

# CHAPTER 1: LOOK AGAIN

*I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between him and every other person in the world there is no possible terms of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our glories? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire on love, and at this hour millions of men would die for him.*  
Napoleon Bonaparte

*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 up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great moral teacher. He has not left that door open to us. He did not intend to.*  
C.S. Lewis

*What is beyond dispute is that Jesus of Nazareth is one of those perennial question marks in history with which mankind is never quite done. With a ministry of two or three years he attracted and infuriated his contemporaries, mesmerized and alienated the ancient world, unleashed a movement that has done the same ever since, and thus changed the course of history forever.*  
J.P. Meier

I'd like you to take another look at Jesus.

I say "another" because I'm pretty sure you already have an opinion. You know something about him. It's hard not to. After all, he is one of the most revered and reviled people of all time.

My request is that you take another look at Jesus. Whether you exalt him as God, write him off as a deluded mystic or place him at one of the many points in between, I ask that you review his claims, teachings and example in light of the New Testament documents and the latest insights from historians.

There are at least seven reasons to do so.

## **Reason One: He is the most influential person who ever lived**

No one has affected the world more than this first-century carpenter. No one. It is an accomplishment made all the more stunning given the obstacles he had to overcome. Here was a man who was born two thousand years ago to a young peasant girl in an obscure village in the backwaters of the Roman Empire. He worked as a carpenter until he was thirty and died on a cross between two thieves before turning thirty-four. He never wrote a book, held office, owned a home or attended college. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place he was born. In fact, he did not do any of the things that usually accompany greatness. He should have been forgotten. And yet, two thousand years later his influence is unmatched and it continues to grow.

Consider a few of the items he could list on his resume:

- More books have been written about him than have been written about any other person who ever lived. <sup>1</sup>
- He has inspired more paintings and music than anyone else.
- Tens of thousands of schools, colleges, hospitals, orphanages and homeless shelters have been founded in his honor.
- His followers credit him with their efforts to abolish slavery, educate the masses and end poverty.
- His birthday is the largest annual celebration in the world.
- Millions of people have laid down their lives for him, and millions more stand ready to do so.
- His followers currently number close to two billion.

And perhaps the most stunning accomplishment of all: millions of people are studying his life and teachings at this very moment. They do so in hopes of becoming more like him. <sup>2</sup>

Sixty billion people have walked on this planet.<sup>3</sup> Most have left it unchanged. Very few have made a lasting mark. Jesus fundamentally reshaped it. More than any person in history, this carpenter from Nazareth has formed our world. Every educated person should know why.

## Reason Two: He is the greatest teacher who ever lived.

Assessing a teacher's performance is complicated. It follows that declaring someone to be "the greatest teacher to ever live" will be controversial. But there are a handful of reasons to think that Christ is just that.

- **He gave us the greatest ethical system we have.** Before Christ told us to "love our enemies," "turn the other cheek," and "do to others what you'd want them to do to you," most people's idea of the high road was limiting revenge to an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."<sup>4</sup> Jesus changed that. He turned the world upside down by arguing that those "who want to be great must be a servant," and that only those "who are without sin should cast the first stone." Professional philosophers may debate whether Aristotle's Nicomedian Ethics or Christ's Sermon on the Mount stands as the greatest ethical system. Moral reformers do not. Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa and hundreds of others all point to Christ.
- **He was a master of the craft.** Set aside the content of Christ's teaching, his mastery of parables, ability to turn everyday events into spiritual lessons and his practice of answering the question behind the question are enough to qualify him for the Teacher's Hall of Fame. If you need convincing, grab a red letter Bible and read the black letters that follow the red ones. What you find among those who have met with Christ is that they are struggling to regain their balance. Jesus has left them stunned. When they finally speak, it's generally to say something like, "We've never heard any of this before." Or "No one has ever spoken to us with this authority before."<sup>5</sup>
- **His action matched his words.** Christ not only called others to live simply, he did so himself. He not only taught that the way to be great was to serve, he washed his disciples' feet. Those in power often claim exemptions from following the rules they impose upon others. Jesus did not. There was no daylight between what he taught and what he did.
- **His legacy is unmatched.** Finally, there is no denying that Jesus turned a group of uneducated and unimpressive "also-rans" into

an unstoppable platoon of disciples. In fact, those he left behind launched the largest and longest-lasting ideological revolution in the history of the world. Does anyone believe Peter, James or John would have done that if they had not been coached by Jesus?

