

INTRODUCTION

Jesus is getting a lot of the headlines these days. Because I love art and history, last spring I read Dan Brown’s book, *The Da Vinci Code*. The book tells the story of a conspiracy to hide the fact that Jesus didn’t really die, but survived the cross and later married Mary Magdalene and had children. Next month, the movie “The Da Vinci Code” starring Tom Hanks will be released. A lot of people ask me what I think about *The Da Vinci Code*, and my first response is to ask them what section of the bookstore it’s being sold in: Fiction. That basically says it all. It’s a fictitious work. It’s a suspense novel.

But the subtle danger of the story is that people who are not Biblically informed may mistake it for truth. In fact, in the flyleaf of the book, the publishers write, “An astonishing truth concealed for centuries...unveiled at last.” But the book seldom comes close to the truth: it is filled with many historical and theological errors; but fiction writers are allowed to stretch the truth. If you want to learn more about these critical errors log on to our website www.gabc.org and we have a link called “Debunking the Da Vinci Code.” The book and the movie are making people consider the question: Who is Jesus Christ?

In addition, last week the National Geographic Society released information about an ancient Coptic manuscript *USA Today* called “The Gospel of Judas.” (I almost wonder if the timing of this wasn’t coordinated with the Da Vinci Code movie!) Of course, even the National Geographic scholars admit Judas didn’t write it: He committed suicide soon after he betrayed Jesus. It was written by someone two hundred years after Judas died. In addition, this is not some “lost gospel” that’s going to change the Bible. In the first 300 years of the church, there were many documents written telling strange and unusual stories about Jesus not found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But again, this front page story makes people consider the question: Who is Jesus Christ?

Which voice are you going to listen to? It reminds me of funny story I heard about an army private on guard duty for the first time. He had orders not to admit anyone onto the base if they didn’t have a special windshield sticker. Around midnight an unmarked car approached the guard shack and the private stopped them. Inside was a four star general and his driver. When the sentry advised them they could not enter because they didn’t have the proper sticker, the general became angry and told the driver, “Don’t worry about it, just drive right on through.” When the private heard this he leaned through the window with his hand on his sidearm and said, “Excuse me sir, I’m new at this. Could you please tell me who I shoot first: You or the driver?” The sentry had conflicting instructions. In the same way, you have to decide which authority you’re going to listen to as you answer for yourself, “Who is Jesus Christ?” And the way you answer that question will determine the direction of your eternal destiny.

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a church in modern-day Turkey to help them answer this question. He wrote this letter because there were teachers called Gnostics who were teaching Jesus really wasn’t God in the flesh. Their false teaching about Jesus is reflected in the teaching contained in this so-called Book of Judas. To correct this growing heresy, Paul hammered out some simple, yet profound truths about who Jesus Christ is.

Colossians 1:15-20. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

Even if you look at Jesus from a purely human standpoint, no individual in the history of the world has had a greater impact than this carpenter from Nazareth. Back in 1999, *Time Magazine* considered people to name as “man of the century” and “man of the millennium.” This is what the article said about Jesus: “It would require much exotic calculation to deny that the single most powerful figure, not merely in these two millennia, but in all human history, has been Jesus of Nazareth. Not only is the prevalent system of denoting the years based on the date of his birth, but a serious argument can be made that no one else’s life has proved remotely as powerful and enduring as that of Jesus.” (*Time Magazine*, Dec. 6, 1999)

But according to the Bible, Jesus is so much more than just a remarkable human being. To review this passage from the last lesson, “The Autobiography of Jesus” we see that Jesus is: (1) the image of God; (2) Ruler of the universe; (3) the Creator; (4) before all things; (5) the sustainer of life. In this lesson we will examine four more truths addressing the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?”

1. JESUS IS THE CHURCH-OWNER

Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Colossians 1:18 says, “When it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.” In the New Testament there are three main metaphors employed to describe the church. First, as the church we are the Bride, and Jesus is the Bridegroom. Second, the church is compared to a building, and each of us is a living stone. Jesus is the foundation and the Chief cornerstone of the church. But the most profound analogy for the church is that it is like a human body: We are all different body parts, but there is only one head—Jesus.

