher. And as a Rabbi he traveled around from village to village preaching, teaching and otherwise explaining and interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament).

1. This isn't all he did. He also invested in the lives of his closest followers - principally the 12 men we think of as disciples or apostles, though there were others, including a number of women who may well have been financing much of the group.

2. And Jesus wasn't a normal Rabbi. There were lots of Rabbis in first century Israel who were doing the same thing. But the Gospels make it clear that he quickly became one of the most popular Rabbis in the country – in part because of the fresh, powerful and life-changing way he spoke, but principally because of his ability to work miracles, especially heal people.

D. There was more going on than what Jesus said. But the question for today is, what did he say? If you showed up to listen to Jesus preach, what would you hear?

IV. What would you hear?

A. For our purposes we'll divide his comments into two categories,¹ starting with what Jesus had to say about God, life, faith and others. His "ethics," if you will. His description of how we are supposed to live and think, which I'm suggesting revolved around five big themes.

1. First - God Comes First:
 - a) Most of us love ourselves first, family members second and God third. Jesus reversed the order.
 - b) He instructed us to love our Heavenly Father with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Indeed, he called on us to love God with such fierce passion that our love for own family looked like hatred beside it.
 - c) In Christ's ethic, God is preeminent. He does not exist for our glory, we exist for his. He is first.
2. Second - Others come second.
 - a) Christ's teaching moved right from a command to love God to a command to love others, especially the poor. People matter.
 - b) Our vertical focus on God is expected to overflow into horizontal acts of mercy, justice, reconciliation and service. Jesus went so far as to demand that we care for those we hate.
3. Third - the Way Up is Down.
 - a) "The first will be last," and those who "seek to save their life will lose it." The way to get ahead is to go to the end of the line.
 - b) These were not commands to act against our own best interests, they were statements designed to correct our confusion and selfish bias. In God's economy the way up really is down. The great serve.
4. Fourth – we are going to Live Forever.
 - a) According to Jesus, we will either spent eternity with God in a place of love and joy, or we will be eternally cut off from Him and all that is gracious and good.

¹ There is a third category that we might consider, and that is his critique of the religious leaders of his day.

b) This truth affects everything. In fact, little of what Christ said makes sense unless we look past the grave and into the world to come. Jesus was adamant that those who were living only for this life are fools.

5. And fifth - we are Stewards.

a) Christ grounded his ethical system on the belief that everything we “own” is on loan from God, and that we are expected to “invest” His resources in ways that reflect His priorities.

b) He made much of the idea that we will be held accountable for what we do with what is entrusted to us. He also stressed that those to whom much has been given will be held to a higher standard.

B. This is a shocking list. And the people were shocked.

1. They were surprised by what he said and they were surprised by the power with which he said it. Over and over you see that they are reeling from the power of his words and asking, “Who is this man? No one has ever talked to us like this before.”

2. Christ’s morals – his explanation of life and what matters and how we should think and live – are beautiful and timeless and cross-cultural and without equal. We need to study, memorize and meditate on what he taught. We need to apply it to our lives. And we need to realize that the world would actually work if we did.

C. But, there is a second category of material that Jesus taught on as well – and it’s more important than his ethics. We need to pay very close attention to what Jesus had to say about himself.

1. Jesus spent a lot of time talking about Jesus. And what he said about himself was every bit as shocking as what he had to say about loving our enemy. In fact, it was more so.

2. Most prominent moral leaders are humble and self-effacing. When Socrates was told that many thought he was the wisest man in the world, he said that the only reason to think he was wise is because he knew how little he knew. Buddha took a similar posture. That is the standard repose of a Gandhi, Mohammad, Moses and other prominent religious leaders - but not Jesus.

3. Jesus was not arrogant – not self-important. He lived very simply – who had no place to call home, no money, no nice things, and who served others, washed the feet of his followers, hung out with the poor and outcasts. And He didn't fuss about his honor. But He made the biggest, boldest claims about himself anyone could ever make.