### **Reason Three: He claimed to be God.**

The same person who made the most profound impact on humanity and who deserves the title “Greatest Teacher of All Time” also made the most outlandish claim possible: He said he was God.

No greater claim can be made.

Sure, others have made it; David Koresh of Waco and Jim Jones from Guyana are two examples. But few believed them then and no one believes them now. Christ impacted thousands during his life and billions since. Or, to state this differently, while anyone can claim to be God, and some others do, no one of Jesus’ stature does. He is the only great moral leader to ever make this claim.

As C.S. Lewis writes:

There is no parallel in other religions. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him: “Are you the son of Brahma?” he would have said, “My Son, you are still in the veil of illusion.” If you had gone to Socrates and asked, “Are you Zeus?” he would have laughed at you. If you had gone to Mohammed and asked, “Are you Allah?” he would first have rent his clothes and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, “Are you Heaven?” I think he would have probably replied, “Remarks which are not in accordance with nature are in bad taste.” The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man.<sup>6</sup>

Think about this. A man who otherwise demonstrated remarkable humility:<sup>7</sup>

- Said that he and the Father were One.

- Used the titles of God to refer to himself.
- Accepted worship, forgave sins and acted in other ways that only God should act.
- Claimed that he would return at the end of the age to judge every person who ever lived.<sup>8</sup>

Can you imagine bolder claims?

Others have claimed to speak for God. But Jesus went further. He claimed to be God. Not godly. Not god-like. Not even “a god.” Jesus claimed to be the one true God.

## **Reason Four: You likely know less about this than you think**

It's always risky to generalize, and you may be the clear exception. But I have a couple reasons to think that you may know less about Christ and the revolution he launched than you think.

**My Experience:** For starters, there is my own background. The Jesus I was introduced to in my kindergarten Sunday school class was as thin as the flannel graph piece of cloth used to represent him. I cannot claim to remember the specifics, but I can say that my take-away was a first century version of Mr. Rogers – the kind of perennial goody-goody you might get if you mixed Snow White with an Eagle Scout. He was always smiling, never raised his voice and was kind to children and small forest animals.

The problem is, this is not the Jesus of the New Testament. There is no way to reconcile my understanding of Christ with the man who threw the money changers out of the temple, called the religious leaders “unwashed graves” and profoundly unnerved Pilate.

**My Observation:** The first reason I think many people know less about Jesus is because I held onto my kindergarten image through high school. The second reason is because I've listened to the Jesus other people say they believe in, and my take is that he generally looks a lot like they do, only he's a bit nicer.

Republicans act like Jesus founded the NRA. Liberals' claim he crusaded for labor unions, and socialists maintain he dressed like Che Guevara.<sup>9</sup> During the last thirty years I've seen Christ claimed by virtually every side of every issue: Jesus the capitalist and Jesus the Marxist; Jesus the pacifist and Jesus the warrior; Jesus the environmentalist and Jesus the corporate titan. Some of this is simple opportunism. (You could do worse than recruit Jesus as a spokesman.) But many people invoke his name based on a misunderstanding of his life, teaching and central message. Few of us understand him as well as we think.<sup>10</sup>

Many people end up making Jesus a lot like themselves, only nicer.

## **Reason Five: There are good reasons to believe that he is God**

I should start by noting that we cannot prove this point. At least not in the way that the word "prove" is generally used today. Since the Enlightenment we want facts, and we want them delivered by people wearing white lab coats. But Christianity is not a scientific claim, it's an historical one. And you can't prove history in a lab. We cannot rewind events and replay them over and over, controlling for different variables until we definitively prove the hypothesis true or false.

Historians base their beliefs on reports of events. They interview first and second hand witnesses – or read their accounts – and then offer their understanding of what actually happened.

The Christian faith rests on such evidence.<sup>11</sup> In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.<sup>12</sup>

Paul grounds the Christian faith on the testimony of over five hundred witnesses. He does not suggest that we should have faith without evidence, or believe in Christ "because Christianity works" or "will make us feel better." He argues that we should believe that Jesus Christ is the promised Savior of the World because the resurrection actually happened - Jesus rose from the dead just as he claimed he would.

