

GROUP GUIDE

WEEK 4

Week 4: Wasn't Jesus just a good man, not a divine Saviour?

Intro: this week we're investigating the claims that Jesus is a divine saviour, as well as being a good man and a great teacher.



FOR DISCUSSION

1. Anyone want to share the main highlight of the Sunday message for them?
2. Read Matthew 13:16-18
 - a. Anything in these verses that speaks to you?
 - b. Jesus asked his disciples what some of the views about himself were circulating the culture. From your experience, what are some of the views about Jesus that are circulating the culture in the 21st century?
 - c. Jesus affirms that Peter came to this revelation of Jesus because the Father opened his spiritual eyes to it. Have you had any experiences where God opened your eyes to who Jesus really is? Tell us. And if so, what affect did it have on you?
3. Explain that the following exercise is different to what we normally do in groups. It is a creative way of processing the evidence for Christ as divine Messiah. There's a saying that it's only what we express that is impressed into ourselves. So by expressing it, it will deepen your own insight.
 - a. Break up the group into 3 subgroups and give each group one of the 3 different photocopiable resources beneath – see instructions on the top of each page.
 - b. After 15 minutes, let the representative from each subgroup share with the larger group.
4. As a larger group ask everyone to share in 30 seconds one thing they learnt tonight they don't want to forget.
5. As subgroups, pray together, thanking God for any insights from the night's conversation. Pray for those in your group facing challenges.

Below are the three sets of pages to be photocopied, a different set for each subgroup...

PROPHECY AS EVIDENCE

Instructions: Your group has 15 minutes to read this together and simplify it. Then select one person in particular to feedback to the larger group what your major insights are. Without rehashing everything, this person has 2 or 3 minutes to share with the whole group in the most simple way possible how this line is evidence for Jesus as the Messiah. As a smaller group help them put this short presentation together.

One line of evidence that Jesus *really* is the divine Saviour is his fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

Did you know there are over 200 prophecies about the coming Messiah in the Old Testament. Here's a sample of what they predict...

Details about the Messiah's entrance...

- That he would one day come to the world – born as a child.
- But he would be no ordinary child – because his name would be 'Immanuel', which means 'God with us' – in other words he would be the divine God-Man.

Details about the Messiah's life...

- He would live a sinless life.
- He would live a life marked by suffering.
- He would not look physically more impressive than anyone

Details about the Messiah's ministry...

- He would have tremendous wisdom – teaching people what life is really all about.
- He would do lots of miracles – healing the blind, enabling the lame to walk, even raising the dead.
- He would come into Jerusalem – announcing himself as king – but the weird thing is that instead of sitting on a war-horse, he'd be riding a donkey

Details about the Messiah's death...

- He'd be betrayed by a friend for 30 shekels – the 30 shekels would be used to buy a field called 'The Potter's field'
- He would be beaten severely
- People would gamble for his clothes
- He would have his hands and feet pierced
- He would be killed through torture.
- His death would be no ordinary death – somehow through this death he would accomplish salvation – one prophecy says 'the punishment that brings us peace with God will be upon him' – in other words, somehow 'God will take the sins of the world, put it upon him and punish it there – so that we could have the chance to go free and be right with God'

Details about the Messiah's resurrection...

- But amazingly, after dying – he would rise from the dead victorious.
- And his victory would be proclaimed by messengers across the whole world – changing millions and millions of lives for those who believe.
- Ultimately – in a cosmic moment called Judgment Day – he would wrap up human history as we know it, deal with every bit of evil in his world, and purge the world of all tears and suffering and death and poverty- and usher in the new heavens and the new earth.

So, who could this Messiah be? There's only one contender, right? It's Jesus. Skeptics have three common objections to the claim that Jesus fulfilled all these prophecies...

Objection 1: The Old Testament prophecies were put in after Jesus lived his life – making it look like he fulfilled them. That's impossible. We have copies of the whole Old Testament, except the book of Esther, dating back to before Jesus was even born.