When the Bible says Jesus is the head of the church, it doesn’t mean that it’s like He’s the head of a corporation. He is like the head on a living organism. A company can continue if changes are made to head leadership. But without Jesus, the church cannot function.

When you look in the mirror you’ll see a round orb on the top of your neck. That part of your body contains the brain, which is the control center for the rest of the body. All the appendages, the arms, legs, and even your little toe get their direction from the head. The same is true of the church. The body can’t function without the head.

A few months ago, a man who doesn’t attend our church was talking to me about Green Acres. He wasn’t happy, because some of our worshipers were parking in front of his house. As he spoke to me about his concerns he asked a pointed question. “Who’s in charge down there at your church anyway?” He probably expected me to say something like, “I am. Or our deacons

are; or our parking lot committee is. But when I thought about what he was really asking, all I could say was, “Well, sir, Jesus is the head of our church. I’m just His servant. I know it’s a problem, but we’re making plans right now to increase our parking.”

Don’t ever forget, this isn’t *my* church, and it isn’t *your* church—this church belongs to Jesus. He is the founder and owner of this church and every church that confesses He is Lord.

2. JESUS IS THE DEATH-BEATER

The Message paraphrase says, “He was supreme in the beginning—and leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end.” (Colossians 1:18)

The Bible claims Jesus was the first person ever resurrected. You may recall the Bible records several incidents of dead people coming back to life. Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, and the son of the Widow of Nain. And Lazarus was restored to life after being dead for four days. But none of those individuals were resurrected; they were simply resuscitated. They eventually died. But Jesus came forth from the grave and is alive forevermore.

This world is littered with the graves of millions of people. You can travel to Medina and see the tomb of Mohammed. You can go to Sri Lanka and visit the Temple of the Tooth, where a tooth from the corpse of Buddha is enshrined. The pyramids in Egypt and the Taj Mahal in India are all just fancy tombs. I’ve stood in wonder as I gazed at the elaborate tombs of the Ming Emperors in China; each tomb taking up more than 100 acres. But when you visit a garden outside of Jerusalem—all you find is an empty tomb. Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb, because He knew He wouldn’t need it long!

Years ago in Russia, when Nikita Khrushchev died, they were looking for a place to bury him. By this time he was *persona non grata* in Russia. Khrushchev’s family even made a request of Golda Meier, the first prime minister of Israel. Her reply was priceless, “Yes, you may bury Mr. Khrushchev in Israel, but I must warn you that Israel has the highest resurrection rate of any nation on earth!”

Before His death, Jesus claimed He would be resurrected from the dead. He pointed to His body and said, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will build it back again.” (John 2:19)

Even if you don’t believe Jesus is God, you’ve got to seriously consider the question: **WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BODY OF JESUS?** Where is the *corpus delecti*? For those who don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead, the theories fall into two categories: (1) The stolen body theory; and (2) the swoon theory. Let me briefly examine both.

First, if the corpse of Jesus was stolen and hidden, either His enemies did it, or His friends did it. If His enemies took the body, when the message of the resurrection started spreading, all they had to do was produce the body and the movement would have died quickly and quietly. And suppose for argument’s sake, that the disciples took the body of Jesus, and then they made up the legend of the resurrection. If they were deceitful enough to do that, surely they would have had a selfish motive leading to some personal benefit for them. So what did the disciples receive?

History tells us all of them were abused and tortured; and except for John, they all died by execution. Surely, one or more of them would have recanted their story in the face of the death—but all of them went to their deaths with unshakable profession that Jesus rose from the dead. Would dishonest men be willing to die for a lie?

The other theory is the swoon theory. This theory suggests Jesus really didn't die; He was merely unconscious when He was removed from the cross. Then in the coolness of the tomb, He revived, unwrapped Himself from a fifty yards of saturated cloth, moved a two-ton stone away from the tomb and walked away. This theory is the one Dan Brown follows in the plot for the Da Vinci Code conspiracy.

One of my favorite radio Bible teachers was J. Vernon McGhee. One reason I like him was because his two passions of life were teaching the Bible and playing golf! He received a letter from a lady who listened to his program. She wrote: "Our preacher said that on Easter Jesus just swooned on the cross and that the disciples nursed him back to health. What do you think?" McGhee replied, "Dear Sister, beat your preacher with a leather whip. Nail him to a cross. Hang him in the sun for six hours. Run a spear through his heart. Embalm him. Put him in an airless tomb for three days. Then you see what happens."

