



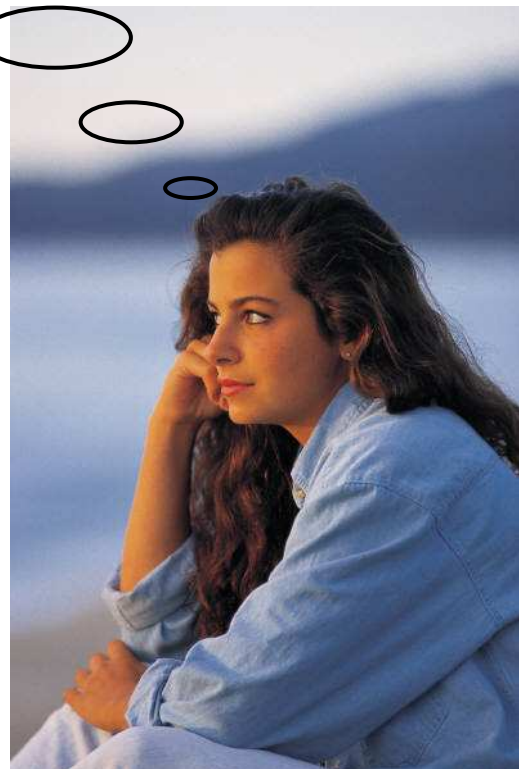
# Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Three

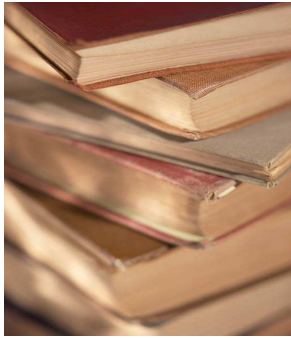
Our second stage of discovery with Theo looked at the Bible and its claim to be the word of God. On this third stage of discovery, Theo will investigate Jesus. Who is Jesus? And why has His impact on human history been so great?

**The quest continues ...**

**Who is Jesus?**

My thoughts about Jesus to begin with ...





# Was Jesus a real person?

No doubt about it. As well as the Bible, there are other reliable historical references to Jesus. For example:

The Roman Historian, Tacitus wrote in his ***Annals*** (ca 115 AD) concerning the great fire in Rome: “To get rid of the report (that Nero started the fires) Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on . . . Christians. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty (crucifixion) during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our Procurators, Pontius Pilatus”.

The Jewish Historian, Josephus, wrote in his ***Antiquities*** (ca 90-95 AD) two references to Jesus. In the first Josephus mentions James, “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ”. In the second Josephus says, “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive”.

## What sort of person was Jesus?

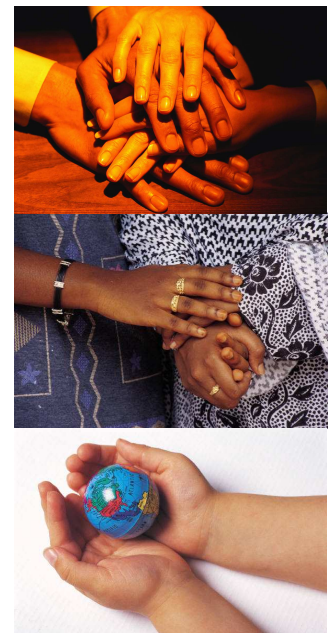


The New Testament is our primary source of reliable information about the life and teachings of Jesus – especially the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (If you haven’t read one of the gospels before, why not plan to read through the Gospel of Mark or Luke over the next week to get better acquainted with Jesus).