4. He never said, "I'm nothing," or "I don't know." Instead, Jesus claimed to be:

- a) God himself. Equal to the Father – the eternal second member of the Trinity.
- b) Jesus claimed to be the one through whom all things were created.
- c) Jesus claimed to be perfect.
- d) Jesus claimed to be more important than Abraham.
- e) Jesus claimed to be worthy of worship.
- f) Jesus claimed to be the Messiah that everyone needed
- g) Jesus claimed to be the King of Kings
- h) Jesus claimed to be the one to whom all authority and power was entrusted
- i) Jesus claimed to be our only hope for eternal life.

5. It is impossible to make bigger claims than Jesus made. It can't be done.

D. Remarkably, a lot of people miss this. A lot of people end up thinking that Jesus is a self-effacing, never-raise-his voice do-gooder - a mild-mannered man who instructed other mild-mannered people to be even more mild mannered. They are wrong. That Jesus does not exist. He never did. That Jesus was safe – the real Jesus is not. That Jesus can be ignored. The real Jesus cannot.

E. One of the very first of the Ten Commandments is, "do not make any idols." Most people turn Jesus into something other than He is. Most people make Jesus smaller and safer and nicer than He is. Most people turn Jesus into someone they can manage or ignore.

V. In the chapter you will read next week I direct you to four passages – four of the dozen or so moments when everyone looks at each other and thinks, "Did he just say what I think he said?"

A. In chapter 3, I note that over the three years of Christ’s ministry he grows increasingly vocal about who he is and what he has come to do. There were plenty of clues early on for those who were paying attention. But Jesus was a bit cryptic in some settings because he could not afford to have people think he was the Messiah as they envisioned the Messiah. And so, much of the time he keeps his head down.

B. But there were a few moments when he would give another clue and people would look at each other and think: did he just say what I thought he said?

VI. One of them is in John 8. Let’s turn there. We’re going to pick up reading in vs 48

A. Opposition to Christ began back in chapter five. It started after Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. The religious leaders got pretty upset about this, and Christ’s claim that he was only acting like his Father – God – didn’t really set them at ease.

B. Chapter 8 opens with Jesus teaching in the Temple and the Pharisees trying to trap him. Initially they bring a woman caught in adultery and ask whether or not she should be stoned. There is then a little dust up over Christ’s claim to be the light of the world, which if followed by more of the same contentious banter, until Jesus ends up telling them that they (the Pharisees) do not know God and are, in fact, children of the devil. (At the risk of beating a dead horse, I will point out that this is not the kind of stuff Mr. Rogers used to say. In fact, I doubt that during the most contentious moments of the Chicago teachers strike, when they were keeping Rahm Emmanuel and Karen Lewis in separate rooms, that either of them said, “you are a child of the devil.”)

C. In verse 46 Jesus then goes on to claim that he is perfect. Which is shocking! I mean, if you were in an argument and the person you were arguing with said, “everything I’ve done has been perfect” you would probably shake your head in disbelief.

1. Jesus makes his claim in the form of a question. He asks, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? What have I ever done that was wrong?”

2. Abraham messes up. Moses messes up. David includes a powerful prayer of confession in which he claims to be all messed up. Isaiah says that he is a man of “unclean lips.”²

3. People mess up. And the better the person the quicker they are to admit it. In verse 46 Jesus makes a subtle claim to be perfect.

² Jonathan Edwards – one of the great theologians of this land, architect of the Great Awakening, brilliant, brilliant man – described his own heart as “an abyss infinitely deeper than hell.”

D. We are picking up in mid-conversation with verse 48, which opens with them calling Jesus names, builds to Christ bold claims to be God, and then ends with them picking up stones to kill him. I'm reading, John 8:48ff

1. The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

a) "Samaritan was the first century "N-word." Jesus ignores it because he doesn't consider it an insult. In fact, He goes out of his way to show that the Samaritans are every bit as valuable as anyone else. But, he does refute their claim that he's pure evil.

2. The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

3. "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it (he is referring to his Father in Heaven).

