

## **June 30<sup>th</sup> 2013: Jesus As The World Sees Him #3 Philippians 2:5-11** **This Man Jesus**

There are many basic things about Jesus that are so well known to us as Christians. Facts about him as a man that are there for us to discover in the Bible, if we care to look for them. Information about His place of birth, family of origin and so on.

The interesting thing is that those same facts are studied by the secular historians in an attempt to discover just who this man Jesus really was. They ask different questions to try to ascertain more about the human existence of the one we claim as our Lord and our God. And the answer to such questions should be part of our knowledge base if we are serious about sharing the truths about Jesus with others.

So this morning I want to set before you 7 such questions and answers relating to Jesus as a man with the first being:-

**When was He born?** Now history tells us that back in AD525 Pope St John and others decided that the date of the birth of Jesus was so important that a distinction should be made between the ages before His birth and the years since. The time before being classed as BC, or before Christ, and the time from His birth being classed as AD, standing for Anno Domini which means, 'in the year of the Lord'.

So the Pope appointed the theologian who proposed this distinction to work out the exact year of Jesus' birth so that from then onwards that year would be known as 1AD. That gentleman's name was Dionysius Exiguus which can be translated as Dennis the Little.

So Dennis worked with the limited historical data he had at his disposal which did not include the exact dates of figures such as Herod and the Emperor Tiberius. Information we now have. So consequently Dennis got it just a little bit wrong and when we put the Biblical information with the solid dating we have about Herod and Tiberius we discover that Jesus was actually born in 5 BC.

**The second question is Where was He born?** Well immediately we respond with the place name that is found in the Bible and in just about every religious Christmas carol—Bethlehem. Matthew and Luke both stress

this as His birthplace, and in the OT Micah predicts it. In John's Gospel we also discover that the Jewish people expected Jesus to be born in Bethlehem and when they heard that He came from Galilee said in John 7:41-43..

***"How can the Messiah come from Galilee? <sup>42</sup> Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"***

But outside the Bible itself there is no record of Him being born in Bethlehem so the secular historians find it difficult to be definite one way or another. And because His birth in Bethlehem is mentioned in two Gospels and not in the other two they reckon that they negate each other. For the Christian however, we have all the proof we need in the Gospels and the Prophets that He was indeed the Son of David, born in the town of David. Bethlehem.

**The Third Question is Where Did He Grow Up**, and that is accepted by all as Galilee. A place that Dickson in his book describes as "a highly fertile region made up of rolling hills, stark mountains and a large valley leading down to the beautiful inland sea known as Lake Gennesareth or simply Lake Galilee."

Geoff and Pat also remember the area around the lake as lush, and in Jesus' day it was possibly even more so. Indeed some put his mention of the birds of the air, and the flowers, and the crops, down to His knowledge of such a lovely part of Judea.

**The Fourth Question is Who did He Belong to**, in the sense of His family. And although the main source for this is the NT, the historians see enough there to convince them that Mary was His Mother and Joseph His purported father. Professor John Meier in his work, "A Marginal Jew" writes..

***'the identification of Mary and Joseph as mother and putative(generally accepted) father is secure'.***

Now Mary appears many times in the Jesus story and is shown at the cross and afterwards in the growing church. Joseph however, never appears in Jesus' adult ministry and the strongly accepted reason for this is that Joseph died before Jesus' ministry began. The other fact that the NT presents is that Jesus was part of a reasonably large family with brothers and sisters.

Later on in the second to fourth century parts of the church began to elevate Mary, by suggesting that after Jesus she remained a perpetual virgin, and that any reference to siblings referred to cousins. But today even the majority of Roman Catholic historians accept that the references in Scripture are to his actual brothers and sisters. So we read in Mark 6:2-3

***<sup>3</sup> Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.***

Now with Jesus and His four brothers plus at least two sisters and Mary and Joseph, that makes a family of at least 9. And we already know that although those brothers at first didn't believe in Him, later on they became key workers in the church. James wrote the epistle of James and became the head of the church in Jerusalem. The other brothers, it seems, married and with their wives became travelling Christian missionaries, according to Paul, who writes in 1 Corinthians 9:5

***Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?***

**The Fifth Question is Did He Ever Marry?** Now to us such a question sounds wrong even blasphemous, for we know that the Scriptures never once suggest such a thing, and throughout His ministry He is portrayed as a single man with one abiding purpose in mind, and that is to give His life as a ransom for many.