And what a life it was! Born into humble circumstances and living in relative obscurity until about thirty years of age in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, Jesus’ short three year

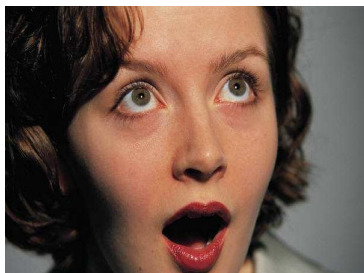
public work of teaching and healing nearly two thousand years ago continues to have a greater influence and impact on the world than any other person's life and teaching – ancient or modern. Nobody has come even close to Jesus in inspiring more music, more art, more literature, more moral and social progress (ranging from law reform to humanitarian benevolence), more dignity and peace . . . More of almost everything that is good and beneficial to humankind (yes, a lot of bad stuff has been done “in the name of Jesus”, but those things clearly violate Jesus' teaching, dishonouring Him and His way. The One who said “love your enemies” and “turn the other cheek” would hardly condone or promote murder and greed!)

Even many of those opposed to Christianity readily admit that Jesus' life and teaching make Him the greatest and most influential man to have ever lived. Just think about some of Jesus' teaching for a moment: Jesus said the most important things are to love God and to love others as ourself (Matthew 22:37-39). Imagine what the world would be like if everyone treated each other as they would like to be treated themselves. There would be no more war, greed and starvation; no more social injustice; no more divorce and domestic violence; no more exploitation of people and the environment. Life would be just like we all know it could and should be – if only we would put aside our selfishness (sin) to *really* follow Jesus' teaching and example.



A man named G. K. Chesterton stated the issue well: ***“it is not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, it is that Christianity has been found to be hard and left untried”*** (sadly, that observation often applies to many of the institutional Christian Churches which sometimes seem to condone and promote what Jesus opposed more than what He taught. But don't blame Jesus for the hypocrisy of some who claim to be His followers. Anything valuable will have its counterfeits!)

With wisdom like this from Jesus, it is not surprising that even an atheist like the philosopher John Stuart Mill would still say of Christ that *“religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in picking on this man (Jesus) as the ideal representative and guide of humanity”*.



# But Jesus claimed to be more than just a man!

If we accept the eyewitness testimony recorded in the Gospels about Jesus' moral excellence, the genius of His teaching and the flawless consistency with which He practised what He preached – *and there is no good reason not to* – we are faced with a dilemma. You see, the One who always told and defended the truth claimed to be more than just a man –

***Jesus claimed to be God!***

(John 10:24-33; Mark 2:5-12; Luke 22:66-71)

C. S. Lewis states the dilemma this way:

**A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell.**

**You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse . . . But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.**

Other great moral reformers and founders of religions say, "I can show you the right path to God". But Jesus alone says:

***Follow Me: I am The Way, The Truth and The Life because the Father and I are One***

(John 14:6-11)

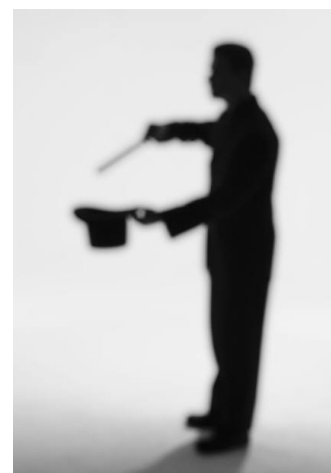




# ... and what about that walking on water business?

Apart from His wisdom and compassion, Jesus is perhaps best known for His miracles.

Jesus' miracles were never the stuff of magic or sensational publicity stunts (Jesus was no Houdini!) Each miracle was performed selflessly and purposefully, and most of them were done spontaneously (i.e. without "setting the stage") and publicly. For example, Jesus' feeding multitudes of people with just a few loaves and fishes pointed to His mission as "the bread of life" (John 6:1-40). In other words, **Jesus' miracles served as living illustrations and demonstrations of who He was and what He was all about.**

