**BIBLE TALK Radio Broadcast**

**On KTTR (99.7 FM) Every Sunday at 8:30 a.m.**

**Rolla, Missouri**

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**Can We Know Who Jesus Is?**

Before we get into our lesson today, I want to make special announcement. Mark your calendar Oct. 31st through Nov. 5th. The St. James church of Christ that sponsors this program will be having a special series of meetings that week. We have invited Chuck Bartlett, an evangelist from the St. Louis area to present lessons that will convict and encourage our hearts. We will meet at our regular times on Sunday and 7:00 pm Monday through Friday. That’s Oct. 31st – Nov 5th. Come and be with us. Our building is located at 685 Sidney Street in St. James where Sidney Street and Highway B intersect.

The title of the lesson today is “Can We Know Who Jesus Is?”

Many today believe that we cannot know really who Jesus is. We cannot know if He rose from the dead, what He actually taught, or even if He really existed. There are so-called “scholars” who will say that the gospel writers were bias (if not dishonest) when they wrote about Jesus’ life. They changed or inflated the story. Scribes who copied scripture altered the text as they copied it. Entire books of scripture were lost or intentionally omitted from the Bible. But in the end, the fundamental point is the same. Jesus will forever remain an obscure figure that we will never be able to really know.

It is odd to me that criticisms like these do not just come from atheists, but sometimes from men and women who assemble with churches every Sunday and sing praises to Jesus. This is odd! If we cannot know Him, what is there to sing about? What is there to praise about? In fact, let’s just cut to the heart of this. If I cannot know Jesus (what He taught, what He did), then our faith is pointless! There is no Savior, no forgiveness, no hope beyond the grave…certainly nothing to sing about. So it’s a really important question, Can We Know Who Jesus Really Is?

The first point we want to make is that Jesus did live. It is interesting to find that there are still people who argue that the Jesus of the Bible never really existed. But the evidence that Jesus is in fact a historical character is overwhelming. First, we have the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the Bible that lay out His life story. If we are fair with these books and use the same standards that historians use to determine if any book is historically trustworthy, we find that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are more reliable than any other book from antiquity. My point is that the first four books of the New Testament Scriptures ought to be enough to prove that Jesus really existed. But this is not the only evidence. In the years that followed, religious leaders wrote about Jesus, mentioning many of the details of His life that are recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Other writers, from that time mention Jesus…Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger.

Bart Ehrman wrote an article in the Huffington Post entitled “Did Jesus Exist?”. Ehrman is certainly not a friend to the Bible, but he made this statement. “One may well choose to resonate with the concerns of our modern and post-modern cultural despisers of established religion (or not). But surely the best way to promote any such agenda is not to deny what virtually every sane historian on the planet -- Christian, Jewish, Muslim, pagan, agnostic, atheist, what have you -- has come to conclude based on a range of compelling historical evidence. Whether we like it or not, Jesus certainly existed.” (from [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com))

And so Jesus lived.

The second point is His life was observed.

Jesus lived a public life. He was not a religious hermit who lived an isolated life in a cave on some mountain, only to have His followers later claim that He did great things. His life was put on public display for men to consider. John the apostle wrote, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14). Large crowds, sometimes numbering in the thousands, heard His teaching (Luke 9:11-17). He performed His miracles in front of crowds. His life, teaching, miracles…all of it was done in the open.

Even Jesus’ enemies knew about His life. This was not some vague knowledge that He was out there. They were in the crowds as He taught. They witnessed His miracles. They were key players in the most important miracle – the resurrection. They knew of His claim that He would be raised and made sure the tomb was guarded (Matthew 27:62-66). When Jesus did rise, they concocted the cover story so they could deny the resurrection (Matt. 28:12-13). Peter said to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, *“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—“* (Acts 2:22) Jesus’ life was so open, so known to all – friend and enemy, that Peter could speak these words on Pentecost.

The third point I want to make is that records were made of His life.

Consider the opening of Luke’s account of the Life of Christ. He says, *“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus; that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed.”* (Luke 1:1-4). Setting aside for a moment the fact that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John’s writings were inspired of God, notice three things this passage tells us about these writers as historians. First, early disciples were concerned with recording the amazing events that surrounded the life of Jesus. Second, they were clearly concerned with accuracy (eyewitness testimony). Third, they were careful and thorough in their work (“having investigated everything carefully”). Those who claim that the gospel writers embellished the story of Jesus or made things up to suit their purposes simply ignore what we are told about their care and precision as they recorded these events.

