

## JESUS THE WAY

**“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to God, the Father except through me.”** According to a Greek scholar, this is an exact translation from the Greek to the English. And extreme Right Wing Christians, love to use this passage to prove that being Christian is the only way to heaven and every other person of no faith or any other faith cannot get to heaven. They have used these two sentences from John to argue that Jesus is the exclusive means of entry into heaven -- “no one comes to God or to the Father except through me.” As if Jesus was standing there at the gate way to heaven – like a security guard – saying nope, Keep Out, Christians only. They misunderstand what Jesus meant. He wasn’t talking about entry into heaven, he was talking about entry into experiencing the presence of God in your life. When he talked about the Way – that in living the way, the truth, the life (like Jesus lived) is the path, the channel or the road (alternative meanings of the Greek word for “way”) to knowing and experiencing God. Let’s put it another way. If we live the way that Jesus lived we will experience God.

**In the last 2000 years there has been so much stuff said and written about Jesus, hundreds of books, that it is difficult to sort through it all and sort out fact from fiction, to really discover this Jesus. But I guarantee that when you do, you will fall in love and seek to follow the way he lived because it is a beautiful way, not an easy way, but a meaningful way to live.**

**So the question we will explore this morning is: who was this real Jesus and how did he live – how did he show us the way to know and experience God?**

The first question that is usually asked is – was Jesus a real person? Tom Harpur, a Canadian Anglican priest and journalist for the Toronto Star after 20 years had a personal crisis of faith when he realized all the mythologies surrounding Jesus and he concluded therefore that there must have been no historical Jesus and wrote Jesus off as a conspiracy of the Christian church. He wrote the Pagan Christ and confused a lot of people. So the first question is: Did Jesus of Nazareth really exist? And the historical answer is yes. We have a known source outside of scripture, a Jewish historian by the name of Josephus who said that a Jew named Joshua (Hebrew name for Jesus) from the town of Nazareth was executed by crucifixion by the Roman government between 30 and 33 AD. That's all he says. He just states a fact. Josephus was not a believer in Jesus, he was a Jewish historian at the time of Jesus and merely reported a fact.

#### **Slide 1 Son of God, Son of Man**

So there really was a baby born into the world 2000 years ago. But the other confusion arises around titles ascribed to him. Son of God vs Son of Man Jesus referred to himself as Son of Man ( a usual title for prophets of the day, people who spoke and taught about God) Others put on Jesus the title Son of God. Now this was a title given to Emperors and Kings and political rulers of that time. You were anointed as divinely appointed by God to rule Rome. Caesar Augustus was described as the Son of God. So the claim by his followers that Jesus was the true Son of God anointed by God to be the King of the Jews came in direct opposition and threat to the existing Emperors and Rulers of Rome who claimed they were the Sons of God.

**For Jesus to be called the Son of God was a political title. When we understand that – we understand why the Romans killed him. But through the ages the title Son of God was misinterpreted to suggest a biological title. By the time that the writers of the gospels of Matthew and Luke came along in 75 and 80 AD. They had already begun telling the story of Jesus and taking him out of his Jewish context for their Greek and Roman audience; they had to communicate the person of Jesus in a way the Greek and Roman world would understand from their religious background of Roman and Greek Gods and Goddesses. Subsequently, Son of God for the Romans and Greeks became a matter of biological identity not political. Hercules as we know was fathered by Zeus, the Chief God of Olympus and a human mother. So what do Matthew and Luke write about... but a Jesus born of a human mother Mary and fathered by the God of Israel and the story of the virgin birth was born. In order to explain who this Jewish baby was to the Romans and Greeks, they made him into a demi-god like Hercules. Half human and half God in origin. In only Matthew and Luke, Jesus' parents stop being human parents Mary and Joseph and in order to make Jesus special to the Greek and Roman empire, he becomes born of the Virgin Mary and the God of Israel.**

**A couple of hundred years later the early church was left to continue to sort out the identity of Jesus and in order to honour his Jewish followers and his Greek and Roman followers, the church declares that Jesus was fully human – born of humans like any good Jew and fully divine – born of God like any Greek and Roman hero.**