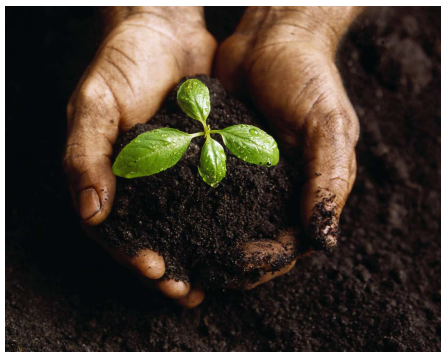


It is important to remember that these stories are not exaggerated legends or fantastic tales like Homer's Iliad or Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark. These gospel accounts record eyewitness testimonies to Jesus' miracles and were spoken and written during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries – not many years later when those people who could dispute the claims were long dead. Even Jesus' enemies (grudgingly) acknowledged His miraculous power (Mark 3:22)



If Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is true, miraculous (super-natural) power is exactly what we would expect from Him (remember Flatland and the artist's touch?) What is really amazing is that He had this power but never used it selfishly – not even to deliver Himself from an unjust and torturous death!





# Jesus' death, burial and resurrection: the greatest miracle of all

Jesus' holy life, His unmatched wisdom, and His miraculous power all substantiate His claim to be the One and Only Son of God – if Jesus' claim were true, we would expect nothing less.

But it is His resurrection from the grave that clearly and indisputably distinguishes Him from all others and proves His claim to be God's Son (Romans 1:2-4)

The historical death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christianity. If Jesus died and was raised back to life on the third day, the truth of Jesus' claims and Christianity is established. If Jesus was not resurrected from the grave, His claims are found wanting and Christianity may be dismissed as being just another religion among many others.

Consider the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection by reading at least one of these accounts: Matthew 26:47-28:20; Luke 22:47-24:53; John 18:1-20:31.





# What happened to Jesus' body?

***Even the strongest critics of Christianity admit that Jesus' body disappeared from the tomb. If Jesus' body was not missing, Christianity could never have gotten off the ground.***

**Did Jesus' disciples steal the body?** This was the story first circulated by the Jewish leaders to explain the missing body of Jesus (Matthew 28:11-15). Not likely! The disciples endured lives of deprivation, suffering and even death for their belief in Jesus' resurrection. People die for causes they believe in (whether what they believe is true or not) but no sane person dies for what they know to be untrue! This sort of deceit and/or foolishness cannot be reconciled with what we know of the character and behaviour of Jesus' apostles and the other early disciples.

## **Did someone else steal the body?**

But who? Who could get past the Roman soldiers set to guard the tomb? (Matthew 27:62-66). It certainly wasn't the Jewish or Roman authorities. They would have loved to be able to produce Jesus' corpse to silence the claims of the disciples about Jesus' rising from the grave and appearing to them alive three days after His death.



**Did the disciples go to the wrong tomb?** Surely Joseph knew where his own sepulchre was – besides, Jesus' enemies would certainly have checked out that possibility.





# What happened to Jesus' body?

***But if Jesus' body wasn't stolen, what happened to it?***

**Perhaps Jesus wasn't dead after all, but revived in the tomb and escaped?** Jesus had been scourged and crucified (John 19:1-30). Experienced executioners pronounced Him dead and thrust a spear into His side to make doubly sure (John 19:31-37). There is no reason to doubt that Jesus was dead.

But if not dead, how did the mortally wounded Jesus move the stone and get past the guards? Even if this incredible scenario were allowed, we still have this problem raised by the sceptic D. F. Strauss:

**It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment ... could have within a few hours of his escape given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression that lay at the bottom of their future ministry.**



***None of these scenarios credibly explain the fact of the empty sepulchre, but the story doesn't end at the empty tomb ...***







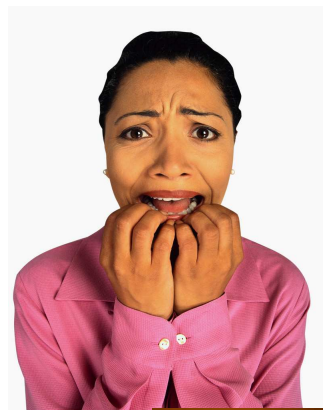
# ***“Read all about it – Dead Man Walking?!”***

***And why did so many give up so much for such a belief?***

**The disciples of Jesus claimed that Jesus had presented Himself alive to them after His crucifixion and burial.** The many appearances of Jesus with empirical proofs (touch Me, eat with Me) to different people (both individuals and groups) at different times over a forty day period following His death rule out any hallucination or vision theories (Luke 24:1-53; Acts 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Immediately following Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were discouraged, disillusioned and frightened. Despite what Jesus and the Old Testament prophets had predicted, His disciples were not expecting or even faintly hoping for a resurrection, and they took a lot of convincing by Jesus Himself! But now these dejected and dispirited cowards are transformed into bold witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle.

