

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA**

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Scripture: Various

***"Why I Believe" (part 6)***

**AN OBNOXIOUS NEIGHBOR**

A few days ago in the early evening, my wife and I were walking our dog in our subdivision. As we were walking, I noticed a Hillary Clinton sign in the front yard of a home on one of the corners. There also was a little white sign attached to it with writing. Curious, I stopped and began to read what it said, *"If you are reading these words you are trespassing. If you come back again I will call the N C (Niagara County) Sheriff's Department. You are being watched with a video cam."* I was like, "Wow, this guy has some issues." Of course, I could read the sign from the road and was not on his property. Well, we proceeded to walk around the corner and up the road and then back again by the man's home. It just so happened that when we came back by the home our dog walked on a corner of his property. After we turned the corner, all of a sudden I heard shouting. The man in the home apparently had seen us and he was not happy. While we were already forty yards from his house, we heard the words, *"I don't want your dog on my property. I don't care if the dog is just walking. If you are on my property again, I will call the police."* At that moment, I took my hands to cuff my mouth and I was going to respond but Kathleen looked at me as if to say no, and then she yelled back, *"Ok!"* We then turned around and kept walking.

Now you are probably wondering what I was going to say? I guess I could have said a lot of things. But seriously, what I thought about saying was *"What happened? You used to be such a nice guy!"* For I had remembered one time a couple years ago of waving to him and him waving back, but then I remembered - I was running by myself, I had no dog! Moreover, if I had said anything this time, he probably wouldn't have heard it! I am glad I didn't say anything. My wife was right - just keep my mouth shut.

As we were walking, I was thinking of all the things I could have done and they really were not I would say "priestly." It's hard when you don't want to respond to someone who is being rude or has crossed the line, in a way that is controlled and peaceful. But then again isn't that the way of the cross? Isn't that the way of Jesus? Jesus said, ***"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*** Meekness is not weakness; it is simply quiet strength. It is not striking back when you have the right to or the power to. It is taking the high road, the road to heaven. It is contrary to human nature and to human history. It is one among many reasons why I believe Jesus is not a man-made myth or a phony. Jesus said, ***'You have heard it said, "You should love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'"***

**THE FOURTH AND MOST IMPORTANT REASON TO BELIEVE**

We have been doing a series on *Why I Believe*. We have already looked at three reasons - Creation, Truth, and the Word of God. Today, I would like to look at a fourth - Jesus Christ Himself. In fact, I believe that Jesus is the greatest and most powerful reason of any to believe. In fact, of the seven reasons I first gave on Easter Sunday and which are the basis for this series, Jesus is at the center of all of them. I

purposely put Jesus as fourth, as the middle reason of the seven. Let's look at the other six briefly as it pertains to Christ. Creation? The Bible says **Col. 1:16-17**, "*For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*" Truth? Jesus is the embodiment of truth. He said in **Jn. 14:6**, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*" Recall before Pilate Jesus said the reason He came to earth was "*to testify to the truth.*" And the Word of God? Jesus said to the Jewish leaders in **Jn. 5:39**, "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;*" How about the fifth reason? Life transformation! Jesus is the reason why we are here. Jesus is the One who changes lives. And the Body of Christ? The Church? You can't have a true Church without Jesus as its head. We are called the Body of *Christ* for a reason. Finally, Israel - Jesus is a descendant of Israel, the progeny of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the descendant of David, the One who came to the lost sheep of Israel and who will be returning to Israel! So it is obvious that Christ is the foundation for all reasons to believe. But now let's look more closely on why that is so.

### **THE MOST UNIQUE AND PROFOUND PERSON TO EVER LIVE**

If Jesus is God in the flesh, He would be unlike anyone who has ever lived. His nature, His words, His actions would all reflect a reality that transcends time and the life itself, a reality that is intellectually deeper, relationally and more powerful than anything man can be or come up with - and one who would impact the world more than anyone or anything else in human history. And this is exactly what we find in looking at the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Now when analyzing the Person of Jesus Christ, there are three areas to look at - what is said about Him, what He says about Himself, and what He does. We can only touch on these briefly, but in our short time together, we will see how the evidence is overwhelming. Jesus is who the Bible says He is!

