

## JESUS MIGHT BE THE ANSWER...BUT WHAT IS THE QUESTION?

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Scripture – Luke 4:14-30

I saw a bumper sticker the other day (one I have seen numerous times before)...and I am sure that you have also seen the same message, whether on a car or a billboard: JESUS IS THE ANSWER! Chew on that for awhile - Jesus is the answer. To those of us who are Christian, the immediate reaction might be one of agreement...it is only a four-word phrase but it is succinct; it is clever; it is positive; it sounds right. However, even a bit of thought must lead to the observation...okay, but what is the question – what is the question to which Jesus is the answer? Because, I would suggest, Jesus is not the answer to every question!

A rich man once told me that he doesn't go home anymore because when he does, everyone has his or her hand out. That's kind of what happens to Jesus – he gets used over and over and over...and often the use is misuse. All kinds of claims are made for what one gets when one believes in Christ, and so many of them are neither biblical nor logical nor correct. All kinds of claims are made for what God will do for one if one has the right faith and follows the right rituals and says the right words and espouses the right beliefs...and this is done by Christians and Jews and Muslims and folks of pretty much all brands of religious observance...but too often there is no evidence to back up such claims. All kinds of claims promising well-being are made to those who must do nothing more than accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but what such well-being might entail is often misleading and untrue.

Throughout his ministry, friends and enemies, supporters and critics, were continually trying to figure Jesus out. They flat out didn't understand him. To them, he was an enigma in a paradox in a quandary – he was far more complex than he ever appeared and, besides that, they couldn't figure out why a man of his obvious power and talents would not use them as seemed most positive and productive. They loved his miracles and thought that everything he did should be miraculous. If he was the messiah, they wanted him to act like a messiah...or at least like their concept of a messiah. The result? – all too often Jesus was a disappointment to even those who loved and followed him. And they wanted so badly for him to be what they hoped and expected him to be.

I would suggest that nothing has changed, even after 2000 years. So we say that Jesus is the answer because we want Jesus to be the answer – the answer to those questions of and in life which confound and perplex us; to those problems of and in life which seem overwhelming and frequently leave us disheartened and frustrated; to those situations of and in life over which we have little if any control and in the face of which we feel helpless. We want Jesus to meet our perceived needs and wants...but sometimes our perceived needs and wants have nothing to do with what Jesus was all about.

So what was Jesus all about? – perhaps that is a place to start. Our scripture lesson of the morning provides at least a partial answer...and reading somewhat between the lines, in addition to utilizing the rest of the picture we have of him, hopefully adds to our understanding. When our episode reported in Luke occurred, Jesus had just returned from what we call his “temptation in the wilderness”. During the forty days he was alone, wrestling with what he thought his mission was and how he was going to accomplish what he felt he had been called to do, Jesus had not had an easy time of it. But he came away from his ordeal with strength of mind and purpose – he knew where he was going...and believed that God had given him what he needed to succeed.

So here he was in the synagogue in his hometown after spending some time traveling around Galilee and making a name for himself as a preacher and teacher. The folks there were eager to hear what he had to say. After all, they had heard about him and had a bit of trouble connecting this image of

influence and prestige because they, and they alone, are the ones needed in the political offices they hold.

When you think of the picture of Jesus presented in and by the New Testament, does all that square with what you find there? I don't think so. I'm not suggesting that politicians are never moral or ethical...but I am suggesting that Jesus doesn't care what they do for a living, although he might care about how they do the work to which they are elected. Jesus, remember, distanced himself from all political power and those who held it. He only came in contact with them when they were hurting those who were under their authority...and then it was as their adversary and critic, not as their supporter or ally. Jesus, himself, indicated time and again that his "kingdom" was a spiritual one rather than an earthly one...so he presented no plans or procedures on how to run a political campaign. So Jesus is not the answer for those asking: *How can I attain power?*

Jesus is not the answer if the question concerns national dominance. Every nation that has ever fought a war has claimed that God was on its side...and it doesn't matter what religion was dominant in that country. So a predominantly Christian nation fights in the name of Jesus and a predominantly Jewish nation fights in the name of Jehovah and a predominantly Muslim nation fights in the name of Allah...and all of them kill with the same gusto and self-righteousness in what each perceives, somehow, as a "holy war". I'm not suggesting here that war is never justified or necessary...but I am suggesting that we leave Jesus, the "Prince of Peace", out of it. And I am also suggesting that when it comes to national preference and prominence, God doesn't play favorites – all people are his people; all families are his family. And, in some way, he blesses them all equally. What they do with those blessings might vary, but the love of God doesn't.

Were you listening when I read this morning's scripture lesson? Then you remember how furious those Jews worshiping in the synagogue got with Jesus when he said that, in the past, the folks who were sometimes apparently helped by God through difficult times were not necessarily Jews! And to claim that God is always on the same wavelength as Americanism or German-ism or Russian-ism or Iranian-ism or Congo-ism or any-ism has no biblical foundation – in fact, such a claim would fly in the face of what the bible does say. So Jesus is not the answer for those asking: *How is my nation favored over all other nations?*

There are numerous other questions to which Jesus is not the answer. Jesus is not the answer for those who see the wrongs in the world and the people who hurt others and do not attempt to do anything about any of it in the belief that Jesus, too, would have sat back and meekly accepted all that happened, good or bad, fair or unfair, just or unjust – seemingly they don't remember what he did to the temple money-changers who were bilking the poor and desperate. Jesus is not the answer for those who expect that they deserve special treatment because they behave a certain way or believe a certain way or speak a certain way – seemingly they don't remember what he said about God's sunshine and rain falling upon everyone without regard for their self-perceived goodness. Jesus is not the answer for those who think that, because they call themselves Christians, they are better than everyone else who is not a Christian...or their brand of Christian – seemingly they don't remember that Jesus was not a Christian...nor was he legalistic or ritualistic as he bent the rules, when necessary, to do the real work of God.

So to what is Jesus the answer, an answer, our answer? Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one should live in keeping with what Jesus, at least, perceived as the will of God. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one can attain a clearer picture of the divine and gain some guidance on how to form a closer relationship with God. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how lives can be changed for the better in terms of caring and compassion, of dedication and discipleship, of sacrifice and service, of faith and fortitude. And Jesus is our answer to

those questions concerning how to acquire the strength to overcome such problems as worthlessness and despondency, of loneliness and despair. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning the possibility of eternal life. And Jesus is our answer to those questions concerning how one can and why one should become, as much as possible, like him. Like him?

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

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