

September 25, 2011

# *Living Out The Gospel In Real Life*

## *Who is Jesus?*

John 7:11 – 24

For two thousand years, men have wrestled with the question of: '**Who is Jesus?**' Was He a good man, with good moral teachings, a prophet? – was He simply a charismatic charlatan who fooled everyone, particularly those closest to Him, a liar in other words? – or can we just write Him off as a lunatic '*a man on the level with someone who claims he is a poached egg looking for a piece of toast?*', – or was He God incarnate – is He God come in the flesh? When I turned on my computer this morning, Microsoft Windows flashed the date, implicitly acknowledging that, whatever else you may believe about Him, the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was so important that it split history into two parts. Everything that has happened on this planet falls into a category of before Christ or after Christ. And yet we are not talking about Jesus this morning because he is simply a great man who changed history. We are not compelled to examine the lives of the great men of history like we are the life of this man. We are drawn to Jesus, irresistibly, because of who He claimed to be.

For example, this gospel tells us that He claimed to be from heaven. He claimed that He would die and by His own power He would rise again. He claimed to be the only hope of eternal life and the gift of God sent to redeem the world. He claimed to be the person by whom every man's salvation, or every man's damnation would be determined. He claimed to be the Messiah, the promised Deliverer. He claimed to be equal with God and claimed, in fact, to **be** the Son of God. He claimed to be the sovereign Judge of all men to whom had been committed all judgment. He claimed to be the source and giver of life. He claimed to be the one who would raise the dead. He claimed that all of the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of Him. He claimed to be the only object of saving faith. He claimed to be the bread of life, the only genuine soul food. He claimed that He would give His life for the world and that anybody who believed in Him would have abundant and eternal life.

In this passage we see His contemporaries wrestling with this very issue. Who is this guy? And the thing you cannot do is simply dismiss Him – either then or now. He doesn't leave you that option. You **can't not** deal with this Jesus. An old Scottish Presbyterian minister nick-named Rabbi Duncan once said: '*Christ either deceived humankind by a conscious fraud, or was Himself deluded, or He was divine – and there is no getting out of that trilemma.*' The problem of Jesus Christ is not a dilemma – it is a **trilemma**. Jesus was either a complete fraud, or He was Himself deranged, or He was exactly who He said He was. And we don't have the option of merely ignoring His claims. His claims are on such a scale that we have to come to one of three conclusions – **deceiver, deceived, or Lord**.

And one of the things that you must take off the table right off the bat is that Jesus was simply a good man – a good moral teacher. The Jews at this feast, and here John is talking about the Jewish authorities, were looking for Him because they were convinced He was not a good man but rather a deceiver, and they wanted to kill Him. *So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?"* John 7:11 They weren't looking for Him because they thought He was a good teacher or a prophet and they wanted to hear more. You see that is what some of the people were saying: *There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"* John 7:12 And over in verse 40, although we didn't read it, some, when they heard His teaching, said: *"This certainly is the Prophet."* That is the equivalent of saying He was a good man, a good teacher. C. S. Lewis, in writing about this trilemma said: *"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 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."*

You can say one of three things about Jesus but you cannot simply say He was a good man that had good teaching for one main reason: **His outrageous claims**. He claimed to be God – and He claimed that in the clearest and most unambiguous terms. For example, over in the next chapter we see the people so enraged by His claims that they wanted to stone Him. He tells them: '**Before Abraham was I AM**'. The "I AM" is the word "Yahweh" – God's very name – the name no Jew would ever utter for fear of taking it in vain. And here is Jesus taking the very name of God for His own, and everyone wanted to kill Him. They knew what He was claiming – they weren't scratching their heads wondering what He meant. He was claiming to be the I AM – the God who IS.

In place after place, Jesus makes it clear that He is not just another teacher, another prophet. You see a good man, a teacher, a prophet says: 'Here is the path to truth and freedom – walk in it'. They point to a reality outside themselves and say, "There it is – live like that". But Jesus claimed to be the path – He claimed to be the reality - **'I am the way, the truth and the life – come to Me!** When He is on trial before the high priest, He is asked, 'Are you the Christ?' And Jesus says **'You have said it! And at the end of history I will appear and will judge all of mankind!'**

Jesus is constantly, both overtly and in subtle ways, assuming this incredibly radical position. In the gospels we read about Jesus all the time forgiving people for their sins – and people are appalled at this, saying things like 'Who does this guy think He is, forgiving sins? Only God can forgive sins!' Because they understood correctly that every sin is a sin against God. If someone breaks something that I've given to one of my children, or my wife, and they come to me and apologize, they're doing the right thing. Why? Because I'm the one who bought the thing and I'm the one who will have to replace it. I'm the one who has been wronged, ultimately. When Jesus forgives the woman caught in adultery – He forgives her even though her sin is against her husband – not Jesus. What does that imply? He is assuming that that sin is against Him primarily. When He is standing, looking over Jerusalem at one point He says, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I keep sending you prophets and wise men and you keep killing them.' What is He assuming? That He is the one who sent them. That He is the God of history and time.

