

Who is Jesus?

Session Overview

www.stmarylitleton.org/rciaresources - To register for the full RCIA program, to see the full calendar, or get class handouts.

Opening Discussion: What is the first time you really encountered Christianity or the Christian claim? What stuck out to you? What was appealing about it?

Historical Evidence for Jesus Outside of the Bible

- Flavius Josephus, Jewish Historian, 93 AD – Discusses the Christian movement and his death on a cross
- Babylonian Talmud, 70-200 AD – Mentions multiple times and accuses him of “witchcraft”
- Cornelius Tactitus, Roman Historian, 120 AD – makes explicit reference to the crucifixion of Jesus

Textual Criticism for the Authenticity of Scripture

- More manuscripts and earlier manuscripts indicate historical reliability.

Work	Written	Earliest Copy	Time Lapse	Copies
Herodotus	488-428 BC	AD 900	1,300 years	8
Thucydides	c.460-400 BC	AD 900	1,300 years	8
Tacitus	AD 100	AD 1,100	1,000 years	20
Caesar’s Gallic War	58-50 BC	AD 900	950 years	10
Livy’s Roman History	59 BC – AD 17	AD 900	900 years	20
New Testament	AD 40-100	AD 130 (full manuscripts AD 350)	30-310 years	5,000+ Greek 10,000 Latin 9,300 others

Historical Arguments for the Authenticity of Scripture

1. Multiple attestation
 - Multiple attestation refers to the principle that the more often a story or saying appears in independent traditions, the more probable its historicity.
 - Contemporary biblical criticism has been able to identify five independent traditions for the four Gospels, namely, Mark, Q, M (Matthew special), L (Luke special), and J (the independent Johannine tradition).
2. Discontinuity
 - Sayings or actions which are discontinuous with the attitudes, theology, or sayings of second-Temple Judaism or would be as underdeveloped because Jesus had sufficient authority to break with that tradition and there is no reason why the early Church would have preserved an undeveloped theology except in deference to Jesus’ having uttered it.
 - Examples: “Abba” for God is a very casual use, Jesus’ Baptism, use of “Son of Man”

Was Jesus Human?

We know from scripture that he had a human body. He ate, drank, got tired, suffered pain. He had human emotions such as love and joy. He had human experiences such as growing up in a family, working, experiencing death. The more important question, was he more than human?

What did Jesus Teach about Himself?

1. He centered his teaching on himself. "I am the way, the truth, and the life"; "I am the resurrection and the life".
2. Jesus exercises divinity when doing things like forgiving sins.
3. Jesus accepts Peter & Thomas' statements of his divinity.
4. Jesus says "I and the Father are One".

Evidence that Jesus is God

1. Jesus is the greatest moral teacher ever. The foundation for our culture.
2. Jesus performed a great number of miracles.
 - a. Water to Wine at Cana
 - b. Numerous healings
 - c. Raising Lazarus from the dead
3. Jesus lived what he preached, he was full of virtue to the highest degree
4. He fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies
5. He defeated death itself.

Evidence for the Resurrection

1. His tomb was empty!
 - a. Maybe he didn't really die? Unlikely with trained Roman soldiers. Water and blood coming from his side fits with his cause of death.
 - b. Maybe the disciples stole his body? But why would they be tortured and killed for a lie?
 - c. Maybe the authorities hid it? Then why wouldn't they show it when they heard claims that he was raised from the dead?
2. He was seen!
 - a. He was seen by the disciples multiple times. He was seen by 500.
 - b. He has physical traits, like eating fish in Lk 24:36.
3. The Immediate Effect
 - a. His followers from discouraged, beaten group who were hiding behind locked doors. Then started a global phenomenon of the Christian faith.
4. The Long Term
 - a. Christianity has come to every country, every corner of the globe, every socio-economic background.

"We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. The man we are talking about was and is just what he said or else insane or something worse. Now, it seems to me obvious that he was neither insane nor a fiend; and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God."

- C.S. Lewis