### **WHAT GOD'S WORD SAYS ABOUT JESUS**

**First, what does the Word of God say about Jesus Christ?** Let's just look at the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures. These sacred writings were all written hundreds of years BEFORE Christ was born. And within the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, there are 300 prophecies that pertain to the coming of the Messiah, the Christ. In other words, these prophecies are predictions that a person, specially anointed by God, would be coming to the earth to take care of sin, to judge the world and to establish God's Kingdom on earth. That's right - 300 prophecies in the Old Testament! I want us to just look at a couple of these passages briefly. First, **Daniel 7:13-14**: "*In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*"

Here we have the vision of a "Son of Man," coming to the world and all people will worship Him. His throne will be the throne of God. It was this title, "the Son of Man" that Jesus used to refer to Himself throughout His ministry. The two most common titles used of Jesus were Son of Man and Son of God.

They reflect the truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is not part God and part man, or 75% God and 25% man or vice versa, He is 100% God and 100% man. This is what we declare in the Creeds. But it is not true because it is simply in the creeds. No. It is true because that is what God has revealed to us in His Word and by virtue of what Christ has declared about Himself.

Now let's turn to a more familiar passage. **John 1:1:** *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."* God becoming flesh. Jesus was born of a Virgin because though Jesus was a man, He also was God and could not have an earthly father. Otherwise, he would be fully man and NOT fully God. We see how this was predicted by another of the prophecies in the Old Testament. Look now at **Isaiah 9:6-7:** *"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."*

The Bible teaches that Jesus is the one predicted of old, the Messiah, God's anointed One who would come in the flesh as a man but would be God. There are literally dozens of passages that bear this out. We have only looked at three!

#### **WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT HIMSELF**

**Second, what does Jesus say about Himself?** Many are familiar with the seven I AM statements of Jesus in John's Gospel: *"I am the Bread of heaven which came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread He shall live forever."* *"I am the light of the world, whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness."* *"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture."* *"I am the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep."* *"I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in Me shall live even though he dies."* *"I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except by Me."* *"I am the vine, you are the branches, if you abide in my and I abide you, you will bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples, for apart from Me you can nothing."*

And then in addition to these seven "I AM" statements, Jesus echoed the words God spoke to Moses in the burning bush when Moses asked God whom shall he say sent him, and God said, *"I am who I am"* sent you. When they said we have Abraham as our father, Jesus said, *"Before Abraham was, I am!"*

He just is. He is ultimate reality. He is God in the flesh.

But let's leave John's Gospel for a moment. Do you know what is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke? Jesus said, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words will never pass away."* Do you know what that means? Jesus is God, for what is heaven and earth, creations of God. They will pass away but the very words which represent the heart of God will not and cannot pass away, for they are eternal. Only God is eternal, outside of time, and so is Jesus.

Jesus said this after predicting what would happen in the future. And one of those predictions was that the Temple would be destroyed within a generation of Jesus' death and it was - in 70 AD by the legions of Rome.

But there is more. When confronted by the religious leaders that his followers were eating on the Sabbath when they shouldn't have been, Jesus said, ***"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*** If Jesus were only a man or even a created being, He could not say He was Lord of the Sabbath. For who declared the seventh day to be the Sabbath in the first place? God. Only God is Lord of the Sabbath. So if Jesus says He is Lord of the Sabbath, He is in essence saying that He is God.

### **WHAT JESUS DID TO SHOW HE IS BOTH GOD AND MAN**

**Finally, what does Jesus do to demonstrate He in fact is God?** Well, first look at His teaching. We are told many times in the Gospels that the crowds were amazed at His teaching. But we don't have to be told. We can just look at the teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels to see that they are profound and revolutionary. Think of all the parables - earthly stories that convey incredible spiritual truths. Think about the aspects that are taught about the Kingdom of God- that greatness is about serving others, that what is most important in life is what's on the inside - "the heart," that selflessness and humility are to be the marks of the true believer. That love means more than taking care of those who are in your family or clan or tribe. Love means doing for others, and others means people who aren't like you, who are strangers or who may even be your enemies.

Think of the beatitudes themselves, ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, blessed are those who mourn, they shall be comforted, blessed are those who are persecuted."*** Where do you find such teaching anywhere? Nowhere do you find love so clearly defined and exemplified than by Jesus Christ.

