



THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST

Paul Smith

PAUL SMITH CLAIMS THAT IT IS TRUTH ABOUT JESUS WHICH OUGHT TO BE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH, NOT THE BLESSINGS WE MAY OR MAY NOT RECEIVE.

I do not need to convince you of the uniqueness of Christ. It stands at the heart of our faith. So, I offer these simple observations in the hope that they may help you to be even more sure of him.

Let me begin with a simple observation - the New Testament is a record of the way in which ordinary people met with Jesus, knew the impact of his life on theirs, came to conclusions about him and how those conclusions made them rethink their view of everything else. That is where we begin, not with theological statements or proof texts, but the record of ordinary people about a very extraordinary person. Those who lived closest to him were driven to the conclusion that there had never been another person like him; and that conclusion challenged and changed their view of everything else.

Why did they come to this conclusion?

HIS BIRTH WAS DIFFERENT FROM ANY OTHER

There had been other unusual births in the history of God's people, but this was different altogether. His mother seems an unlikely choice; a young unmarried woman from an obscure village in the Roman empire. Excluded from the comforts and provisions which normally accompany childbirth; born into poverty, without even a cradle. Discovered by shepherds after a clue given in most mysterious circumstances; and within a short while, he was worshipped by philosophers and astrologers who had come hundreds of miles looking for him.

And then there's the question of Mary's virginity. As someone who entered the Ministry in the late 60s, I

have sat through endless and fruitless debates about this. But when you've said it all, it is still clear that Luke believed that Mary was a virgin and, as such, that the birth of her son was miraculous. He was far nearer the events than me. So, if he believed it why should I doubt it?

HIS LIFE WAS DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER

Laying aside the chisel and hammer of the carpenter's shop at about thirty years old, he embarked upon three years of ministry. He would have the most profound effect on all those he met. From the beginning, there was a power in his personality which led ordinary people to leave their everyday jobs and follow him. His teaching turned upside down the standards of the world and especially those of the religious people. He told stories about ordinary things which were made extraordinary because he spoke about them. He healed at a touch and took upon himself the authority to forgive sins. Folk began to feel that by following him everything could be different. The past, whatever it had been, no longer had a claim on them.

Not only did people begin to make tremendous claims about him, he made tremendous claims about himself. Eventually all this drove people into a corner. He was such a big character that they could not be neutral about him any more. And so, he was betrayed by a friend, deserted by those closest to him, ridiculed by the governing powers and crucified between two thieves.

And just when folk thought that it was all over, they began to discover that he was too big to be held in a tomb. Those same ordinary people encountered him again and discovered that not even death could take away the transforming power of his love. Like ripples on the pool of human life, the pebble of his personality and power has spread wider with every passing generation. Like those who knew him best, he drives us into a corner too. We cannot be neutral about him. We must decide. Who was he really?

HIS EFFECT ON THE WORLD HAS BEEN DIFFERENT TO ANY OTHER

He has inspired the greatest music and finest art. He has changed the lives of millions. He has been the driving force behind those who have given their lives in the sacrificial service of others for twenty centuries. Every time we write the date, we bear testimony to his outstanding

presence. So profound is his teaching that over 2000 years after it was given, thousands of people all over the world are bending all their mental powers to grasp its profundity and still feeling that they are just scratching the surface.

It was C. S. Lewis who offered us three alternative conclusions about this Jesus of Nazareth. He was either a mad man with illusions of grandeur, a charlatan who deliberately deceived people, or he was the person he claimed to be - God incarnate. Given those options, and I can think of no other, I know where I stand. Every person who thinks seriously about him must come to their own conclusion.

Western society today is consumer-driven. The faith of the New Testament Christians was very different. They did not follow Christ for what they could get out of him. They embraced the faith because it was true! And that's what has kept me down the years. In the dark days, the one undeniable fact that has kept me is that there was a real person called Jesus, and, after weighing the evidence, I cannot escape the conclusion that he was the person he claimed to be. And it is so profound a fact that I can no longer live as though it were not true. It must touch and change my view of everything.

So, I commend him to you, not because of the blessings he will bring, though there will be many, but because here is a truth firm enough to hold you through both time and eternity.

Paul Smith is a Methodist Minister, now retired though still very active, who lives in West Devon. He has served in circuits throughout the country, the last of which was Plymouth Central Hall where he served as Superintendent for thirteen years. He was also the Chair of Headway, one of the forerunners of MET.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION | GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you answer someone who says, 'If following Jesus gives you fulfilment, get on with it, but don't expect me to do the same'?
2. How many people can you think of who were inspired by Jesus and who, as a consequence, went on to change their society and the world?
3. Do you follow Jesus because of what he does for you, or because of who he is?



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