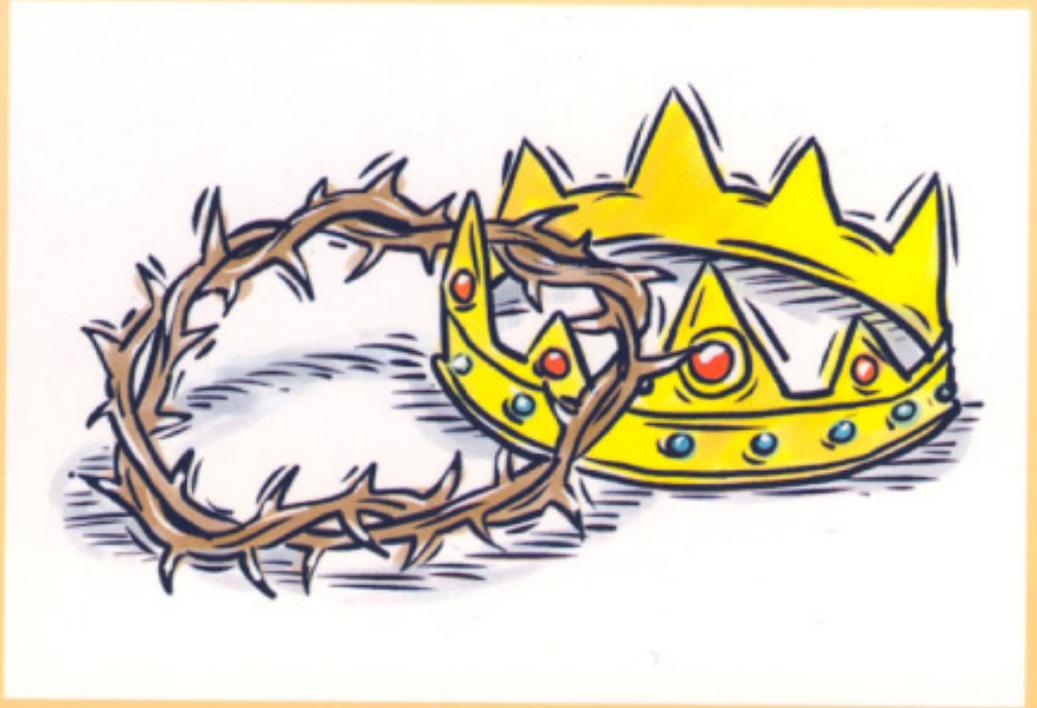


# God — Man



**Is Jesus Really  
God?**

Dick Tripp

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## Foreword

Observers of Western society in its moods and changes tell us that a generation ago the big question people wanted the answer to was: What is true? Today they tell us, the question that matters most is: What is real?

Who knows what people may be asking as we move into the 21st century?

In different ways both of these questions are important and both are addressed in this booklet.

What adds to their importance in this instance is that these questions are asked of a person who, more than any other single individual, has influenced the world in the West as we know it today.

Can we know who he was? Can we believe him? What difference does it make for us personally anyway?

Dick Tripp helps us think through these issues, and does so in a style which is straight forward to follow, wide ranging in its selection of evidence, and dynamic as it catches our imagination and stretches our minds.

Read on!

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## Introduction

For 2,000 years Christians have proclaimed that Jesus is God. They believe that God exists as three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus, sometimes spoken of as the Second Person of this "Trinity"<sup>1</sup>, came from heaven, lived on earth for about 33 years, was crucified for our sins, rose from the dead, now reigns with his Father in heaven and one day will return to judge the world. The New Testament declares it, the early creeds affirm it and a large portion of the world claims to believe it. Thousands more are coming to believe it daily, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The purpose of this booklet is to examine this claim. Is it reasonable? Does it have a historical foundation that fits the evidence we possess? If it does, do I need to do anything about it?

For the purpose of the discussion I will assume that the New Testament provides an accurate record of what Jesus said and did. There are good historical reasons for accepting this. If you have doubts on that score may I recommend to you two other booklets I have written: *Did the Writers of the New Testament Get Their Picture of Jesus Right?* which deals with the eyewitness testimony that is embedded in the New Testament, and *The Bible: Can We Trust a Book Written 2,000 Years Ago*, which deals with the accuracy of the records as they have come down to us today.

