

Finding Out About Jesus

By Dr. John Ankerberg

Now, how do we find out about Jesus? How do we come to any conclusion about Him? I'm not going to approach this topic in the sense that I'm going to take the Bible as the inerrant, inspired Word of God. I believe the Bible **is** the inerrant, inspired Word of God but I'm not going to start there. I'm going to start from a different basis. I'm going to say that Jesus Christ is a person that actually lived. I'd like to ask you a question. How many of you here tonight believe that Abraham Lincoln was the President of the United States at one time? How many of you that believe Lincoln was the President of the United States, how many have met Lincoln personally?

Now let me ask this: If you have never met Lincoln personally, how did you know he was the President of the United States? Well, you can remember one day you were awake in history class, right? And you can remember that the teacher was talking about some people that saw Abraham Lincoln, they heard what he said, they got his speeches both pro and con. People that loved him; people that hated him. They read about him. They wrote about what they saw. That information has come down as historical information about Abraham Lincoln and it's solid enough for us to figure out that at the end of his life, he was in Ford's Theater and he was shot by a gunman in Ford's Theater instead of being in Peoria and slipping on a banana peel and dying. We understand the information. We can get to the bottom line because of the historical information.

Now, going back in history, there are other characters that you remember and you believe in even though you have never met them. Do you remember Napoleon? Do you remember Charlemagne? Little foggy, but he's back there. And Julius Caesar? And right about the time of Julius Caesar, there's another person that actually lived and his name is Jesus Christ. He's an actual, historical figure. How do we know? Because there were people that wrote about Him that both loved Him and hated Him; people that saw Him, and there was information that came out about Him that has come down to us as historical manuscripts.

Now, there were eight people that actually were eyewitnesses or claimed to be in touch with the eyewitnesses who wrote about Jesus Christ: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, the writer of Hebrews. Okay? Now, those men **claimed** to be witnesses or eyewitnesses of Jesus' life. But as soon as you say that, people say, "But wait a minute. Aren't those the disciples? Aren't those the people that actually were His buddies? Didn't they pad the case?" Well, that's a good assumption. They may have but we can check them out.

For example, if we make the assumption that just because somebody was known and a good friend of somebody that they padded the case, what would you do with all the friends of John F. Kennedy that wrote about him? What would you do about all the people that wrote about Nixon or wrote about Carter? Because they were friends. Do you automatically say, "No, we're going to outlaw those people. They can't tell anything that's truthful?" No, but we do check them.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the fifteenth edition, has 20,000 words listed to the person of Jesus Christ. And do you know what, there's not even a hint in all of those words that He didn't exist. That's more words about Jesus Christ than any other person in the *Ency-*

clopedia Britannica. Why? Because those guys at the University of Chicago are such warm evangelicals and they just wanted to load up on all the stuff for Jesus? Come on! Every person that has ever lived in the first hundred years and wrote a book about the history of the first hundred years A.D., whether they be Buddhist, Hindu, skeptic, agnostic, has had to include Jesus Christ. Why? Because He's a real, historical person.

But now the problem is today, with that kind of information, we have scholars today, like the ones that you can read in *Newsweek* magazine, that say stuff like this. I'm going to give you the standard line that is taught at the universities of our country right across the board, unfortunately many of them Christians as well. This is what they're telling your kids and if you are high school or college students and you haven't had a course in Bible as literature, this will be the standard line that you will get when you get the course.

Professor Avrum Stroll at the University of Columbia made this statement. It was picked up in the Northeast and touted quite highly. He said, "Jesus probably did exist. But so many legends have grown up about him that it is impossible for scholars to find out anything about the real man. The Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John were written long after Jesus was crucified and provide no reliable historical information about him. It is almost impossible to derive historical facts from the legends and descriptions of miracles performed by Jesus."

Now, that's the standard line at the university. That's what they believe. That's what you can read in *Newsweek*. Now, here's what they're saying. It's like going to a party where you played that little game where you go to one person, let's say I go up into the balcony and I whisper into the ear of one of the fellows up there a sentence and I say, "Now, you turn to the next guy," and he whispers it into the ear of the next person and it goes all the way around the room, all the way on the main floor and finally comes down here. And I say, "What was the sentence?" Now, you've played this game. What happens to the sentence that was up there when it finally gets here? Totally different, right? There's no relationship between this and that.

