

Sermon 11: Jesus Christ as an argument for Christianity

OUTLINE

His life
His words

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest proofs of the truthfulness of Christianity is Jesus Christ Himself. Once at a dinner party on St Helena Napoleon was part of a discussion on who Jesus Christ was. He sat silently while everyone else shared their opinions. Some thought him man others thought Him God, at the end of it all Napoleon declared, 'I know men, and Jesus was no man.' He is considered to be the most influential person in history. One author highlights the following:

'We have no record of his date of birth, yet all the world's chronology is linked to it.

He never wrote a book, yet more books have been written about him than about anyone else in history, and the output is still accelerating. The nearest thing we have to his biography has been translated in whole or in part into over 2,000 languages.

He never painted a picture or composed any poetry or music, yet nobody's life and teaching have inspired a greater output of songs, plays, poetry, films, videos and other art forms.

One film, based on his recorded words, has been produced in over 100 languages and has already been seen by more people than any other film in history.

He never raised an army, yet millions of people have laid down their lives in his cause, and every year thousands more do so.

Except for one brief period during his childhood, his travels were limited to an area about the size of Wales, but his influence today is worldwide, and his followers constitute the largest religious grouping the world has ever known.

He had no formal education, but thousands of universities, seminaries, colleges and schools have been founded in his name.

His public teaching lasted just three years, and was restricted to one small country, yet purpose-built satellites and some of the world's largest radio and television networks now beam his message around the globe.

He set foot in two countries, yet an organization committed to his cause claims to make regular flights to more countries than any commercial airline.

He was virtually unknown outside of his own native country, yet in the current issue of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* the entry under his name runs to 30,000 words.

He is by far the most controversial person in history. Nobody has attracted such adoration or opposition, devotion or criticism, and nobody else's teaching has ever been more fervently received or more fiercely rejected. For centuries, every recorded word he spoke has been relentlessly analysed by theologians, philosophers and others. On the day this sentence is being written (and read), millions of people are studying what he said and did, and trying to apply the significance of his words and actions to their lives.

Even most dyed-in-the-wool sceptics must acknowledge that this man was something special, and any open-minded student of human history should agree that he deserves meticulous attention.

His name is Jesus, who lived and died about 2,000 years ago.¹

1 Blanchard, p556-557.

We cannot look at all that we should be looking at as we consider the person of Jesus Christ, so we will focus on just three aspects. We want to look at His life, in particular His birth and ministry and death. Secondly, we want to listen to Jesus talk about Himself.

His life

Jesus life stands apart from all others. There is no other human life or death like His. Jesus conception as a man began with an announcement by an angel to His unmarried and virgin mother that she would conceive a child by the Holy Spirit, Luke 1:26-38. Though there are many miraculous births by barren women, there has been no other virgin birth. This particular birth was the birth that was foretold throughout the pages of the OT. It was foretold that son born to a woman would crush satan's head. That He would be a blessing for all nations, that He would be born of the line of David, that He would be born in Bethlehem, that He would was eternal would be born as a child. The satanic attempt to wipe him out as a child, the heralding of the event to angels and the journey of the wise men to see this king all underline the uniqueness of Christ.

Then as we look at Christ's ministry we see a number of amazing miracles. He healed various kinds of ailments like blindness, paralysis, leprosy, withered limbs and fever. He cast demons out of the demon possessed. He calmed the storm, walked on water, turned water into wine, and multiplied the bread and fish. And more than once He raised the dead.

His death was unique among all other deaths. His death was foretold by prophecy. He was to be the suffering servant of Is. 53 who as an innocent would die for the sins of others that the guilty might be saved. Many aspects of the last 24 hours of His life were foretold and came to pass in His last day. He was betrayed by a friend, abandoned by His disciples, falsely accused, arrested, beaten, mocked, whipped, crucified, had His clothing gambled for, was thirsty, would be stabbed and die among criminals. But His death is unique for another reason as well, He died for others, for the forgiveness of their sins. Someone in the army might be willing to die to save the lives of those he is defending, but none can die in order to atone for another's sins, this is the death Christ died. It is the only truly vicarious death, a death by which others who are sinners and deserve to die can be acquitted and saved by. Some have called it the only truly voluntary death. You see we must all die because we are sinners, we are under the curse and deserve to die. But Jesus was sinless, was not under the curse of sin and voluntarily chose to die for us even though death had no right to have Him.

