

In this series, we have covered many different things, but the main point we just keep coming back to is that simple fact, we all must choose. There are

many books out there which will teach many different philosophies about who Jesus was and is. However, the Gospels preserved for us in the New Testament and the writing which follows, all tell us the same thing. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise given to us from the creation, trusted in by men like Job, Abraham, and Moses, reconfirmed and illustrated through the chosen nation of Israel and the law God entrusted to them, and proclaimed to be just around the corner by John the Baptist. However, the choice is not a hard one if we are only willing to give Jesus a chance through seeking to actually know Him.

One of the biggest points made in this series, which I hope will stick with us all, is that Gnostics teach us God is unknowable, but the Bible tells us God is very knowable. This is why I say over and over in my writings that it's so dangerous to believe faith is simply blind belief. To believe this is to have nothing more than a Gnostic has. It's to say we have chosen what to put our trust in and now we are simply hoping for the best, but that is not what true faith is. Faith is the substance of what we hope for, which is: an eternal relationship with a very personable, knowable God, like the one who created man and came to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden even after they had sinned. (Gen. 3:6-9) Faith is the evidence that a place has been prepared for us that after this life passes - and we all know it will - we can be where God is! (Heb. 11:1, John 14:1-3)

So, the choice is not between two blind leaps, but between the foolish thoughts of man and his hope he can save himself, and therefore, not have to yield to a perfect God and a true relationship which proves God is the best thing a human could ever have. We get this opportunity not because Jesus was a man who died and left behind a wife and kids to start some secret order, but because Jesus is alive for evermore. Jesus did not entangle Himself with

DECODING THE TRUTH

PART VI

the pleasures of this flesh, but promised us a place with Him and a new incorruptible flesh. (John 6:24-71) He did not leave us

comfortless but prayed The Father send us The Holy Ghost. (John 14:15-17) Through The Holy Ghost's guidance, we are reminded of the fact Jesus is not only alive but returning to gather all those who desire to be with Him unto a place He has prepared for us, where the sin of this world and life will no longer grieve and vex our souls. (John 14:25-26, Rev. 21:1-4) Jesus was/is not simply one of many guides emanated from a higher power. He is The Highest Power in all that exists. (John 14:9) He told us so with His own mouth, (John 10:27-33) and that is why it is ridiculous to doubt that Jesus was who He said He was and still believe He was a great prophet of some sort instead of a crazy man. There just isn't any middle ground!

For example, it has been suggested by some false teachers that in Matthew chapter 16, Jesus was confused about who He really was and that was His reason for asking His apostles, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" This, of course, is an absurd interpretation of the Scripture, but there's the issue in a nutshell. Jesus was either accomplishing something special or He was mentally unstable, conflicted and confused!

The truth is, Jesus wanted to know what the disciples were hearing as they walked among others; and He wanted to know whether they had, by walking with Him, come to the right understanding in spite of the confused public opinion which surrounded them. In this story, we see the disciples explaining that many people believed Jesus was a reincarnation, or the like, of some past prophet or the contemporary John the Baptist. This is a very interesting fact. If people believed Jesus was some reincarnation of a long deceased prophet or somehow a very recent one, then they understood what a prophet was. The people obviously did not feel so far removed from long ago prophets that they did not understand even John the Baptist was one; and

the significant point here is that they all understood Jesus was not, “simply a prophet.” The answer was not that Jesus was a prophet “like” Elijah, Elisha, or John the Baptist; it was that He was somehow one of those prophets in a new form. This is because even the common people understood Jesus was something special, something unique, something more than even the greatest prophets they had ever known! What they came up with was the idea that Jesus was a great prophet of the past who had somehow come back in some new, more powerful form. This shows a very Gnostic way of thinking. In their minds, a great prophet who had originally been just a man, ascended through death or another means and then returned as something greater than any man could be in the first place. This is also why they believed the possibilities as to whom Jesus had been in the past were wide open. Any great prophet would do, because in Gnostic thinking, any man can ascend if he works to do so. Thoughts like this are why the Bible makes it clear that only one man can ascend to The Father, and only through Him do we have the opportunity to follow. (John 3:13)