## **A Brief Time Out**

Christianity is not a small topic. In fact, it claims to be the way we are to understand everything. It follows that it's hard to explain it without occasionally backing up to explain a piece of it. At this moment I need to call a time out and explain two things: the basic tenets of the Christian faith and the way we understand the miraculous claims found in the New Testament.

The Tenets of the Christian Faith: Christianity revolves around Christ. In fact, while you could have Buddhism without Buddha, Judaism without Moses and Islam without Mohammed, you could not have Christianity without Christ.

But the claims of Christ are not limited to his life. The Christian faith is a way of understanding everything, and the basic tenets reach beyond Christ. While I am not going to set every tenet before you, I believe there are a handful of the most basic that you need to hear.

- Jesus Christ is God.
- Jesus Christ existed from before time began. In fact, he was there when the universe was made.
- At the incarnation, Christ became man. That is, while remaining fully God he became fully man. He did this in order to rescue us from sin and death. By dying in our place he paid our moral debt. This allows those who accept his payment to be reconciled with God.
- The Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) is about Christ. After opening with a brief explanation of our situation – i.e., we were made in

God's image but became estranged from God because of sin – God promises to send a rescuer. In Genesis 12 he calls Abraham to be the father of the people through whom the Savior will be born. Beginning with this “call” in Genesis 12, the entire Old Testament is a run-up to Christ's birth.

- The Gospels – i.e., Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – tell the story of Christ's life. They begin with the announcement of his virgin conception, briefly cover his birth and early years, and then focus almost exclusively on his death and resurrection.
- Christ's death and resurrection are understood to be the focal point of history. In fact, the resurrection is offered as proof that he is who he claimed to be. The New Testament documents contend that if the resurrection did not happen then Christianity is not true. But if it did happen then it is. If Christ rose from the dead he is most certainly who he claimed to be: God himself and the Savior of the world.
- The rest of the New Testament – i.e., the story of the first thirty years of the church (the Acts of the Apostles), the letters written by the apostles<sup>13</sup> and the final “look ahead” (the Book of Revelation) – were written to help us better understand Christ's life and mission. They are critical because it's not always enough to know what happened; we also need to know something of the event's significance. For instance, being told that a group of men crossed a small river in a row boat could mean a variety of things. If the river was the Rubicon, the men were being led by Julius Caesar and in crossing it he was declaring war on Pompey, we need to be told that. Similarly, there is a big difference between “Christ died” and “Christ died for our sins.” The first is a simple matter of history. The second is an explanation of the Christian faith.<sup>14</sup>

The Miracles of Christ: The New Testament is the most remarkably and rigorously attested ancient document in existence. The number, date and quality of the ancient manuscripts is astounding. And the story it reports is supported by first and second century non-Christian historians.

In fact, even though first-century Palestine lacked today's international news

media, and in spite of the fact that most of what was written back then has been lost, there is enough historical information outside of the New Testament to establish that:

- A person named Jesus lived in the first century region of Judea.
- He was a provocative teacher and a wise and virtuous man.
- He reportedly performed miracles and made prophetic claims.
- The Jewish leaders condemned him for acts of sorcery and apostasy.
- He was crucified by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate at the time of the Jewish Passover during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.
- Christ's followers - called Christians - reported that he had risen from the dead.
- This launched the Christian faith, which quickly spread to Rome and beyond, even though Christians were persecuted and martyred for their faith.
- First-century Christians worshiped Jesus Christ as God and celebrated the Lord's Supper in their services. While at times the Romans ridiculed the followers of Christ as morally weak, these disciples were often known for their courage and virtue.

Considering that most ancient historians focused on political and military leaders, not on obscure rabbis from the outskirts of the Roman Empire, this is remarkable information. What it means is that Jewish, Greek and Roman historians confirm the major events that are presented in the New Testament.

Nevertheless, the primary source that Christians turn to are those found in the New Testament. But, because the New Testament books contain reports of miracles – e.g., Christ healing the sick, calming a storm and raising the dead – many believe that they cannot be trusted. A full defense of miracles (let alone the New Testament) is outside the scope of this essay, but I do want to briefly acknowledge the skepticism and speak directly to it.<sup>15</sup>

Several things are worth noting:

- **The Gospels do not read like myth.** Matthew, Mark, Luke and John claim to be first- and second-hand accounts of the life of Jesus, and that is how they come across. Yes, they report supernatural events, but they do so without sounding like Aesop's Fables. Instead of beginning "a long time ago in a far away land," they are carefully set in the context of precise historical references. Dates, geographical settings and the names of contemporary politicians are all noted.<sup>16</sup>
- **The miracles are central to the story.** There are not as many miracles in the New Testament as many people think, but those that are reported drive much of the story.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, if you take them out – e.g., if you argue that Jesus did not calm a storm, he simply predicted the weather, or he did not walk on water, he simply found a sand bar<sup>18</sup> – you end up with several problems. First, some of what he taught was based on the miracles he performed. Take away the miracle and you have to give up the teaching. Second, much of what he taught was about himself – specifically, it focused on his claim to be God. If you take all of this away there is not much left.<sup>19</sup> Finally, if you take away the miracles you cannot explain his popularity. Jesus drew large crowds just about everywhere he went. Are we to believe people followed him all over Palestine just to hear him say, "be nice?"
- **It would be odd if Christ did not reveal his power.** Can you imagine what the skeptics would say if Christ claimed to be God but never revealed any unique powers? They would demand proof. The problem is, once "proof" is offered it is discounted. In fact, the proof is used to discredit the entire story. A thoughtful reading of the Gospels actually presents quite a balanced report. Unlike the faith healers of his day (or ours), Christ did not create a circus-like atmosphere or brag about his abilities. Instead, he quietly met the needs of troubled people by exercising the same kind of authority over sickness, evil and nature that he did over people.<sup>20</sup> How would you expect God-in-the-flesh to act?
- **The disciples were utterly convinced that He had risen from the dead.** Critics of Christianity either portray the disciples as simpletons who were easily misled by third-rate magic or as conniving schemers who

pulled off the biggest hoax in history. Neither conclusion is supported by the facts. Far from being quickly persuaded that Jesus was God, the disciples seem to take forever to get it. But once they did “get it” they were unshakable. Ten of the twelve die as martyrs for their faith. Whether Jesus was God or not, it is clear that they believed he was.

- **The disciples were among the people least likely to believe that Jesus was God.** All twelve of the apostles were Jews, which meant two things: they believed in one God, and they believed that this God was infinite, holy and transcendent – i.e., he could be walking around next to them. In order to be persuaded that Jesus was God-incarnate these men had to modify just about all of their most-deeply-held beliefs – and they did.<sup>21</sup>
- **Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Hebrew prophecies.** The Hebrew Scriptures contains several hundred descriptions about the Jewish Messiah. All of these were written at least four hundred years before Christ was born. Many lay beyond his ability to influence – and yet he perfectly fulfilled them. The odds of this happening are beyond astronomical.
- **Even his critics conceded his exceptional abilities.** Historians pay special attention to the writings of critics, believing that any point that a critic concedes against their case is almost certainly true. In the case of Christ, the critics concede that he has some sort of supernatural power. They attribute it to the devil, not to God, but they are forced to admit that he possesses unique powers.<sup>22</sup>

Your skepticism is likely shaped more by your starting assumptions than by the evidence itself – and that is not the way it is supposed to work. In fact, it’s a bit irrational. Christianity rests on a historical claim. You owe it to yourself to consider the historical evidence.

## **Reason Six: He is Not Just a Good Person**

Many people contend that Jesus is the one thing he could not possibly be - a good man but nothing more. They applaud his ethics and example, celebrate his selflessness, and suggest that he was both a wise sage and a gifted spiritual guide. In short, they affirm him in every way possible except in his

central claim: that he is God. And yet, if Jesus is not who he claimed to be, then the one thing he could not be is a good man. Because he either knew he was not god and lied about it, or he thought he was god but was deluded.

If I tell you that I am a fifty year old, happily married father of three with a bad golf swing, you'll probably think, "That sounds about right." If I go on to say that, "I'm better looking than anyone else you've met," you'll either think I'm making a joke or hopelessly vain. If I go further – e.g., if I claim that I am smarter than Einstein and can run faster than any Olympic athlete, you'll begin to think that I'm delusional and need help.<sup>23</sup> But if I claim to be God Almighty – the creator of heaven and earth, the judge of all humanity, the Bread of Life and Light of the World and that you should reorder your life to revolve around me – you would think that I had completely lost my mind.

Jesus made all of those claims and more. If they are not true, he is not a good person. He is either a liar or a narcissist. The early church understood this, which is why one of their earliest statements about Christ was: *aut Deus aut homo malus* – Jesus is either 'God or a bad man.'