I reject the stolen body theory as well as the swoon theory. I believe in the miracle of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. The supernatural life of Jesus was bracketed by two impossibilities. He came into this world through a virgin birth and left through an empty tomb. Jesus entered the world through a door marked "no entrance" and left through a door marked "no exit." We will all have to face death. Before Jesus, death had a big, scary sign that said, "No Exit." But Jesus changed the sign to read, "Follow me."

As this passage affirms, Jesus is the "firstborn from among the dead." That not only means He's the first, but that there will be other resurrections—ours! He's the first in the parade, but there is more to come. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we have the hope that one day even our dead bodies will be raised and changed into a resurrection body like His!

3. JESUS IS THE TOP-GOD

Colossians 1:19 asserts, "He's there towering far above everything, everyone..., everything of God finds its proper place in Him." (*The Message*) In our dog-eat-dog world we're familiar with the phrase "top dog." I'm not dyslexic, or lexdyslic or anything. The Bible teaches Jesus is greater than all the other gods (small "g").

You may be thinking, "I thought there is only one God!" There is only one LIVING God. But there have always been man-made gods. In fact, the term "gods" appears over 200 times in the Bible. For instance the Bible says, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens." (1 Chronicles 16:25-26)

All religious teachers spoke about a god or gods, but none of them ever made the claims Jesus did. If you had gone to Buddha and asked him, "Are you the son of Brahma?" He would have

said, "No, 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 have first torn his clothes, and then cut your head off. If you had asked Confucius, "Are you heaven?" He would have probably said, "Remarks such as that are in bad taste and do not reflect wisdom." But Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father."

Other religious leaders said, "Follow me and I'll show you the truth." Jesus said, "I AM the truth." Other religious leaders said, "Follow me and I'll show you the way to salvation." But Jesus says, "I AM the way." Other religious leaders say, "Follow me and I'll lead you to enlightenment." Jesus said, "I AM the light of the world." Other religious teachers said, "Follow me and I'll show you one of the doors to God." Jesus said, "I AM the door."

There are thousands of different religions. But the thing that makes Jesus stand out as unique is that He claimed to be God. In our age of tolerance, some people try to say Jesus was merely a great man, a good teacher. But that is not a viable option when you examine the words of Jesus with intellectual honesty. The brilliant English writer and scholar, C.S. Lewis, summarized the issue in this way: "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 the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." (*Mere Christianity*, p. 30)

4. JESUS IS THE LIFE-FIXER

I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases Colossians 1:20, "All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross." (*The Message*)

We're all born with a problem: We're sinners by nature and by choice. Nobody ever had to teach you to tell a lie—you were born with that tendency. This sin problem has created a chain reaction of other problems in our lives. That's the problem of humanity. We're all broken down by our sinful condition. We're like a broken watch, or a broken computer. And in our throw-away world, we usually toss things away when they break. But Jesus doesn't do that. He is willing and able to fix up our lives.

Our culture chews up people and spits them out, leaving them broken and dislocated. The Swiss psychiatrist Dr. Carl Gustav Jung wrote: "The central neurosis of our time is emptiness."

If you are feeling broken and empty, Jesus Christ can fix the fundamental problem of your life. The philosopher Blaise Pascal put it aptly when he wrote: "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which only God can fill through his Son Jesus Christ."

The Bible says Jesus reconciles us with God. The word “reconcile” is a hyper-intensive form of the verb which described putting back together the pieces of a broken vase. The word *reconcile* means to “bring together” or to “agree.”

Back before electronic banking, I used to diligently balance my checkbook by hand every month. When I added up all the outstanding checks, and arrived at a figure, I had to make sure that number reconciled with the same balance that the bank said I had. If the numbers didn’t agree I had a problem—it was usually a problem in my addition or listing. I had to go back to work until I could reconcile those two numbers.

That’s what Jesus did for us on the cross. Because of His humanity, He could take the hand of sinful mankind, you and me. Because of His Divinity, He could take the hand of Holy God. Then on the cross, He brought two together and said, “It is finished!” That’s reconciliation!