**But aren't we all – born of human parents, and our spirits, our souls conceived by God, the Holy Spirit. Look at this child who could be any child – isn't birth into human life miracle enough for us?**

## **Slide 2 Christ of Faith**

**But now because time has passed all sorts of mythologies are put onto the historical Jesus and stories by believers in the Christ of Faith. And we have the stories of Jesus performing miracles like walking on water and calming the seas and turning water into wine -- all sorts of magic tricks. Long before these stories were told about Jesus, they were told about Horus, an Egyptian God of the Underworld and these mythologies were put on Jesus by 30-100 AD when the 4 gospels of Jesus were written. If you look at the stories of the resurrection you can see details about the resurrection evolving and becoming more and more exaggerated as time goes on. Mark written in 60 AD merely says that the tomb was empty. Luke comes along 15 years later than Mark and writes that 2 angels greeted the women and the Risen Christ meet two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Matthew comes along 20 years after Mark and says there was an earthquake that shook at the time of Jesus death. John comes along 30 years after Mark and says that Jesus had a conversation with Mary Magdalene. All of these stories were used to affirm the specialness of the Christ of Faith. But the myths surrounding Jesus have all but obliterated Jesus the man and a more sophisticated 20<sup>th</sup> century audience casually dismisses Jesus as little more than a wishful superstition.**

## **Slide 3 Jesus of History**

**So then in the 1980s on the brink of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a group of scholars from Canada and the U.S. known as the Jesus Seminar set out to discover the historical Jewish man underneath the myth. And over the course of three years they gather to discuss and debate all of the sayings and teachings of Jesus and then for another 3 years they gather to meet to discuss and debate all of the actions and behaviours of Jesus and vote on whether or not Jesus said or did these things. And they have some criterion to determine this. Does Jesus say or do this in more than one of the 4 gospels? Is it inherently consistent with something Jesus would say or do? Would saying or doing this get you crucified by the Roman government? If the answer is yes to all three – Jesus probably said or did it. And Marcus Borg, one of these New Testament Scholars gathered all of the Jesus Seminar findings and wrote a wonderful book called Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time and attempted to put the shattered pieces of the Jesus story back together again. And this is what he says:**

#### **Slide 4 Mystic**

**Jesus was a mystic. That is, he was a man of prayer, a contemplative, who felt deeply connected to his Sacred Source, to God. A relationship so intimate that he felt himself constantly in the presence of God and that this God was present in him. He was a mystic in that he had the abilities to envision an alternate reality called the kingdom of God in which God was visibly present and active working to transform the world into something more than it was. He describes this alternate reality as the Kingdom of God that is already here and active among us if we could only have eyes to see it, and be born again and awakened to it. He was a man of vision.**

## **Slide 5**

**Jesus was a 1<sup>st</sup> century Healer. Because he was so deeply connected to his Sacred Source, Jesus was reported to have the capacity to heal people, to actually cure diseases. People who were blind, could see, people who were deaf could hear, people who were lame could walk, he could make the mentally ill, sane, he could make the emotionally and spiritually destitute, experience wholeness. Borg believes that Jesus had the capacity to heal disease because a 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian Jewish society would not be impressed with a leper just being healed of the social stigma of leprosy, he would have to be cured in order to be safe enough to return to Jewish society. A Jewish priest would have to be convinced that a leper was indeed cured and was safe to rejoin society. That is why Jesus would say to someone he had healed to go show yourself to the priest to confirm your healing. Jesus always healed for purposes of the sick to join community and re-enter into human relationship. It was this capacity to heal and cure people of disease that intimidated the Jewish priests and made them jealous and threatened but popularized him among the Jews and Gentiles alike as they sought healings for their ailments.**

## **Slide 6 Jesus as Teacher of Unconventional Wisdom**

**Jesus taught things that went against every day teachings. For the ancient Jews, family was everything – Jesus taught leave your family and follow the way of God. He taught that God forgives sinners, he taught people not to take revenge but to love your enemies, he taught don't dwell on the dead or what is past, live in the present, and mostly he taught about God's new kingdom, that if we put the ways of God into**

practices, and if God was really in charge of this world and we lived in the kingdom of God as a present reality we would practice compassion and justice and truth and peacemaking and equality and inclusivity. These teachings were radical and infused ordinary people enslaved by poverty and foreign occupation with hope for their lives, in inspired them to know that what God really wanted for their lives was abundant life.

