

THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

Vernon C. Grounds

Copyright © 1945

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GODLIKE GALILEAN

WHY DO Christians hold unwaveringly to the belief that Jesus was and is God? To begin with, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in poverty and expired in agony, was and is Almighty God because of His Godlike character. He was holy and loving and righteous in all His ways. He was precisely what you might imagine God to be like if He were to lay aside His glory and live as a man among men.

This is not the opinion of Christians only; they are open to the charge of prejudice. This has also been the verdict of competent judges who made no profession of personal faith in Jesus as their Saviour. This, for instance, is the verdict of Rousseau. Comparing Socrates the Greek and Jesus the Galilean, he exclaims:

“The death of Socrates, peacefully philosophizing among friends, appears the most agreeable that one could wish: that of Jesus, expiring in agonies, abused, insulted and accused by a whole nation, is the most horrible that one could fear. Socrates, indeed, in receiving the cup of poison, blessed the weeping executioner who administered it; but Jesus, amidst excruciating tortures, prayed for his merciless tormentors. Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God.”

And that opinion is shared by many other notable world-figures, for instance, Napoleon Bonaparte. On the lonely isle of St. Helena the exiled emperor was once discussing Christ with General Bertrand, a faithful officer who had followed him into banishment and who did not believe in the Deity of Jesus. This is what Napoleon said:

“I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions the distance of infinity . . . Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by himself. His ideas and sentiments, the truth which he announces, his manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things . . .

“The nearer I approach, the more carefully I examine, everything is above me— everything remains grand, of a grandeur which overpowers. His religion is a revelation from an intelligence which certainly is not that of man . . . One can absolutely find nowhere, but in him alone, the imitation or the example of his life . . . I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or to explain it. Here everything is extraordinary.”

For another thing, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in poverty and expired in agony, was and is Almighty God *because of His Godlike teaching*. Now you must remember that this Teacher who had no place to lay His head, had no opportunity at all for the formal education which we rightly prize so highly. He never attended a grammar school, and, apart from the Old Testament, had no books at home which He might study. Neither did He have access to a library where He might become acquainted with culture and philosophy. He grew up in the midst of ignorance and bigotry and superstition and intolerance. Yet this Man gave to the world a body of teaching which up to the present hour has never been equaled, or surpassed, or even remotely approached by the greatest sages and most learned thinkers.

Consider this as a sidelight upon the amazing quality of His teaching. Fifteen years ago Arthur Hinds compiled a little book which he entitled *The Complete Sayings of Jesus*. It was a condensation of the Gospels in which the narrative was set in small type while the words of Christ were printed boldly so that they immediately attracted attention. Recently a prominent official of one of the radio networks, who says of himself that he is not “particularly religious,” came across that little book and decided it was of such unusual value that it must be widely circulated; so he privately undertook the task. On the last report some twenty-five thousand copies had already been distributed. Bear in mind that it contains nothing but the Words of a Teacher of long ago who was crucified at the age of thirty-three. Dale Carnegie, author of the best seller, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, writes about it in this way:

“Lowell Thomas said to me recently: “Dale, I’ve just come across a little book that is the complete expression of everything we are fighting for. You’ll be impressed by the book and the story behind it, and I have a hunch it would greatly interest your readers.” And he sent me that extraordinary little book. It fits into the vest pocket and you can read it in a couple of hours, yet it contains every recorded word of a man who has 700,000,000 followers. Its title: *The Complete Sayings of Jesus*. If I know anything at all about human nature, many of my readers will welcome this little vest pocket book as a “find.” For this is no tract primarily for the religious or the literary. It is a working manual packed with practical guidance for solving the daily problems of human relationships. More than that, it contains the teachings of the greatest of all teachers of the difference between right and wrong — which is basically the reason why we are fighting the Axis.”

For still another thing, Christians believe that Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in poverty and expired in agony, was and is Almighty God because of His Godlike influence. Now ordinarily when a young criminal is put to death, no matter how sensational his career might have been, very speedily his memory is blotted out.