A good place to start any exploration about the identity of Jesus, is to examine what he said about himself. After all, it is widely recognised that, whoever he was, he possessed wisdom. It is reasonable therefore to find out what he said about himself and his mission.

What follows in the next few pages is a comprehensive list of all the claims that Jesus made about himself. They can be roughly grouped under eight headings. If you find it a bit much to plough through the whole list, then I suggest you pick out one or two claims under each heading. This should be sufficient to convince you that if Jesus knew anything at all about what he was talking about, then we must be

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<sup>1</sup> If you wish to explore further the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, may I commend my booklet, *Understanding the Trinity: A Look at the God Revealed in Jesus Christ*.

dealing here with an individual who is unique in history and different from anyone else about whom we have any record. In the rest of the booklet I will consider the credibility of these claims and their implications.

### **What Jesus said about himself**

One of the first things that must impress any serious reader of the gospels is that Jesus said an awful lot about himself. He said things about himself that a first century Jew must have found very puzzling, if not shocking.

#### **He claimed to exist before his birth in Bethlehem**

He spoke of the glory he shared with his Father **“before the world began”** (John 17:5). He existed before Abraham (John 8:58). On the occasion on which he said this he was nearly stoned for blasphemy. He came from **“above”** whereas his hearers were from **“below”**. His hearers were **“of this world”** whereas he was not (John 8:23). He came from heaven (John 3:13; 6:33-35). There are about 20 instances where he claimed to have been sent into this world by his Father (e.g. Luke 10:16; John 4:34; 5:38).

#### **He claimed a unique relationship with God his Father**

He constantly spoke of God as his Father (about 120 times in John alone). Often he called him **“my father”** (Matthew 15:13; 18:10; Luke 2:49, etc.). In one instance he addressed God by the Aramaic term **“abba”** (Mark 14:36) which a Jewish child would use of their dad. The Jewish scholar, Professor J. Jeremias, has drawn attention to the rarity of the word “Father” in Jewish literature as applied to God. God is rarely addressed as Father in the Old Testament and there are only a few examples of it in Palestinian Judaism during the early Christian era. The first appearance of “my Father” is in the Middle Ages. The use of the term “abba” as a personal address to God is unknown in Jewish writings. Jews of Jesus’ day would have considered it improper, indeed scandalous, for a person to use such intimate titles for God. They realised that, in speaking this way, Jesus was making himself equal with God, and so sought to kill him (John 5:18).

Jesus took this claim further. He declared himself to be the only one who knew the Father, and therefore the only one who could reveal him to others (Matthew 11:27; John 6:46). He was one with the Father (John 10:30,38). Everything that belonged to the Father belonged to him (John 16:15; 17:10). The Father would send the Holy Spirit to believers in *his* name (John 14:26). To have our prayers answered we are to ask the Father in *his* name (John 14:13; 15:16; 16:23,24). He claimed to be *the* Son of God—not *a* son of God (Matthew 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,17; 21:37; Luke 22:70; John 1:49,50; 5:19-27; 10:36,38, etc.).

### **He claimed authority over the lives of people**

He invited a love and a loyalty that took precedence over love and loyalty for parents, children, possessions, and even life itself. Without giving him this kind of devotion people could not be his disciples (Matthew 8:21,22; 10:37; 19:29; Luke 14:26-33). He expected people to suffer insults, persecution and slander for *his* sake (Matthew 5:11, Luke 6:22) and to lose their lives for *his* sake (Matthew 10:39; 16:25). He expected people to acknowledge him before others and said they would be rewarded for doing so (Matthew 10:32). His Father would honour those who served him (John 12:26). He claimed to be his disciple's only Master, Teacher and Lord (Matthew 23:8-10; John 13:14).

He claimed to be a king with the right to rule over others (Matthew 25:34; 27:11; John 1:49,50; 18:37), and spoke of "**my kingdom**" (Luke 22:29,30; John 18:36). One of his most common ways of describing himself was to call himself the Son of Man. The Son of Man is a figure who appears in the book of the prophet Daniel who is given a kingdom of universal domain and eternal duration (Daniel 7:13,14).

