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*Forgive Me for Waiting so Long to Tell You This*  
by David Servant

# NINE

## Lord, Liar or Lunatic?

Have you ever heard anyone make a statement similar to this one?:

“I think that the idea of Jesus Christ is just a myth. The whole incredible story was just invented by a few religious zealots years ago, and since then, multitudes of people have been deceived.”

That’s what people sometimes say when you begin to talk to them about Jesus Christ. They imagine He’s in the same category as Zeus, Hercules and Pandora. The idea of Jesus being a myth, however, has no basis in historical evidence, but is based solely upon the personal bias of the pseudo-intellectual person who makes such an absurd claim.

It’s a fact of history—a man named Jesus actually walked on this earth about 2,000 years ago, and anyone who denies it is revealing a willful ignorance of what every student of history knows cannot be intelligently denied. A person might as well claim that George Washington or Abraham Lincoln was a myth. Jesus was no myth. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* contains over 20,000 words under the entry *Jesus Christ!*

How do we know for certain that Jesus was a historical person? Although we don’t have a copy of His birth or death certificate or any photographs of Him, there is more than sufficient evidence to prove that He lived for thirty-three years on this planet. A number of non-Christian first century writers document the historicity of Jesus and the early Christians.

Besides those documents, the foremost historical proofs are the four biographies about Jesus. Two of the Gospel accounts were written by disciples who knew Him personally, and the other two were authored by men who were His contemporaries.

### **A Novel Look at Nixon**

Some might claim that the Gospels are simply imaginative fiction. But stop and think for a moment how ridiculous that theory is.

What if someone were to publish a book about former President Richard Nixon and reported within the book that Mr. Nixon worked many miracles during his lifetime—that he healed incurably sick people, raised the dead, multiplied food and walked on water? Not only that, but Mr. Nixon claimed to be the Son of God and was murdered because of it. Then he miraculously rose from the dead three days after his death, fulfilling an event that he himself predicted would occur.

How many copies would such a book sell? How long would it take before it would be on the *New York Times* best seller list? Of course, no one but a fool would buy such a book, knowing it was a historical farce. The author would be ridiculed or ignored.

Now what are the chances that four different authors could write widely accepted biographies of Jesus within a few years of His life, reporting His miracles, His claims to be the Son of God, and His resurrection? How could that happen if, in fact, He never lived or had lived just an ordinary life? Would anyone have believed their stories? Of course not.

Not only were the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life believed, but they were revered and carefully hand copied over and over again. Within a few years they had been translated into other languages, so that today we possess *thousands* of ancient manuscripts that contain portions of the New Testament (and in some cases *all* of the New Testament) that date between 130 A.D. to 400 A.D.

Compare those figures with the works of Aristotle, who wrote 350 years before Christ. The most ancient copies we have of his works are a few dated 1,100 A.D.-1,400 years *after* he wrote the originals!

### **Out of the Mouths of Martyrs**

It would have been quite simple for anyone to discredit all four gospel accounts if they were indeed false, especially in light of the *incredible* events that each author reported. But the truth is, no one could successfully discredit their accounts because there were *thousands* of people who could substantiate the authenticity of their facts.

Thousands of people had seen Jesus; thousands had heard Him preach; thousands were miraculously healed by Him; thousands had eaten food that He multiplied; thousands had witnessed His crucifixion; and we know that *at least* 500 people saw Him after He had risen from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:6).

The biographies of Jesus that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote were accepted by a wide audience, because much of what they wrote was common knowledge to multitudes of people.

Not only did multitudes of Jesus' contemporaries believe the four historical accounts of His life, they believed them to the extent that they were willing to give their lives for their belief. The first martyrs were ten of Jesus' twelve disciples. Would they have died for something they knew was just a hoax? Of course not.

It has been estimated that as many as *six million* people gave their lives as martyrs during the three centuries after Jesus' life. Would all of those people have died for someone who couldn't be proven historically to have existed?

### **The Accuracy of the Gospels**

This same reasoning can be applied to prove the historical accuracy of all the specific events contained in each of the four Gospels. If Matthew, Mark, Luke or John had written of even a *single* event in Jesus' life that didn't actually happen, thousands of first-century

people would have immediately recognized their error. And if they could prove one inaccuracy, then the reliability of the entire Gospel account would have been rightfully questioned.

For example, what if Jesus hadn't actually raised Lazarus from the dead? If He hadn't, it could have easily been disproved. A person could visit Bethany (Lazarus' hometown), just a few miles from Jerusalem, and conduct an interview many years after the supposed incident occurred. All that would be needed was an elderly person to question:

"Was there a man named Lazarus who lived here? Did you know him? Did he die? How long was he dead? Did a man named Jesus come to Bethany and raise him from the dead? Were you there when Lazarus came out of his grave? Was he really alive? Did anyone else see it happen? How long did he live after he came back to life?" It wouldn't take long to find out if Jesus really had raised Lazarus.

