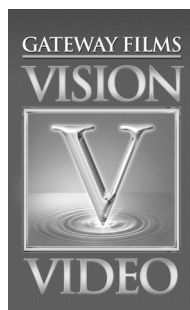


Supplement to the Video Program

Jesus: “Who Do Men Say That I Am?”

Producer – Timothy Donner
Executive Producer – Leesa Kelly

This supplement is prepared by Ann T. Snyder



“Who do men say that the Son of Man is?”
Matt. 16:13

Introduction

Perhaps the most important question ever asked is this: Who is Jesus? For believing Christians the response is immediate: Jesus is the Son of God. For others his question is met by skepticism or indifference. For those who look on Jesus as a great moral teacher, C. S. Lewis wrote: “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 a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make the choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.” (*Mere Christianity*)

The video *Jesus: Who Do Men Say That I Am?* attempts to explore the many ways in which Jesus is viewed in our society.

The film opens with “man in the street” comments illustrating the diversity of public opinion.

The narrator reminds us that as another millennium approaches, the debate over who Jesus is continues. A wide range of perceptions from deeply devout to rejection fan the flames of controversy. Nevertheless, Jesus seems to be “an intriguing, provocative character.”

Search for the Historical Jesus

Historians agree that Jesus was born between 4 and 7 BC in Bethlehem, Judea; that his mother, Mary, was from Nazareth and that she married a carpenter named Joseph. There is no record of Jesus’ life from age 12 until 30. It is agreed that He was probably baptized by John, that He was consistently controversial and mixed with the dregs of society. His followers were small, humble men ranging from Jewish Zealots to men who collaborated with Rome. He said He was sent from God and called Himself the “Son of Man.” He answered “yes” to those who asked Him if He was the Son of God. He was arraigned before Jewish and Roman courts. He was crucified and died within a matter of hours and buried in a tomb. Three days later the tomb was found to have been opened – and empty. The body was never recovered.

As the various scholars express their views, we are exposed to such ideas as “(Jesus) is an unsettling figure;” “Clearly influential;” “A bright young man;” “A complicated man;” “He was an ordinary young man that partied with the wrong people, violated the Sabbath from time to time – a basic fun-loving person.”

Some are disturbed by and wonder “how to edit out certain unpleasant things” (reference to the Pharisees, cursing the fig tree,) and observe “a certain element of religious fanaticism” in the Gospels.

However, it is noted that one third of the world's population accept Jesus as the Son of God, that for these people He converts human souls and changed human wills.

One scholar observes that "if you don't believe Jesus is the Son of God you are not a Christian," and then hastens to add that "Jesus never said He was the Son of God." However, Jesus was *quoted* as saying He was the Son of God, and He assented that He was the Son of God when asked (Matt. 27:43, Luke 22:70-71, John 10:35-37). Jesus demands that you make a point about His central claims. Jesus' appeal to African Americans is explained as relating to the Black condition – poor, doubted, denied, "lynched." The idea of being "brought to life by His Father – gives them hope not in some heaven somewhere, but in the here and now." Jesus died and rose again as a pledge of salvation in Heaven for all who believed in Him. The idea that Jesus came to bring about a utopian life in this world was rejected by Him, although it persists in chiliast belief. Heaven as a goal appears to be less important to many modern theologians. Once again, C. S. Lewis had something to say when, thinking of everlasting bliss, he wrote: "real life hasn't even begun yet." And, "I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along a region of Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself." (*The Great Divorce*)

The Gospels

Virtually nothing was recorded during Jesus' lifetime. It is likely that Matthew, Mark and Luke were written between thirty and forty years after Jesus' crucifixion and John as much as sixty years after the event. The style of each Gospel varies, but disparity is for a definite purpose. The Gospels deal either with events or with events and interpretation. The synoptics – Matthew, Mark and Luke – present the human side of Jesus. John's Gospel is described as presenting us with a Jesus already in glory and was intended primarily for an unbelieving and agnostic Greek audience. Each uses historical truth for a different emphasis.

Prophecy

Many Old Testament prophecies are believed to relate to Jesus. Most familiar is the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah, about the Suffering Servant who would endure a particular death for our transgressions.

This is denied by a Jewish scholar who sees this Bible reference only in the context of the age in which it was written, thus expressing the traditional Jewish view of Christian prophecy.

Many other prophecies, including Isaiah 7:14, Psalm 22:16 and Micah 5:2, are believed to foretell the Savior.

Failure to produce the body of Jesus is dealt with in the Scriptures. The Roman and Jewish religious leaders needed to produce it. If they could have produced the body, they could have stopped the movement.

