



*inciting a* **CROSSCULTURE** *Revolution.*

## More Than a Carpenter

**Chapter Excerpts**  
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### Chapter Excerpts

#### **Excerpt: Chapter 1 -- What Makes Jesus so Different?**

Recently I was talking with a group of people in Los Angeles. I asked them, "Who, in your opinion, is Jesus Christ?" The response was that he was a great religious leader. I agree with that. Jesus Christ was a great religious leader. But I believe he was much more.

Men and women down through the ages have been divided over the question, "Who is Jesus?" Why so much conflict over one individual? Why is it that his name, more than the name of any other religious leader, causes irritation? Why is it that you can talk about God and nobody gets upset, but as soon as you mention Jesus, people so often want to stop the conversation? Or they become defensive. I mentioned something about Jesus to a taxicab driver in London, and immediately he said, "I don't like to discuss religion, especially Jesus."

How is Jesus different from other religious leaders? Why don't the names of Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius offend people? The reason is that these others didn't claim to be God, but Jesus did. That is what makes him so different from other religious leaders.

It didn't take long for the people who knew Jesus to realize that he was making astounding claims about himself. It became clear that his own claims were identifying him as more than just a prophet or teacher. He was obviously making claims to deity. He was presenting himself as the only avenue to a relationship with God, the only source of forgiveness for sins, and the only way of salvation.

For many people this is too exclusive, too narrow for them to want to believe. Yet the issue is not what do we want to think or believe, but rather, who did Jesus claim to be?

The New Testament clearly presents Christ as God. The names applied to Christ in the New Testament are such that they could properly be applied only to one who was God. For example, Jesus is called God in the phrase, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13; compare John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8; Romans 9:5; 1 John 5:20, 21). The Scriptures attribute characteristics to

him that can be true only of God. Jesus is presented as being self-existent (John 1:4; 14:6); omnipresent (Matthew 28:20; 18:20); omniscient (John 4:16; 6:64; Matthew 17:22-27); omnipotent (Revelation 1:8; Luke 4:39-55; 7:14, 15; Matthew 8:26, 27); and possessing eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12, 20; John 1:4).

Most of the followers of Jesus were devout Jews who believed in one true God. They were monotheistic to the core, yet they recognized him as God incarnate.

Because of his extensive rabbinical training, Paul would be even less likely to attribute deity to Jesus, to worship a man from Nazareth and call him Lord. But this is exactly what Paul did. He acknowledged the Lamb of God (Jesus) as God when he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Peter confessed, after Christ asked him who he was: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus responded to Peter's confession not by correcting his conclusion but by acknowledging its validity and source: "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

Then of course we have the confession of Thomas, better known as "The Doubter," Perhaps he was a graduate student. He said, "I won't believe unless I can put my finger into his nail scars." I identify with Thomas. He said, "Look, not every day does someone raise himself from the dead or claim to be God incarnate. I need evidence." Eight days later, after Thomas chronicled his doubts about Jesus before the other disciples, "Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then He said to Thomas. 'Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.' Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him. 'Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed'" (John 20:26-29). Jesus accepted Thomas's acknowledgment of him as God. He rebuked Thomas for his unbelief, but not for his worship.

At this point a critic may interject that all these references are from others about Christ, not from Christ about himself. The accusation in the classroom is usually that those at the time of Christ misunderstood him as we are misunderstanding him today. In other words, Jesus really didn't claim to be God.

Well, I think he did, and I believe that the deity of Christ is derived directly from the pages of the New Testament, The references are abundant and their meaning is plain, A businessman who scrutinized the Scriptures to verify whether or not Christ claimed to be God said, "For anyone to read the New Testament and not conclude that Jesus claimed to be divine, he would have to be as blind as a man standing outdoors on a clear day and saying he can't see the sun."

For example in the Gospel of Mark we have the trial of Jesus (14:60-64). Those trial proceedings are one of the clearest references to Jesus' claims of deity. "And the high priest arose and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You make no answer to what these men are testifying against You?' But He kept silent, and made no answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, 'Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' And Jesus said, I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' And tearing his clothes, the high priest said, 'What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?' And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death."

An analysis of Christ's testimony shows that he claimed to be (1) the Son of the Blessed One (God); (2) the One who would sit at the right hand of power, and (3) the Son of Man who would come on the clouds of heaven. Each of the affirmations is distinctively messianic. The cumulative effect of all three is significant. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish court, caught all three points, and the high priest responded by tearing his garments and saying. "What further need do we have of witnesses?" They had finally heard it from him themselves. He was convicted by the words of his own mouth.