The claim that was perhaps the most startling of all was that one day he would come again, this time in power and glory. All judgement had been committed to him and he would be the one who would call us from our graves for judgement (Matthew 7:22,23; 13:41; 16:27; 24:30; 25:31-46; 26:64; Luke 9:26; John 5:22,23, 27-30; 6:40)

He spoke of the future church as *his* church and that they would meet in *his* name (Matthew 16:18; 18:20). He said we could do nothing of significance without having a right relationship with him (John 15:5). Finally he declared that all authority in heaven and earth was his (Matthew 28:18). You can't have much more authority than that!

### **His estimate of his own character**

He dared challenge his opponents to prove him guilty of sin (John 8:46). He always did what pleased his Father (John 8:29). The devil had no hold on him (John 14:30).

### **His estimate of his own teaching**

His purpose for coming into the world was to bear witness to the truth and those who were "of the truth" would listen to him (John 18:37). He went further and declared "**I am the truth**" (John 14:6). He claimed the right to put his own interpretation on the moral commands God had previously given his people through Moses (Matthew 5:21,22,27,28). In Jewish thinking a rabbi's authority only came to him as derived from Moses. Yet in these and in several other instances Jesus is plainly claiming an authority superior to that of Moses. Ernst Kasemann, in *The Problem of the Historical Jesus*, says:

*To this there are no Jewish parallels, nor indeed can there be. For the Jew who is doing what is done here has cut himself off from the community of Judaism—or else he brings the messianic Torah [Law] and is therefore the Messiah.*

As Lord of the Sabbath he had the right to declare what was lawful on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:1-8). Hearing and obeying his teaching was the only solid foundation for life (Matthew 7:24-27). His words would never pass away (Matthew 24:35). If people were ashamed of his words he would be ashamed of them at the judgement (Luke 9:26). Hearing his word is necessary for having eternal life (John 5:24). His teaching came from God and he only said the things his Father told him to say (John 7:16; 8:40; 12:49,50). On judgement day the word he had spoken would be the criteria by which we would be judged (John 12:48). Attention to his words was a requirement for having our prayers answered (John 15:7). Those who kept his word would not see death (John 8:51).

As the noted Anglican scholar, John Stott, sums it up:

*The distinction between wisdom and folly in this life and between survival and judgement in the next, he dared to say, would depend on whether people had listened to his teaching and had obeyed or disobeyed it.*

To add emphasis to the solemn nature of his statements Jesus frequently preceded them with the words “**Amen, I say to you**” or “**Amen, Amen, I say to you**”. There are over 70 instances of this in the gospels. “Amen” is normally used at the end of prayers to assert one's affirmation of, or agreement with, what has been prayed. Using it in the way Jesus did is unknown elsewhere in Jewish literature. Translations into English use such phrases as “Truly, truly” or “I am telling you the truth” to try to convey its meaning.

### **He was the fulfilment of all prophecy**

He said he had come to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies (Matthew 5:17; 11:2-6; 26:54,56; Luke 4:17-21; 24:25-27, 44). The Old Testament Scriptures spoke of him (John 5:39-40, 46). He was the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek) anticipated by faithful Jews (Matthew 16:16,17; 26:63,64; John 4:25,26). False Christs would come in *his* name (Matthew 24:5). His contemporaries' eyes and ears were actually seeing and hearing what had for centuries been foretold (Matthew 13:16,17).

Professor Moule, a leading English New Testament scholar, says:

*The notion of the fulfilment of Scripture in a single individual, a figure of recent history, and he a condemned criminal, who claimed to be the coping stone of the whole structure, and the goal of God's whole design, was new. And it was the Christian community which first related together, round a single focus, the scattered and largely disconnected images of Israel's hope. It was utterly new for*

*images like 'Messiah', 'Christ', 'Son of God', 'Son of Man', Suffering Servant' and 'Lord' to be seen as interchangeable terms all relating to one figure.*

What is even more significant, however, is that the new Christian community was only following Jesus' lead. *He* first used such terms to describe *himself*.

