

## WHY JESUS?

David Renwick, September 6, 2015  
National Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC

### I. Other Religions

Hindu – no focus on one particular person, but on ideas

*e.g., pervasiveness of God; escape from cycle of endless rebirth; karma*

Buddhism – some focus on a person, Buddha (Gautama), but main focus is on ideas; *e.g., escape from suffering, illusion of material world*

Islam – some focus on Muhammad (God's prophet), but central focus on, *e.g., God (monotheism), God's Book (the Koran); essential practices*

### II. Christianity (historic)

Focus on a person – Jesus of Nazareth . . .

1. But did he live? There are other early records, not only the Bible
2. Why so Central?
  - a. **What he said (Hebrews 1:1-2)**
    - i. The Power of a Voice (John 7:46; Matthew 17:5)
  - b. **What he did (Hebrews 1:3b)**
    - i. The Perfection of his Life (1 Peter 2: 22)
    - ii. The Purpose of his Death (Hebrews 2:17)
  - c. **Who he was (Hebrews 1:2-3)**

Exalted Son of God; Image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15)

    - i. Was this a growing myth? (Bousset, Aslan)  
= *does Jesus become "the Divine Christ" with time?*
    - ii. But . . .
      1. People don't die for a myth when they have actually known a person well.
      2. Pharisees loved arguing, but stayed together; but for them, Jesus crossed a line (blasphemy would do it!)
3. Is he Central to You? Me?

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### Matthew 16:13-17

13Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi,  
he asked his disciples, "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*"  
14And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah,

and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15He said to them, "*But who do you say that I am?*"

16Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

17And Jesus answered him, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!*

*For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you,  
but my Father in heaven.*

### Hebrews 1:1-3

1Long ago God spoke to our ancestors

in many and various ways by the prophets,

2but in these last days he has spoken to us -- by a Son,

whom he appointed heir of all things,

through whom he also created the worlds.

3He is the reflection of God's glory

and the exact imprint of God's very being,

and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

When he had made purification for sins,

he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .

### TACITUS (late 1<sup>st</sup> century, early 2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman historian)

To suppress the rumor [that Nero had started the great fire of Rome], he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons *commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius:* but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome..." Tacitus, "Annals" xv, 44.. (NY, Harper, 1858), p. 423.

### PLINY (2<sup>nd</sup> century Roman administrator); AD 110-112

". . . they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, *when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god*, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor to deny a trust when they should be called on to deliver it up..."

Pliny, "Letters" X, xcvi. Loeb Classical Library.; (Harvard, 1935), Vol. II, p. 103

See Also: **Suetonius, Lucian**