Robert Anderson points out: "No confirmatory evidence is more convincing than that of hostile witnesses, and the fact that the Lord laid claim to Deity is incontestably established by the action of His enemies. We must remember that the Jews were not a tribe of ignorant savages, but a highly cultured and intensely religious people; and it was upon this very charge that, without a dissenting voice, His death was decreed by the Sanhedrin—their great national Council, composed of the most eminent of their religious leaders, including men of the type of Gamaliel and his great pupil, Saul of Tarsus."<sup>6</sup>

It is clear, then, that this is the testimony Jesus wanted to bear about himself. We also see that the Jews understood his reply as a claim to his being God. There were two alternatives to be faced then; that his assertions

were blasphemy, or that he was God. His judges saw the issue clearly—so clearly, in fact, that they crucified him and then taunted him because "He trusted in God ... for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43).

In most trials, people are tried for what they have done, but this was not true of Christ's. Jesus was tried for who he was.

## **Excerpt: Chapter 2 -- Lord, Liar, or Lunatic?**

The distinct claims of Jesus to be God eliminate the popular ploy of skeptics who regard Jesus as just a good moral man or a prophet who said a lot of profound things. So often that conclusion is passed off as the only one acceptable to scholars or as the obvious result of the intellectual process. The trouble is, many people nod their heads in agreement and never see the fallacy of such reasoning.

To Jesus, who men and women believed him to be was of fundamental importance. To say what Jesus said and to claim what he claimed about himself, one couldn't conclude he was just a good moral man or prophet. That alternative isn't open to an individual, and Jesus never intended it to be.

C. S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge University and once an agnostic, understood this issue clearly. He writes: "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 the one thing we must not say. 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 your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

Then Lewis adds: "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."<sup>1</sup>

F. J. A. Hort, who spent twenty-eight years in a critical study of the New Testament text, writes: "His words were so completely parts and utterances of Himself, that they had no meaning as abstract statements of truth uttered by Him as a Divine oracle or prophet. Take away Himself as the primary (though not the ultimate) subject of every statement and they all fall to pieces."<sup>2</sup>

In the words of Kenneth Scott Latourette, historian of Christianity at Yale University: "It is not his teachings which make Jesus so remarkable, although these would be enough to give him distinction. It is a combination of the teachings with the man himself. The two cannot be separated." "It must be obvious," Latourette concludes, "to any thoughtful reader of the

Gospel records that Jesus regarded himself and his message as inseparable. He was a great teacher, but he was more. His teachings about the kingdom of God, about human conduct, and about God were important, but they could not be divorced from him without, from his standpoint, being vitiated."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus claimed to be God. He didn't leave any other option open. His claim must be either true or false, so it is something that should be given serious consideration. Jesus' question to his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15) has several alternatives.

## **Excerpt: Chapter 8 -- Can You Keep a Good Man Down?**

A student at the University of Uruguay said to me, "Professor McDowell, why can't you refute Christianity?" I answered, "For a very simple reason. I'm unable to explain away an event in history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

After more than 700 hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I came to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is either one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon people, or it is the most important fact of history.

The resurrection issue takes the question "Is Christianity valid?" out of the realm of philosophy and makes it a question of history. Does Christianity have a historically acceptable basis? Is sufficient evidence available to warrant belief in the resurrection?

Some facts relevant to the resurrection are these: Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet who claimed to be the Christ prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, was arrested, judged a political criminal, and crucified. Three days after his death and burial, some women who went to his tomb found the body gone. His disciples claimed that God had raised him from the dead and that he had appeared to them various times before ascending into heaven.

From this foundation, Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and has continued to exert great influence down through the centuries.

Did the resurrection actually happen?

### **JESUS' BURIAL**

The body of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish burial customs, was wrapped in a linen cloth. About 100 pounds of aromatic spices, mixed together to form a gummy substance, were applied to the wrappings of cloth about the body.<sup>1</sup>

After the body was placed in a solid rock tomb,<sup>2</sup> an extremely large stone (weighing approximately two tons) was rolled by means of levers against the entrance of the tomb.<sup>3</sup>

A Roman guard of strictly disciplined men was stationed to guard the tomb. Fear of punishment "produced flawless attention to duty, especially in the night watches."<sup>4</sup> This guard affixed on the tomb the Roman seal, a stamp of Roman power and authority.<sup>5</sup> The seal was meant to prevent vandalizing.

Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb's entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law.

But the tomb was empty.

#### THE EMPTY TOMB

The followers of Jesus said he had risen from the dead. They reported that he appeared to them during a period of forty days, showing himself to them by many "convincing proofs" (some versions say "infallible proofs").<sup>6</sup> Paul the apostle said that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of his followers at one time, the majority of whom were still alive and could confirm what Paul wrote.<sup>7</sup>

Paul Althaus states that the resurrection "could not have been maintained in Jerusalem for a single day, for a single hour, if the emptiness of the tomb had not been established as a fact for all concerned."<sup>9</sup>

Paul L. Maier concludes: "If all the evidence is weighed carefully and fairly, it is indeed justifiable, according to the canons of historical research, to conclude that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was actually empty on the morning of the first Easter. And no shred of evidence has yet been discovered in literary sources, epigraphy, or archaeology that would disprove this statement."<sup>10</sup>

How can we explain the empty tomb? Can it possibly be accounted for by a natural cause?

Based on overwhelming historical evidence, Christians believe that Jesus was bodily resurrected in time and space by the supernatural power of God. The difficulties of belief may be great, but the problems inherent in unbelief present even greater difficulties.

The situation at the tomb after the resurrection is significant. The Roman seal was broken, which meant automatic crucifixion upside down for those who did it. The large stone was moved up and away from not just the entrance, but from the entire massive sepulchre, looking as if it had been picked up and carried away." The guard unit had fled. Justin in his Digest 49.16 lists eighteen offenses for which a guard unit could be put to death. These included falling asleep or leaving one's position unguarded.

The theories advanced to explain the resurrection from natural causes are weak; they actually help to build confidence in the truth of the resurrection.

### THE WRONG TOMB?

A theory propounded by Kirsopp Lake assumes that the women who reported the body missing had mistakenly gone to the wrong tomb. If so, then the disciples who went to check up on the women's statement must also have gone to the wrong tomb. We can be certain, however, that the Jewish authorities, who had asked for that Roman guard to be stationed at the tomb to prevent the body from being stolen, wouldn't have been mistaken about the location. Nor would the Roman guards, for they were there.

If a wrong tomb were involved, the Jewish authorities would have lost no time in producing the body from the proper tomb, thus effectively quenching for all time any rumor of a resurrection.

### SWOON THEORY

Popularized by Venturini several centuries ago and often quoted today, the swoon theory says that Jesus didn't really die; he merely fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood. Everyone thought him dead, but later he was resuscitated and the disciples thought it to be a resurrection.

The skeptic David Friedrich Strauss—himself no believer in the resurrection—gave the deathblow to any thought that Jesus revived from a swoon: "It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who still at last yielded to his sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death, at the most could only have given it an elegiac voice, but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship."<sup>12</sup>

### THE BODY STOLEN?

Another theory maintains that the body was stolen by the disciples while the guard slept.<sup>13</sup>

J. N. D. Anderson has been dean of the faculty of law at the University of London, chairman of the department of Oriental law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, and director of the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London. Commenting on the proposition that the disciples stole Christ's body, he says: "This would run totally contrary to all we know of them: their ethical teaching, the quality of their lives, their

steadfastness in suffering and persecution. Nor would it begin to explain their dramatic transformation from dejected and dispirited escapists into witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle."14

The theory that the Jewish or Roman authorities moved Christ's body is no more reasonable an explanation for the empty tomb than theft by the disciples. If the authorities had the body in their possession or knew where it was, why, when the disciples were preaching the resurrection in Jerusalem, didn't they explain that they had taken it?

If they had, why didn't they explain exactly where the body lay? Why didn't they recover the corpse, put it on a cart, and wheel it through the center of Jerusalem? Such an action would certainly have destroyed Christianity.

Dr. John Warwick Montgomery comments: "It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it simply by producing the body of Jesus."15

## **Excerpt: Chapter 10 -- Isn't There Some Other Way?**

Recently at the University of Texas a graduate student approached me and asked, "Why is Jesus the only way to a relationship with God?" I had shown that Jesus claimed to be the only way to God, that the testimony of the Scriptures and the apostles was reliable, and that there was sufficient evidence to warrant faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. Yet he had the question, "Why Jesus? Isn't there some other way to a relationship with God? What about Buddha? Mohammed? Can't an individual simply live a good life? If God is such a loving God, then wouldn't he accept all people just the way they are?"

A businessman said to me, "Evidently you have proven that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Aren't there other ways also to a relationship with God apart from Jesus?"