Objection 2: 'It's just a co-incidence that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies.' Did you know that a famous Mathematics Professor called Peter Stone, took 8 of the prophecies about the Messiah, and got 100s of students to calculate the odds of a man fulfilling these 8 prophecies. You know what the odds were? 1 in 10 to the power of 1021. Let me help you picture that – it's like piling R5 coins 60 metres high across the whole world, marking one of those coins with a purple dot. Getting someone who is blindfolded to pick out a single coin – and the chances of that man picking up the coin with the purple dot are the same chances as a single man in history fulfilling just 8 of those prophecies. Well, Jesus fulfilled far more than just 8! Co-incidence? I think not.

Objection 3: 'Jesus faked being the Messiah by trying to fulfil the prophecies.' The problem with that is: how did he manipulate his birth and death? The Old Testament prophecies describe where he would be born. And one prophecy said that the Messiah would be born in a small town called Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Where was Jesus born? That's right. You can't control when and where you are born. And who was Jesus born to? About 30 prophecies say the Messiah would be a physical descendant of king David – and guess whose blood Jesus was born with? The blood of David. And you can't control how you will die. One prophecy (1000 BC, Psalm 2) says that the Messiah would have his hands and feet pierced. Did you know that only 300 years later the Persians invented crucifixion – a way of executing people through piercing hands and feet. And you know how Jesus died, right? *My point? Prophecy fulfilled is a very strong line of evidence to support the claim that Jesus really was and is the divine Saviour.*

RESURRECTION AS EVIDENCE

Instructions: Your group has 15 minutes to read this together and simplify it. Then select one person in particular to feedback to the larger group what your major insights are. Without rehashing everything, this person has 2 or 3 minutes to share with the whole group in the most simple way possible how this line is evidence for Jesus as the Messiah. As a smaller group help them put this short presentation together.

One line of evidence that Jesus *really* is the divine Saviour is his resurrection from the dead.

We don't have time to examine the many lines of evidence for Jesus' resurrection. Why not read chapter 12 of Tim Keller's Reason for God for a quick summary of some of the evidence?

Suffice to say that since day 1 in the history the church, there has been one central message: 'Jesus is alive as Lord. After all, he conquered the grave.' The disciples of Jesus proclaimed this and the church was born. Now, many skeptics today claim that the disciples were creating a hoax – in order to start their own religion. But the problem is that virtually all of them were executed for their claim. All they needed to do was say, 'It is a lie.' And their life would be spared. But they declared Christ's resurrection till their dying breath. In the words of Blaise Pascale, 'I believe those witnesses who get their throat cut.'

William Lane Craig, Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, has written several books on the historical evidence for the resurrection. By way of conclusion he writes, 'We can state as a matter of *history* that (1) after his crucifixion Jesus of Nazareth was interred in a tomb by Joseph of Arimathea, (2) the tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on Sunday morning, (3) various individuals and groups of people on multiple occasions and under different circumstances saw appearances of Jesus alive after his death, and (4) the original disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection was not a result of their faith in him or of wishful thinking, but that, on the contrary, their faith was the result of their having come to believe in this resurrection. These are the facts. The question is, how do you explain them?'

He then tells a story of how – when these facts are presented, the skeptic faces a desperate situation. He says, "A few years ago I had debate on the resurrection with a professor at the University of California who had written his doctoral dissertation on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. He did not deny the facts of Jesus' honorable burial, the empty tomb, his resurrection appearances, or the origin of the disciples' faith. Rather his only recourse way to try to explain them away by some new theory. He argued that Jesus must have had an unknown, identical twin brother who was separated from him at birth, and who showed up in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion, stole Jesus' body, and then showed himself to the disciples, leading them to mistakenly infer that Jesus rose from the dead. I won't bother you with how I went about refuting the theory; but I think this example is instructive because it shows to what desperate lengths the skeptic has to go to avoid the resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the evidence is so good that one of the world's leading Jewish theologians, the late Pinchas Lapide, declared himself convinced on the basis of the evidence that the God of Israel raised Jesus from the dead.'

Kenneth Scott Latourett, a tremendous Yale historian, 'Why among all the cults and philosophies competing in the Roman-Greco world did Christianity succeed and outstrip all others? Though it had greater persecution than all the others? And less backers from influential people? How did it overcome and outlive the very empire that sought to uproot it? It is clear that at the beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy, perhaps unequalled in our history, without which the future course of Christianity is inexplicable.' He goes on to say that only the witnessed resurrection of Jesus could account for this 'vast release of energy'.