Now, that was the common man’s take on the issue; but if we look at what the religious leaders of the day had to say about Jesus, we find they tried to simply blow Jesus off as a nobody, for the most part. They tried to point out the simpleness of Jesus’ humanity. They were trying to say, look this is no one special, He’s just a man like the rest of us. This shows us one good thing: the Jewish religious leaders were not Gnostic in their thoughts. They did not attempt to pass Jesus off as a prophet, not even of the false kind. Jesus had power which they tried to say was of Satan, at times, (Matt. 12:22-30) and they found constant offence in Jesus showing Himself as The Messiah, but they never said He was something great. They wanted it to be clear that Jesus was not, in their interpretation, anything special, much less the rightful King of Israel.

However, this contrast between the common people and the religious leaders shows us two distinct viewpoints which prove Jesus was something very special, different, and unique. Religious leaders who should have been giving the answers as to who Jesus was and explaining why He was able to

do the things He did, only tried to point out that Jesus did not come from the kind of political circumstances they believed even a great prophet should come from; thus, He was a nobody, in spite of His works. (Mark 11:27-33, John 18:19-23) However, the inaccuracy of that view could not have been more clear to the common people of the day. All the evidence showed them there was something more going on! The people did not know exactly what Jesus was, but by leaning on human understanding, they had their theories. These, of course, were incorrect, but it did show a base understanding in which could be used to teach the people the truth! It would be the disciples’ responsibility to teach that truth to anyone willing to hear it, and it’s that responsibility which has been passed on to every true believer ever since.

Through their refusal to accept Jesus for who He really was, the religious leaders had created a convenient void in teaching which the disciples could fill with the truth. The disciples, being mostly common men themselves, could reach out to the common man with the message the people needed so greatly; but this could only happen if the disciples had a firm grasp on the truth themselves. This is the problem we are facing today. So many people claiming to be followers of The Messiah do not have a firm grasp on the truth about who Jesus really is. Jesus wanted to make the point to His disciples that if they were to have value, they had to understand the truth for themselves. Thus, Jesus asks the disciples point-blank, “But whom say ye that I am?” It would be Peter who would state, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

This was the conclusion the religious leaders wanted to avoid, and they would eventually use this truth for the reason to demand Jesus’ death. However, it was this understanding that Jesus specifically tells His disciples would be the foundation upon which He would build His true church. (Matt. 16:16-19) Those who could understand the explanation for the extraordinary nature of Jesus was that He was The Messiah they and their ancestors had been waiting for all these long centuries, would be the ones who would benefit. Those who could see Jesus was The Lamb Abraham told Isaac God

would provide, (Gen. 22:8) The Emmanuel spoken of by the prophet, (Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:22-23) The Passover sacrifice and the Firstfruits portrayed in the law of Moses, (Lev. 23) would be the ones who could celebrate, and began to explain to others the fact God had kept His promise to all mankind. Those who understood Jesus was The Christ, The Son of The Living God, could proclaim the good news that God had provided more than just another great prophet, but the ultimate sacrifice which would give what the blood of animals could only remind us would be needed for our redemption. Abraham knew as he walked with Isaac that even the sacrifice of his son would not save their souls. God would have to provide a more excellent sacrifice. (Heb. 10:11-13) The simplicity of the gospel message was and is, that God, through Jesus, has provided Himself a Lamb!