4. There is one who seeks my honor, "and he is the judge. Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."

5. At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

6. Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

7. "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

8. "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

E. They pick up stones to kill Jesus because He has taken the holy name of God as his own. In Hebrew it's the name "Yahweh."

1. This was God's covenant name. Not his title. God has lots of titles

a) The Bible uses a number of different Hebrew and Greek words (such as Elohim, El-Shaddai, Adonai, Theos) that are translated *God, Lord, King, Sovereign, Almighty*. These describe God or offices He holds or highlight attributes of his character. He has lots of titles. But he also has a sacred name.

b) When Moses was preparing to accept the assignment of leading the Jews out of Egypt he asked God, “When I go back to the people and tell them that I have met you, they will ask, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I say?”

c) Because biblical names mean more than names generally do today, they were not asking, “What sound do we use to refer to him?” but rather, “What is he like? What is his character? What can we expect? What defines him?”

d) Names simply meant more, which is part of what is behind the 3rd commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” It’s not simply a command not to swear. There is more wrapped up in a name back then that today.

2. Well, when Moses asked, “What is your name?” God replied, “Tell them ‘I AM’ sent you.” And this is a very special word.

a) It’s a form of the verb “to be.”

b) In Hebrew it’s pronounced Yahweh.

c) And the Jews considered it so sacred that they were not willing to say it or even write it – which led to lots of confusion later on for us.

3. As an aside, I believe the essence of God’s name, “I AM” is along the lines of, “I AM who I AM” or “I will be who I will be, not who you make me.”

F. But the point here is that Jesus took this name as his own. When he said, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was I AM,” He was not simply claiming to predate Abraham – he was not simply claiming to be eternal (which is an attribute of God) – He was claiming to be God. He had taken the sacred name of God as his own.

G. And though you may miss what is going on when you read this, be assured that those listening to him did not. They understood perfectly well what He was doing, and they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy.

H. Men and women, Jesus claimed to be God. Not God-like. Not God-lite. Not god with a small “g.” Not next to God. Not on an important assignment for God. But God. Jesus claimed to be fully God, equal to the Father. One with the Father.

I. He accepted worship. He forgave sins. He said he was present at Creation and that he would return at the end to stand in judgment over everyone. After the resurrection but just before He ascended into heaven He claimed that all power and authority had now been placed in his hands – that is all power and authority on earth and in heaven. You cannot make bigger claims!

VII. Now stop and think about that that means.

A. Stop and reflect on this remarkable point: the man who impacted our world more than anyone else – who shaped it more profoundly than anyone else, who left those who listened to him overwhelmed with his out-of-the-world wisdom and power – claimed to be God.

B. This isn't like me claiming to be God or you claiming to be God or someone who is mentally disturbed claiming to be God. This is the most unique person who ever lived – the most influential of the sixty billion who have lived.

C. If you took all the people who claimed to be God and put them in one camp and then you placed the most influential people who ever lived in one camp and you placed the great moral and religious leaders in one camp, the only person who you'd find in all three, is Jesus.

D. That should give us pause.

E. Whether it does or not, it leaves us with just a few options. We can believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be – and stop everything and orient our lives around him. Or we are forced to say that He is a crazy man or a liar.

1. We are forced to concede that He is profoundly disturbed or wicked. He thought he was God when he wasn't. Or he knew he wasn't God but claimed to be.

2. Lord, Liar or Lunatic

3. Those are the options. (By the way, tonight I'll pick up the one that some have tried to tack onto this, that is to suggest he doesn't exist. So, we might say, Lord, Liar, Lunatic or Legend. If you have any concerns that the record we are using might not be trustworthy, come back tonight.

F. For our purposes let me say, the early church understood the options and framed it up the same way. They said Jesus is aut Deus, aut homo malus. Jesus is God or a Bad Man.

G. I say, he is God. Indeed, I am basing my life on it. What do you say?

VIII. Next week we will keep looking at Jesus. We will take up the question: what did he do? We've asked, "Who is this Man?" And now, "What did he say?" Next week we take up the question, "What did he do?"

A. Invite your friends and come back. Let me pray for us.