But Jesus, this strange Teacher of antiquity, who was crucified at the age of thirty-three, is reported to have said to His disciples on the night of His execution, “**I have overcome the world.**” What a preposterous statement to make when to all appearances the world had proved too much for Him and at last was to destroy Him! Nevertheless, it is a verifiable fact of history that out of the life of this strange young Man who was put to death as a criminal there has flowed the most penetrating, transforming and uplifting influence in a history. Consider this:

“Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine, than all the philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of the school, He spoke words of life such as were never spoken before, nor since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He has set more pens in motion and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, works of art, learned volumes, and sweet songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times. Born in a manger and crucified as a malefactor, He now controls the destinies of the civilized world, and rules a spiritual empire which embraces one-third of the inhabitants of the globe.”

So wrote Philip Schaff, and he was by no means exaggerating when he wrote in that fashion. Or consider this:

“Measured by its fruits in the human race, that short life has been the most influential ever lived on this planet. As we have been at pains to point out, the impress of that life, far from fading with the passing centuries, has deepened. Through Him millions of individuals have been transformed and have begun to live the kind of life which He exemplified . . . Gauged by the consequences which have followed, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have been the most important events in the history of man. Measured by His influence, Jesus is central in the human story.”

So says Kenneth Scott Latourette, director of department of religion in Yale’s graduate school, and he is not exaggerating when he says that.

“The life of Jesus Christ has exerted a Godlike influence upon the world. That is why Christians believe that Jesus is God. Which is more reasonable, to believe that this Man of Godlike influence who claimed to be God was really God, or to believe that He was a liar or a lunatic?”

And more than that, Christians believe that Jesus is God because He has done and is still doing for men what only God can do. Men have a hunger in their souls, and Jesus Christ who said “**I am the bread of life**” somehow satisfies man’s deepest longings and yearnings; only God can do that. Men are as sheep going astray, living aimlessly and hopelessly, and He who said “**I am the Good Shepherd**” guides them into pathways of purposefulness and pleasure and peace; only God can do that. Men are blind to the wonder and glory of the kingdom of heaven, and He who said “**I am the light**” makes them see the wonder and glory of the world invisible; only God can do that.

Men are entangled in error, uncertain as to the answers to the great problems of existence, and He who said “**I am the truth**” brings them to the place where they can look out upon life serenely and surely, affirming “**We know**”; only God can do that. Men are dead in trespasses and sins, and He who said “**I am the resurrection and the life**” raises them up and makes them alive to righteousness and purity and holiness; only God can do that. Men are helplessly lost and undone, and He who said “**I am the way**” saves them and remakes them so that they truly become new creations; and only God can do that. According to the *New York Times*, far out on an island in the Pacific an army Chaplain has built a church out of driftwood. He has taken shipwrecks which littered the island’s shores and he has erected a chapel to the memory of an airman who lost his life, a chapel in which the soldiers gather to glorify God. Imagine that! A church for the glory of God, built out of shipwrecks and driftwood! But that is exactly how Jesus Christ is building His own Church. He is taking shipwrecked lives and human driftwood, and out of such material He is erecting a Church which for all eternity will be to the glory of God. Is that not proof that this man Jesus Himself is God?

A drunkard, who for many years had squandered his wages on liquor and had terribly maltreated his family and was transformingly converted, was giving his testimony one night on a street corner. A sneering skeptic began to ask him questions like this: Where was Jesus born? Who was His father? Who was His mother? How did He earn His living? And the former drunkard, totally ignorant of Scripture, was nonplused until in a flash of inspiration he replied, “I don’t know anything about that; but I do know that just a few weeks ago my wife was unhappy, and my children were in want and hated me, and my own heart was in misery. But then I was saved, and now everything is different. My wife is happy; my children love me; and I have joy in my own heart. And I know that Jesus did it all!” Well, that’s enough! He who does for men what only God can do must be, as He said He was, God incarnate.

Who will open mercy’s door?
Jesus will, Jesus will;
As for pardon I implore,
Jesus, blessed Jesus, will!

Who will take away my sin?
Jesus will, Jesus will;
Make me pure without, within,
Jesus, blessed Jesus, will!

Who can conquer doubts and fears?
Jesus will, Jesus will;
Share my joys and dry my tears,
Jesus, blessed Jesus, will!

~ end of chapter 5 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