CONCLUSION

So, if you’re looking to discover the truth about Jesus Christ, I can’t recommend “The Da Vinci Code.” However, I can wholeheartedly recommend another movie released last year, “The Chronicles of Narnia.” The movie is based upon the book *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. Of course it’s fiction, but it also conveys a powerful allegorical message about Jesus. Jesus is portrayed by the character Aslan, a powerful lion. Like Jesus, Aslan takes responsibility for a mistake Edmund made, and then allows himself to be killed by a blood-thirsty mob of grotesque creatures. Just before he dies; a wounded and bleeding Aslan whispers, “It is finished.” Tears came to my eyes when I watched that scene in the movie. And then, when it appeared as if everything was lost, Aslan rises from the dead and leads his army to victory. I loved the movie not only for the pure story, but also for the powerful underlying plot.

Even people who don’t care for the Christian message can’t miss it. Richard von Busak is a secular movie critic and he wrote this about “The Chronicles of Narnia: “It is hardly buried Christianity that is flaunted here; Aslan’s execution and rise, the establishment of Peter [get it?] as his representative, the healing bloodlike fluid in a heart-shaped glass—even Sunday school dropouts can’t fail to get the picture.” I didn’t miss it, did you?

There’s one part of the story that really appeals to me. The children are frightened when they first learn about Aslan. Susan asks Mrs. Beaver, “Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a Lion.” Mrs. Beaver replies: “That you will, dearie, and make no mistake, if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” Lucy asks: “Then he isn’t safe?” And in my opinion, Mr. Beaver makes one of the greatest theological statements about Jesus in all of literature. He says: “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good...One day you’ll see him, another you won’t. He doesn’t like being tied down...He’s wild you know—not a tame lion.”

I admire C.S. Lewis’ portrayal of Jesus as a wild, powerful lion. I say that because I think many of us have reduced Jesus to some kind of harmless religious icon. We have tried to fit Him into the confining box of our own denomination or our own little minds. He’s not like that. He’s the powerful Lion of the Tribe of Judah! He won’t be tied down. He’ll never become a circus lion

who jumps through our personal hoops of belief when we crack our whip. He's much too powerful to ever be a tame lion. But he is good—and he loves you.

In the end, it matters little what Dan Brown, C.S. Lewis or David Dykes says about Jesus. It all comes down to this: Who is Jesus Christ to YOU? Be careful how you answer that question because it will determine your eternal destiny.

Was he a religious charlatan who launched a conspiracy still fooling millions today? You decide. Was he a demented man who had delusions of being God? You decide. Or is He the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. If you decide that He is, here's the promise of the Bible: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9)

In Jesus we find a love that can never be fathomed; a life that can never die; and a righteousness that can never be tarnished. In Jesus we find a peace that can never be understood; a rest that can never be disturbed; and a joy that can never be diminished. In Jesus there is a hope that can never be disappointed; a glory that can never be clouded; and a light that can never be darkened. In Jesus we experience a beauty that can never be marred; a wisdom that can never be baffled; and resources that can never be exhausted. The Bible says Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; the author and finisher of our faith. In Jesus you find everything you will ever need for this life and the next! That's the supremacy of Jesus!

OUTLINE

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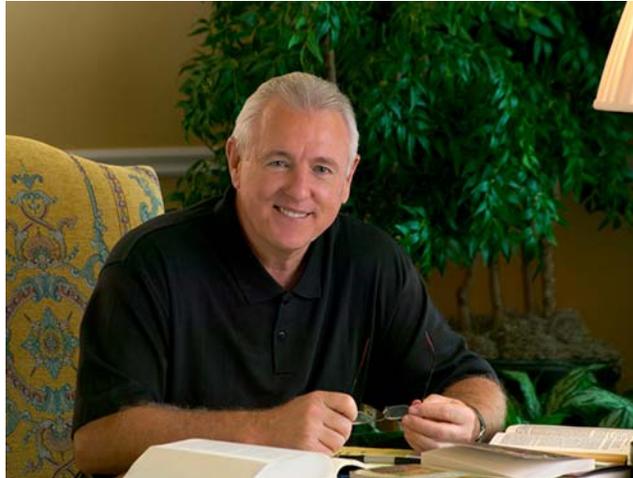
"He was supreme in the beginning—and leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end."
Colossians 1:18, The Message

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes