



Jesus – Mad, Bad or God? Leaders' Notes



What have people said about Jesus?

1. He didn't exist
2. He did exist but he was just a **good man**, like the Hindu teacher Gandhi. His disciples made up stories about him and turned him into a legend after his death.
3. He was **bad**. The Jewish authorities certainly thought this.
4. He was **mad**. Romans such as Pilate may have considered him so. He must have been delusional to have said the things that he did unless they were true.
5. He was **God**: the disciples, his cousin John, his brothers – eventually

Did Jesus exist? Game available for this

No one today seriously doubts whether Jesus existed as a historical character. Both Roman and Jewish historians refer to him. The Jewish Talmud was written by the Jewish authorities who were Jesus' enemies. People who don't exist don't acquire enemies.

Was Jesus a good man/ teacher?

Many people believe that Jesus was just a **good man** and that his disciples made up stories about him and turned him into a legend after his death.

Islam teaches that Jesus was a messenger of God – a prophet; a good man; a teacher. He did not die on the cross but was transported to heaven beforehand and Judas took his place in disguise. Christians have changed the Bible so it is not accurate.

Stephen Fry, actor, writer and atheist, said he thought that Jesus was *"a very good soul... an inspiration as a teacher."* But he also added *"I do think a lot of the things he says are actually nonsense when you examine them."*

Professor C S Lewis who wrote the Narnia books and was an atheist for many years wrote a book called 'Mere Christianity' in which he argues the case for believing in Jesus. A famous quote is:

"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 the level of a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell; you must take your choice. Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But don't come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great moral teacher. He hasn't left us that option." Professor C S Lewis 'Mere Christianity'

- Is C S Lewis right? That Jesus could not possibly just have been a good teacher when you examine the things he said such as those below.

Astonishing claims

Jesus said of himself: There is a true/false PowerPoint game on this

1. He who has seen me has seen the Father (God) John 14:9
2. Before Abraham was born, I am. John 8:58
3. I came down from heaven to do what God wants me to do. John 6:38
4. If you obey my teaching you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. John 8:31
5. I am the bread that gives life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry. John 6:35
6. I am the light of the world John 8:12
7. I am the resurrection and the life John 11:25
8. That he was the long awaited Messiah or Saviour of the world. John 4:25-26
9. That he could forgive sins. Mark 2:5
10. That he would return in glory as a King and judge the world. Matthew 25:31-32

Does this make him sound like any normal good teacher? If it doesn't, we are left with Lewis' suggestions of mad, bad or God.

"He would either be a lunatic on the level of a man who says he's a poached egg, or else he would be the devil of hell; Either this was and is the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."

Was Jesus mad?

If Jesus was a good man but not the Son of God, maybe he was delusional to have said the things that he did unless they were true. Romans such as Pilate may have considered him so.

Was Jesus bad?

The Jewish authorities certainly thought that he was bad. They said that he was in league with the devil which was how he could perform miracles. He claimed to be one with God which is blasphemy and a serious offence. They saw him as leading people astray. They considered him dangerous as his activities could have incurred the wrath of the Romans which could endanger the whole nation. Their holy book, the Talmud from 2nd century AD has a number of hostile references to Jesus. It says that he was the "son of an adulteress" and claims that his father was a Roman soldier. Another one says:

"On the eve of Passover, they hanged Yeshu. He practised black magic and led Israel astray."

At his trial there were 3 charges against him:

- He threatened to destroy the Temple
- He claimed to be equal with God
- He stirred up the people against the Romans

If he was not the Son of God then perhaps they were right and he was both evil and dangerous.

Was Jesus God?

The Egyptian Pharaohs and the Roman Emperors tried to convince people that they were gods. Jesus' disciples and family spontaneously acknowledged him as God, although for some of them it took longer for them to come to terms with this than for others. We have records of the following astonishing statements from Jesus' closest friends and family.

The disciples, his cousin John, his brothers – eventually came to this conclusion, some of them quite reluctantly.

His cousin John who was the same age:

*“He is far greater than I am for **he existed long before me.**”* John 1:15

“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” John 1:29

Nathanael, a disciple, during his first conversation with Jesus

*“Teacher you are the **Son of God**; you are the King of Israel.”* John 1.43-51

Peter *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Matthew 16:13

“You have the words that give life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One from God.” John 6:68

Disciples: *“We can see now that you know all things. You can answer a person’s question even before it is asked. This makes us believe that you came from God.”* John 16:30

Thomas: *“I will not believe until I see the nail marks... My Lord and my God!”* John 20:25-28

Have Christians changed the Bible?

There are 4 accounts of Jesus’ life which help to give us a picture of him. It has been firmly established by biblical archaeologists that most if not all of the New Testament documents were written in the first century before 80 AD, so less than 50 years after the events happened. This means that there was not enough of a gap for myths and legends to have grown up around the character of Jesus as too many eye witnesses were still living when they were written.