So here's what the scholars are saying. You see, Jesus actually lived and talked, and people saw what He did. But then it was passed on orally, word of mouth, to the next group of people and then it was passed on to the next group of people and it was passed on orally and it went all the way down through the years. Bultmann and some others have said, "200 years after the time that Jesus lived it was finally written down over here. And we all know the fact is they were sincere, but this is why the story of Jesus is actually the story of the faith of the Church. You guys made it up as you were giving it. You didn't hear it right or you added something or took something away and you passed it on. You were sincere but you were sincerely passing along something that was wrong. And what is written down, we don't know if this is myth or legend. We have a hunch that this is not history but it's really the faith of what the people cooked up." So now that's what they say and, of course, if that's what happened, we're in deep trouble.

The question is, Is that what happened? What about this? What if we play the game this way. What if I go up in the balcony and I say to that young fellow, "Here's the sentence," and I whisper it into his ear. And after I whisper it into his ear I say, "Stand up and tell everybody." Well, we've got a good shot at getting it absolutely 100% correct then, don't we? What is the claim of the writers in the New Testament? I want to get a little academic on you. I'm not going to be easy here because they're not going to be easy on your kids when they go to school and if you meet people that are coming out of school, this is the standard line. It's very interesting.

I want to go, first of all, to what did the authors actually say in the book that they wrote? Have you ever seen why the New Testament writers say they wrote their books? And again, I'm not taking it as inspired or inerrant, I just want to find out as I'd look at Tacitus or Aristotle or anybody else. I just want to find out, "What did the guy say?" before I make a judgment.

Now, take your Bible and turn over, please, to Luke, Chapter 1. All right, now look, "Forasmuch," Luke says, "as **many**"—underline the word **many** right off the bat—"Forasmuch as **many** have taken in hand"—notice, they didn't do it just by mouth—"to set forth in order a declaration." What is a declaration? The Greek word there is a narrative. It's a written report. It's a historical account. And Luke says, "Forasmuch as **many** have taken in hand to set forth a written account." In other words, by the time he got there, there were already written reports circulating about Jesus. That's very interesting because the skeptics are saying it was all oral for the first 200 years. "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration"—notice what he's going to talk about—"of those things which are most surely believed among us." What are "those things"?

If you go to Acts, Chapter 1, you will find there that again Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, as well as the book of Luke, his second book is Acts, and he says, "O Theophilus, the reason I wrote the former book"—which is this book we're looking at right now—"is to tell you all the things that Jesus said and did in the land of Palestine." Now, it's very interesting. He's saying, "I want to tell you about the things of Jesus' life"—"those things which are most surely believed among us." That is, that he's absolutely certain took place. Okay? And he says, "even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." They've got two classes of people here. You've got "from the beginning **eyewitnesses**." Who were they? They were the apostles, the guys that actually lived and ate with Jesus; traveled with Him. They saw His ministry for His whole 3-1/2 or 4 year ministry. Okay? These were the fellows that knew everything that happened. Then, the other fellows, "the **ministers of the word**." The Greek word here means "those who had just partial contact with Jesus."

For example, in Luke, Chapter 10, there are about 70 people that Jesus knows and sends them out personally to do business for Him and tells them to come and report back to Him. Those people were with Him the whole time but they were ministers of the Word; they had partial contact with Jesus but the contact that they had was accurate. They were eyewitnesses of that part. And Luke says you've got these two categories of people, "even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." In other words, those guys that had total recall of Jesus' ministry, as well as partial, they were both writing accounts. Not only just talking it but the fact is, they were writing it. He said, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding." What is "perfect understanding"? The Greek there actually means to have carefully investigated everything about the life of Jesus.

In other words, it means to track it down by research. Like doing a term paper. You gather all the information, then you write it. How did he do this? What he is saying is, "Look, you've got these written reports by other people that are both full-time people that were with Jesus, as well as the partial people. They wrote accounts. I've gathered up their reports. Then, I didn't just accept it." The guy says, "Hey, I was with Jesus for this time, or I was over here and I saw Jesus do that."

Luke says, "I didn't just accept that." He says, "Having had perfect understanding," which means investigating everything carefully, he went to those people that were the

eyewitnesses and He cross-checked them. Did he have the opportunity? Sure. He was one of the traveling companions of the Apostle Paul. And when Paul would see the Apostles, he could go up to Peter and say, "Hey, you know this guy over here says such and such. You were there, Peter. Is that what happened?" And Peter said, "Yeah." Check that one off.

He went around checking with the original eyewitnesses the information that he had. Then notice what he says: "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus..." In other words, he's writing an account to him. Why? "...that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." He wanted to have certainty for them.

(to be continued)