#### **Slide 7 Jesus was a Social Prophet**

Jesus criticized the Domination System of his day known as the 3 Ps – he named and criticized the Purity System of the Synagogue – the sick, the disabled, the menstruating woman, people committing any or all of the over 650 Jewish laws were unclean and impure and therefore despised by God and could not enter the temple. But the righteous who obeyed all the laws, the well, the non-menstruating woman, the able-bodied, were pure and clean and were blessed by God and could go to Temple. Jesus criticized the Purity system and touched the sick and ate with sinners and bleeding women and ignored all of the purity laws.

Jesus criticized the Patriarchal system that had a hierarchy of rich men at the top, then poor men, then women, then the sick and poor, then slaves, then children and turned the hierarchy upside down and insisted that in the kingdom of God the child and most vulnerable were the greatest in the kingdom and that to be greatest you must become a servant to all and that God was the head of the household, not men.

**Jesus criticized the Peasant system and called for an end to exploitation of the poor and ran the money changers who were exploiting the poor out of the temple and insisted that in the kingdom of God, the poor are blessed and whoever had wealth and didn't share it was not welcome in God's kingdom.**

#### **Slide 8**

**It was his role as Social Prophet that got him crucified. Luke says that there were two thieves on either side of Jesus. The word lactase does not translate as thief, it translates as political rebels or dissidents. Jesus was crucified by the Romans because they considered his teachings a threat to the stability of the Roman empire and they executed him for political treason. Crucifixion is a slow painful and humiliating death in which the person is stripped naked, they defecate on themselves, they freeze at night and die of heat exhaustion in the midday heat, and you are slowly asphyxiated by your lungs collapsing under the weight of your body. You are left there for days to serve as a deterrent for others who might think about opposing the government. Your body would never be returned to your family for a dignified burial, that would eliminate the purpose of humiliating you so your body would probably be eaten by scavengers of vultures and dogs and then buried in a mass grave. Scholars think that is what happened to Jesus' body.**

#### **Slide 9**

**But that was not the end of Jesus. Followers of Jesus began to claim that they experienced the risen Christ, that he had been resurrected. Now claims for resurrection are different from claims of resuscitation. If you are resuscitated you**

died and you get up and walk around in your body like you did before and have to die again. If you are resurrected, you stand again in a spirit form. Spirit or energy can pass through doors, appear and disappear, move at the speed of light. Jesus followers claimed that they individually and collectively experienced the spirit of Christ palpably present to them. Paul never knew the historical Jesus; he claimed that he had an encounter with the Resurrected or Risen Christ who spoke to him. Jesus promised his followers that they too will rise again and greater works will they do then he did.

To be followers of the way, the life, the truth of Jesus is to know God. And what is the way Thomas asks – the way of relationship, relationship with God and with one another – it is the way of the mystic – being intimately connected to God, it is the way of the healing – living a life of compassion and being healing to the life of others and helping everyone to belong, it is the way of the teacher – bringing wisdom about God’s Kingdom, the way to live and abundant life and how to treat one another, it is the way of the prophet – challenging the domination systems of our day and naming injustices and being peacemakers in a world of violence, it is the way of death and sacrifice for others. This is the way of Jesus and when we live this way we will know and experience God and know what it is to live a resurrected, new life. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Jesus was not divine by origin, but the way in which he lived his life we call it holy and divine – we call it the way of God. As one person said: “it was not Jesus’ divinity that made him compassionate, it was compassion that made him divine.”

**If we live the way that Jesus lived, whether we are Catholic or Protestant, Buddhist or Muslim, Sikh or Hindu, male or female, says Jesus, we will know and experience God, we too will be fully divine which is to say fully human and experience the fullness and the true meaning of life. May the Spirit give us the courage to live this way. Amen.**