

# Who is Jesus?

## 1 John 1:1–4

### Introduction

Christianity is unique among all the other religions of the world. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam all have their adherents, but I contest that Christianity is superior to them all.

The essence of every other religion puts man's effort at the center of his eternity. It is evidenced by pleas like these:

- Work hard enough.
- Wait long enough.
- Be good enough.
- Try hard enough.

By contrast, Christianity puts Jesus at the center of eternity and says, "Jesus is enough." Let me summarize it this way: Other religions say, "*Do this and live*"; Christianity says, "*It's done; now live.*"

Christianity, unlike some other religions, is not built on morality or ethics. It certainly contains morality and ethics, but Christianity stands or falls on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The options as to who Jesus is and what Jesus did can basically be reduced to four:

- Liar – Someone who simply was not who he claimed to be and knew it.
- Lunatic – Someone who thought he was somebody, but in fact was not.
- Legend – Someone who was not who others later imagined him to be.
- Lord – He is who He said He was. Everything He said is true.<sup>1</sup>

In our twenty-first century context, we constantly face misunderstandings, distortions, inaccuracies, and outright denials of the Jesus revealed in the Bible. But these falsifications and confusions are not new. The apostle John faced the same challenges in the first century, and he

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1, 2, & 3 John* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014), 3. This argument is adapted from C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*.

penned 1 John to set the record straight. I want to answer this question today: “Who is Jesus?” It is essential that we get the Jesus question right!

I want you to picture this war-torn, battered soldier of the cross at age 80 sitting down to write this letter. But he is not just sitting on his front porch, rocking his life away. He still has a vital and vibrant ministry to fulfill. He is still preaching in Ephesus and writing letters to churches. While sitting down to write this letter, suddenly his eyes light up with the energy of a child. He experiences a heightened sense of intensity as he dives into the defense of “Who Jesus Is.”

**Transition:** This passage reveals three non-negotiables about this Jewish man who lived for thirty obscure years in a little country in the Middle East. It first shows . . .

### 1. Jesus is a real Person (verse 1).

There existed a band of deficient theologians during this day named Docetists. They taught Jesus was not a real living, breathing person. “He is a ghost—nothing more than a phantom,” they said. They did not deny Jesus *appeared* to be human; rather, they denied He was *actually* human. This heresy infiltrated the church only fifty to sixty years after the birth of the church.

Notice the four evidences of His reality. John and the apostles heard, saw, looked upon, and touched this Jewish man.

- **Heard**<sup>2</sup> – John heard the audible voice of Jesus. On one occasion, when hundreds of soldiers came on a manhunt for Jesus, Jesus said, “I am.” He was attesting to the fact that He was “I AM” of Exodus 3. Immediately, hundreds of well trained military men took an invisible blast to the chest that dropped them on their backs. They heard the voice of Jesus. You may ask if I have ever heard the audible voice of Jesus. No! I have heard something much louder. I have heard His still small voice through His Word.
- **Seen** – This word has the idea of seeing with understanding. This word pictures pieces of a puzzle fitting together perfectly. The apostles heard His claims, saw His miracles,

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<sup>2</sup> Both *heard* and *seen* are perfect indicative active, expressing action in the past with lasting results. This indicates that the hearing and seeing are still making a difference.

experienced His power, and started to put the pieces together. These men spent three years looking at Jesus.

Not only did these men hear the *audible voice* of Jesus, see the physical body of Jesus, but they also studied the *actual person* of Jesus.

- **Looked upon**<sup>3</sup> – The verb *theaomai* gives us our English word *theater*. It refers to contemplation—like watching actors on a stage. John is saying, “Jesus was on the stage of human history, and we carefully watched Him play out His role as the God-man.”<sup>4</sup>
- **Touched** – Well, John, maybe you are hearing and seeing things. Could your mind be playing tricks with you? No! *I* touched Him. *We* touched Him. This is not hearsay or a secondhand account. I am a witness. I give an eye-witness account that Jesus walked this earth as a human being. He was 100% human.

John is living in the last decade of the first century and here writes a rigorous defense of the humanity of Jesus. He is possibly the only man alive to have seen Jesus in the flesh. John, the last living Apostle at this time, says that Jesus is not a fairy tale, a myth, a phantom, or an illusion. John says, “Just as surely as I am a man, Jesus was a man.”

**Transition:** As I mentioned earlier, John reveals three non-negotiables about this Jewish man who lived for thirty obscure years in a little country in the Middle East. We find that Jesus is a real person and, secondly, that Jesus is God.

## 2. Jesus is God (verse 2).

“That which was from the beginning”<sup>5</sup> (verse 1). There has never been a time when the Son was not. Never! We call this the pre-existence of Christ. He existed before Bethlehem.

“Concerning the Word of life” (end of verse 1). John wrote many books in your Bible: the Gospel according to John; 1, 2, and 3 John; and the Revelation. The gospel record was the

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<sup>3</sup> This verb expresses the long, continual gazing and studying on the part of John.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Davey, “Eyewitness,” Colonial Baptist Church, accessed October 17, 2015, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/20130113-am.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> The “beginning” could refer to the beginning of creation, Christian preaching, or of Jesus’ ministry. Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 591.

first book John wrote, and the Revelation was the last. 1, 2, and 3 John are sandwiched in between. When John arrives at the end of verse one, he recycles a term he has used before. Notice the term *word*. You may remember John using it in John 1:1–3: “In the beginning was the *Word*, and the *Word* was with God and the *Word* was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made [italics added].”

Some of you may have encountered people that call themselves Jehovah’s Witnesses. They do not deny that Jesus is the Son of God, but they deny Jesus is God. They will agree heartily with you that Jesus was a good man, but deny that He is the God-man. They will go to John 1:1 and say that the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was *a* god. Without getting too complicated, they replace the word *the* with the letter *a*. They replace the definite article with an indefinite article. The Greek language has no indefinite article, so we have to supply those for understanding. In other words, Greek does not have a word for *a* or *an*. But Greek does have a word for *the*. Actually, there are about twenty-four ways of saying the word *the*. In the Greek, this passage does not say the Word was a god, but it actually says God was *The Word*.

That means Jesus was not just a man of God, or just the son of God, but He was God. It is no small matter to be wrong on the person of Jesus. It is possible to accept the Jesus of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and still go to hell. Any Jesus that we have created that is not divine is not the Jesus of the Bible.

The Gospel according to John shows us that Jesus is God. 1 John shows us Jesus was with God. We see both deity and a hint to the Trinity in these combined passages.

I can see the stumbling block that keeps so many people from believing. Don't you? One scholar said it this way:

Many are willing to believe in Christ if he remains a merely spiritual reality. But when we preach that Christ has become a particular man in a particular place issuing particular commands and dying on a particular cross exposing the particular sins of our particular lives, then the preaching ceases to be acceptable for many.

I don’t think it is so much the mystery of a divine and human nature in one person that causes most people to stumble over the doctrine of the incarnation. The stumbling block is that if the doctrine is true, every single person in the world must obey this one particular Jewish man. Everything he says is law. Everything he did is perfect. And the particularity of his work and word flow out into history in the form of a particular

inspired book (written in the particular languages of Greek and Hebrew) that claims a universal authority over every other book that has ever been written.<sup>6</sup>

Even Benjamin Franklin answered the Jesus Question incorrectly. In a letter dated March 9, 1790, he wrote:

As to Jesus of Nazareth . . . I think the system of morals, and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England some doubts as to his divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now . . .<sup>7</sup>

When we move into verse 2, we find that John forms a parenthesis to make clear beyond all measure that the life John bears witness of was revealed by God in the historical person of Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

“The life was made manifest”<sup>9</sup> (verse 2) – The person that has always existed is now being shown in a new way for the first time. God took the initiative to make Himself known in history—through Jesus. Jesus Christ intersected human history. Jesus invaded space and time so God could be seen.