Not only did He die, He also resurrected, and His resurrection is unique. The Bible records several people being resurrected, but they resurrected and died again, Christ has risen from the dead to never die again. This resurrection we have already shown was witnessed by over 500 people. There has never been a man like Christ.

His words

Of utmost importance is to listen to what Christ says of Himself. John the Baptist said that he was not the Messiah, Muhammad claimed to be nothing more than a prophet. What Jesus claimed about Himself has to be reckoned with. Mark 2 tells us the story of Jesus healing the paralytic. You will remember the man's four friends letting him in through the roof so that Jesus could heal him. In verse 5 Jesus sees the man's faith and tells him that his sins are forgiven. The Pharisees accuse Him of blasphemy because no one can forgive sins except God. So Jesus puts a question to them, v9 'Which is easier, to say to the

paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?'² Which is easier? You can say your sins are forgiven, but how can you prove that it has happened, but to say rise and walk would need to show the proof of a healing. So technically, as far as evidence is concerned it is the harder thing to say that a healing has happened. Look what happens next, 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—¹¹"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"³ To prove that He can forgive sins, he demonstrates it by healing the man.

He demanded that He be loved above all, Matt. 10:37-39, 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.'³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'

He put Himself forward as the object of people's faith, Matt. 11:28-30, 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."⁴

He claimed that He was the central theme of all Scripture, John 5:39, 'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.'⁵

He described Himself in the famous I Am sayings, as the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the way the truth and the life. Most significant among His statements are the I Am statements in John. I Am was an OT name for God, and when defending His identity to the Jews. In John 8:48-59 the Jews are accusing Jesus of being a Samaritan with a demon. When Jesus makes the claim that any who keep His word will never see death, they bring in Abraham and the prophets who have died as a way to show that he is not making any sense and is confirming their accusations of having a demon. Jesus says that Abraham saw His day and rejoiced, v56. When the Jews pointed out He was not even fifty years old, He made this famous statement, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I Am.' This resulted in the Jews attempting to stone Him, v29. The Jews made this same response in chapter 10 when Jesus said 'I and the Father are one.' John 10:31-33, 'The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.'³² Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?"³³ The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God."⁶

2 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mk 2:9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

3 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mk 2:10–12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

4 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:28–30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

5 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 5:39). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

6 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 10:31–33). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Jesus was making the claim that He was divine. He makes this clear by using the I Am statements; by using the definite article in reference to the Father and the Son making His particular sonship distinct from all other sonships; he makes the claim that no one knows the Father but the Son, Matt. 11:27, 'All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'⁷

That fact that He is God brings the fact that He is willing to become a man in order to die for us to pay our sins back to us with new power. We see our God willingly identifying Himself with our suffering. This is how one writer brings the point home:

'At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly—not with cringing shame but with belligerence. 'Can God judge us?'

'How can he know about suffering?' snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. 'We endured terror... beating...torture...death!'

In another group a young black man lowered his collar. 'What about this?' He demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. 'Lynched for no crime but being black!'

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. 'Why should I suffer?' She murmured. 'It wasn't my fault.'

Far across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he had permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred! What did God know of all that men had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a black, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly disabled arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the plain they consulted each other.

At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their verdict was that God should be sentenced to life on earth—as a man! Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tried to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured. At last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die in agony. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a whole host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced the portion of his sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of the people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence there was a long silence. No one uttered another word. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence.⁸

Who is this Jesus Christ? Monotheistic Jews worshipped Him as their God, who do you say that He is? Some say a prophet, others a good teacher, but He cannot be either of these if He claimed to be God, for then He would be a false prophet and a false teacher. This is how C. S. Lewis puts it:

7 [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:27). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

'I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sorts of things that 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 a devil of hell. You must make your choice... 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.*⁹

Paul was a man who used to reject Jesus claimed and kill any of His followers that he could. But then he met this Saviour and as a monotheistic Jew He worshipped Him. He became a servant laying down his life to spread the message that this Jesus is Lord who will also one day come back to judge the living and the dead. We cannot remain neutral, we cannot suspend judgement, we cannot ignore His claims and pretend you have not heard. He calls all to turn from sin and believe upon Him today.

9 Blanchard, p572.