The question is there however, because some non-believers have suggested that Mary Magdalene and Jesus were a couple. A supposition that the novel and film, "The Davinci Code", was built around. The evidence they use to support such a claim is so sparse that you wonder at their motive in using it. It comes from one paragraph in the late second or early third century Gospel of Philip. This is one of those Gnostic Gospels that I referred to last week which contain supposedly secret knowledge about Jesus. The paragraph is so badly preserved that many of the words have just disappeared and scholars have guessed the words that are missing, with most of these words being vital as far as making sense of it all is concerned.

So the total evidence they have for such a drastic claim is one corrupted paragraph from a very dubious account of the life of Jesus, written about two hundred years after His death!

Much more support is found in the fact that in that culture at that time plenty of Jews gave up the gift of marriage in order to perform special services for God, and that Jesus not being married would not have been an issue for those He ministered to at all.

**The Sixth Question relates to the work He did before He commenced His ministry.** With the exception of His visit to the Temple as a 12 year old we are told nothing of this period of His life. Consequently some have sought to fill the gaps with speculation about exotic trips to India or Egypt in order to learn magic or meet with holy men from other faiths. There is absolutely no evidence anywhere for such a claim.

But we do know from the Scriptures that Jesus followed Joseph's trade and became a carpenter. A trade that involved building houses as well as making all types of wooden tools and furniture, and required strength and vigour as the carpenter had to cut, cart, and prepare his own timber. Professor John Meier writes:

***"...he plied a trade that involved, for the ancient world, a fair level of technical skill. It also involved no little sweat and muscle power. The airy weakling often presented to us in pious paintings and Hollywood movies would hardly have survived the rigors of being Nazareth's [carpenter] from his youth to his early thirties."***

**The Seventh Question is Who Influenced Him as He prepared for His ministry?** And of course the major answer is the Holy Spirit within Him and the Scriptures that He had learnt and knew, and His constant communication with His Father. But as well as that we recognize the contact Jesus had with His cousin John the Baptist. John was extremely popular as a preacher and is mentioned at length by Josephus in his writings. Crowds followed him and according to Josephus, 'they were aroused to the highest degree by his sermons'. Jesus was Himself baptized by John and some even suggest that He was once a disciple of John.

This was probably not the case but it is obvious that much of Jesus' initial preaching was similar to the call by John for people to repent in order to avoid a coming judgment and to receive the promise of God's forgiveness. The most important thing is that John Himself knew Jesus to be the promised Messiah, and gladly directed people away from following Him to following Jesus.

This is of course the truth that all these questions and answers lead up to. For what John believed is what we now accept by faith. That this man Jesus was indeed the Messiah and also the Son of God.

Philippians 2:6-8 declares this amazing truth in a very direct way. It's our Faith Statement for this morning. That Jesus...

***Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his  
own advantage;  
rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!***

Before He became the human Jesus He was in very nature God, and it was impossible for Him to stop having the nature of God. But what He could do as God was to take upon Himself the nature of man for a time, which would mean a willingness on His part not to hang on to the privileges and rights He had as God.

The Greek text talks about Him emptying Himself in order to become a man, and the way he emptied Himself was by taking another nature upon Himself that completely nullified all the advantages that were His by virtue of the fact that He was God.

Before He was beyond all suffering, all pain, all evil, all temptation, all weakness and death. He had immediate access to all the powers of the universe for they found their Yes in Him. But that was not the case for the human nature He chose to take.

It was an amazing and sacrificial act for Him to empty Himself by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. He became a human so that He could live amongst us and give His life for you and for me.

This last week I watched Nik Wallenda step out onto that 2inch cable and walk across the Grand Canyon without a safety harness. And I could hardly watch it because of the fear that he might fall. And then I thought that the

Son of God had done so much more than that when He chose to leave His place in glory and become a man. He stepped out on His rope knowing that He would give His life in the most cruel way so that we might live forever.

JB Philips paraphrases this passage in this most wonderful way:-

***For he, who had always been God by nature, did not cling to his prerogatives as God's equal, but stripped himself of all privilege by consenting to be a slave by nature and being born as mortal man. And, having become man, he humbled himself by living a life of utter obedience, even to the extent of dying, and the death he died was the death of a common criminal. That is why God has now lifted him so high, and has given him the name beyond all names, so that at the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow", whether in Heaven or earth or under the earth. And that is why, in the end, "every tongue shall confess" that Jesus Christ" is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

This is our God. This is He whom we believe in and live out our days for. This is our Saviour. Let us praise His name together as we pray.