

Contents

Foreword.....	1
1 Introducing Jesus.....	3
2 He is the man of God	11
3 He is the Son of God	23
4 He is the Lamb of God	41
5 He is the Way to God.....	53
Notes.....	67

Foreword

I became a Christian at the age of fifteen while on holiday in Lebanon, staying with my relatives who ran a Christian hospital in Beirut. I had had a wonderful holiday, but towards the end of my month there my uncle, Hagop Sagharian, spoke with me about Jesus. I had just beaten him at tennis – but then he was three times my age – but he was about to impact me in a way that would change me for ever.

Using a pocket Bible, he showed me short passages outlining the gospel. He spoke to me about God, explained that the Bible said I was guilty of sin, but that Jesus had come into the world with the express purpose of dying to pay the penalty for my wrong.

He showed me how Jesus had risen from the dead, but it was his explanation of the death of Jesus which hit home to me. When I understood that Jesus had paid the penalty for my sin, and had done so because of His love for me, I felt I had to trust Him as my Lord, Saviour and Friend.

That decision was like a hinge which changed the whole direction of my life. My interests and involvements are many, but what defines me is simply Jesus. He means everything to me. Since becoming a Christian, nothing has ever happened that has dulled my love for Him. And this little book is commending Him to you. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to hear that you too have come to know Him who said that He had come to give life, and give it more abundantly.

I want to thank those who have read, criticized and improved my manuscript. I am grateful to Mrs Jean Smith of Leicester, Ossie Ross of Long Crendon and Ben Carswell for their constructive and always helpful input.

Roger Carswell

January 2011

1.

Introducing Jesus

He is easily the dominant figure in history ... A historian without any theological bias whatever should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to the teacher from Nazareth. – H. G. Wells

Towering above the rest of humanity stands one Man whose life, death and influence have had a greater impact than any other. For 2,000 years men and women have travelled the world to make this Man known. Millions today trust, love and follow Him, not because of compulsion but out of love. His life has never been equalled.

I would love to know what Jesus looked like, to hear His voice, to eavesdrop as He gave thanks before a meal, to watch Him as He spoke to children, or even see Him playing as a child, but we don't have these details. In

reality, they are not important. But who He is and what He accomplished in His life, death and resurrection are of utmost importance. According to the Bible, it is how we respond to Him that will determine our whole eternity.

We know that when John, the disciple who had been with Jesus for three years but was now imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea, had a revelation of Jesus in heaven, he fell down at His feet as dead.¹ Jesus is startling as a person, amazing in His grace, tender in His compassion and love, whilst being unequalled in His authority and power.

Jesus was born in the little village of Bethlehem, eight miles south of Jerusalem. He was the son of a young peasant woman. He grew up in Nazareth to the north (I like to think He had a northern accent!), where He worked in a carpenter's shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He became a travelling preacher. He never wrote a book. He didn't compose any songs. He never married or had a family, or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never visited a big city except, of course, Jerusalem. He never travelled more than 200 miles from the place where He was born. He did none of those things one usually associates with greatness.

He had no credentials but Himself. He owned nothing but His robe. He once said that foxes have holes in the ground and birds have nests, but He, the Son of Man, had nowhere even to lay His head. He preached from a borrowed boat and had to borrow a coin when He made the point that we are to render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. He rode to Jerusalem on a borrowed ass, and was eventually buried in a borrowed tomb.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. They once forsook everything to follow Him, but now they forsook Him and fled. One denied even knowing Him. Another sold Him for the price of a slave. He was turned over to His enemies and went through a mockery of a trial. He was executed by the state. While He was being executed, His executioners gambled for His clothing, the only property He had on earth. When He was dead, He was laid in a grave donated through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is still the central figure of the human race and all history. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that

*ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of human beings on this earth as much as Jesus.*²

Jesus' impact on the world has been immense. All types of people have tried to claim Him as their own, describing Him as a revolutionary, a hippie, a feminist, a Communist, and even the partner of Mary Magdalene and father of her children! In a perverse way His name is just a word of blasphemy for many, though even that speaks of His significance. We don't curse using the name of any other religious or even political leader. The Bible has hundreds of names for Jesus, but supremely He is called Prophet, Priest, King, Messiah and Lord.

