



- The Life and Times of Jesus Christ - - "The Darkness did not Comprehend It" -

- John 1:1-5

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of Jesus Fellowship of Believers
in Menomonie, Wisconsin
on July 26th, 2015

John 1: (1) *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* (2) *He was in the beginning with God.* (3) *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* (4) *In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* (5) *And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*

**"God will use what is in the light to restore,
the enemy will use what is in the dark to destroy"**

The Harbor

For hundreds of years......seemingly from the moment of his departure, there have been those who have been trying to kill Jesus a second time, this time in the hearts and minds of men. Still the 'occupying Rome' and the 'religious Pharisee'...the names have changed but the rolls have not. Both those who seek to rule by the "I WILL" rather than the "I AM," and those that attempt to usurp the sovereignty of the Creator and sit in His place of religious authority.

There has been innumerable attempts to prove that the whole matter is merely fairy-tail, and that Jesus never existed, even despite secular scholarly acclaim that the Bible is one of the most reliably preserved and historically accurate books in history. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote around the first century AD and published a 20 volume historical work on the Jewish world at that time. In one of his books he records the following: *"Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works,--a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."*¹

The Roman historian and senator Tacitus also referred to Christ, his execution by Pontius Pilate, and the existence of early Christians in Rome in one page of his final work, *Annals* (written ca. AD 116), book 15, chapter 44: *"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind"*.²

¹ Flavius Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 18, Chapter 3) . Flavii Iosephi opera. B. Niese. Berlin. Weidmann. 1892

² Tacitus; *Annals* (written ca. AD 116), book 15, chapter 44

Both of these accounts of course have been called into question and often accused of forgery. Ironically, the rest of these historians accounts are generally accepted as accurate except the accounts of Christ. How convenient. Such is the result of worldly critical review that starts from the presupposition that such *can't* be true, so something must be amiss. One would think that if someone was to forge a false account for propaganda purposes he would have been a little more elaborate and certainly more compelling!

Others admit...albeit often reluctantly, that Jesus *was* here, and was indeed a 'good man' and a 'good teacher' but He wasn't God...He wasn't deity. But how can that be.? I assure you that if any of us were to stand here and take upon himself the mantle of deity, to say that he was 'God in flesh' he would not be thought of as a "good man and good teacher" but rather as bit of a nut. No...either Jesus was indeed who said He was, or he was a liar and a bit of a lunatic. Because He did indeed take upon Himself such a title. (See John 6:51, 8:58, Mark 2:28, Mark 14:60-64,Luke 22:70, etc). Certainly the people of that day understood that He was claiming as much. In Mark 2 they tried to stone Him to death for such a claim! The people had to choose what to believe, just as everyone of us do today.

In order to look back to the beginnings of His ministry, we must look beyond His physical departure...His return to the Father. The second generation ministry Jesus Christ...the account of a carpenters son from the nothing town of Nazareth, was often received as perhaps the first 'urban myth.'" A legend, a fable, a folktale invented and propagated reportedly by His radical followers and zealous adherents to His teachings, His philosophy...His musings. And now for 2000 years, it has been an epic struggle between the ideologue and the demagogue; the revolutionary supporter and the 'spin-doctors' who have made use of whatever current prejudices and rumors that happen to be blowing in the winds as a stepping stone to power. The battle has often degraded to nothing more than school yard tomfoolery, where there is such injurious and inflammatory behaviors such as name calling and sticking out tongues at each other.

Who has so graced this earth with their presence that it was shook to its very core? Who in history so profoundly transformed its culture? It's morality? Jesus appears in art, literature, secular historical documents, social media, billboards, big screen movies, bumper stickers, tshirts, and radio stations. Yet we are still debating today whether He even physically existed? So loved by some and so utterly despised by others, no matter your position on Jesus, no one can argue that He was not, *is* not, controversial and earth-shattering!

For many, the story of Jesus begins on any Christmas morning. It begins in a manger with 'Silent Night' playing in the background. Yet John says in his gospel "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*" (John 1:1-2)

John's testimony, of course, was post-departure of Jesus and after everything ultimately played out. But we don't have to wait that long. In fact, we only need to wait 26 verses into the Bible itself, ...before the original creation was even complete: Genesis 1:26 *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Who was "us" unless the triune godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was present from the beginning? Those who penned the scripture under the power of the Spirit thought so, as has scholars down through the ages, noting that "US" and "OUR" herein is capitalized reflecting a proper noun, like a name...denoting the person of God.

In scripture there is found something called a "Theophany" or a "Christophany." Perhaps such a thing has never been a concern to you as you may relegate such concepts to those nerdy theological types, but their existence in the Old Testament greatly matter! For these "appearances" speak to the deity, the "everywhere presence", the eternal aspects of Jesus Christ. These appearances could not have been mere angelic manifests. It seems that Abraham spoke to the pre-incarnate Christ in Genesis 18; (*Incarnation: Deity manifesting in the flesh; I.E. God in human form via Jesus Christ*) "*Then the LORD appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day. So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the ground, and said, "My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant."* (**Genesis 18:1-3**)

As Jacob did in Genesis 23: *Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. . . . And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:24–25, 28–30)*

To Samson's mother... *And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman ('Note capital A on Angel!') and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name. (Judges 13:3–6)*

This "capital A" Angel ... "THE" Angel of the Lord as scripture renders it, appears throughout the Old Testament, and certainly manifested behavior well beyond any angelic being.