Jesus is also constantly and continually making the most outrageous demands for allegiance. He tells the disciples at one point – 'Unless you hate your father and mother and brothers and sisters, you cannot be My disciple! Any devotion you have to Me must be so great that all other allegiances you have seem like hatred in comparison'. He says things like, 'If you lose Me you, you lose everything. If you try to retain your life instead of giving your whole life to Me you will inevitably lose it'. He claims that He is worth any sacrifice to gain and if there is anything holding you back – get rid of it. If it is your hand – cut it off. If it is your eye, gouge it out. 'Nothing is worth losing Me'. You cannot get away with thinking that Jesus was merely a good moral teacher, or a wonderful prophet. No one has ever made claims like this who wasn't dismissed as either a deluded fool or wicked deceiver. No one. So you cannot say, 'I accept Jesus Christ as a great moral teacher and prophet, but I don't accept Him as God'.

But that still leaves us with this trilemma: **deceiver, deceived or Lord**. And some of those at the feast thought He was a deceiver: *others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray."* John 7:12 That is, they considered that Jesus was knowingly deceiving people. But there were still others who thought that He Himself was deceived. When Jesus tells them that they were seeking to kill Him, *"Did not Moses give you the Law, and yet none of you carries out the Law? Why do you seek to kill Me?" The crowd answered, "You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?"* John 7:19-20 In other words, the only way they could deflect His assertion that though they claimed to be disciples of Moses and godly lawkeepers, they were in reality law breakers, was to accuse Him of lunacy. But there were others in the crowd who thought He was who He said He was. In verse 13 John tells us: *Yet no one was speaking openly of Him for fear of the Jews.* John 7:13 That is, there were some in the crowd who were hearing His claims, who had seen the evidence of His life, who had witnessed His miracles, but were too afraid to speak openly on His behalf. To speak openly here means to speak up boldly. In other words, they were pretty sure He was the Messiah, but weren't willing to bet their lives on it.

And the trilemma of the crowd is the trilemma with which we must deal. But two of these theories are improbable and only one is possible as I think we will see in this passage. Because this passage gives us three solid proofs of His claims – **His teaching, His life and His deeds** – and two of the theories simply don't line up with the facts. The views that Jesus was a deceiver or that He was deceived are really the same thing. In both cases He was deceiving somebody, either Himself or others. In the one case He was self-deluded and in the other He was wicked because He knew what was going on and deceived people on purpose. But in either case, He wasn't a good man but someone who wittingly or unwittingly deceived people into thinking He was divine, Son of God and Son of Man. But the problem with both of these theories is that they don't square with the facts of His teaching, His life or His deeds.

**First of all His teaching doesn't square with that.** Look at verses 14 and 15: *But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and began to teach. The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?"* John 7:14-15 If we look ahead a bit to verses 45 to 46 we see that the chief priests and Pharisees sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus. But they came back without Him and they asked the guards why they didn't bring Him.

'You know this guy is a deceiver or a lunatic or demon-possessed – you know He's a fraud – why didn't you arrest Him?' And essentially the guards say, 'We're sorry, that theory doesn't hold water'. **'Never did a man speak the way this man speaks'**. This is not the work of a deceiver or a demon-possessed man – His teaching sounds like it comes from God Himself! The Jews who heard Him teach, verse 15 says, were astonished, amazed – the word indicates that they were in a perpetual state of surprise and wonder at the depth and purity of His words.

The great English thinker and writer, G.K. Chesterton put it like this: If you should happen upon a key lying on the ground, and you picked it up and tried it out on a number of locks, and you found one lock that it opened perfectly – what would you assume? You would assume, and the most rational explanation is, **that key was made by the locksmith who made the lock**. The key was designed for the lock. And here you have the teachings of Jesus, spoken to a pre-modern, oriental society 2,000 years ago, and yet they have been found to have such universal validity and appeal and longevity that in every age, in every society, every culture, some of the greatest intellects have found them to be not only fulfilling and satisfying, but divine and eternal. And Christianity has taken root and flourished and spread in every century and nearly every culture because of the teachings of Christ that have transcended culture, transcended time, transcended fads and fashion. Today Christianity is rapidly growing in cultures that a century ago had never heard the name of Christ. If it is really possible that the teachings of Jesus, given in a pre-modern, near-eastern culture have that kind of universal validity and still reverberate with truth – if His teachings so matches the lock of the human heart, does it make sense that these are the teachings of a mad man or a deceiver? Or does it make more sense that they are devised by the lockmaker? **'Never did a man speak the way this man speaks'**.