Books by their thousands have been written about Him, and even more because of Him. His life and death have been the backcloth drama of so many of our classics such as *A Tale of Two Cities* where the innocent dies in place of the guilty, or *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Coral Island* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. William Shakespeare, writing nearly 500 years ago, captures the significance of Jesus in his play, *Henry IV*:

*Those holy fields
Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nail'd
For our advantage on the bitter cross.*

His mark on music has been immense, whether Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* or Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Hundreds of thousands of hymns have been written in His praise, many of which are part of our Western culture and heritage – think of 'Amazing Grace' and 'The Old Rugged Cross'.

To visit any art gallery in the world is to be impressed again as to how Jesus has been the subject of thousands of artists who are struck by His birth, His life, His death and His resurrection. Artists have depicted Jesus as a baby, as a child and in His ministry. He has been painted with animals, children, His disciples, as well as with lepers and outcasts, or before Pilate, and, of course, hanging on the cross. He is the most painted person of all time.

Architecture has been impacted by Jesus. Buildings built for the glory of God and the worship of Jesus are amongst the greatest structures in the world. Bill Bryson described Durham Cathedral, which was built without an architect, as the greatest building in the northern hemisphere, and that led to him being made chancellor of Durham University! Churches, chapels and cathedrals have been designed so that their worship can exalt Jesus.

It is because of Jesus that His followers have built hospitals and schools, and worked for acceptable standards in prisons. Jesus said that those who belong to Him will give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty;

they will care for strangers, clothe the naked, as well as visit the sick and prisoners. Social reformers like William Wilberforce, who worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery, Lord Shaftesbury, 'the poor man's earl', who fought for the abolition of child labour, Elizabeth Fry and John Howard, who strove to bring about prison reform, and Florence Nightingale who cared for the wounded in the Crimean War, did so because they were followers of Jesus. Thomas Barnardo and George Müller began their orphanages because, as Christians, they had a concern for orphaned children, and a desire to see them helped for the glory of God.

In recent years, Christians have been at the forefront of campaigns such as 'Stop the Traffik', caring for street children in South America, India and the Far East, as well as running drug rehabilitation centres and numerous aid agencies in needy parts of the world.

Whereas we are sometimes told to practise what we preach, Jesus preached what He had practised. His standard of morality has never been surpassed, yet He only taught us what He was doing. He loved His enemies, He prayed for those who persecuted Him, He went the extra mile, He cared for the underdog, He was the Friend of sinners, and He loved us and gave Himself for us on the cross. He never needed to apologize, or blush with embarrassment or shame. There was no duplicity or sham in the life of

Jesus. He didn't pander to the whims of the influential to seek their favour. He reached out to the underdogs of society. He sought to benefit the outcasts. Children loved to be near Him; the worldly-wise could not trap Him with their trick question but were confounded by His wisdom.

There have been many famous deaths in history. From the death of Socrates to Joan of Arc to Nelson on the quarterdeck, and more recently Marilyn Monroe, J. F. Kennedy, Diana Princess of Wales, and Michael Jackson – they have each left their mark on history. But no death has made such an impact as that of Jesus on the cross. Thousands died by crucifixion, but Jesus' death has become the centre point of Christianity. It is at the cross that God made a way back to Himself from our waywardness.

Yet history records that Jesus not only died but was buried and three days later rose from the dead. I have a friend who used to be a schoolteacher. On one occasion, he took a group of pupils to the centre of London on a day trip. As part of the day trip they visited Madame Tussaud's. As the students wandered around, he was leaning against a pillar in the Chamber of Horrors, when a small group of people gathered around him mistook him for one of the waxwork models. They tried to discover what number he was and to identify him in their catalogue. He savoured the moment, but soon couldn't help smiling. The crowd

realized their mistake and quickly went away. For a moment they thought he was a figure of history, only to discover he was really a living person.³ Jesus was both.

So who is Jesus? When Jesus was walking with His twelve disciples near Caesarea Philippi, He asked them that question, ‘Who do men say that I am?’⁴ The disciples gave various answers, but then Jesus put His finger on the nerve when He asked, ‘But who do you say that I am?’

There is no more important question to answer. Our answer will determine our eternal destiny. So, who is Jesus? In the following chapters, we will look at four answers, examining Jesus from different angles.