

## The Trilemma of the Heart

Richard Dawkins, the author of 'the God Delusion', and one of the acclaimed New Atheists, did an interview with *the Guardian* and he made a very interesting comment which even took me aback. He claimed that

“somebody as intelligent as Jesus would have been an atheist if he had known what we know today...he was a great moral teacher.”

While the first part of his statement is a little sensational, it is not uncommon for us to hear in our secular world that Jesus is a great moral teacher like Buddha or Ghandi and the like.

However, if we read the Gospels, **is it possible for us to make that claim that Jesus was just a great moral teacher?**

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Some people like Richard Dawkins may ask, “where in the bible does Jesus claim to be God? Show me in the bible where he says ‘I am God?’ Because I just don’t see it” Richard Dawkins has a point in saying that Jesus does not explicitly call himself God in that way, but if we understand the Gospels in their Jewish context, it would be crystal clear that Jesus was claiming to be God.

Here are four points you can give to someone who claims that Jesus is just a moral teacher.

- 1) When Jesus claims to be “lord of the Sabbath” (Mk 2:28), you have to wonder, who is the Lord of the sabbath? God! So when Jesus is identifying himself also as lord of the sabbath, he is in effect claiming to be God.
- 2) Similarly, in another passage, he tells the Pharisees, “Something greater than the temple is here” (Mt 12:6)
- 3) After Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic, the scribes said, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk 2:7)
- 4) In the Gospel of John, Jesus says “Before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn 8:58)

**Clearly, Jesus is claiming to be God.**

Therefore, if Jesus clearly claims to be God, we are left with three options or a trilemma concerning his identity. CS Lewis writes that Jesus cannot be just a

great moral teacher because no moral teacher claimed to be God like Jesus did. Either he is the Lord, a Lunatic or a Liar.

If Jesus thought he was god but in fact he was not God, he would be a lunatic. If he knew he was not God, but continued to tell people that he was god, then he would be a liar. However, if he truly is God and he claims that he is also God, then he is the Lord! Jesus is not just a great moral teacher.

Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. *He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to*—CS Lewis

How do we know that Jesus is Lord? By his death and resurrection, Jesus validates his claim that he is God. What does Doubting Thomas say when he encounters the resurrected Jesus? “My Lord and my God!”

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As Catholic Christians, even though we claim that Jesus is our Lord and our God, we may be tempted to experience **a trilemma of the heart** where Jesus is Lord in certain parts of our life and in others he is a lunatic and a liar.

We could say, “Jesus you are Lord of my life when I go to Church and pray and do my bible studies.” In other parts of our life we could accuse him of being a lunatic: “No contraception? No abortion? No euthanasia? Jesus you’re crazy.” And maybe in another part of our life we could accuse him of being a liar: “Do you really love me Jesus? My life is in shambles and I’ve experienced so much loss in my life right now that I doubt that you love me.”

We can experience **a trilemma of the heart**, yet Jesus wants to remind us today that his word is true, that the Son of Man who is lord of the Sabbath is also Lord of our **entire life** as well. And so as we approach the Eucharist today, let us receive the Lord and enthrone him in his rightful place in our heart *so that in proclaiming him as Lord before others, they may also see him as Lord dwelling in our hearts as well.*