We know from the Bible account that a *multitude* of people witnessed Lazarus' resurrection (see John 12:17). They weren't just over-zealous followers of Jesus who suffered a mass hallucination either. It was this miracle that convinced the jealous Pharisees that Jesus needed to be killed (see John 11:47-53).

If Jesus hadn't, in fact, raised Lazarus from the dead, then all the Pharisees had to do was produce the body of Lazarus before the shouting multitude during Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That would have proven Jesus to be a fake and ended His ministry. But they couldn't deny that Lazarus had indeed convincingly *died* and *come back to life*. The only way they figured they could stop Jesus was to kill Him, and even *that* failed miserably!

So what if Jesus hadn't raised Lazarus from the dead, as the apostle John reported He did? Then you can be sure that John's Gospel would never have made it into the second century-much less the twentieth century. Incidentally, we possess a fragment of John's Gospel that has been dated A.D. 130.

An author of any one of the four gospels couldn't risk reporting *anything* inaccurately. If he made even one mistake, his entire book would have been discredited, as he would have been proven to be an author who could not be trusted. That is why Luke, who wasn't an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life as were Matthew and John, began his account with the words:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word [Jesus] have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, *having investigated everything carefully from the beginning*, to write it out for you in consecutive order...*so that you might know the exact truth* about the things you have been taught (Luke 1:1-4; emphasis added).

### **Move Over, Orson Wells**

If the Gospels are not true, they should be classed in a category far removed from mere myth, fairy tale or science fiction. This is true for at least two reasons.

First, because of the many *miraculous events* they record as absolute facts, all of which authenticate Jesus' deity.

Second, because of the *words of Jesus*-which the Gospel writers claim will determine the eternal destiny of every person, depending on whether or not they are believed.

If the Gospel accounts are not true, then they are the most diabolical documents ever penned by anyone, having led millions into a deception upon which they entrusted their eternal destiny and by which millions wastefully sacrificed their lives.

If the Gospels are not accurate historical documents, then their authors are of the most despicable character and should not be revered as saints. Instead, they should be classed beneath the most ignominious figures of history.

You may have heard of Orson Wells' radio reading of *The War of the Worlds* on Halloween night in 1938. That drama, thought by many listeners to be an actual news broadcast, resulted in many later-regretted follies by terrified citizens who prepared for an invasion from Mars.

That deception pales a million-fold in comparison to the damage that has been done by the writing of the Gospels, if they are not true. Multitudes of sincere people, down through the centuries, have believed the words of the Gospel writers and staked their lives and futures on them. Many have suffered greatly because of their beliefs.

It is impossible, then, to conclude that the gospel accounts can be categorized as harmless myths or fairy tales. The wonders they report as true are too spectacular; the message they contain is too significant.

Either they are part of the most cruel and diabolical conspiracy ever perpetrated, or they are the accurate accounts of the miracle-working Son of God who became a man. Either you must love the Gospels, or you must hate them. But you cannot say they are just another simple myth, like the ones about Pandora or Zeus.

### **Who is Jesus?**

Because of the historical accuracy of the Gospels, we can trust that they contain the actual words that Jesus spoke. And Jesus didn't leave us to second guess who He was. He claimed to be the *divine Son of God*.

Some people are not so foolish as to deny that Jesus was a historical person, yet they prefer to think He was just a good person—a noble religious leader who taught many wonderful things.

The Gospels, however, leave us no option to believe that Jesus was just a good person. One who claims to be the Son of God and the sole source of salvation for all humanity cannot be classified as “just a good man.”

Think about it for a moment. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He *forgave sins* (Mark 2:5, Luke 7:48), *accepted worship* (Matthew 4:10, 14:33, 28:9), *claimed to be eternal* (John 8:56-58, 17:5), and *presented Himself as the only way to salvation* (John 14:6).

At His trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asked Him directly, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus replied, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62).

We can conclude that Jesus was either telling the truth, or He was telling a lie. If He was telling the truth, then He was the divine Son of God. If He was telling a lie about who He was, then either He was doing it consciously, making Himself a cruel deceiver, or else He mistakenly thought He was telling the truth, thus making Himself a lunatic.

So there are our choices. Either Jesus was 1) *God in the flesh*; 2) *an evil, hypocritical liar*; or 3) *He was a crazy-man*. Those are the only options we have. To think He was just a good man—a nice moral teacher—is out of the question.

Every one of us must decide. We can despise Jesus as the worst deceiver who ever lived; we can laugh at Him as a fool with a Messiah-complex; or we can worship Him as God. But we cannot begin to entertain the idea that Jesus was just a good, moral teacher.