**Or look at the witness of His life.** Does it make sense that Christ such a consummate actor that He even fooled the people close to Him? Or that if He was deranged that He could live a life of such attractive beauty and perfection? You may have a hero, maybe even more than one. But the thing about heroes is that they always have feet of clay. I don't care who you idolize, whoever it is, has some glaring inconsistency or debilitating character flaw that exposes them as merely human. And the reason we know that is because they have people around them who notice those things. But look at the evidence. We have gospels that are written just a few years after Christ and they are without exception, universal in their claim that He was the God-Man. That He didn't have feet of clay – that there were no character flaws in this man. Even His enemies couldn't say anything bad about Him and make it stick.

Lots of people have claimed to be perfect. Lots of people have claimed to be God. But not one of them has ever gotten away with it. There has always been someone to dig up the dirt on them – to expose the truth. But that has never happened with Jesus – because those who lived closest to Him were utterly and completely convinced that He was who He said He was. That's why they lived and died for Him. Nobody puts his life on the line for a fraud. Nobody could call Him a fraud and make it stick – no one could call Him a mad-man and make it stick. Why? Read the Bible and you'll see. Just listen to His words in verses 16 and 18: ***So Jesus answered them and said, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me...He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.*** John 7:16, 18

The people around Him, who listened to Him, who bought into His gospel, saw the same thing we see here – total humility, but absolute authority. Here is a man who is not looking to glorify Himself but the Father who sent Him. If you read through the gospels you see someone who combined virtues that you can find in no other human being. He was tenderness without any weakness. Strength without any harshness – holiness and unbending conviction without any lack of approachability – there is unhesitating authority yet with no self promotion – He is not afraid to tear down the self important and proud – and yet so gentle and humble toward the broken. Every other phony messiah – every other claimant to deity – every other false savior the world has ever known, has been in it for power, money and ego. But not Jesus. Want to know how to tell the real from the fraud? The real Savior is the one who doesn't seek His own glory. Everything Jesus did or said was for the Father's glory – He lived to glorify God – never Himself. P.T. Forsyth, an old Scottish preacher once said ***'If God be not thus, He is less than the God we crave for and the world needs...'*** In other words, if you read about Jesus in the Bible and you say that's not God, then the god you know of is less than the God I crave and the world needs – that is no God at all.

The theories that Jesus was either a deliberate fraud or a madman do not square with Jesus' teaching or His life, **or with His deeds.** *Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel. For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."* John 7:21-24 The deed that Jesus was referring to was the healing we saw back in chapter five of the man at the pool of Bethesda. And He is chastising them for wanting to kill Him for making an entire man well on the Sabbath, calling it 'work' – but they themselves would do the 'work' of circumcision, even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath.

It was rather ironic because circumcision, instituted before Moses by God through Abraham (the fathers) was a sign of the covenant – it represented that this person was a lawkeeper. And that was important to them because they derived their authority from Moses, the law giver – but they would break the law of the Sabbath for the sake of their covenantal sign. And Jesus was not making a statement that either circumcision or Sabbath-keeping was the issue – the issue was that those things were types and shadows of the reality of the Christ to come – they pointed to Him – and here He was healing on the Sabbath and they were upset that God was healing on the Sabbath. They took the deeds of Christ which should have convinced them of who He was and trampled them under the feet of their unbelief. He healed a man that hadn't walked in thirty-eight years and all they saw was a lawbreaker – a Sabbath-breaker and they wanted to kill Him. Here was the evidence before them – He walked on water, delivered demon-possessed people from bondage, opened blind eyes and loosened dumb tongues. He healed the terminal, raised the dead, and fed the hungry – these are not the actions of a deluded madman or a wicked deceiver.

The only thing then, that we can conclude – if Jesus was not merely a good man; if Jesus was not a madman, demon-possessed; if He was not a wicked deceiver who consciously led people astray – then what are we left with? The only conclusion is that He is who He says He is – He is God, incarnate in the flesh who came to die for you and me. And the implications of that are tremendous. I suspect there are more implications than we ever will have time to cover, but there are two really important ones. If all of this is true, first of all it means that **this is an all or nothing proposition.** And I know that some of you don't live here. For many of us He represents a part of our lives – we are content with a little bit of God, we are moderate about God. We are not sold out for Him. We have invited Him in, but not all the way. It is like if I showed up at your door and rang the bell and you answered it and said, 'Come in Mike, but stay out Sandberg'. I would be conflicted at that point. It's an all-or-nothing proposition – you can't have Mike without having Sandberg – it's either all of me or none of me.