This is exactly why, if you truly believe in the Word of God, the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) included, you must receive Jesus as who He said He was or simply reject Jesus altogether and look for another! The idea that Jesus is one of many great prophets or guides is ludicrous. Jesus did not come preaching what others had preached. Every true prophet and teacher in the Jewish nation had taught that we should live our lives waiting for the day when God would make a way. They emphasized points like the one made by the prophet Micah, about not being able to save yourself with rivers of oil, multiple animal sacrifices or even the giving of your children. (Micah 6:7) John the Baptist said prepare ye the way, (Matt. 3:1-3) but Jesus said "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6 Prophets of old cried, "Heal me, O Lord,..." Jeremiah 17:14 Jesus said "...thy sins be forgiven thee." (Mark 2:1-12) Jesus was not a destroyer of the law but the fulfillment! (Matt. 5:17)

With all the evidence surrounding Jesus' life, the question is, why was this fact not obvious to all the people of Jesus' day? The Scripture had clearly taught that The Messiah would come. It also taught that the world should look unto Israel for The Messiah. This means The Messiah would need to be a Jew. Another fact is that The Messiah would

be specifically from the house of King David. (Jer. 33:14-21) So, this narrows our search down to the descendants of one specific house! So, why could they not see it? The entire problem was the people were doing just what we so often do today, they were basing their thoughts, not on the Word of God, but on the traditions of men. The problem came clearly down to the fact far too many people, not just of the past but of the present, listen more to the traditions of men than they do the Bible itself. The religious leaders said Jesus could not be God because He was just a common man; but the Bible never said it mattered that when Jesus was born He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The prophets never described a grand royal birth for The Messiah. What they did say was He would be humble (Isa. 53:1-5) and born in Bethlehem, (Micah 5:1-4) which He clearly was! Joseph would eventually take his family back to Nazareth where Jesus would spend His youth, and the religious leaders would say, "...out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." John 7:52 What a truly odd thing to say. The prophets said The Messiah would come out of Nazareth! (Matt. 2:22-23)

The people seemed to understand what a prophet was, for they recognized John the Baptist, but they obviously did not hear his words. John said there is "...but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose:" Luke 3:16 When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John told Jesus he had need to be baptized of Jesus. (Matt. 3:13-15) John clearly told his followers he must decrease and Jesus must increase. (John 3:30) This was all significant because the Bible shows us great prophets of the past clearly lived and worked at the same time as each other with no problem; but John said he would have to decrease leaving only Jesus to increase in recognition. John, as a great prophet, was clearly saying that Jesus was not just another prophet among many. Jesus was The One! Jesus was not a prophet: He was the fulfillment of what the prophets had been telling everyone right up into Jesus' lifetime!

The problem was that the religious leaders had a thought about what The Messiah should look like. They had an idea which was based on current

political circumstances which said The Messiah's immediate goal would be to free Israel from her enemies: that He would come as a great leader and, in many ways, a powerful military leader. They greatly desired this; and these thoughts did not just cause them to overlook the humble Jesus as The Messiah, but it caused them to see a man whom, even if He was The Messiah, they did not want! If The Messiah was going to be a man who simply did great works, even for those Gentiles which oppressed them, instead of a great ruler to break the back of their Roman overlords, then He was not The Messiah they wanted. This shows us just how deep our belief in ourselves goes! As bad as it is to believe so strongly what we think the picture will look like is what it must look like, right to the point of missing the truth when it is right before our eyes, it is still not as dangerous as the arrogance which tells us we can reject the true picture because we desire another!

The common people of Jesus' day said He was something above just a great prophet. Well, if He was more than a great prophet, why did more of them not simply conclude He was The Messiah? The likely answer is that many of them did not know enough for themselves what the Bible said; they did not feel comfortable making such a profound claim! Many of them had not been paying enough attention to what the religious leaders had been telling them over the years. So, they were not so deeply submerged in the thoughts which said a humble man from Galilee could not be the conquering hero the religious leaders desired. However, declaring Jesus The Messiah still seemed out of reach for the majority. Jesus needed people who could get past all the false beliefs and see He was The Messiah of Scripture.