The above comments are indicative of many people's questions today about why one has to trust Jesus as Savior and Lord in order to have a relationship with God and experience the forgiveness of sin. I answered the student by saying that many people don't understand the nature of God. Usually the question is "How can a loving God allow a sinful individual to go to hell?" I would ask, "How can a holy, just, righteous God allow a sinful individual into his presence?" A misunderstanding of the basic nature and character of God has been the cause of so many theological and ethical problems. Most people understand God to be a loving God and they don't go any further. The problem is that God is not only a God of love. He is also a righteous, just, and holy God.

We basically know God through his attributes. An attribute is not a part of God. I used to think that if I took all the attributes of God—holiness, love, justice, righteousness—and added them up, the sum total would equal God. Well, that's not true. An attribute isn't something that is a part of God but something that is true of God. For example, when we say God is love, we don't mean that a part of God is love, but that love is something that is true of God. When God loves he is simply being himself.

Here is a problem that developed as a result of humanity entering into sin. God in eternity past decided to create man and woman. Basically I believe that the Bible indicates he created man and woman in order to share his love and glory with them. But when Adam and Eve rebelled and went their own individual ways, sin entered the human race. At that point individuals became sinful or separated from God. This is the "predicament" that God found himself in. He created men and women to share his glory with them,

yet they spurned his counsel and command and chose to sin. And so he approached them with his love to save them. But because he is not only a loving God, but a holy, just, righteous God, his very nature would destroy any sinful individual. The Bible says. "For the wages of sin is death." So, you might say, God had a problem.

Within the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—a decision was made, Jesus, God the Son, would take upon himself human flesh. He would become the God-man. This is described in John 1 where it says that the Word became flesh and tabernacled or dwelt among us. And also in Philippians 2 where it says that Christ Jesus emptied himself and took on the form of a man.

Jesus was the God-man. He was just as much man as if he had never been God and just as much God as if he had never been man. By his own choice he lived a sinless life, wholly obeying the Father. The biblical declaration that "the wages of sin is death" did not apply to him. Because he was not only finite man but infinite God, he had the infinite capacity to take upon himself the sins of the world. When he went to the cross almost 2000 years ago, a holy, just, righteous God poured out his wrath upon his Son, And when Jesus said, "It is finished," the just, righteous nature of God was satisfied. You could say that at that point God was "set free" to deal with humanity in love without having to destroy a sinful individual, because through Jesus' death on the cross. God's righteous nature was satisfied.

An incident that took place several years ago in California illuminates what Jesus did on the cross in order to solve the problem God had in dealing with the sin of humanity. A young woman was picked up for speeding. She was ticketed and taken before the judge. The judge read off the citation and said, "Guilty or not guilty?" The woman replied, "Guilty," The judge brought down the gavel and fined her \$100 or ten days. Then an amazing thing took place. The judge stood up, took off his robe, walked down around in front, took out his billfold, and paid the fine. What's the explanation of this? The judge was her father. He loved his daughter, yet he was a just judge. His daughter had broken the law and he couldn't simply say to her, "Because I love you so much, I forgive you. You may leave." If he had done that, he wouldn't have been a righteous judge. He wouldn't have upheld the law. But he loved his daughter so much that he was willing to take off his judicial robe and come down in front and represent her as her father and pay the fine.

This illustration pictures to some extent what God did for us through Jesus Christ. We sinned. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death," No matter

how much he loved us, God had to bring down the gavel and say death, because he is a righteous and just God. And yet, being a loving God, he loved us so much that he was willing to come down off the throne in the form of the man Christ Jesus and pay the price for us, which was Christ's death on the cross.

At this point many people ask the question, "Why couldn't God just forgive?" An executive of a large corporation said, "My employees often do something, break something, and I just forgive them." Then he added. "Are you trying to tell me I can do something that God can't do?" People fail to realize that wherever there is forgiveness there's a payment. For example, let's say my daughter breaks a lamp in my home. I'm a loving and forgiving father, so I put her on my lap, and I hug her and I say, "Don't cry, honey. Daddy loves you and forgives you." Now usually the person I tell that story to says, "Well, that's what God ought to do," Then I ask the question, "Who pays for the lamp?" The fact is, I do. There's always a price in forgiveness. Let's say somebody insults you in front of others and later you graciously say, "I forgive you," Who bears the price of the insult? You do.

This is what God has done. God has said, "I forgive you." But he was willing to pay the price himself through the cross.