- He is identified as God in *Judges 6:11* and *Zechariah 12:8*.
- He performed miracles in *Judges 6:21* and *13:20*.
- The "Angel" accurately foretold future events in *Judges 13:3*.
- His name is "wonderful" in *Judges 13:18* and *Isaiah 9:6*.
- He destroyed 185,000 soldiers of the Assyrian army in one night in *2 Kings 19:35*.
- He miraculously and mysteriously appeared in front of Balaam, stopping his donkey in his tracks in Numbers 22.
- To Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3... and the list goes on...

While angels have occasionally performed some of these actions, such as miracles and prophecy, there are clear examples when "the Angel of the LORD" cannot be viewed as a normal angel. He is occasionally identified as God, accepted worship, and at least two people who saw Him thought they would die for seeing Him face to face. These same attributes and activities are clearly attributed to God elsewhere in Scripture. The point in this theological explanation is that Jesus did not arrive in that manger on Christmas morning. No, "before the foundations of the earth were laid" He existed, engaged in the kingdom plan for humanity and was participating in the mystery of the triune Godhead.

Eventually... after man had exhausted all of his own efforts to redeem himself and his culture... through priests, and prophets, and kings... hundreds of years of personal struggle and corporate failure, the Old testament came to an end, as did the grand experiment of man's attempt to save himself. Jesus came as both the ultimate and still the *only* answer to the redemption of man.

Yet still around the world today we are inundated by religions and philosophies and credos presented as the answer to man's dilemma: his struggle, his strife, his emptiness, and his inability to control his life and destiny. An answer to death itself and man's constant fear of such. If we can't erase Him, let's replace Him. And 'replacements' were born... other religions for you to choose from. Religions of every kind and every flavor. Something for everyone! But it appears that all religions have the common denominator in them that you need to *do* and *be* in order to be accepted by God (with Christianity not really being a true religion for the absence of that element). Islam makes no promises of eternal life, as Allah may be in a bad mood that day that you roll in. Buddhism only promises you "nothingness" when you're done. Judaism is in real trouble because you have to follow every law, never breaking one, and since there is no temple to sacrifice in anymore, your pile of sin just keeps growing larger every day. But not really a problem because they don't believe in eternal life anyway.

Such a quandary of beliefs... a muddle of religious duck tape and bailing twine tying together pieces of belief systems and cultural leanings. Some latch on to pieces of the truth, and spin it to serve the flesh as well. Religions for the irreligious. Some political or social, some ascetic, some indulgent. But none filled the hearts and lives of their adherence. None brought rebirth and grace redemption.

The world does no better at their turn at bat. Physiology keeps changing its mind despite selling itself to modern man as the answer, never mind that it's been an unequivocal failure and we are a society crazier than ever. Recent polls tell us that one might expect "that 85 percent of psychology clients would improve with the help of a good friend and 40 per cent without even that."³ And if a shrink is not your cup of tea, then hey, there's always large quantities of legal pharmaceuticals to numb your consciousness or a multitude of illegal or marginally legal recreational one's to give you that ever illusive smile. And of course as a last ditch effort there is always heavy alcohol use. Maybe lots of money will do it, or lots of sex, or...and the list of mans efforts go on and on, reaching down throughout the centuries of our existence. And yet even a cursory viewing would show us that we are crazier, more unhappy, less fulfilled, less joyful, and less satisfied, and overall less stable than ever. "The difference between Christianity and every other faith in the world is that all other religions are about man trying to reach up to God. Christianity is about God reaching down to man." And the coming of Jesus is just that. God, reaching down, to man.

The plan was set forth from the sin of the garden. Ultimately, God would, out of his supreme albeit oft inexplicable love for His creation, would have to come here Himself. After all, he had for centuries tried to send His surrogates...His representatives with little success. Matthew 21:35 - "...and he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"

But wouldn't the plan be better if He had...*I don't know*, brought a little more 'splash?' Something loud...something very public...something with a parade? Why the baby thing? Why the human/man path? Hebrews 4:15 tells us it was so he could "sympathize with our weaknesses, (and who would eventually be).. tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." No one would ever be able to say that He just doesn't get it...He doesn't know...He doesn't understand. Showing up in the form of a man "He would make himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Phil 2:7) Jesus would come and walk and talk, and work and rest, and laugh and cry, and be hot and cold, and *feel*. He would be tempted...and suffer...He would live like a man, and He would die like a man. He would be the second Adam. This time doing it right, and by that making it right for all of us. It had to be God. And it had to be a man. It took a unity of the two. A unity that today He is offering all of us.

"They say that Christ is the prophet of the weak, and on the contrary He came to give strength to the languishing, and to raise up those trodden under foot to be higher than kings. They say that His is the religion of the sick and of the dying, and yet He heals the sick and brings the sleeping to life. They say that He is against life, and yet He conquers death; that He is the God of sadness, and yet He exhorts His followers to be joyful and promises an everlasting banquet of joy to His friends. They say that He introduced sadness and mortification into the world, and on the contrary when He was alive He ate and drank, and let His feet and hair be perfumed, and detested hypocritical fasts, and the penitential mummeries of vanity. Many have left Him because they never knew Him."

Giovanni Papini - THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The world is trying still to kill our Messiah. They keep digging holes and kicking His body in, but just like after the cross, He just won't stay dead! And the one thing that stops the presses and shuts the mouths of all the naysayers and every intellectual...the one incontrovertible and definitive proof of Jesus...ironically, is still ***you and me***. He is the one who has made the drunk sober, the addict free, the convict redeemed, the used restored, the sinner saved. He has brought the troubled peace, the fearful boldness, and made the blind to see. YOU are the greatest proof that Jesus was...

For once I was lost, but now I'm found...

³ Dineen, 2001 p.117