Lack of true Biblical understanding put the common people into about two different groups when it came to Jesus' trial and death. For the disciples and those who followed Jesus regularly, there was great amazement at the fact Jesus was crucified. They were stunned that the man they believed was The Messiah had been killed. Not only had He been killed, but He had been crucified like a criminal alongside true criminals; and to

make matters worse, He was killed by the very Gentile overlords which they believed The Messiah had come to overthrow. So, they spent that time between the awful day of Jesus' crucifixion and the day they came to understand He was alive, wondering what went wrong and worrying about what would happen to them! As far as they knew, they would all be considered traitors and rounded up into prison or given the same penalty as Jesus. Once they found out Jesus was alive, they were excited but still confused. It's at this point they ask the direct question about when Jesus would restore again the kingdom to Israel. Jesus simply tells them, it's not for us to know the times and seasons which The Father has put in His own power. (Acts 1:6-8) As they stood on the Mount of Olives and watched Jesus ascend into heaven, they were still a bit stunned about what to do next; and it took angels from God to get them to go and simply do what Jesus had already instructed them was next: that was to go back into Jerusalem and wait for the promise of The Holy Ghost! (Acts 1:9-14) It would not be until after they had received The Holy Ghost that they would finally understand what the true picture was! (Acts 2)

The second circumstance this misunderstanding of the common people created shows up at that moment of choice during Jesus' trial. The Romans had a custom which stated that every year one prisoner would be released unto the people. This was done as a gesture on the Romans' part to say we may not understand your way of life completely. This means we may have imprisoned some of your citizens for things you do not consider crimes or because you do not believe they were guilty of the crime they were imprisoned for. It was a way for the Romans to say, we trust you in some small way to make choices even if we do not fully agree. A way for them to say, we may have made a mistake and this gives you a way to correct it. In many ways, it was an avenue for the Romans to try and understand the people a little better; but before you think I'm trying to make the Romans out to be some incredibly wise and benevolent rulers, understand, they did not do this for the people, they did it for themselves! By doing this, they were taking the pulse of the people! Giving the Jews this choice

once a year gave the Romans a chance to see what kind of mood the people were in. The Romans could evaluate what they were up against. First, what prisoner did the Jews choose to release; and second, how did the religious leaders and common people contrast between each other in making the choice and responding to who was released. The year Jesus was brought, Pilot decided there was no better time than the present to use this once a year sampling. The religious leaders had brought a man before Pilot in whom he found no fault. (Luke 23:4) Someone Pilot could not figure out why they would want to kill. They had told Pilot it was because Jesus claimed to be The King of the Jews; but a king of their own people seemed to Pilot the very thing the Jews desired, not feared! So, Pilot brought out a man known for true insurrection and placed him next to Jesus. Then Pilot asked the crowd, as a whole, who they would desire to be released that year? There can be little doubt that Pilot was stunned at the response of the people to let Barrabas go. Thus, he asked them what he should do with Jesus? Their response was to crucify Him! (Matt. 27:11-26)

This may be the most amazing human moment in all the New Testament! How could a people who thought Jesus even more than just a great prophet and who had seen His many miracles firsthand, not pick Jesus? The answer is that in the end, they trusted in the religious leadership more than the knowledge they should have had for themselves! They simply leaned on the idea that if the religious leaders said Jesus could not be The Messiah, He must not be. It was one thing to support Jesus if the religious leaders had tried to arrest Him in the temple as Jesus preformed miracles, but following Him once it appeared He could not or would not free Himself from Pilot, was another thing altogether!

Now, some would feel sorry for the people. They would ask, how were the people to know the truth? The answer to that question is simply this: they should have been listening to the reading of the law and seeking to understand it, not just going through the religious motions. The fact people were simply going through religious motions is why

Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple. Sacrificing was no longer a profound personal experience but a convenience store kind of activity. Jesus said, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:10-13)

One day a man was brought to Jesus' disciples who was possessed with a demon which the disciples could not cast out. When Jesus came, He simply commanded the demon to leave and he did so! Afterward, the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him why they could not cast out the demon, and Jesus told them, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Mark 9:29 By this, Jesus was teaching us something even wider than just casting out demons. He was teaching that we will find ourselves in situations which, if we are not ready for, we will not be able to handle. We will not be able to prepare ourselves in the moment. In some cases, the will of God can only be accomplished because we have put in prior work. This is why Jesus pointed to prayer and fasting. There is no way for us to know day by day what circumstances may come our way. We must spend our time drawing close to the heart of God. Then, whether it's demons or a challenge of some other sort, we will be a ready to hear God's instruction and allow God's presence to flow through us!

