

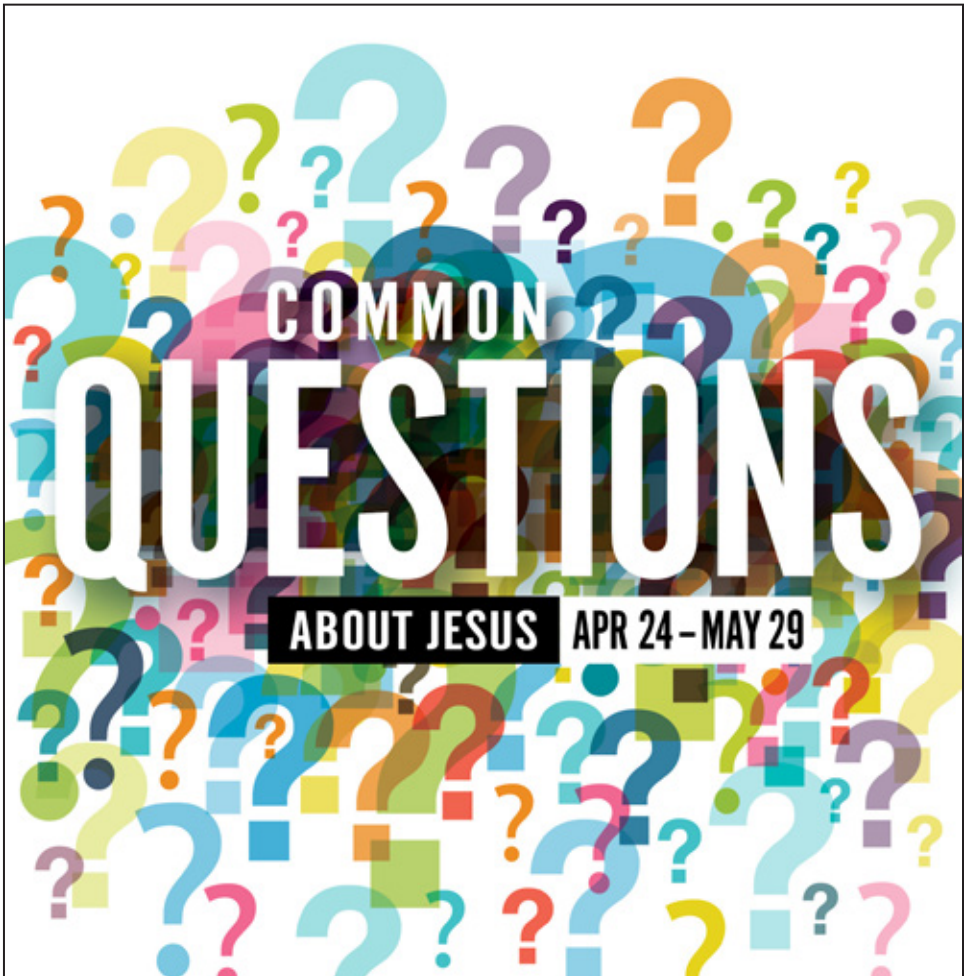
GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

APRIL 25 - 29, 2022



MONDAY

Read [Job 24:13-17](#); [2 Timothy 3:1-5, 16-17](#); [4:1-5](#)

I am now 66 years old, having lived my first 39 years as a periodically churchgoing “cultural Christian,” the last 27 walking with Jesus. I’m struck by how this parallels the Bible itself: 66 books total, 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New.

My first 39 years featured the pitfalls of those Jews settling for a legal relationship with God per Old Testament misapplication of His Word: self-righteousness based upon a self-perception as a “good person,” with the misguided sense that my own “goodness” was “good enough to earn heaven.” I was in the worst place possible: living apart from Christ without even knowing it, knowing things *about* Jesus without knowing Him personally, generally content, marching steadily toward judgment.

Fortunately, God did not leave me there. In retrospect, the Holy Spirit had been wooing me for years, putting godly influences in my life, allowing me to recognize a growing sense of joylessness despite the external trappings of professional and familial “success,” etc. Upon final surrender to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I entered into my current “New Testament phase.”

