



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

God Is: The Greatest Clue of All

John 14:7-9

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Introduction

1. In what amounts to the climax of his book, *Worldviews in Conflict*, Ronald Nash writes:

Furthermore, consider all the other things we can settle once we know that Jesus is God and that his words are God's words. We then have an authoritative answer to all our most important questions: Is there a personal God who loves us? What is our duty in life? How do we become children of God? Why did Jesus die? Is there life after death?¹

2. As previously noted, there are no formal arguments for God's existence in the Bible. But there are clues that point us to how to make the case. Nash calls attention to one that is often overlooked: if the only rational explanation for Jesus is that he was God in the flesh, God must exist.
3. Of course, it is by no means universally accepted in our world of ideas that Jesus is God. As has always been true, the very mention of Jesus elicits various reactions.
 - a. Some have little idea of what we are talking about; they may have heard his name, but may not think he really lived. Save for some art work they've seen, or a t-shirt here and there, or perhaps news reports at Christmas and Easter, they know nothing about him.
 - b. Some esteem him as a good teacher and/or prophet, but as only one among many good teachers, whose teaching is no better or worse than others whose teachings point us to God.
 - c. Some know the Bible story, or at least enough of it to know its bold claims for Jesus, but do not believe it can possibly be telling things as they really happened. They may see Jesus as a wise teacher, a guru, a healer, a revolutionary, or a real person later given mythical status. But not God and certainly not Lord and Savior.
4. In a world with so many ideas, we must know well what we should believe about Jesus. Or, to state it more strongly: our faith will never develop and sustain the fervor it should, or reach others like it should, if we are casual or imprecise about what we believe about Jesus.
5. So let's review the basics and renew our appreciation for the astounding story of Jesus.

Body

- I. A Stunning Story.

- A. Though "good news" is the way Bible writers describe it, the story has been around long enough to have lost some of its freshness and appeal.

- B. But step back and try to hear the story as if for the first time.
 - 1. In Jesus, God entered history as a member of the human race (Galatians 4:4-5).
 - 2. The infinite, eternal God “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14, NIV).
 - 3. After a teaching campaign and display of amazing powers, wonders, and signs, the Divine-Man was executed by official order of the Roman governor, but was raised from the dead and seen by many witnesses (Acts 10:36-43; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11).
 - 4. No wonder the Jews saw the Christian message as a “stumbling block” and Greeks saw it as “folly” (1 Corinthians 1:23).
- C. But there is more.
 - 1. Jesus did not just die by crucifixion—a method of execution with the greatest of stigmas—his death was necessary to make amends for all the wrong things people have done and to make it possible for people to be in fellowship with God (1 Corinthians 1:17-18; 2:2, 4-5; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21).
 - 2. So convinced were they of the truth and significance of this story that the earliest Christians dared to say that life has no meaning if Jesus had not died and been raised (see 1 Corinthians 15:32).
 - 3. Simply put, the first Christians believed that Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; Matthew 11:27; Acts 4:12), “that in Jesus the one thing that needed to happen has happened in such a way that it need never happen again.”²
- D. It understates it to say that the Christian claims are extraordinary, even incredible.
 - 1. In fact, Christianity is of such a nature that, “if false, it is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”³
 - 2. But why should we believe it? Time permits only a summary, but if it nurtures our faith even a little, it will be time well spent.

II. Why Believe in Jesus?

- A. First, the New Testament writings that report his story are believable.
 - 1. To summarize, we must defend against two distinct but related claims.
 - a) It is alleged that the amount of time between when the events occurred and when the accounts of them were written—as well as the time between the original documents and the extant manuscript copies—means that we cannot trust the writings to truthfully tell the story.⁴
 - b) The distance between time of the events and writing is actually minimal and is offset by the fact that the ancient East was an oral culture.⁵
 - c) The evidence for the New Testament is better than that for records of other ancient events and writings.
 - 2. The writings also tell their story accurately. When checked against external historical evidence where a check can be made, the New Testament has consistently been validated and its critics have been repeatedly discredited.
- B. Second, Jesus claimed to be divine.
 - 1. The point is not that a claim to deity makes it true—a circular argument—but that the absence of such a claim would damage the case; it is reasonable to expect a divine being to know he was divine.