The problem the people faced the day they were asked to make a choice between Barabbas and Jesus was, they had not prepared their hearts and lives the way they should have. They may not have completely bought into or understood the religious leaders' picture of what The Messiah should look like, but they had sold their souls to the idea they should simply go along with what seemed like the more educated belief of the day. If we do not want to find ourselves in this same situation, we must ask ourselves, do we know the Bible for ourselves? The Psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalms 119:105 You see, we can never know every bump and turn in the path which is before us, but knowing the Word causes us to be able to navigate that path in spite of the lack of specific knowledge. What the people of Jesus' day needed was not some, carved in stone, picture

of who and what The Messiah was going to look like and what He was going to specifically do day by day. What they needed was a knowledge of the Word which would have given them the sight to see who The Messiah was when they found themselves standing in front of Him!

You can look to many books, whether works of fiction and/or ancient manuscripts; but the reason the Gospel of John tells us Jesus is The Word is because true recognition of The Messiah comes only through seeking a personal walk with God. A personal walk is why Abraham knew who God was the day He visited Abraham's tent. (Gen. 18) In spite of all his personal flaws, Jacob knew who God was when he wrestled that night at the ford Jabbok. (Gen. 32:24-29) Moses knew who He was as he came shoeless before a burning bush in the wilderness and was instructed per Moses' question about who should I tell them sent me, to tell them, "I AM hath sent me unto you."; (Ex. 3:1-14) and in spite of what everyone else may have believed, Peter knew Him and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16

Jesus is not dead, and there are no blood descendants or ancient manuscripts hiding in a cave or castle somewhere which you must find before you can know the truth. The truth has always and only been known by those who seek to know God for themselves in spite of how different their belief may seem in contrast to the mainstream belief of the day! Does this mean you have to be in contrast? No. It's not the contrast or lack thereof which is important; it's the fact that knowing the truth is more important to you than any contrast it may create! We can look far and wide, asking everyone we meet who they believe Jesus is, but the only answer which really matters in the end is the answer to the question Jesus is asking each and everyone of us still today, "But whom say ye that I am?" Matthew 16:15

Now, the time has come for me to close this series, but as I do, I want to leave you with this thought. If you are worried or ever do worry that you may not really know or understand the truth about who The Messiah really is, think about the

story of Saul who became Paul. Saul was incredibly passionate in his belief that those followers of Jesus were incorrect. That passion put him on a road one day to Damascus, with papers in hand, giving him the authority to imprison and kill Jesus' followers there, but he did not make it unscathed. Jesus came to Saul on that road, and with a literal blinding light, asked Saul why he persecuted God? Because Saul knew who he was talking to, he asked much the same question as Moses had asked. Saul simply asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" and Saul was informed that he was persecuting the very Messiah he was looking for. From that day forward, Saul's life changed. Not from being the one who was passionate about the work of God, but about his recognition of The Messiah. (Acts 9:1-21) An unknowable god cannot do such a thing, but a living God, Who's desire is to walk with you, can and will if you are seeking to know Him! "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

There is, of course, much, much more I could instruct and teach on the issue of Gnostic belief; but teaching the truth is not best done by running around attempting to stomp out every flame of false doctrine which ignites in our world. Teaching the truth is best done by simply teaching the Word for what it is. That being said, I hope you have enjoyed this series and that it has been a help to you. I hope it has given you a perspective from which to defend the truth in your own heart, as well as those times when you are asked by others to give an account of your faith. (I Pet. 3:15-17) I also hope this series has been a general blessing and encouragement to your life as you seek to walk with The God who has created all things!

So, for this series, I say one last time, may The God of grace and mercy guide you into all truth as you study His Word!

By Philip E. Busby