Sadly, anything like this week’s theme—“Did Jesus Christ Really Exist?”—never entered my mind during those earlier years. As a cultural Christian I believed *in* Jesus, confident that He existed, that He died for my

sins, even that He was God the Son. However, I did not believe *on* Jesus. I had not recognized my desperate need for the Savior, that I was spiritually bankrupt without Christ and “*apart from [Him] I could do nothing*” (John 15:5). Previously, I failed to see every moment as an opportunity to serve the Lord gratefully.

Why do the “common questions” about Jesus, our current series, matter? We know the answers already, right? Or do we merely “know the answers in our heads” superficially—like me in younger years—rather than fully and deeply via Spirit-surrendered hearts? And even if you “know the answers” somewhat, do you know them sufficiently to address the related concerns of sincere pre-Christians? Will you settle for shallow gifts, or do you wish to share something that’s valued and meaningful?

QUESTIONS

Did you have an “Old Testament” phase to your life? How has following Christ changed that? Why is it important for us to consider and wrestle with common questions of unbelievers, such as “Did Jesus really exist?”

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Sowing Seeds for Life has been blessed with many community partners who generously give their time, talents and treasures. Our prayer is that they would be blessed for all their hard work and support.

TUESDAY

Read [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#); [Romans 3:23-26](#); [1 Peter 5:8-9](#)

As we consider the “Did Jesus Really Exist?” question that many take for granted, here is something else to consider: Why do so many oppose the Gospel message? It’s good news, even the best news—God wants intimate relationship with us, despite our depravity, so much that the Son died that we might be reconciled to Him! And salvation is fully available to all, regardless of background, competence, or related “qualifications.”

As you likely grasp already, the enemy is real and influential. Even though defeated at Calvary’s cross (though likely blinded here by extreme narcissism), Satan aims to destroy every human and thereby confound God’s plan of redemption. He provokes unbelief and sponsors false religions accordingly. God permits the devil’s opposition, for now, both to strengthen believers and help “separate the wheat from the chaff” (Matthew 3:12). The enemy, seeking your destruction, wants you questioning Jesus’ existence and the Bible’s credibility. He’d rather that you self-perceive as a “privileged animal,” the product of random evolution—making it understandable when you act or vote accordingly.

Our own sin nature and unwitting rebellion against God collaborate with the enemy and creation’s fallenness. Channeling a C.S. Lewis sentiment, fallen unbelievers don’t think of themselves as rebels

against God because this is all they've known since birth. A non-Christian who asks, "Is God your enemy?" rarely replies, "Yes!" Yet so many, either with open antagonism or worldly inertia, resist Christ.

I know why I dismissed Christ during my 39 "Old Testament," pre-Christian years: inconvenience. Embracing the gravity of an ultimate Moral Source would compel me to change. As a Christian I could no longer "just do what I want to" without fear of consequences. In spiritual laziness, I was repelled by the notions of facing my sinfulness and "becoming a Bible-thumping weirdo."

Surrender is hard, especially for a self-perceived "good person." It's hard for me—a daily process—even as a 29-year Christ follower. But God has to strip us of pride and pretense, entitlement, and the delusion of self-sufficiency if we are to dwell with Him eternally. Earthly life is "practicing for eternity." How's your "practice" going? Whom will you invite to join?

QUESTIONS

Why do you think so many resist the Gospel? If you ever resisted, why did you? What does "present, earthly life is practice for eternity" mean?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Please pray that the Lord would continue to provide the donations needed in order to serve those in difficult times. This food pantry is only possible due to the support and donations of community partners and volunteers.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Psalm 19:1-3; Luke 23:50-24:10**

A common debate tactic: to discredit another's assertions, you attack their source—a “first defense” for Christianity is the validity of the Bible itself and its claims. A 1st century event, however, muddies this water. “In AD 70, the Romans invaded and destroyed Jerusalem ... Entire cities [and the temple] were literally burned to the ground. ... Much evidence of Jesus' existence (including temple-archived official records) was destroyed. Many of the eyewitnesses of Jesus would have been killed.” (GotQuestions.org) Let's draw upon logic, therefore, to assist us here.