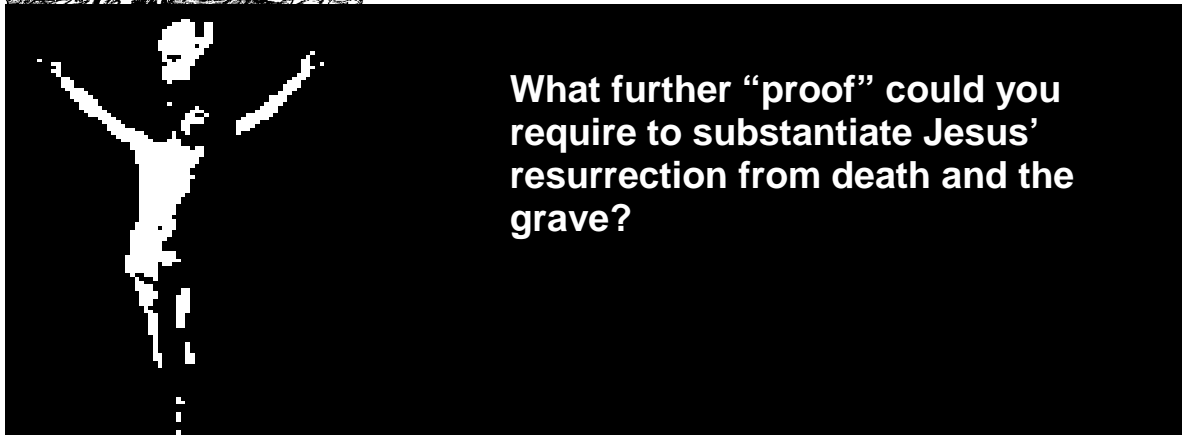
Over the next few years, many thousands of people, including former critics and enemies of Jesus – both Jews and Gentiles, convert to Christianity on the basis of their eye-witness testimony regarding Jesus' resurrection from the grave. And many of those converts were forced to give up all for that faith: career, family, prosperity, safety ... even their lives!



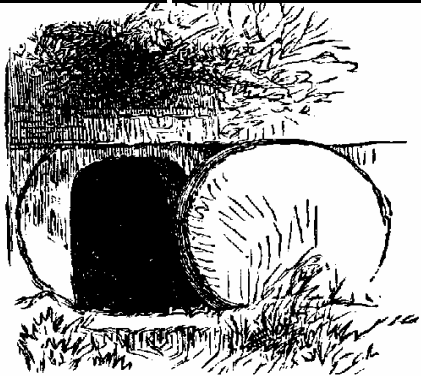
***There is only one explanation that satisfactorily accounts for the mystery of the empty tomb, the alleged appearances of Jesus after His death, and the growth of the Christian church – Jesus was killed, was buried, and was resurrected to life on the third day!***



- What would you expect if God were to come and live among us as a man? How would He be different to Jesus?
- When it comes to Jesus' claim to be God, there are only three options: He was a **liar**, He was a **lunatic**, or He is the **LORD!** Which option do you think fits Jesus?
- If the resurrection of Jesus was invented by Jesus' disciples . . . Why? What did they gain from such a conspiracy?



What further “proof” could you require to substantiate Jesus’ resurrection from death and the grave?



**He is risen! He is truly God’s Son!**

***Putting the pieces together:***

**God** has revealed Himself in **Creation** and in **the Bible**. And God has revealed Himself most fully in the person of **Jesus Christ**, God’s only Son.