## **Reason Seven: The Stakes are High**

The final reason I think you should take another look at Christ is because the stakes are so high.

A few years ago I stopped by my doctor's office to be vaccinated before traveling to a meeting in Africa. Together we consulted the Center for Disease Control's guidelines for the area I was going to be visiting. After thinking for a few minutes my doctor said, "Four shots are listed. Three of them are no brainers. You have to have them. But there is one shot you need to think about. The odds that you'll contract this disease are low. And the shot is very expensive. But, if you catch this disease you will really regret not getting this shot. First you'll get very sick, then you'll wish you'd die, and then you will."

In other words, the risks were low but the stakes were high.

When it comes to Jesus I'm convinced that both the risks and stakes are high. That is, I believe that the chances are really good that Jesus is who he claims to be. And I think that any stakes that involve our eternal destiny – which is

what Christ says is in play – are high by definition.

## Conclusion

If I thought I could hold your attention much longer I'd keep listing reasons why you should take another look at Jesus - such as my conviction that he is the most attractive personality you'll ever meet and my belief that he is the answer to the deepest longings you have. But I've had my chance. I've listed seven reasons to take another look at Christ. I now invite you to do just that.

In the five chapters that follow we are going to unpack the life of Jesus. We'll start by tracing the biblical account of his life and work through a variety of different stages, beginning before creation and moving through his birth, childhood and public ministry and continuing all the way through what we are told about his death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation. We will then end with a chapter devoted to examining the most commonly asked questions people have about Jesus.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The Gospels have been translated into more languages than anything else ever written, and numerous people devote decades of their life to learn languages with the expressed purpose of translating the New Testament into that language.

<sup>2</sup> There are several points worth noting here: 1) Christianity is the fastest growing religion in the world; 2) it is growing rapidly through conversion; and 3) because of this more books have been written about Christ in the last twenty years than in the previous 1,900.

<sup>3</sup> John Blanchard, *Why on Earth Did Jesus Come* (EP Books, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Never mind that this approach would leave most of us blind, it was a step down from revenge.

<sup>5</sup> I made a decision to become a Christ follower more than 30 years ago. Since that time I have been studying his life and teachings on an almost daily basis. In preparation for this book I spent ten weeks focused almost exclusively on his life and work. Two things struck me about that experience: 1) How much I didn't know. Jesus struck me as a source of infinite wisdom and truth – a well that would never run dry. (John writes at the end of his Gospel, "If everything Jesus did was written down the whole world wouldn't

have room for the books that would be needed.”) and 2) How fresh his words and story remain. It does not grow old. This is equally shocking. Who can sustain this level of inquiry? Whose words can remain powerful and shocking when you read them for the two-hundredth time?

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, “What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ?” (1950)

<sup>7</sup> I occasionally meet people who argue that Jesus did not actually claim to be God. We will explain the many ways he did so. At this moment I will only note that those who heard him speak accused him of blasphemy. Indeed, this is the main reason that religious leaders wanted Christ put to death.

<sup>8</sup> Christ claimed that at the end of “the age” he will return as King, and that in that role he will judge everyone who has ever lived. He further claims that his assessment will be both perfect and final, and that it will be based in large part on how people responded to him.

<sup>9</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev said, “Jesus was the first socialist. The first to seek a better life for mankind.”

<sup>10</sup> As Michael Massing said, “Many who like Jesus have found him exactly what they like.” Michael Massing, *America’s Favorite Philosopher*, *The New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 28th, 2003, p. 7. For the record, it is not only true that people assume that Jesus thinks the way they think, it is also true that many assume that Jesus looks like they look – e.g., in spite of the fact that he was a first century Jew, most citizens of the U.S. picture him as an handsome Anglo with blue eyes and white teeth.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the Christian faith is based on historic claims. I highlight this because some mistakenly believe it is based on a “faith claim” – i.e., it is based entirely on wishful thinking – and others view it as an ethical system or a philosophical argument, both of which are based on reason.

<sup>12</sup> I Cor. 15:3ff

<sup>13</sup> The New Testament letters – which are occasionally called Epistles – were written by Paul, Peter, James and John, all of whom are identified as apostles. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews is not identified. Some scholars think it was Paul; others do not. It is possible that it was written by someone other than an apostle.