Ravi Zacharias and William Lane Craig offer the following regarding the Bible's truth and authenticity. “Every physical state has some specific time preceding it ... [which must be] nonphysical if it is ... uncaused (eternal). [There must be something, or Someone, nonphysical and uncaused preceding the universe's creation]. Evolution ... logically cannot be a theory of ultimate origins ... [partly because of] the irreducible complexity of life's critical components (e.g., the subsystems in many organs cannot exist or 'survive' apart from—thus could not preexist—their greater system) ... violates the tenets of evolution. ... [Likewise,] the course of human events ... all points to the existence of a moral, highly intelligent, highly involved and personal first Cause, God Himself. ...

“[Jesus' body] was buried by Joseph of Arimathea (a member of the Sanhedrin, Jesus' condemners) in his personal tomb. ... The tomb must

have been empty if the claims of resurrection had a basis for truth. ... [Jesus' followers would not] have invented a fictitious character like Joseph, who was a colleague of the bitter enemies of Jesus and who [respected] Jesus by giving Him an honorable burial. And there were no other competing burial stories—if the burial story was [merely] legend, you'd expect alternative, competing versions. ...

“On [Easter] Sunday ... the tomb was found empty by a group of women ... [whose] testimony was regarded as worthless in 1st century Jewish culture. ... This [is] an embarrassing and awkward fact in 1st century Jewish context, [reinforcing] that this was simply stating historical fact that was faithfully recorded by the Gospel accounts (i.e., not fabricated).”

Tomorrow and Friday of this week consider credible, non-biblical, non-Christian sources supporting Jesus' existence. Some may surprise you.

QUESTIONS

Why do so many attack the validity and historicity of the Bible? How did the Jerusalem temple's AD 70 destruction by Rome add fuel to the fire regarding biblical validity? Why do you think God would have let that happen?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Please pray for the clients of Sowing Seeds. Pray that they would experience the love, generosity, and care of Jesus for their lives and seek to know Him. Pray for grace over their lives as they go through a variety of difficulties.

THURSDAY

Read **Isaiah 29:15-16; John 20:24-29; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8**

Today's "Did Jesus Really Exist?" exploration takes us to two of the most widely sourced, credible, ancient, non-Christian historians, "(Rome-commissioned, 1st century Jewish historian) Flavius Josephus ... [and] the 1st century Roman, Tacitus. ...

"In his *Antiquities* ... [Josephus wrote] (in a disputed passage some deem a later forgery), 'Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats.' ... One version reads ... 'Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples ... [reported] that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and ... was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.' ... [Tacitus' writings] mentioned superstitious 'Christians' ... who suffered under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.'" (GotQuestions.org)

"Josephus [wrote]: 'Ananus ... convened ... the Sanhedrin and brought before them ... James, the brother of Jesus, who was called the Christ. ... He accused [James] of having transgressed the law and delivered [him] up to be stoned.'" (American Atheists) "Josephus ... wrote only decades after Jesus' death. Jesus' known associates, such as Jesus' brother James, were his contemporaries. ... If any Jewish writer were ever in a position to know about the non-existence of Jesus, it would

have been Josephus. ... Tacitus was careful enough not to report real executions of nonexistent people.” (Lawrence Mykytiuk).

Other paraphrases of these two 1st century, non-Christian historians follow, supporting that Jesus of Nazareth truly existed. “Pilate rendered the decision that [Jesus] should be executed, as both Tacitus and Josephus state. ... [The Savior’s] execution was specifically by crucifixion, according to Josephus. ... The Christian movement began in Judea, according to Tacitus. Josephus observes that it continued during the 1st century. Tacitus deplors the fact that during the 2nd century it had spread as far as Rome.” (Mykytiuk)

Hopefully, your faith is sufficiently grounded and strong that it is not buoyed by the knowledge of these secular sources affirming Jesus’ life and circumstances. However, unbelievers you know may find such insights useful as they consider the Bible’s claims. Tomorrow we consider several more ancient sources.

