

EQTH105 Basic Bible Doctrine

Unit 4d Person of Jesus Christ

Presented by the



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There is so much more to the doctrine of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ than we are covering in this short course. But one thing I would like to explore in more depth is the actual person of Jesus Christ, the actual historical record of a person who actually existed like any other person. He was born, he lived, and he died. He had a birthday, probably not December 25th, but there was a date. There was a time and a place for a person named Jesus of Nazareth. So to explore questions about the life and ministry of Jesus, we must first establish the fact of his existence. And this is not difficult to do for both believers and unbelievers alike testify that the man Jesus did exist. Actual historical records exist outside of Scripture to support this fact.

Now, the only firsthand source that we have of the life and ministry of Jesus is found in the New Testament. The New Testament consists of 27 separate documents which were written by people living in the 1st century who had personal contact with Jesus. All of these writings testify to the existence of Jesus Christ. These New Testament witnesses can be divided as follows: the four gospels, the Book of Acts, letters of Paul, and the universal letters. The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, each give an account of the life of Jesus. Matthew and John were two of Jesus' 12 disciples. They wrote with firsthand knowledge of what Jesus did and said. Mark wrote about the life of Jesus from the viewpoint of Simon Peter, also one of the 12. And Luke wrote from the perspective of Jesus' mother, Mary. He wrote that his account was based on the testimony of eyewitnesses. So the four gospels chronicle the ministry of Jesus in a historical setting.

Luke, for example, provides the name of the rulers living at the time when John the Baptist appeared. Luke writes, and bear with me as I try and pronounce some of these names, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." [Luke 3:1-2] Note the fact that there are seven specific historical reference points in those two verses. Among other things, Luke tells us who was the reigning Caesar, who governed Judea, as well as the names of the current high priests in Israel. The detailed historical nature of his account is clear and also supported in archaeological references aside from the scriptural account. The same holds true for the other gospels.

In this, it's important to remember the gospels are four independent writings. According to my friends at blueletterbible.org, the first of the gospels was written by Matthew in 43 A.D. To put that in perspective, Jesus was crucified in 30 A.D., so that's 13 years later. Luke writes his gospel around 59 A.D.; Mark a few years later in 64 A.D.; and John, the last, in 85 A.D., a full 55 years after Jesus was actually on earth. So we have four independent writings, each recording specific eyewitness testimony to the fact that Jesus did exist.

There is also the testimony of the Book of Acts written by Luke. You probably know that the events of the Book of Acts pick up where Luke's gospel leaves off, that is, the resurrection of Jesus, as I stated earlier, about 30 A.D. After Jesus came back from the dead, he gave his disciples instructions on how to proclaim his message. The Book of Acts records the struggles of his disciples to fulfill this task, which in turn, results in the establishment and rise of the New Testament church. These events, their experiences and preaching from 30 A.D. through the end of the Book of Acts around 63 A.D. give further testimony to the existence of Jesus.

And then there is the writings of Paul, whose letters make up a large part of the New Testament. Paul, who was formerly named Saul, was a devout Jew who hated Christians to the point that he put them in jail and consented to their execution. Yet one day, when he was on the road to Damascus to persecute even more Christians, Jesus appeared to him. This resulted in Saul's conversion and he became known as Paul. The remainder of his life was spent spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul's letters give convincing testimony to Jesus' existence. The rest of the New Testament consists of letters by various disciples of Jesus. We have two from Simon Peter (that's 1 and 2 Peter), one from James, one from Jude, and four from John. And then there's the anonymous letter to the Hebrews. But these writings contain instruction and encouragement to the believers in Jesus. They give firsthand testimony to the fact of Jesus' life and ministry.

So to summarize, a man named Jesus of Nazareth existed. Both Christians and non-Christians agree on the fact that there is no real doubt that he lived. The 27 different New Testament documents unanimously testify to the existence of Jesus. Given the fact of numerous historical reference points as well as specific details of Jesus' ministry, the fact of his existence should not be an issue. Now, scholars agree that a person named Jesus existed, but many will argue if Jesus was really the Son of God. But no serious scholar debates his actual existence. So we'll take that statement that Jesus lived as a historical fact.

So the question is not the who of Jesus. It's more the what. And in that, we see in Scripture that Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God. All evidence that we have about Jesus from the New Testament as well as other sources admits that Jesus claimed a special relationship between himself and God, that of being God's son. He also predicted his crucifixion and resurrection. From the gospels, we have the clear picture that Jesus predicted his death by crucifixion and his resurrection to follow. That these predictions were made is confirmed by the fact that the Jews asked the Romans to place a guard at the tomb. Why guard the tomb if there had not been some prediction of a resurrection? The gospels as well as the apostle Paul unanimously testify that Jesus died by crucifixion in the City of Jerusalem and was then buried. Three days after his burial, the tomb of Jesus was empty. If it had been occupied, the enemies of Christianity would have produced the body. The fact that unbelievers said the disciples of Jesus had stolen his body testifies that the tomb was empty. The disciples of Jesus believed they had seen him alive after his death on the cross. They believed he had risen from the dead.

But to me, the number one reason to believe in the historicity of Jesus is that because he lived and died and rose again, the disciples' lives were transformed. The picture of the disciples before Jesus are a group of confused, sometimes bickering, sometimes cowardly human beings. Peter denies Christ three times. Hardly a flattering portrayal. But afterwards, these same disciples were transformed from cowards to passionate evangelists, and ultimately, for all but John, eventually martyred. Because of the influence of Jesus, men's lives were radically altered. And their message was consistent: Jesus Christ had risen. The Book of Acts, the writings of Paul, and other New Testament authors all have the resurrection of Christ as their central message. Almost immediately after the death of Christ, the message of his resurrection was heralded in Jerusalem, the very city where the events took place. A group of believers banded together and became known as the church. They grew rapidly and spread through the known world based on the belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. All of the primary sources in the New Testament, historical facts, and archaeological evidence points to one thing: Jesus is real. The question is what will you do with that fact?