But some of you are saying, 'Come in Servant – stay out King. Come in Teacher – stay out Lord. Come in Jesus – stay out Christ'. He can't do that – Jesus is an all or nothing proposition. I heard about an interview with an old German who had experienced life under Hitler's regime in the 30's and 40's and he said there were only three responses possible to Hitler. You could run away, you could assassinate him, or you could sell yourself body and soul to him. You couldn't compromise with him or deal with him or partner with him. You are all for him, or all against him, or all away from him. If that is true of an evil man like Hitler who had great charisma and leadership gifts – how much more true must it be of Jesus? **When you come into the presence of Christ it is all or nothing.** He demands total reorientation of your life – He demands total obedience – He demands absolute allegiance – He demands complete and undiluted loyalty. There is nothing else you can do – if He is who He says He is.

**Secondly, the reality of who Jesus is demands that we conform to Him – not He to us.** We cannot create a Savior in our image – a Christ that we are willing to live with – a God who bends to our will. Some time ago there was a panel debate over the question, 'What are we to make of Christ in light of our modern day lifestyle and values. And there was a Marxist who spoke up and said, 'I like to think of Christ as a revolutionary who brings liberation'. And another guy, an artist spoke up and said, 'I like to think of Christ as a prophet against the cultural establishment'. How absurd! Imagine two flies, living in a barn with a cow and they have this debate over the cow. 'What are we to make of this cow? How should we think about the cow? But if there is a cow – it doesn't matter what the flies think about the cow. The cow is so much greater than the flies it renders their personal opinions about the cow moot. Who cares what they think? It is the job of the flies to adapt to the reality of the cow – not the other way around. For example, 'Stay away from the tail' and 'Don't fall into the milk pail'.

There are some of you who have already decided what you will believe about God and life and the big questions of living. 'I already know what I believe about marriage and sex and gender distinctions. I already know what I believe about God. I already know what I believe about my needs. I already know what I believe about abortion and all the other hot-button issues – and if the Jesus of the Bible doesn't fit my ideas, I don't want Him. But do you understand what you've done? If Jesus Christ is who He says He is, who cares about your needs or your opinions or the way you think things ought to be? If Jesus Christ be God – then I must surrender myself to Him – heart and soul and mind and will. We must let the truth of who Jesus is deal with our hearts, deal with our emotions, deal with our will.

And this is **the promise** – we'll end here: *"If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.* John 7:17 The deepest and strongest objection to knowing Christ is a heart obstruction – not a head obstruction. It is a problem with our wills, not a problem with our reason. Our natural love for our own glory makes it impossible to know and follow a person whose whole life is bent on emptying Himself in order to glorify His Father and save sinners. Our natural resistance to authority makes it impossible to give ourselves wholly to someone whose entire life on earth exhibited radical and total obedience to His Father. To know Him for who He is, we must be willing to do His will.

Perhaps you've looked into your heart today and found that you are not willing to do His will – especially as Jesus has shown us the Father's will in the gospel of John that we have been studying. Maybe you realize that the will of God summed up in the two greatest commandments: love God supremely and love your neighbor as yourself is not your deepest desire. What do you do? First of all, pray. Pray that God would cause His will to be treasured in your life – that He would cause His name to be hallowed and glorified in you above all things so that your eyes would be opened to who Christ really is. Pray for a will that is more passionate for His glory and less addicted to your own. Go to Him and say, 'Lord, I don't even know if You are real, but if You are, make me willing to do Your will.' And then spend time studying Christ in the Scriptures – spend time with those who love His will – who love His glory. If you want to increase your love for anything – you spend time in it and that is no different with God. Look at Jesus in the gospels – see what the writers of the New Testament said about Him – read what the Prophets wrote about Him in the Old Testament – and the promise of God is that you will know Him. *'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.'* Jeremiah 29:13

*Our gracious God and Savior,*

*Open our eyes that we would see the majesty and beauty, the glory and the grace of Your dear Son. Forbid it Lord that we would claim You as Servant but not as King. That we would say 'Come in Teacher – stay out Master.' Waken our souls to the wonder and perfection of Your words and deeds and life and let them overwhelm our hearts and minds to the truth that is in You. Grant us to be willing to know Your will and transform our thinking to want what You want, to love what You love, and to hate what You hate. Teach us to measure our thoughts by Yours and not the other way around. Humble us under Your mighty hand. Fix our allegiance to You alone and give us a will that is more passionate for Your glory than for our own, so that we might truly be those who delight in God through Jesus Christ, spreading His joy through the gospel to all people we pray, in the Name that is above every name, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*