QUESTIONS

How do non-biblical, non-Christian historical sources help in the debate about whether Jesus really existed? Might it prove helpful for you to learn a bit more about Flavius Josephus and Tacitus?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

We are always in need of additional helping hands to assist with distributions, with driving trucks, and with sorting donations. Our prayer is that the Lord would lay it on people’s hearts to join the work of Sowing Seeds for Life.

FRIDAY

Read **Matthew 28:1-15; John 3:19-21**

Concluding the week, let's consider additional, non-biblical sources supporting the reality of Jesus' life. "Julius Africanus quotes the historian Thallus in a discussion of the darkness that followed the crucifixion of Christ. ... Lucian of Samosata ... [wrote] that Jesus was worshiped by Christians, introduced new teachings, and was crucified for them. ... (Roman POW) Mara Bar-Serapion confirms that Jesus was ... considered by many to be the king of Israel [who] was put to death by the Jews. ... Gnostic writings ... all mention Jesus." (GotQuestions.org)

Even revered, ancient Jewish sources affirm this. "[The *Talmud*, a 3rd to 6th century] collection of Jewish rabbinic writings ... shows that even Jesus' enemies affirmed His existence. One passage says that on 'the Passover, Yeshu (Jesus) the Nazarean was hanged' ... Another [Talmudic passage] ... [refers to] 'the Nazarene'—a title often applied to Jesus." (jw.org) "Nond denial of Jesus' existence is particularly notable in rabbinic writings of those first several centuries. ... [I]f anyone ... had a reason to dislike the Christian faith, it was the rabbis. ... [Yet] all Jewish sources treated Jesus as a fully historical person." (Mykytiuk)

"We can almost reconstruct the gospel ... from early non-Christian sources: Jesus was called the Christ (Josephus), did 'magic,' led Israel into new teachings, and was hanged on Passover for them (*Babylonian Talmud*) in Judea (Tacitus), but claimed to be God and would return

(Eliezar), which His followers believed, worshiping Him as God (Pliny the Younger). ...

“There is overwhelming evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ. ... Literally thousands of Christians in the 1st century AD ... were willing to give their lives as martyrs for (the risen) Jesus Christ. People will die for what they believe to be true, but no one will die for what they know to be a lie.” (GotQuestions.org)

Many “doubt” Jesus’ life because they don’t want Him to exist, just as they oppose accountability to a holy God. Such recognition is “inconvenient” for unbelievers. Don’t let others’ resistance and doubts, however, keep you from “scattering seed.” We are not responsible for the results—the “harvest” is God’s; He is “*the vinedresser*” (John 15:1). We are called to faithfulness. How will you faithfully share the risen, living Christ this week?

QUESTIONS

Which of today’s non-Christian sources reinforcing that Jesus Christ actually lived do you find most surprising? Which of these might be most useful to you? How does the willing death as martyrs of so many after Jesus’ resurrection—particularly by the ten disciples who fled the crucifixion scene as cowards—add credibility to the biblical accounts?

PRAYERS FOR SOWING SEEDS FOR LIFE

Pray that the Lord would shine His love and light upon this organization as it seeks to honor Him with its efforts. Please pray that the Lord would minister to the clients, pour out grace on the volunteers, and fill the necessities of this agency.

Sources

- GotQuestions.org's quotes can be found at <https://www.gotquestions.org/did-Jesus-exist.html>.
- Ravi Zacharias' and William Lane Craig's quotes are from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/videos/lectures/top-five-questions-university-of-iowa-students-ask-about-christianity>.
- The American Atheists quote can be found at <https://www.atheists.org/activism/resources/did-jesus-exist/>.
- Lawrence Mykytiuk's quotes are from the Biblical Archeological Society, January/February 2015, <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/>.
- jw.org's quote can be found at <https://www.jw.org/en/library/magazines/awake-no5-2016-october/did-jesus-really-exist/>.



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