### **Only through him can eternal life be obtained**

Jesus claimed that he was the one who could give people eternal life—that quality of life that comes from being rightly related to God (John 6:27; 10:28; 17:1,2). The way to receive eternal life was to trust in him (John 3:15,16; 6:27,40,51; 11:26). He associated “**following**” him with “**entering the kingdom of heaven**” and “**inheriting eternal life**” (Matthew 19:21-23, 28, 29). He was the gate into salvation's fold (John 10:9). He was the only way to God (John 14:6).

Not believing in him was the ultimate sin (John 16:8,9). Those who did not believe in him would die in their sins (John 8:24). He came to establish a new covenant between God and man which, by implication, would replace that established with Abraham and Moses. His death would be a chief factor in the operation of this covenant (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20; Mark 10:45).

### **Other hints at divinity**

He claimed the right to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 7:48,49). C. S. Lewis, professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at the University of Cambridge, has a pertinent comment to make on this claim in his book *Mere Christianity*. It is worth quoting in full:

*Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toe and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness unrivalled by any other character in history.*

Forgiveness would be preached in *his* name (Luke 24:47). He was greater than the temple, the prophet Jonah and king Solomon (Matthew 12:6, 41, 42). He allowed himself to be worshipped (Matthew 14:33; John 9:38). He could take a quotation from the Old Testament that referred to God and use it of himself (Matthew

21:15,16—quoting from Psalm 8:1,2). He was the one who had sent the prophets of old to gather together God's people (Matthew 23:37).

The images he used of himself, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Bread of Life, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the true Vine, and the Resurrection point to divinity, especially in the contexts in which he used them and when compared with similar associations in the Old Testament. He would send the Holy Spirit to live in his disciples (John 15:26; 16:7). He accepted Thomas' acknowledgment, "**My Lord and my God**" (John 20:28,29).

To know him was to know God (John 8:19; 14:7), to see him was to see God (John 12:45; 14:9), to believe in him was to believe in God (John 12:44), to receive him was to receive God (Mark 9:37), to hate him was to hate God (John 15:23) and to honour him was to honour God (John 5:23).

### Sorting out the issues

What are we to make of all this? Has anyone ever made such claims and got away with it? Indeed, has *anyone ever* made such claims? But Jesus didn't get away with it—he was executed. The celebrated Jew, M. Salvador, has made it clear in his book *Jesus Christ*, that in view of the claims of Jesus, a Jew had no logical alternative to belief in his divinity, except the imperative duty of putting him to death.

However, there were a reasonable number in his day who *did* believe him and there have been millions since. As Thomas Schutz said:

*Jesus Christ is the only recognised religious leader who has ever claimed to be deity and the only individual ever who has convinced a great portion of the world that he is God.*

Certainly, Mohammed never made such claims. Buddha never made such claims, though some of his followers have granted him divine status.

So here we are presented with a problem. Was he God? Was he history's most successful con-man? Or was he mentally deluded? The historian, Philip Schaff put it like this:

*Christ stands...solitary and alone among all the heroes of history, and presents to us an unsolvable problem, unless we admit him to be more than man, even the eternal Son of God.*

Perhaps C. S. Lewis has summed up the options that we have as well as anyone, in *Mere Christianity*:

*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; 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 with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*

## **The proof of the pudding**

When someone makes extraordinary claims as Jesus did, the obvious thing to do is to ask the question: Do the other things we know about this person support such claims or not? I suggest there are four lines of evidence that support his claims. Each, taken separately, presents a compelling argument. Together they present overwhelming evidence. I shall avoid using the word “proof”! Each person must weigh up the evidence for themselves.

### **His character supports his claims**

In all of history has there been anyone whose character and sheer goodness has shone so brightly? Although his claims seem egocentric, his life-style was humble. He avoided publicity and refused to perform miracles to please the crowds. He taught his disciples that service to others was the mark of greatness. He left them with a servant model by washing their feet. He deliberately sought out the despised of society, yet seemed equally at ease with the upper classes.

His life exemplified his own teaching. He said to the religious Jews, **“How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God”** and at the same time appeared immune to the praise or blame of others. He taught that **“a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”** and demonstrated his own freedom from the grip of material things. As far as we know he only possessed the clothes he wore. He condemned hypocrisy in others and gave no hint of it in himself.

He told his disciples to love their enemies and he himself prayed for forgiveness for those who nailed him on the cross. His compassion for others comes through in every chapter of the story. If, as the New Testament constantly affirms, he laid down his life for the sins of the human race, to reconcile people to God, we have here an example of love that is beyond human comprehension. At every point his teaching and his example are one of a kind.

His self-assurance and courage stand out clearly and nowhere more so than at his trial. J. B. Phillips, who translated the New Testament into modern English, says of him:

*This man could be moved with compassion and could be very gentle, but...he was quite terrifyingly tough, not in a James Bond sort of way, but in the sheer strength of a unified and utterly dedicated personality.*

His attitude to women was in sharp contrast to the customs of the age, indeed of any age. Dorothy Sayers in her book *Are Women Human?* sums this up aptly:

*They had never known a man like this Man — there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronised; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as "The women, God help us!" or "The ladies, God bless them!"; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.*

He showed particular kindness towards divorced women, prostitutes and his mother.

It is interesting to note what his closest friends made of him. John declared, **"We have seen his glory...full of grace and truth"** (John 1:14) and **"in him is no sin"** (1 John 3:5). Peter said, **"He committed no sin"** (1 Peter 2:22). These were men who spent two-and-a-half years as his closest companions. Paul, who did not know Christ personally while he was on earth, but who knew many who did, said that he **"had no sin"** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

His enemies sought to find fault with him over a period of two or more years. However, at his trial they could find no evidence against him, other than that of blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah, and of insurrection for claiming to be a king. When they attacked his character they only contradicted themselves. Pilate, though allowing him to be crucified out of cowardice, declared twice, **"I find no basis for a charge against him"** (John 19:4,6). Even the traitor Judas confessed that he had betrayed an innocent man (Matthew 27:4).

What are we to make of such a man? The Russian author Dostoevski, in a letter to his brother, put it like this:

*I want to say to you that I am a child of this age, a child of unbelief and scepticism and yet...I believe that there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more human and more perfect than the Saviour.*

Wakasa no Kami was a Japanese feudal lord. In 1854 he discovered a waterlogged copy of a Dutch translation of the Bible floating in the waves. He acquired a Chinese translation and studied it for eleven years. One day he appeared at the door of Verbeck, the first Protestant missionary to Japan, with fifty retainers in full regalia, and asked for baptism. He declared:

*I cannot tell you my feelings when for the first time I read the account of the character and work of Jesus Christ. I had never seen, heard or imagined such a person. I was filled with admiration, overwhelmed with emotion and taken captive by the record of his nature and life.*

Marcus Loane, biblical scholar and Archbishop, summed all this up well when he declared:

*His life was marked by a moral perfection which people might try to describe but could never invent. His death was invested with a sacrificial value which could only have derived from one who was sinless. That perfection of character under every test and in every circumstance could not be the product of an imperfect group of disciples. There was no one like him: no saint or seer; no prophet or psalmist; he was unique. And the glory of the New Testament is that it shows how God sent His Son into this world that by means of him our sins may be forgiven.*

### **His teaching supports his claims**

One aspect of his teaching that constantly impressed his hearers was the authoritative manner with which he spoke: “...**the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law**” (Matthew 7:29), “**The people were all so amazed that they asked one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—and with authority!'**” (Mark 1:27). Jesus never quoted any authorities other than the Old Testament Scriptures. He never said, “Rabbi so-and-so says this”. Neither did he hide behind the authority of Jehovah as the prophets of old, “Thus says the Lord...”. He simply declared, “Truly I say to you...”