Jesus claimed to be God. He asserted that He was 100% God and 100% man. He was not 50% God and 50% man, 100% God and 0% man, or 100% man and 0% God. John has zero tolerance for error and those who perpetrate error. You should too!

**Transition:** Who is Jesus? He was not a religious founder. He was not the first Christian, a spiritual nut, or a guru leader. Jesus is a real person, Jesus is God, and . . .

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<sup>6</sup> John Piper, “Eternal Life Has Appeared in Christ,” *Desiring God*, accessed October 17, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/eternal-life-has-appeared-in-christ>.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Franklin, “Letter from Franklin to Ezra Stiles, 9 March 1790,” *Constitution Society*, accessed October 17, 2015, <http://constitution.org/primarysources/franklin-stiles.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Rogers and Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 591.

<sup>9</sup> This verb speaks of Christ’s first coming. The word means “to be revealed.”

### 3. Jesus is our basis of fellowship (verses 2–4).

“Proclaim”<sup>10</sup> (verses 2 and 3) – After this message is proclaimed, people turn from their sins and do not go back (the Bible calls this repenting); then, they become a part of the family of God. Fellowship is not a common word we use today, but companionship, friendship, and camaraderie are. Jesus is the basis of true companionship.

We do not have fellowship<sup>11</sup> because . . .

- We share the same language.
- We share the same background.
- We share the same status in society.
- We share the same city of residence.

Neither do we have fellowship because we have the same skin color or because we spend time in the same building designated for religious purposes.

No! We have fellowship because we share the same life in Christ! We have fellowship with God, with Jesus, and with one another. You see, because we belong to Him, we actually belong to one another. We have a camaraderie far richer and deeper than a . . .

- College fraternity
- Country club
- Community club
- Sports team
- Political party
- National identity
- Ethnic identity

When Jesus becomes our Savior, God becomes our Father and Christians become our brothers and sisters. It is a package deal! This fellowship breaks down the artificial barriers. This fellowship will never allow someone to . . .

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<sup>10</sup> The present, indicative, active verb indicates they are currently declaring who Jesus is daily.

<sup>11</sup> This word indicates the setting aside of private interests and desires and the joining in with another for common purposes. Rogers and Rogers, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, 591.

- Make a racist joke. I spoke with a preacher one time who pastored a predominately white middle-aged congregation, and he had a couple of black people who began to attend his service. He told me that he was going to start a new church. I thought that was great. I am all for church planting. Then he proceeded to tell me why he was starting a new church. He said he was starting a new church so that “they” could have a place to worship and so that “we” can have a place to worship. He did not understand fellowship. His view of fellowship was ethnic identity.
- Look down upon someone is not as educated as you are.
- Have a superior attitude toward *anyone* concerning *anything*!

This fellowship will force you to put aside your personal preferences and join in for the greater cause. Change will not disrupt the fellowship; personal preferences will not dissolve the sense of community. I am here to ask you this question: Are you Christian enough . . .

- Not to make a big deal when something does not go your way in the church?
- Not to make a big deal when something does not go your way at the job?

We have more in common with a believer in a communist country than with a red-blooded, flag-waving Republican non-believer. We have more in common with an African Christian than with the person who works at your job but is a non-believer. We have more comradeship with a Chinese brother who does not speak our language than with a shopping partner or hunting buddy who does not know Christ. You see, our fellowship is not *superficial*; it is *spiritual*.

In verse four, we find that this truth brings joy. Notice verse four. Some translations say “our joy” and others say “your joy.” Either one is fine. Their joy was John’s joy, and John’s joy was their joy. Jesus brings joy. This fellowship brings joy. We should have a passion to enjoy this life.

## **Conclusion**

This fellowship will force you to make concessions for the greater good of your spiritual family. It will not be difficult to make those concessions. In fact, it will be joyful. This fellowship will not allow you to become fickle or nitpicky in your relationships.

This is the first in a series of messages through the book of 1 John. I am praying this study will increase your joy (verse 4), increase your assurance, and increase your holiness. I am going to ask you to make this your prayer.

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