But where Jesus sets Himself apart is when He talks about forgiveness. Jesus began His ministry with the message, ***"Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand."*** Repent from what? Sin. Sin is seeking of our own will instead of the will of God. It is what distorts our relationship with God, other people and the entire creation. And only God can forgive our sin. The Jews understood this.

So when Jesus said to the paralyzed man, ***"Son, your sins are forgiven,"*** Many of those present believed that Jesus committed blasphemy because only God can forgive sins. But then Jesus said, ***"So that you know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sin, I say to you, rise and walk,"*** and that is exactly what happened. The man who had been paralyzed rose and walked, He had been healed.

But what was Jesus first concerned about - showing His power to heal? No, letting people know that they could get right with God, that they could have a personal relationship with the living God as long as they recognized their need for God and to be forgiven of their sin. Let's face it we all are sinners. No one is righteous, the Bible rightfully declares. No one. And it is because of our sin that we have all the problems we do in life. But Jesus came to take away the power of sin. And He did it by becoming like us! He didn't just show His deity by declaring forgiveness and healing the sick; He did it by being tempted in every way as we are and yet not sinning! He was perfect, but He still struggled in the flesh. He experienced hunger, thirst, abandonment, rejection, sorrow, uncertainty, and temptation; but He remained

faithful as He relied on His Father and the Holy Spirit while He was in the flesh, thereby giving us an example.

The incredible act of Christ is that He came to take our place to die on the cross as a perfect sacrifice, not only satisfying God's justice but demonstrating God's love. And because of what Christ did, He now gives that same authority to His Church! That is what we read in our Gospel lesson today from John 20. You see, forgiveness leads to a right relationship and a right relationship leads to the Holy Spirit living in us. So before you had the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, you had to have the cross and the resurrection. It is why Jesus said in **John 16** that He must go so that another Comforter will come to be with us forever; Jesus said that He (i.e. the Holy Spirit) will take from Me (Jesus) and impart it to You (us).

And through it all, Christ not only demonstrated power over sin and sickness but He demonstrated power over Satan; He demonstrated power over creation - the laws of physics when He walked on the water and multiplied the loaves and fish, and even the weather itself, when He calmed the storm and raging sea. And finally, He demonstrated power over death itself by becoming death. He robbed death of its sting by dying like us, thereby showing that He has gone through everything you and I can and will go through and that He is with us every step of the way. It is why there is no greater message of hope, because there is no one greater than Jesus! On top of that, He accepted worship. When the disciples worshipped Him, He did not stop them. Why? He was God in the flesh. For Jews to worship Jesus after knowing the first and second commandments which say that you are not to make for yourselves any graven images to worship and bow down to; and that you are to have no other gods, shows that they recognized that Jesus was indeed different! He was God in the flesh!

### **LORD, LIAR, or LUNATIC?**

Anglican author and theologian, C.S. Lewis put it this way- when it comes to who is Jesus, there are only three options - Lord, Liar or Lunatic. Most everyone thinks Jesus was a great man of God, a great prophet or theologian, a wise moral teacher. The world's religions recognize this. But that cannot be an option. For either Jesus is who He said He was - Lord; and certainly everything written in this book (the Bible) testifies to this, and everything He said and did reiterates this truth or He is not. And if He is not, then that would make Him one of two things - a liar - He knew He wasn't the Son of God or the Messiah but He pretended He was and as a result would have been the instigator of the greatest fraud known to man. But everything He said and did reflected the opposite of falsehood, so that really doesn't hold water. Well then maybe He was a lunatic. In other words, He really thought He was the Son of God but in reality He wasn't. He was just crazy. But again, the record doesn't allow for such a thing but it is clear by what is presented in the Gospels and how Jesus spoke and conducted Himself that He was not deluded or crazy. And so if Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, we are left with only one option - LORD!

As Thomas in **Jn. 20:28**, exclaimed after first doubting but then seeing Jesus' nailed, scarred hands and side, my we also respond with the words, "**My Lord and My God!**" My we recognize Jesus for who He is, the Christ, the one and only Son of God" For when we do we will be on the road to understanding the true meaning of life and the road that leads to eternal life! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!