

Is Jesus The Real Deal?

Sometimes, it's hard to know what to think, or who to believe. Especially when we are told stuff by experts. Here is an example.

Vaccination, the MMR Vaccine, and Autism.

In 1998 a gastroenterologist in the UK named Andrew Wakefield published a study in a medical journal that supposedly showed a link between the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine, and autism. People believed this study and it sent alarm bells ringing among parents who had had their children vaccinated. But further investigation revealed that the study involved just 12 children, and had used data obtained using unethical methods and then falsified. The study was discredited and Wakefield was struck off the UK Medical Register for unethical research and fraudulent behavior. But that wasn't the end of the matter. A movie called "Vaxxed" is doing the rounds which claims that the whole vaccination program is a conspiracy theory. Medical experts all around the world have assured parents that the MMR vaccine is safe, but there are parents who won't vaccinate their children because they don't trust the experts. Who do you believe when the health, and perhaps the life of your child is at stake?

Take another example.

Climate Change.

This one doesn't just affect those with children. This affects all of us. Our children, our grandchildren and great grandchildren. Here is a quote from an expert: ***"There is a consensus of evidence that human activity is causing all of recent global warming. Not some of it. Not even most of it. All of it."*** When you read a claim like that, the first question you want to ask is "Who says so?" Here is the source. His name is John Cook, a cognitive scientist at the Centre for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University in Virginia. Cook has also stated ***"among climate scientists, there is virtually no disagreement that humans are causing climate change."*** But there are plenty of people who deny climate change. There are "experts" by the dozen quoted on the internet. There are conspiracy theories galore if you want to hook into them. If you believe the climate scientists, then the future of our world is at stake. If what they are saying is true, then all of us have to change the way we live.

What do you believe about Jesus?

This one really does matter, because if what Jesus said about himself and about the future is true, then this is not just about the safety of our kids, or about the future of our world, but about our future for eternity. This morning we are going to look at the claims Jesus made about himself. You are going to have to decide if he was the real deal or a sincere, but deluded fool. I won't be able to read all of John Chapter 5 this morning. You can do that in your own time at home to check to see I haven't misquoted Jesus. But I want to examine some of the claims Jesus made, then I'm going to ask you if you think those claims stack up.

The back story to what Jesus said about himself was that he had just healed a man who had been a paraplegic for 38 years. Because he had done it on the Sabbath, and told the man to pick up his mat and walk, he was confronted by the Jewish leaders. Telling someone to pick up their mat and walk was considered work, and work on the Sabbath was an absolute no-no for a Jew. Only God was allowed to work on the Sabbath. So Jesus was cross examined by the Jewish leaders, and the more he explained himself, the more angry they got. The next three numbered points are not what Jesus said, but what the Jewish leaders understood him to be saying. Then after that I've quoted what Jesus actually said.

1. "I can work on the Sabbath because I am God"

"Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:17 -18 NIV) Jesus was saying that he had a right to work on the Sabbath. That could only mean that he was claiming to be

God. What's more, he was deliberately calling God his Father. Nothing could be plainer to the Jewish leaders. In calling God his Father, he was making himself equal with God. No wonder they wanted to kill him.

Here's the second one.

2. "I'm so much in touch with God I only do the things He tells me to do."

Jesus didn't say those exact words, but that's what they understood him to be saying. Here is what he actually said:

"Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed." (John 5:19-20 NIV)

This answer by Jesus inflamed the situation even more. No one would dare describe a relationship with God on such intimate terms. As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned this was absolutely outrageous. He is describing his relationship with God as a Father-Son relationship. As a Son, he is saying that he knows what God is doing, what God has planned, what God wants done. These claims of Jesus are so over the top that he is either who he says he is, or he belongs in a mental health unit. But there is more.

3. "Just as God gives life to the dead, so he has given me the same power to raise the dead and act as judge at the end of time. If you don't honour me, you don't honour God. If you hear my words and believe them, you will have eternal life. And if you don't believe me, you will be condemned."

In case you think I'm making this up, we had better read what Jesus actually said.

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him. "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me." (John 5:21-30 NIV)

Why believing in Jesus matters.

Now this is where this question about Jesus gets really personal. This is bigger than who to believe about vaccinating your child, or whether the experts are right about global warming. This concerns you and me and our future beyond this life. Jesus is saying that he is going to raise the dead. Which is all of us. Last time I looked the mortality percentage was 100%. He is going to be the judge of all mankind, and the two options are either life, or condemnation. Jesus presents us with a stark choice. We either hear him and believe that God sent him, in which case we have eternal life, or we are condemned. The choice is as stark as the one made by the paraplegic at the pool. Either believe Jesus, do what he tells you to do, get up and walk, or stay by the pool for the rest of your days.

So why did people believe him?

Up to this point in John's Gospel we have descriptions of a whole lot of God signs that point to the fact that Jesus was who he claimed to be.

- John the Baptist identified him as the Messiah – the Son of God
- At his baptism the Spirit came down from heaven in the form of a dove and remained on him.

- When he called his disciples, he had supernatural knowledge of their character before they had even met him.
- He changed over 500 liters of water into wine at a wedding in Cana in Galilee.
- When he took a whip to the money changers in the temple, he claimed to be clearing out his Father's house.
- When he talked with Nicodemus he told him he was the only way to salvation.
- He had supernatural knowledge about the Samaritan woman's life. He told her he was the life giving water to satisfy her spiritual thirst. He told her outright that he was the Messiah. She believed him and so did many people from her village.
- He healed a royal officials son at a distance. He just spoke the word and that exact time, the boy was healed.
- And then of course there was the invalid by the pool who was healed.

On the basis of that evidence alone, there were many people who were convinced that Jesus was the real deal, and they followed him. But you and I have much more evidence than that. We have the rest of the history of the life of Jesus. We have the record of his death on the Cross. But most compelling of all is the evidence of the resurrection, when Jesus came back to life, as he said he would.

Believing has implications.

If you vaccinate your child, and there is a link to autism, you could seriously damage your child's health. But if the experts are right, and you don't vaccinate your child, you could also seriously damage your child's health. If the climate change scientists are right, and we don't start acting responsibly in the way we treat our world, there are going to be serious consequences for the generations that follow us. For example, in the last 70 years we have produced 8.3 billion tons of plastic. Only 9% of that is recycled. 12% of it is burned, And the rest is going into landfills or into the ocean. In the UK 16million plastic bottles are thrown away every day. If you and I believe that we are killing our world, then we have to change the way we live.

Believing or not believing in Jesus has implications. He has said that if we don't believe in him, we will be condemned. But there are implications if we do believe in him. If Jesus is the real deal and he really was the Son of God and if the only way to have eternal life is through him, then it's not enough to say "Yeah I believe that". We can't just believe in Jesus and have everything stay the same. Can you imagine those first followers of Jesus looking him in the eye and saying "I believe that you are all you claimed to be Jesus" and then carrying on their lives as before? It doesn't work like that. If Jesus is who he said he is, and if what he said is true, and we make the decision to follow him, then absolutely everything is up for grabs.

There is a statement of faith that is widely used by Christians all around the world. It was written over 1600 years ago. We are going to stand, and I want to invite you to say it out loud as a statement of what you believe. But please don't say it just for the sake of saying it. Let this Creed be your declaration that you not only believe that Jesus is the Son Of God, but you intend to follow him.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.