2. The New Testament consistently claims deity for Jesus and the earliest Christians worshiped him as divine.⁶
3. Consider one example—John 10:22-33.
 - a) Jewish critics challenged Jesus to declare whether he was their Messiah (v 24).
 - b) He replied that the signs he had performed pointed to his identity (24-26).
 - c) He then boldly claimed he would grant eternal life and guaranteed eternal security for all who would follow him; these claims not only implied his right to do what only God could do, but also declared that, like the Father, he had the power to do them.
 - d) He then stated his claim explicitly: “I and the Father are one”(v 30).
 - e) That the people who heard him understood his claim is evident from their subsequent attempt to stone him (vv 31-33; cf. 8:48-59).
- C. Third, Jesus’ character and works support the claims for Jesus’ deity.
 1. John’s use of the word “sign” to describe Jesus’ miracles show that they were designed to reveal more than raw power.
 2. In the signs, we see the compassion and character that reveals his uniqueness.
 - a) When he gave sight to the blind, healed the lepers and the lame, and fed the crowds, Jesus showed God’s love for all, regardless of rank or station.
 - b) When he walked on water and calmed raging storms, he showed God’s power over the elements in all their power and unpredictability.
 - c) Even death held no mystery for him (see John 11).
 - d) Furthermore, those who saw him most closely testified to his superior character (see 1 Peter 2:21-25).
 3. His signs lead to belief in him as God with us (John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22-24).
- D. Fourth, Jesus’ bodily resurrection validates his claim.
 1. Paul said that Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).
 2. The earliest Christians claimed that belief in his resurrection rested on the evidence of the empty tomb and the witnesses who saw him alive after he had died (Acts 2:32; 1 Corinthians 15:5-11).⁷
 3. It is upon this claim that Christianity stands or falls (1 Corinthians 15:17).
 4. His willingness to die sacrificially showed his commitment to humanity (Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 9:21-27), but his victory over death showed that he could lead all others to the same victory (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; Hebrews 2:14-15; Romans 4:25).

Conclusion

1. Looked at in light of these bold claims, Nash’s declaration is almost an understatement!
2. But, the story has never ended with the claims. Like everyone who ever met or has ever heard about Jesus, we must decide what we think about him. “But what about you? . . . Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29).
3. C. S. Lewis was right: if Jesus was—and is—God, then that is a truth that is of infinite importance. I believe he was divine and that he is therefore our Savior (John 8:24). Who do you say he is? What have you done about it?

April 26, 2009
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Notes

¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, 154.

² Stephen C. Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, 17.

³ C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 101.

⁴ See Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, et. al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, 25-28.

⁵ As Robert Stein has written, "We must not forget that the ability to remember traditions and pass them on faithfully is not limited by our present-day inability to do this or conceive of this. The introduction of cheap writing materials into the world has had a negative impact in that it has paralyzed our abilities to memorize and to use the mind, rather than notebooks and files as a data-bank. ("The 'Criteria' for Authenticity," in R. T. France and David Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, 1:227.)

The article on "Oral Tradition" in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* agrees, noting that "in the East learning by heart is unto this day the normal way of transmitting even the longest texts, as the Koran and its commentaries. With the Jews both Mishna and Talmud were orally transmitted for centuries; in the synagogue it was long forbidden to say the Torah from a written scroll; also the Aramaic and Greek translations were originally given orally, but in a traditional fixed form.... The common memory of the circle and the 'chain of traditionalists' were for long considered to be securer than script. (It must be remembered that here we do have to do with generations whose memory was not spoiled by magazines and dictionaries.") (Vol. 4, p. 684.)

See also the work of Birger Gerhardsson and the Scandinavian School, as e.g., *The Gospel Tradition; Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity*; and *Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity*.

⁶ Larry W. Hurtado has written extensively on how early belief in Jesus' deity had to have developed. More popular level works include his *How on Earth Did Jesus Become God? Historical Questions About Earliest Devotion to Jesus* and *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion*.

⁷ Both are necessary. An empty tomb would be required for there to have been a resurrection, but by itself is not sufficient to prove the case (cf. Matthew 28:11-15). Nor will all the witnesses in the world suffice to prove the case if the body can be located in its tomb. Of course, additional steps must be taken to address the question of the credibility of the witnesses.