

Wonderful Jesus

Most of the world does **not** have an accurate understanding of the *identity* of the man known in history books as *Jesus of Nazareth*. Nevertheless, everyone's eternal destiny—whether positive or negative—depends on his or her relationship to Jesus. The Bible features the good news of God's full self-disclosure through Jesus, his holy human son. Jesus identified the one true God as being invisible holy spirit. Jesus in his historical humanity filled out fully *the revelation* of God, so that when we see Jesus in the *Gospels*, we “see” no less than the spiritual image of his invisible father in heaven. For all people for the duration of time, Jesus expressed *the word* of God and provided *the way* into fellowship with God. His atoning cross—the accursed tree—paradoxically, replanted in the world “the tree of life.”

Because of the uniqueness of Jesus in first-century Israel, it was inevitable he would be misunderstood by his contemporaries. His life and character, uninfluenced by public opinion, enjoyed the heavenly father's presence, confirmation, and commendation. He came to his own Jewish people, and as Isaiah had prophesied only a *remnant* of them would be receptive of salvation through him. Yet there were genuine believers who were privileged to hear his teachings and see his miracles. They placed their *faith* in him, resonated with *hope* in him, and accepted his holy *love* into their hearts.

Jesus was not only the most misunderstood human being who has ever lived, but also the most interesting and affable one because of the profound depths of his holy love. After his living 30 quiescent years in Israel, he expended himself for 42 months, the final 10% of his life, in a compassionate, altogether dynamic ministry in Israel. Although he was so great as a prophet, teacher, and extraordinary physician, he freely made himself accessible to thousands, especially the poor, including children, and all kinds of people with every normal and desperate human condition. Whenever this trustworthy teacher was asked a question, he masterfully recognized the presupposition behind it. His wise answers were truthful and memorable. So too were the incisive questions he often initiated to cut straight to the truth as he embodied it.

Jesus healed *without* medicine or herbs and delivered people possessed with evil spirits. He never charged fees for his faith-accessible ministry and neither derived support nor endorsement from organized religion of his day.

Jesus is two millennia removed from us historically. Indeed, he ascended out of this world in the first century. Yet Bible students can truly know him today. Although critics have fabricated many false identities to mask Jesus, degrading him as it were, to their own low level, we have a Bible that records the truth about him. This indestructible prophetic and apostolic message about Jesus from eyewitnesses and ministers of the word makes the sincere seeker take heart that a true understanding of Jesus is possible after all. That clear understanding of the Lord Jesus is facilitated by the constancy of his character throughout his life and ministry. Because he did **not** vacillate or ever have to reinvent himself, the first Jesus you meet in Scripture has continuity with the final Jesus disclosed there. Comprehensively, he is the “A” and “Z” of the revelation of God, or in the language of the Greeks, the *alpha* and *omega*. As the first and final letter of the alphabet, no biblical space remains for an anti-Christ to replace him. In contrast to the false prophets over the centuries who have tried to oust him from his supreme position, he stands alone as the only one anticipated by 1400 years of authenticating prophecies. Historical time has been significantly divided, as we are reminded when we acknowledge the date of any year, by what came before or after him.

Celebrities of this world characteristically desire attention but always fear overexposure. Jesus, by contrast, had such *spiritual* depth that he, the truth, could **not** be overexposed. He, therefore, had no need to cover his eyes with dark glasses, nor would he ever be embarrassed about anything he had said or done. His *mystique* came from the inexplicable origin of his holy life from conception onward and the consequent *holy presence* in him. Anyone’s contact with him became a spiritual experience of one kind or the other. Looking people in the eye when he spoke, he personified and projected holiness, grace, and truth.

Jesus, who received the spirit of God in immeasurable fullness, expressed “the word of God” faithfully, and presented “the spirit of God” transparently. The better one gets to know Jesus, the more there is about him to appreciate and to love. Mindful of his crucial mission, he continuously was motivated to complete it in the appointed time. The apostle Paul summed up Jesus' life and work in this terse analysis: “**God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.**”

The good news of the gospel sorts out into three decisive questions—for all of which there are biblical answers: *Who was Jesus? What was his mission in life? What will be his role when the world as we know it passes away into “the day of the Lord”?* Restated in present time

we ask: *what is Jesus' identity, what is his necessary role now, and what will be his future role when all must face him for evaluation in eternity?*

Jesus depicts God's self-expression as his loyal human son and willing servant. As the image of the invisible God, Jesus expressed genuine love, righteousness without pretense, truth divulged, wisdom personified, faithfulness without excuses, wholeness in human nature, grace of character, and the glory of God revealed in word, action, and resurrection. He completed the redemptive work his father gave him to do on earth prior to his consequent glorification. “*Finished,*” shouted from his cross, was his autobiographical, and final, agonizing word directed to the world, as the holy human died to overcome and remove humanity’s sin, guilt, and death. On the cross he fulfilled his life’s mission, codified from birth in his Hebrew name, that means “**savior**”—Jesus.

