

What Can You Say About Jesus to Your Non-Christian Friends? - Part 2

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Would you like to know how to answer the tough questions your friends are asking about God? Do you know what to say if someone asks you to show him or her who Jesus really is? Do you know what Jesus claimed about Himself? Do you know where and how Jesus says He can change a person's life? The Scripture instructs all Christians to "be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is within you" (1 Pet. 3:15).

I'm going to summarize the three main assumptions that have been made by critics who do not believe the New Testament books present accurate historical information about Jesus. Then I will present the evidence that you can use to refute these assumptions.

Number one, the critics assume that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John really didn't write their books; instead somebody else did 200 years later and put their name on it. Number two, they assume that the people who wrote the book were not eyewitnesses; they were the guys that heard it through the grapevine way back there 200 years later. Number three, they assume that the books were written and circulated, not to the people—whether friends and enemies—who had seen and heard Christ, but to a completely different generation that had never met Jesus, didn't know anything about Him, and was 200 years removed from Jesus.

Now, that's the standard fare that is usually taught at the university. Those are also the assumptions the critics make about the New Testament. But I want you to have the evidence to refute their assumptions.

Let me ask you, what would you say to contradict a professor or critic who said these things? What information do you have right now that would put you on firm, solid, factual, historical ground to say that's a lie, and you know it's a lie?

Where did the Gospel writers get their information?

Turn to 2 Peter 1:16. Do you remember the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*? Martin Scorsese's screenplay was based on Nikos Kazantzakis' book of the same title. It's just incredible that they were trying to put the liberal view of today in story form. They had the disciples sitting around a fire. Okay. Here's Peter. Here's John. Jesus has already passed off the scene. And as they're sitting there, Scorsese, following Kazantzakis, has them say this:

Peter turns over to John and says, "Hey, John, we've got to talk to the people tomorrow. We need a good miracle from Jesus. What could we have Him do?" And John says, "Well, let's see. I know. People are hungry so why don't we have him feed 5,000 people. That'll kind of swing."

You see, what they were saying was, Jesus didn't really do this stuff. It was cooked up

around the campfire by the disciples. Nikos Kazantzakis, as well as Martin Scorsese and any of the people at Universal Studios, never read 2 Peter 1:16 to see what Peter himself said! He says, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were **eyewitnesses** of His majesty.”

So first of all, Luke says, “We based it on eyewitnesses report.” Peter says, “Hey, this is not cleverly invented stories. We didn’t make this stuff up. We were there!”

Go to 1 John 1, written by the Apostle John. If you want to see a guy that says he saw something and that’s what he’s proclaiming to you, you have turned to the right spot. Take a look at this. Five times in 1 John, chapter 1, John says, “We have **seen** something.” Three times he says, “We have **heard** something.” Six times he says, “That which we have **heard and seen**, we proclaim [or testify] to you.”

Look at what he says: “That which was from the beginning.” Sounds like John 1:1, doesn’t it? “That which was from the beginning [namely, God], which we have heard [talking about the apostles and other eyewitnesses], which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at [That word “looked at” is “carefully scrutinized; to really examine carefully”] and our hands have touched.”

Why did he say that they had touched Him? Because there was this cult group, called Gnosticism, that said Jesus was a ghost. You don’t touch ghosts. John says, “We touched Jesus. Hence, He’s not a ghost.”

He continues, “...—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ.”

Then in verse 5, “And this is the message **we have heard from him** and we declare to you.”

Do you get the idea that John saw something, heard something and that’s what he’s telling the people about? Look, if he didn’t say that here, I don’t know how the words could express that.

Now turn over to Acts 2:22. Here’s what they said. Peter is preaching. “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, **as you yourselves know.**” I want you to get the idea here: when Peter preached, he was preaching to other eyewitnesses.

As F. F. Bruce at Manchester University said about the New Testament Gospels, one of the reasons that we know that they’re true information is, try to pad the case or lie when you’re preaching to an audience of people that were at the same scene that you’re talking about! And he says, remember, not all of those people were friendly. They had killed the very person they were talking about. You had hostile witnesses. And if you said one word wrong, you’re history.

Go over to Acts 2:32. Peter is preaching again, “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all **witnesses** of the fact.”

Now go to Acts 4:19. This is great. Peter and John, okay? We just read from John; see if this sounds like him: “Peter and John replied, ‘Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what **we have seen and heard.**’” Boy, that sounds like John, doesn’t it? But they were saying, “What we’re talking about is what **we** saw, what **we** heard.” They are witnesses.