JESUS' UNIQUENESS AS EVIDENCE

Instructions: Your group has 15 minutes to read this together and simplify it. Then select one person in particular to feedback to the larger group what your major insights are. Without rehashing everything, this person has 2 or 3 minutes to share with the whole group in the most simple way possible how this line is evidence for Jesus as the Messiah. As a smaller group help them put this short presentation together.

One line of evidence that Jesus *really* is the divine Saviour is his uniqueness.

a. Think of the uniqueness of his claims. Jesus once said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life – no one comes to the Father but through me.' He claimed to be Ultimate Reality itself. To not have him is to be blind to Reality. And he claimed to be worthy of our life's devotion. He told us to follow him and give him everything. Now, many people have claimed to be God. But how many have lived a life that aligned to that claim? None, but Jesus.

The author of the book, 'The world's great religions' writes: 'There have only been 2 prominent and influential figures in history for whom the data of their lives was so tremendous and beautiful that people did not just ask, 'Who are you?' but 'What are you?' It was Buddha and Jesus.'

But there's a difference between Buddha and Jesus. Buddha would say, 'Don't look to me – look to my Dharma. My Dharma (ie teachings) can save you.' Jesus said, 'Don't just look to my teachings. Look to me. I can save you.'

b. Just think of the uniqueness of his teachings: 100 years ago, GK Chesterton says this better than I can:

'If I found a key on the road, and discovered it fit and opened a particular lock at my house, I would assume most likely that the key was made by the lock maker. And if I find a set of teachings set out in pre-modern oriental society that has proven itself of such universal validity that it has fascinated and satisfied millions of people in every century, including the best minds in history and the simplest hearts, that it has made itself at home in virtually every culture, inspired masterpieces of beauty in every field of art, continues to grow rapidly and spread and assert itself in lands where a century ago the name of Jesus Christ was not even heard; if such teaching so obviously fits the locks of so many human souls, in so many times and so many places, are they likely to be the work of a deceiver or a fool? In fact it is more likely that they were designed by the Heart Maker.'

c. Just think of the uniqueness of his life. John Watson says this better than I can:

'No one has yet discovered the word Jesus ought to have said, none suggested the better word he might have said.' Look at Jesus in the gospels. He is always surprising you and taking your breath away. He's better than you can imagine. He is full of surprises, but they are all the surprises of perfection. He surprised us by combining qualities never before combined: Tenderness without weakness. Strength without harshness. Humility without the slightest lack of confidence. Holiness and unbending convictions without the slightest lack of approachability. Power without insensitivity. Passion without prejudice. The harshest challenge on the self-satisfied, yet the most winsome kindness to the broken and the marginal. Never inconsistent. Never a false step. Never a jarring note.

PT Forsythe aptly says: 'If God be not thus, he is less than the God we crave and less than the God the world needs.'

d. And think of the uniqueness of his impact. Almost every historian puts Jesus Christ as one of the 3 most influential people who have ever lived. Many put him as number 1. But what were the odds of him making this kind of global impact? Philip Brookes says this better than I can...

'He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village where he worked in a carpenter's shop until he was thirty. Then for three years, he was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book, held an office, had a family, nor owned a home. He never went to college, visited a big city, nor travelled more than 200 miles from his birth-place. He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for his garments, his only property. When he was dead they laid his body in a grave borrowed through the pity of a friend. But twenty centuries have come and gone and today he is still the central figure of the human race. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on this earth as much as this solitary man.'

Remember what Jesus said in the Bible verses we read at the beginning? 'On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.' On what rock? On the rock of the revelation that Jesus is really the divine Saviour. Based on that claim, he made a promise that his church would grow and grow and grow – because he really is who he said he is. Surely the dramatic growth of the church – now numbering 2,3 billion (1 in 3 people on the planet), growing faster now than ever before – surely this is one more evidence for the claim he is who he said he was? You want evidence that Jesus is the divine Saviour? It may just be *you*. Has your life been radically changed through faith in Christ? Well, your not alone. So have the lives of millions.