<sup>14</sup> In his book *Understanding Jesus*, Alister McGrath develops this point in greater detail. The example he uses is of Julius Caesar crossing a small river with a single legion of men in 49 B.C. The name of the river was the

Rubicon, and it marked the boundary between Italy and Cisalpine Gaul. The event was the simple crossing of the river. The significance of the event was that it marked a declaration of war by Caesar against Pompey. In a similar way, the Christian faith is based upon certain historical events – but it is not identified by these events alone. These events need to be interpreted. In many cases the Gospels interpret themselves. However, it is not unusual for the event to only be fully understood: 1) later, after other events; 2) in light of an earlier prophecy; or 3) after additional information has been shared in one of the letters that make up the New Testament. In this study I will be doing my best to indicate the significance behind many of the major events that are being reported. (Alister McGrath, *Understanding Jesus*, Zondervan, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> As noted earlier, I am basing the exploration of the life of Christ on the Gospels because they are the best source of information we have on his life. In chapter seven I will address the question of their reliability in greater length. At this point let me simply note that the history reported in the Gospels has been corroborated by outside sources. You do not have to believe that they are inspired by God to acknowledge the degree to which they have been validated. Luke in particular is singled out as a first rate historian. Dr. John McRay, a professor of New Testament and Archeology at Wheaton College, speaks for many when he writes, “The general consensus of both liberal and conservative scholars is that Luke is very accurate as a historian. He’s erudite, he’s eloquent, his Greek approaches classical quality, he writes as an educated man, and archeological discoveries are showing over and over again that Luke is accurate in what he has to say.” John McRay, quoted by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> C.S. Lewis’s comments here are especially helpful. Lewis wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia* – one of the most successful myths of the twentieth century. He was also a professor of Medieval Literature at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities – and in that capacity was an expert on myths. He writes: “Turn to John. Read the dialogues: that with the Samaritan women at the well, or that which follows the healing of the man born blind...I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends and myths all my life. I know what they are like. Of this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage...pretty close to the facts...Or else, some unknown writer in the second century, without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn’t see this has simply not learned to read.” C.S. Lewis, *Fern-seed and Elephants*, p. 108, cited by J.I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God* (Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey argues that once you accept the idea that Christ is God, the question is not, “Why did he do so

many miracles,” but “Why did he do so few?”

<sup>18</sup> Likewise, he didn't feed 5000 (plus women and children) – that number was inflated, or, the “real miracle” was the example of the boy who went first. After he shared his lunch everyone else saw the value of sharing and brought out the food they had brought.

<sup>19</sup> As we will see later on, Christ's teaching is principally about himself. To be more direct, it is principally about the fact that he is the Son of God. After you take those sections out and those sections that follow or set up a miracle, there is not much left.

<sup>20</sup> If you study the miracles of Christ a few things become clear: 1) They fell loosely into three categories: healings, power over nature (silencing a storm, turning water into wine, etc.), and exorcisms; 2) It was as a healer that Jesus was famous. (There are twenty specific accounts of healings – including raising the dead – plus several general statements about the large number of people healed by Christ. Mk. 1:32-34; 3:7-12; 6:55f; Lk 7:21f). There are not that many other miracles: eight displays of power over nature and six exorcisms. When you step back and consider these miracles more broadly, you realize how perfectly they compliment his life and claims. His exorcisms displayed his power over evil. The feeding of 5,000 not only set up his claim to be the “Bread of Life” but also shows his power over nature. He changed the water intended to be used to keep people ceremonially clean and turned it into wine. (PB 112)

<sup>21</sup> Every day the Jews would recite the Shema: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Believing that God was one while believing that God the Father was God and that Jesus Christ was God – and doing so before any concept of the Trinity had come into view – meant that Jesus could not be God. And yet Jesus was so clearly God that they began to worship him as just that.

<sup>22</sup> Celsus, a Greek critic, stated that Christ “practiced magic.” (Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.38). The arrest warrant issued by the Jewish leaders (Sanhedrin 43a) reported that, “Yeshua of Nazareth” was to be stoned “because he practiced sorcery.”(Note: Jesus was not stoned, he was crucified. However, this warrant was issued by Jewish authorities not Roman ones. If the Jews had put Christ to death it would have been by stoning.) The critical point is that both accounts acknowledge that Jesus had special powers.

<sup>23</sup> Psychologists tell us that one of the ways to assess our mental health is to measure the distance between ‘who we think we are’ and ‘who we actually are.’