

# Lord, Liar, Or Lunatic?

**Introduction.** Throughout history, people have given a variety of answers to the question, "Who is Jesus of Nazareth?" Whatever their answer, no one can escape the fact that Jesus really lived and that His life radically altered human history forever. Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race.

Jesus thought it was fundamentally important what others believed about Him. It was not a subject that allowed for neutrality or a dishonest appraisal of the evidence. A man who was merely a man and said what Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic -- on a level with the man who says he is a hard-boiled egg -- or else he would be the devil of hell. Let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

It is not His teachings that make Jesus so remarkable, although these would be enough to distinguish Him. It is a combination of the teachings with the man Himself. The two cannot be separated. In Matthew 16:15-16, Peter admitted that Jesus was the Christ. Not everyone accepts Peter's answer, but no one should avoid Jesus' question when He asked, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Matthew 16:13). If Jesus' claims are true, then He is the Lord, and we must either accept or reject His lordship. If Jesus' claims to be God were false, then there are just two options: He either knew His claims were false, or He did not know they were false. We will consider each alternative separately and then consider the evidence.

## I. ***Was He A Liar?***

- A. If, when Jesus made His claims, He knew He was not God, then He was lying and could not be God (cf. Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). But if He was a liar, then He was also a hypocrite, because He told others to be honest, whatever the cost, while He, at the same time, was teaching and living a colossal lie (Matthew 16:3; Luke 6:46; 11:39).
- B. More than that, He was a demon, because He deliberately told others to trust Him for their eternal destiny. If He could not back up His claims and knew they were false, then He was unspeakably evil (John 8:44). Finally, He would also be a fool, because it was His claims to deity that led to His crucifixion (Mark 14:61-64).
- C. If Jesus was a liar, a con man, and therefore evil, then how can we explain the fact that He left us with the most profound moral instruction and powerful moral example that anyone ever has left (Matthew 5:1-7:29; 1 Peter 2:22-23)? The very notion is incredulous.

1. Throughout history Jesus Christ has captured the hearts and minds of millions who have strived to order their lives after Him.
  2. The simple record of Jesus' short life has done more to regenerate mankind than all the discussions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.
- D. The testimony of the scriptures, if not true, would just be downright blasphemy or madness. The thought of blasphemy cannot stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus, revealed in His every word and work, and acknowledged by universal consent. The thought of madness in a matter so momentous, and with an intellect in all respects so clear and so sound, is equally out of the question. The poet would, in this case, be greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus.
- E. How could an impostor -- a deceitful, selfish, depraved man -- have invented, and consistently maintained from beginning to end, the purest and noblest character known in history with the most perfect air of truth and reality? The answer, of course, is that Jesus could not have! Someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught, and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar. So what are the other alternatives?

## II. ***Was He A Lunatic?***

- A. If it is inconceivable for Jesus to have been a liar, could He have thought He was God but have been mistaken? After all, it is possible to be both sincere and wrong. But for someone to think he was God, especially in a culture that was fiercely monotheistic, and then tell others that their eternal destiny depends on believing in him, could only be the thoughts of a full-fledged lunatic.
- B. An accurate measure of insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are.
1. If I think I am the greatest preacher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I have left sanity behind.
  2. But If I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite objects, even a man and a butterfly.
- C. However, Jesus had three abundant qualities that liars and lunatics conspicuously lack.
1. His practical wisdom and ability to read human hearts.
  2. His ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven.
  3. His authority and ability to astonish, including unpredictability and creativity.

- D. Look at the reactions to Jesus. People were amazed (Luke 2:48; 4:36; 5:26; 9:43), they believed (Luke 1:1; John 2:11, 22-23; 4:39, 41, 50; 7:31, 46; 8:30; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11, 42; 20:29), and they were astonished (Matthew 13:54; 22:33; Luke 2:47; 4:32). People are usually pretty good at picking out those who are emotionally disturbed. Doing this kind of work with calmness and self-possession shows a mark of full faculties.
- E. The truth is, Jesus was not only sane, but the counsel He provided gives us the most accurate formula for peace of mind and heart. For nearly 2,000 years the world has been holding in its hand the complete answers to humankind's restless and fruitless yearnings.
- F. The historical difficulty of giving for the life, sayings, and influence of Jesus any explanation that is not harder than the biblical explanation is unbelievably great. The discrepancy between the character of His life and teaching, and the delusions of grandeur which must be behind Him unless He is God, has never been satisfactorily explained.

### III. ***He Is Lord!***

- A. If Jesus of Nazareth was not a liar or a lunatic, then He must be Lord.
  - 1. In the opening line of the New Testament book bearing his name, Mark declared that Jesus was the Son of God (1:1).
  - 2. Peter declared that God had made the crucified Jesus of Nazareth both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33-36).
  - 3. The apostle Paul wrote that His resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4).
  - 4. The Hebrew writer declared that He was the exact representation of God (1:3; cf. Colossians 1:15).
- B. Furthermore, the clear testimony of His Sonship by the people who were closest to Him was unmistakable.
  - 1. The demons (Luke 4:34, 41).
  - 2. Peter (Matthew 16:16; John 6:66-69).
  - 3. The centurion (Matthew 27:54).
  - 4. Nathanael (John 1:49).
  - 5. Martha (John 11:27).
  - 6. Thomas (John 20:24-29).
  - 7. The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37).
- C. There have been many who have tried to prevent some social calamity or cultural disintegration by heralding the past, or pointing people toward the future, or waging war or bartering for peace, or claiming wisdom or divinity. Other self-proclaimed gods and saviors have come and gone upon history's stage, but Jesus is still here, standing head-and-shoulders above them all.

**Conclusion.** Who you decide Jesus Christ is must not be an idle, intellectual exercise. You cannot put Him on the shelf as a great moral teacher. That is not a valid option. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. You must make a choice. The New Testament's purpose is to give evidence of Jesus as Lord (John 20:31; 21:25).

No one who knows the gospels and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a liar or a lunatic. However, some people reject the evidence because of the moral implications involved -- they are reluctant to repent and live righteously. There must be a moral honesty in the consideration of Jesus as either liar, lunatic, or Lord. If you are convinced He is Lord, then take up your cross, obey the gospel, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

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