One more—Galatians 1:20. This was written by the Apostle Paul, who wrote a lot of the New Testament. Paul says, “I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.” Now, when

you hear this, you wonder if Nikos Katsanzakis, Martin Scorsese, or any of the liberal professors such as Avrum Stroll or Rudolph Bultmann, ever read the New Testament. These men said they were there and they were eyewitnesses.

When were the Gospels written?

Now, the next thing is, when were these accounts written? Remember, our liberal scholars say it was written 200 years later. Let me give you a couple of quotes. William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins University was the foremost biblical archaeologist in the world. Every one who goes into archaeology in school and especially into biblical writings, the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, and so on, will have to deal with Albright. Before he died, William F. Albright said that **every one** of the books that you have in your New Testament—from Matthew to Revelation—every one of them, was written by a baptized Jew between 40 and 80 A.D. Then he narrowed it down and he said, “Most likely, 45 to 75 A.D.”

One of the greatest critics of the Bible was the fellow that wrote *Honest to God*, John A. T. Robinson. He was a bishop and critic of the New Testament in England. He was challenged by his scholarly friends to reexamine when the New Testament documents were written. Before he died, he came out with a book called *Redating the New Testament*, in which he said, “Every book of the New Testament that we have was written before 69 A.D. and the Gospel of Mark probably went to 40 A.D.”

When did Jesus die? 33 A.D. If you want to see the documentation for that, look at *The Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Harold W. Hoehner). It's a book that just takes archaeology and puts the New Testament together from archaeology in terms of the dates. 33 A.D. was when Jesus died. If the first book, according to the critics—guys that didn't even believe the Bible—came out in 40 AD, that means that **seven years** after the crucifixion the New Testament documents were on the newsstands around Jerusalem. Okay? You don't come up with myth or legend in seven years.

Let me give you an illustration. Where were you, what were you feeling, and what were you thinking, when you heard these words: “The President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, has been shot”? Can you remember where you were and what you were feeling? Now, how long ago did that happen? 1963. More than 40 years ago. But you've got no problem remembering that. [If that's before your time, how about the Challenger explosion?]

What if somebody came out and said, “Now, here's how Kennedy died. He was driving down the street in his limousine and there was an Indian standing on the sidewalk. He had a bow and arrow. Took the bow, shot the arrow, got Kennedy right in the head. The arrow was sticking right out!” You would say, “No. Because we've all watched the gory scene of the bullets going through his head. We know he didn't die by an arrow in the head.” Why? You were an eyewitness via the television, or maybe you were actually on the street in Dallas.

I was speaking a few years ago at a church in Dallas. It was one of those speaking tours where you go from city to city, and you don't know where you are, you're just preaching! I was talking about this when all of a sudden this audience went absolutely stone-cold dead on me. I thought, “What did I say?” Then it dawned on me, I'm in Dallas. Where am I in Dallas? I was three blocks away from where Kennedy was shot. And the very people I was talking to, some of them **were** eyewitnesses right there on the curb.

But, what I'm saying is this: you can remember what happened. So if somebody came out with a phony report right now—because you can remember and you're an eyewitness—they couldn't get away with that.

When these books of the New Testament came out, if it was only seven years from the time that Jesus had died—Kennedy’s assassination was 40 years ago, and you can remember that clearly; you had no problem—do you think it would be a problem for those people in that day to contradict those apostles who were standing up in Jerusalem and saying, “He’s alive. We saw Him!” Do you think they would have been shy about speaking out against them? They’re the ones that had Jesus killed.

Let me give you a real example from Mark, chapter 2. It’s something that you guys all remember. It’s the story of the paralytic that was let down through the roof. Now let me show you something you probably never saw.

In that account what happens? The place is packed. The scribes, the Pharisees, the leaders of the Jews are sitting there. These poor guys come to the meeting, carrying the paralytic, but when they get there, all the tickets are sold. They can’t even get in. Why? Because the bigwigs of the Jews are sitting there. So one guy says, “Hey, let’s go to the roof. We’ll rip it up and let the guy down.” The other guys said, “Hey, let’s do it.”

So the guy comes down through the roof. You know, I love Jesus. Nothing bothers Him. And did you ever realize, this guy never walked? They obviously wanted Jesus to heal the guy. What does Jesus say to the guy? “My son, your sins are forgiven.”

“Hey, Jesus, you’ve got the wrong page here. Wrong script. No, no, no. Heal is what we need here.” It’s really a wrong script when you realize that, if you look at the Greek words there in Matthew 9, it says this guy didn’t want to go to the meeting. It says when they picked him up, they **forcefully** picked him up and threw him on the mat. He didn’t want to go to the meeting.

