

HATHQ: Foundational Question # 2

“I believe that Jesus was a great moral teacher and a really good man, but I don’t believe that He was God.”

Jesus once asked His disciples,

“Who do men say that I am?”¹

They gave Him various answers,

“John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.”

Jesus responded back to them

“But who do you say that I am?”

“But who do you say that I am?”

... is a question that Jesus still asks each of us today

All who have heard of Jesus Christ and the claims that He made for Himself face a choice of what to do about those claims – especially His claims to be God and of His being the only way of salvation.

As we shall see below, there are only three possible options for Jesus making these claims. And there are only four possible reactions to them. The four possible reactions to His claims are

- (1) To disbelieve them
- (2) To ignore them without further thought (which is really to disbelieve them)
- (3) To want to investigate them further
- (4) To believe them.

It is certainly one’s right to choose to disbelieve or ignore the claims of Jesus. Many do. But what is really quite remarkable, is that while rejecting His claims to be God and the only way of salvation, many go on to state that they believe Him to have been

¹ Mark 8:27-30 (also Matthew 16:13-16; Luke 9:18-20)

a really good man and great moral teacher. But, as we shall very shortly see, even if said out of an attempted show of respect for Him, it simply cannot be that He was merely a “really good man” and “great moral teacher” but not God.

C. S. Lewis, a great Christian writer of mid-twentieth century, known mostly for his books *Mere Christianity*, *The Screwtape Letters* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, gave us a very helpful trilemma (a trilemma is a quandary with three options, as opposed to a dilemma with only two options) to explain how Jesus being only a really good man or great moral teacher is simply not a valid option.

Lewis stated his trilemma as follows ...

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.’ That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

*Quote taken from: Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis,
Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., pages 55-56*

Let’s think this through ...

Jesus claimed to be God and claimed that salvation was to be had only through Him. I think that we can all agree that these claims must either be true or false ... which leaves us with only three possible options for His making the claims:

Option 1: They were false claims and he knew it

Option 2: They were false claims and he did not know it

Option 3: They were true claims

Let’s look at the implications of each of these Options:

Option 1: If the claims were false and he knew it, he was a deliberate liar of the worst sort ... for what could be worse than for someone to tell people that he is God and that they should put their trust in him alone for their eternal salvation, if he knows that it is not true. This certainly is not the mark of a “*really good man*” or “*great moral teacher*”.

Option 2: If the claims were false and he did not know it, then he could be nothing other than a totally deranged lunatic, one who, as Lewis stated, is “*on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg*”. This likewise is certainly not the mark of a “*really good man*” or “*great moral teacher*”.

Option 3: If Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, the only other alternative is that His claims about Himself were, and still are, true, that He really was who He said He was – God Himself.

In sum, to Jesus’ direct question to each of us ...

“*Who do you say that I am?*”

... there can be only one of three answers ...

“*You are either a liar, a lunatic or Lord and God.*”

As we said earlier, all three of these alternatives are possible. But, as Lewis stated, we must not entertain any “*patronizing nonsense*” about His having been only “*a really good man and great moral teacher*” – but not God. For, if He was not God, then only Options 1 and 2 are left open to us – He was either a deceiving liar or a raving lunatic. He simply cannot have been “*a good man and a great moral teacher, but not God.*” As Lewis so very correctly pointed out, “*He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*”

So, the three possible answers to Jesus’ question “*Who do you say that I am?*” lay before you.

You must choose for yourself which of the three you think is most probable. But you must choose among those three, for as Lewis put it, “*Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.*” There simply are no other valid alternative options.

While you are considering the alternatives, you should also carefully consider just what is at stake here. If Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic, and really was God incarnate, then what He has to say is of extreme and immeasurable importance to you and to everyone else.

With this in mind, we would urge you to read the Biblical Book of John (in the New Testament, right after Matthew, Mark and Luke) to see the claims that Jesus actually made for Himself. Even if you ultimately reject His claims, you should at least know what the claims are that you are rejecting.

Our hope, of course, is that your reaction to His claims would be # 4, "*To believe them*" or # 3, "*To want to investigate them further*". If this is the case, our hope and prayer for you at HATHQ.com is that our website will help remove some of the obstacles to your seriously considering just who Jesus Christ really was, that you will come to see that what He had to say concerning you and your eternal destiny is of extreme importance to you, and that you will desire to learn more about Him.