Here was a man named with what we who have three names would recognize as comparable to a first name. His symbolic name was supplied before birth, not by Mary or Joseph nor as the namesake of any ancestor; it was assigned him by a messenger from heaven. As was customary in his day of low world population, he lacked a middle or last name. But his grandeur of character and responsibilities in mortal life, extending beyond his resurrection, merited for him **70** identifying **titles** revealed in the Bible. Some of these were **prophetic** by many centuries in advance of him, as for instance: *seed of the woman, wonderful teacher, God's champion, peaceful leader, everlasting father, the messenger of the covenant*. Some titles were also consequential to his **mission in life**, such as: the most frequently used New Testament title, linking him with the Old Testament as messiah, that is, *Christ*, meaning, *spirit-anointed one*. Other life-mission titles exclusively accorded Jesus are these: *the lamb of God, the one mediator between God and man, the savior of the world, the head of the church*.

Several **humble** titles also fit Jesus, such as his favorite term of self-identification—*the human one*—used by him in **57** different instances. He was also *the servant of Yahveh, the root out of dry ground, the man of sorrows familiar with suffering*. Moreover, there were **glorious** titles of Jesus, recognizing his incomparable worth: *Yahveh's chosen one, immanuel, heir-owner of everything, king of kings, prophet like Moses whom Moses promised as his replacement, supreme sovereign, prototype from the dead, the resurrection and the life, the supreme shepherd, universal Lord, the glory of God*.

Many of Jesus' titles were revealed in the form of memorable **metaphors** such as: *the arm of Yahveh, the bright morning star, the cornerstone of the church, the gateway for the sheep, the keystone of the arch, the last Adam, the light of the world, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the magnificent high priest, the spiritual rock, the true bread from heaven, the true light, the true vine.*

Some of Jesus' best known titles remain to be stated. On the night of the *last supper* in his life-summary prayer (John ch. 17), he twice mentioned that the heavenly father had given *his own name* to him. That holy ID accorded Jesus was revealed to Mary in according him the title as “**the son of God.**” But Jesus, confident of who he was, did not go around introducing himself as per that title because the works he accomplished certified his identity as being of divine origin. Yet when he was interrogated, neither did he deny the implications of being God's human son. In a character sketch reduced to one adjective, he was known by the apostles as “**the righteous one,**” or by the longer descriptive apostolic phrase, “God's son . . . full of grace and truth.”

One of the most apt titles of Jesus is “**the word of God,**” because he ever expressed the *mind* of God. He was the human expression of the same **word** that had created and sustained the universe from its genesis. Once when deputies of the religious power structure in Jerusalem came to arrest Jesus at Solomon's Colonnade in the temple where he was teaching, his speech was so electrifying that the would-be apprehenders had to return to their superiors empty-handed, giving as their reason for failure to take him in: “This man's speech has never been matched by that of any other man!” Jesus explained on another occasion, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit, containing life.” The synonym applicable to Jesus in this regard is “the truth” because as “the word of God,” he establishes and preserves in himself “the truth” in content and action.

Jesus manifested brilliantly both **God's** intelligence and his power. For instance, no one in his right mind would do as Jesus did, packing earth moistened by his saliva into the eye sockets of anyone that could not see, *unless* he had the requisite craftsmanship to create from wet clay a new pair of eyes for a man born without them. Without fanfare, Jesus did exactly that, and let all the world see the product of his creativity as an extraordinary potter. On a later occasion, Jesus called down the eerie corridor of the unknown to his four-days dead friend, buried in an

above-the-ground tomb. Lazarus heard his commanding voice that brought him back to mortal life—to the astonishment of Jesus' friends, and to the consternation of his enemies. Whether anyone he met was depressed, demonized, or even dead, no one was beyond the saving reach of Jesus' powerful word.

Whereas Adam, the first man, was alive with life given to him, Jesus, the last Adam, now glorified, is the eternal-life giver—the “life-producing spirit.” After coming to his people on day two of the *new creation*, he breathed his precious spiritual presence into those of his friends gathered around him as eyewitnesses of his resurrection. Seven weeks later, from his glorious station in heaven he fulfilled the prophecy of John the baptizer as well as his own promise. That is, at Pentecost Jesus began to immerse his young church in the powerful holy spirit, to enable them to be his *dynamic* representatives everywhere.

The apostle John stated that his gospel was written that you might believe in Jesus and share his life. Therefore, we ask: What does Jesus mean to you? How has he affected your life and vision for the future? When you stand for his final evaluation, will you be able to smile back at him when his pure eyes meet yours? As you think about him in relation to your life and destiny, let us leave you with one final word of encouragement, or warning, as the case may be. While we have been looking at Jesus from the perspective of the whole Bible, let the summary declaration of Hebrews 13:8 now strengthen your faith always for: **“Jesus Christ is the same today as he was in history and will be forever.”**