Only the disciples had a genuine motive to remove it, but the question is asked if these weak men could join in a conspiracy of silence, live lives of hardship, endure torture and finally meet death without revealing the conspiracy. Someone recently noted that the Watergate conspiracy broke down within two weeks. We are told that the issue of the missing body is critical.

What we do know is that something changed the disciples – twelve uneducated, frightened men – who were to have a lasting impact on the world.

A Jewish scholar who reminds us that the Pharisees and Orthodox Jews believed in the resurrection of the body, thinks that the Resurrection of Jesus is “no big deal!” He makes clear that the major difference between Jews and Christians is that “we do not believe in the resurrection (of Jesus).” This puts new emphasis of Paul’s statement: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14).

Fact and Faith

Most of the Christian scholars seem to agree that regardless of how we are exposed to Jesus, a commitment of faith is needed. “You really have to make up your mind to the radical nature of His claims.” He claimed deity: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

The Jewish scholar observes that when the Messiah comes, the crucial question for Jews would be “Have you been here before?”

Jesus and Religion

Christianity has been the primary religion in our Western culture for so long that Jesus is now seen as a symbol for all sorts of religious, political or ideological groups. A recent poll showed that 84% of Americans believed in the divinity of Christ, but only 44% attend church. This may reflect a growing belief that Jesus wanted to do away with organized religion. Some see organized religion as a mausoleum or a beautiful shell lacking the personal experience of Jesus. Others believe both a sense of sacred history and personal experience are needed and that Christ did establish a church with a leadership.

The black experience in America is described as in a sense “miraculous,” because Blacks “rechristianized” Christianity. They experience the reality of Christ entering their lives – a God who loves them, a nurturing God.

A traditional view of church is that it is a church of sinners, men and women who fall and rise again, and a wounded church because of the divisions that have existed from even before the Great Schism and through the Reformation.

How does God come to man? Our Jewish scholar says: “God becomes immanent (the Incarnation.) This is theologically neat, clear, cogent. I just don’t believe it. Yet belief is just what Jesus Himself requires of us.”

Good and Evil

We are told that many people no longer believe in original sin. At the same time, we remember G. K. Chesterton's comment: "Original sin is the only doctrine of Christianity that can be empirically proven."

That evil in the world is a harsh reality none of the scholars deny, but the rabbi sees it as the main reason why he denies that Jesus is the Messiah. He is echoed by others who see in Jesus a great religious or moral leader, but deny His divinity because of the problem of evil and suffering in the world. They expect Him to bring peace, joy and love. Once again, the renewal of the world is seen as more important than the renewal of the soul or, put another way, this material world remains the major concern of most of humanity. And what is peace, or joy, or love, but Christ Himself?

We are also reminded that "niceness," the ordinary "good" life, is not enough for a Christian. What Jesus requires is commitment.

The essential encounter with Jesus need not come with the force of Paul's conversion, it may come quietly in moments of quiet reflection, while reading a book, a hundred different ways. But it is only through his encounter that we come to know Jesus. We can never return to Palestine in the first century and know Him as He was with His friends and disciples. Instead He comes to us and reveals Who He is to our wondering and worshipping souls.

The brief summary in the preceding pages illustrate the many topics worthy of discussion. No doubt you have a list of questions. Here are a few more.

Questions for Discussion

1. How did you feel when you heard the comments made by the "people in the street?"
2. How do you think Jesus would respond to these comments if He were sitting among us?
3. What impressions do you have of contemporary religious scholarship from watching this video?
4. Many of the participants in the video expressed widespread modern views. Which of these views did you find credible? Which did you reject?
5. If you had been asked to join the group of experts, what would you have wanted to ask of or say to them?
6. Can you think of ways to strengthen your own faith that might help others?
7. What Bible verses are you aware of that relate to faith in Jesus as Lord and/or Son of God?

Here is a sampling of related verses: Mat. 22:43, 26:63-64, 27:54; Mk. 3:11, 12:36-37; Lk. 1:35, 2:11; Jn. 11:27, 20:28; Acts. 9:20, 16:31, 19:17; Rom 1:3-4, 6:23; I Cor. 1:9, 8:6; II Cor. 1:3, 1:19, 4:5; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 2:5, 2:11, 3:20; I Jn. 3:8, 4:15, 5:9-10, 5:13, 5:20.

No definite conclusion is reached in the film. The individual opinions of a number of leading religious scholars having been expressed, the viewer is left to make up his own mind. For Christians across the centuries there has been one answer, the answer that Peter gave to Jesus' question:

"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus answered him, Blessed are you Simon Bar Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Matt 16:16-17

For a free catalog of our videos contact:

Gateway Films/Vision Video
P.O. Box 540
Worcester, PA 19490
1-800-523-0226
Fax: 610-584-6643
E-Mail: info@visionvideo.com
<http://www.visionvideo.com>