There is a wisdom and comprehensiveness about the ethical teaching of Christ that has never been surpassed. He dealt with all the most vital issues of life; our relationship with God and with one another, our attitude to material possessions, our motivations and goals in life, and the relationship of this life to the next. Philip Toynbee, reviewer and writer, expressed it this way:

*I call myself a Christian because I discern in the New Testament a man whose life, death and central teaching penetrates more deeply into the mysterious reality of our condition than anyone or anything else has ever done. In the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles, I find a total view of what man is, of what he could be and ought to be, which evokes a response in me such as no other writings have ever done.*

During the last 2,000 years no teaching on the subject of how people should behave has emerged that represents any advance on Jesus’ model. According to G. Thomas:

*...since the days of Christ, in spite of all the progress of thought, not a single new ethical ideal has been given to the world.*

There is also a challenge in his teaching that has not been equalled. He drew attention to thoughts and motives as well as outward behaviour (Matthew 5:21,22, 27,28; Mark 7:6,21-23; Luke 12:15; John 5:44, etc.). There is an uncanny way in which

he always gets to the core of an issue. It is therefore difficult to study the gospels with moral neutrality. Carnegie Simpson, in his book *The Fact of Christ* says:

*The historical fact of Christ has religious issues because of its moral challenge. As we study, our conscience is aroused. As we examine him intellectually, he examines us spiritually, and the roles are reversed. We study Aristotle and are intellectually edified thereby. We study Jesus and are in the profoundest way spiritually disturbed. We are constrained to take up some inward moral attitude of heart and will in relation to Jesus. A man may study Jesus with intellectual impartiality, but he cannot do it with moral neutrality. We must declare our colours.*

Jesus also had the ability to take the ordinary experiences of everyday people and use them to illustrate, in unforgettable ways, the deeper truths of life. The method of his teaching, as well as its content, was unique. Although he had never had higher education he impressed his hearers. **“The Jews were amazed and asked, ‘How did this man get such learning without having studied?’”** (John 7:14). How indeed?

Here again, the problem between his claims and the wisdom of his teaching is highlighted. As Elton Trueblood put it:

*All four Gospels bristle with supernatural claims on the part of Jesus. If he was only a teacher, he was a very misleading one.*

Or to quote C. S. Lewis again:

*the discrepancy between the depth and sanity and (let me add) shrewdness of his moral teaching, and the rampant megalomania which must lie behind his theological teaching, unless he is indeed God, has never been satisfactorily got over.*

### **His miracles support his claims**

The influential Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple noted:

*It is now recognised that the one Christ for whose existence there is any evidence at all is a miraculous figure making stupendous claims.*

The gospel stories contain numerous examples of Jesus healing all kinds of illnesses and, in three instances, raising the dead. He also demonstrated his powers over nature. These miracles, as Archibald Alexander puts it:

*were performed, for the most part, in an open and public manner, in the presence of multitudes of witnesses, under the inspection of learned and malignant enemies, in a great variety of circumstances, and for several years in succession.*

His enemies never denied these signs.

In today's materialistic world these miracles appear as an embarrassment. We distrust anything that does not have a “scientific” explanation. However, I suspect that the problem is often not so much with Jesus’ miracles as with his claims. The question we ought to be asking is, “If Jesus was the one through whom the universe was created, would we expect his life to be different?” If he had the power to heal, and did not do so, then would we use *this* as an argument to dispute his claims?

Jesus himself claimed that his works were evidence that the Father had sent him. He urged both his disciples and his opponents to believe in him on the basis of these works if they found it difficult to believe on the basis of any other evidence (John 5:36; 10:37,38; 14:11). However, he studiously avoided performing miracles just for show or to obtain a following. John calls his miracles “signs”—signs of who he was and what he had come to do.

The greatest of all miracles in the life of Jesus was his own resurrection. I have dealt with this in a separate booklet, *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?* as it is worth a booklet on its own.

### **His influence in history supports his claims**

We divide history into BC and AD because of Jesus! H. G. Wells said:

*I am an historian. I am not a believer. But I must confess, as an historian, this penniless creature from Galilee is irresistibly the centre of history.*

Jesus has captured the heart and mind and allegiance of peasant and king, of intellectual and illiterate the world over. Wherever the message of this man has been proclaimed, among all races and cultures, people have turned from their own ways to follow him. His influence in art, music and literature is incalculable.