“Want to go?”

“No.”

“All right, you’re going anyway. Here we go.”

Now, this poor guy comes down through the roof, looking at all these people. And Jesus says, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Immediately the place goes up for grabs. Everybody goes into an uproar.

What’s going on? Why did the place go into an uproar? You’ve got to know a little bit about Jewish background. Josephus, in his *History of the Jews*, tells us there is this guy by the name of Theudas who wanted to prove to the people that he was God’s messiah. He said, “I’m God’s messiah, the Son of God,” etc. Well, if you were to be God’s messiah you had to do a miracle. Theudas was a real mental case, so he goes out to the Jordan River with this crowd of Jews.

They said, “Okay, show us the stuff. Give us a miracle.”

He looked at the Jordan River and he said, “Part, Jordan!” Everybody looked. Nothing happened. Josephus says they stood out there for about four hours in the hot sun and this guy is yelling at the Jordan River. And when nothing happened, they concluded “this is blasphemy!” and they had a rock party. And they stoned old Theudas deader than a doornail for blasphemy.

The moral of the story is that you could get killed. You didn’t go around saying “I’m the Messiah.” You didn’t go around saying, “I’m the Son of God.” You didn’t say any of that kind of stuff because they killed you if you did.

But Jesus says, in front of the scribes, the leaders of the Jews, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” And they said, “We’re going to have another rock party.” Jesus picks up on this and He says, “Hey, guys, what’s the problem? What’s the problem?”

They said, “Who do you think you are? God? There’s only One that can forgive sins. That’s

God alone!” The Pharisees and the scribes weren’t always wrong. This time they were right—there is only One that can forgive sins. They read Isaiah in the Old Testament where God said, “I’m the only Savior. I’m the only God out here. I’m the only One that forgives anybody’s sins and nobody else.”

Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven.”

They said, “Wait a minute. Who do you think you are? God?”

Now, things were getting a little tense in the room, so it’s interesting to see what Jesus did. He asks them a question. Jesus said, “Guys, in this situation, which is easier for me to say to the paralytic, door number one—your sins are forgiven, or door number two—take up your bed and walk?”

What was Jesus doing? Why did He ask them that question?

Well, they were saying, “Who do you think you are? God?” And basically Jesus, by saying “Your sins are forgiven” was claiming to be God. But, just like Theudas, if you can make a claim you better back it up with a miracle. So, Jesus asked, “Which is the easiest thing to say in this situation?”

Now, let’s say that Jesus was a fake and a phony like the modern liberal critics say today—and like the scribes were saying back there. They were saying, “Jesus, you’re not God.” Well, if you’re not God, if you are a fake, what are you going to say? You’re **not** going to say, “Hey, fellow, you that have never walked, I’ve got no power here, but let me just say, ‘Walk.’” Nothing happens and what do they do? They kill you. So that’s not the easiest thing to say.

However, if you’re trying to pass yourself off, if you want a phony miracle, something that can’t be disproved, how about this one: “Now watch this. This is the proof that I’m the Messiah. Now watch this. Nothing up my sleeve. Now watch this: ‘Fellow, your sins are forgiven!’ Did you see that?”

“That was a lousy miracle, Jesus. Nobody can see sins being forgiven. Boy, you are slick.”

So, in effect, Jesus was saying to them, “Guys, you say I’m not God, and you think I said this so I can kind of impress you and you couldn’t pin me to the wall.” That would be the easiest thing for Him to say because they couldn’t see that.

But did you ever see what He said **after** He said that? He says, “But in order that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins,”—that which you cannot see—let me do something for you that you **can** see: “And He said to the man, ‘I say unto you, take up your bed and walk.’ And the man stood up and he walked” and he walked out of there.

Jesus was saying, “When you see me do this one [make the man walk], you’ll know I did that one [forgive his sins].”

Now, here’s the punchline. What book did that show up in? Mark. What was the first book on the newsstands? Even the liberal scholars say that Mark was the first one. Seven years from the time we had Jesus’ funeral and He resurrected.

Just think about F. F. Bruce saying, “Listen, you had hostile people. Those Pharisees and scribes, they were still alive when that book came out! If that had never happened and they were there and they were named to be there and all this stuff happened”—that was only seven years. You guys didn’t forget Kennedy in 40 years. In only seven years, with Mark, that account was on the newsstands. That tells me we have accurate information about Jesus, otherwise, it would have never gotten by the populous of that day.