Now, add this fact: these writings were produced shortly after the events took place. It was not as though stories about Jesus circulated among His followers for a hundred years before someone decided to write them down. The entire New Testament was complete by A.D. 100, roughly seventy years after the death of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke were written much earlier than this, perhaps within twenty or thirty years from Jesus’ death. This dating is extremely significant. The more time that passes between an event and someone writing down what happened, the more opportunity there is for the story to change and to be embellished. This could not happen with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. When these accounts were being written, there were still lots of people alive (friends and enemies) who knew the facts of the story.

This brings us to our fourth point…

The writers were reliable. These writers take a lot of heat from Bible critics today. Many accuse them of being bias and embellishing the story to make Jesus larger than life. Others suggest that they just made stuff up, particularly the parts about Jesus working miracles and raising the dead. The bottom line is they are telling us that we cannot trust what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John say about Jesus because the men were not reliable.

But these accusations are made against all of the evidence to the contrary. Let’s return to the point we just made for a moment. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written within a few decades of the life of Jesus. People who witnessed these events were still alive, friends and enemies. Any effort on the part of these writers to make stuff up or embellish the story would have been repudiated. No one would have believed them. Their writings would have been dismissed as frauds. You remember Peter’s statement on Pentecost when he said to the Jews that Jesus was “*a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—“* If his claim here was not true, how do you think the Jews who knew Jesus would have responded? You can be assured they would have presented the evidence that Peter was a liar. Would it be any different for Matthew, Mark, Luke and John if they had changed the story?

Add to this the fact that we have every indication that these men were honest and careful. Luke does not appear to be a man interested in writing his own version of events. Remember what he said to Theophilus – “*it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order,* (Luke 1:3). The word “accurately” comes from a word which W. E. Vine says, “expresses that ‘accuracy’ which is the outcome of carefulness.” (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers) The NIV translates verse 3 in this manner, *“Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.”* Luke was concerned about presenting the facts. What evidence exist that these writers were not honest? The only reason someone would doubt them is because these writers claim that Jesus worked miracles and that proves He is the Son of God, and that, they do not wish to believe. And if these writers are writing lies, what reward did these men receive for their “fraud”? They did not get rich or enjoy some privileged position. Many of the witnesses who spread the story about Jesus (including some of these writers) lived difficult lives and endured persecution because of their testimony. Some were even killed. I realize that it is not uncommon for men to die for a lie. We see it with the suicide bombers in the Middle East. But if these guys made up the stories, they would KNOW it was all a lie. Men do not give their lives for something they KNOW is not true! If men who gave their lives for their message cannot be trusted to tell the truth, who can? There can be no doubt that these writers were reliable.

And then point number five, the records have been accurately preserved.

Now, of course, there are critics who have their objections. Some say the scribes who copied the Bible by hand made mistakes. They say that some changed the text to give them an advantage in theological disputes. They claim that entire books of scripture were lost or excluded by men who did not like what they said…etc.

Time does not permit us to pursue this very broad subject now. But let me make two points.

First, historians have tests that they use to determine if a book from antiquity has been accurately preserved. When the New Testament scriptures are subjected to those tests, it does not just pass the test; it’s at the head-of-the-class. There is more evidence to prove that the New Testament text has been accurately preserved than we have for any other work from antiquity. If we cannot trust the New Testament scriptures on this point, then no book can be trusted. The truth is, if we removed the miraculous elements from the Bible story, the New Testament would be regarded as the greatest, most reliable historical work from its time. The problem is not with the text.

Second, if one believes that God is in anyway involved in this process, then we must believe that He would insure that His message was accurately preserved over time. It is illogical to imagine that God would bring about this great plan, have it recorded, and then allow it to be corrupted.

And so, there can be no doubt that what we read in our Bible today is what the original writers wrote.

So what does it all mean? It means that Jesus was who He claimed to be. He said He was the Son of God and He proved it. There can be no doubt about this. It means that I must do what He says (Luke 6:46). At the end of the day, this is why men do not believe. It’s not because of the evidence, it’s because of the implications.

Before we close we want to invite you to check out our website. On this website you are able to hear sermons on a variety of Bible topics, and you also are able to hear previous Bible Talk radio broadcasts. The web address is sjchurchofchrist.com, that’s sjchurchofchrist.com.