So much of what may be called “progress” has been done in his name: the abolition of slavery; the building of hospitals; the development of the nursing profession; the reform of prisons; the abolition of child labour; the care of the elderly and orphans; the foundation of innumerable charitable organisations such as the Red Cross and the YMCA; the development of education worldwide, particularly of the lower classes; pioneer work with lepers; literacy projects all round the world; the abolishing of forced labour in the Congo; resistance to black-birding in the Pacific; the ending of cannibalism and child sacrifice on several continents; the fight for human rights in combating opium, foot-binding and exposure of girl babies in China; the war against widow-burning, infanticide and temple prostitution in India—the list goes on and on. Until comparatively recently eighty percent of all education in Africa south of the Sahara was done by Christian missionaries.

Historian Ruth Tucker says:

*The ministry of missionary medicine during the twentieth century has been without a doubt the greatest humanitarian effort the world has ever known.*

As late as 1935 half the hospitals in China were run by missionaries. Even the foundations of modern science were laid in the name of this man from Nazareth, as were the foundations of Western music.

Much of the influence of Jesus is well documented in the book *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born* by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe (Word Publishing, 1994). This is an excellent book as it does not overlook the failures of those who claim to be his followers. It is no wonder that the Encyclopaedia Britannica gives far more space to the historic Jesus than any other human figure.

His influence has not diminished today. Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette has observed that:

*Never has Jesus had so wide and so profound an effect upon humanity as in the past three or four generations. Through him, millions of individuals have been transformed and have begun to live the kind of life which he exemplified...Gauged by the consequences, the events which have followed the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have been the most important events in the history of man. Measured by his influence, Jesus is central in the human story.*

Christians claim that this influence stems not only from his life on earth, but also from his resurrection and continued activity in the lives of his people by the Holy Spirit. If we deny this then we are left with the belief that it all grew out of the impact of a mere three years ministry of this remarkable man, in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire, and that alone.

## **Conclusion**

Once we begin to seriously consider whether or not Jesus might be God, we are faced with another uncomfortable dilemma. C. S. Lewis, in *God in the Dock*, put it like this:

*What are we to make of Jesus Christ? This is a question which has in a sense, a frantically comic side. For the real question is not what are we to make of Christ, but what is he to make of us. The picture of a fly sitting deciding what it is going to make of an elephant has comic elements about it.*

It is not only what he thinks of me that becomes the important issue. If it is true, as the New Testament repeatedly affirms, that the main purpose of his coming was to die for our sins and reconcile us to God, then we must decide whether we want to be reconciled. William Barclay, Bible translator and popular writer, reminds us:

*Either what Jesus said about himself is false, in which case he is guilty of such blasphemy as no man dared ever to utter; or what he said about himself is true, in which case he is what he claimed to be and can be described in no other terms than the Son of God. Jesus leaves us with a definite choice—we must either accept him fully or reject him absolutely. That is precisely why every person has to decide for or against Jesus Christ.*

I suggest that there is only one logical response. It could hardly be put better than it was by a man of whom Billy Graham tells in an article in the *Readers Digest*:

*I shall never forget the glow on the face of a man who came to see me some time ago. "All my life," he said, "I'd felt that God was high and holy—and unreachable. It's hard to understand a God like that, let alone love him. But then you showed me Jesus and quoted his words: 'He that has seen me has seen the Father.' And like a flash it came to me that if God is like him who walked the common ways of man, loved and served the weakest of his creatures, and whose great heart burst on the cross to redeem us from our sins, then he can have my life, my soul, my all. I made that gift, and I've never taken it back."*

Jesus invites us all to make that response and to receive his gift of eternal life. He said, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** (John 10:10).

.....

If you would like to meet with this God, who has made himself known supremely through the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and if you would like to receive all that he has to offer—his forgiveness, his love, his transforming presence, his strength for daily living, assurance of a place in his kingdom, and more—then you may find the following prayer a helpful guide:

*God, I acknowledge that I have failed to live by your commands and my need of forgiveness.*

*I believe that you came into this world in the Person of Jesus—and that you died for my sins. I thank you for it.*

*Come into my life.*

*I accept your forgiveness and your gift of eternal life.*

*I am not worthy of it, but I thank you for it.*

*I accept you as my Saviour and submit to you as the Lord of my life.*

*Help me to live worthy of your love.*

