

# What Is Essential About Jesus Christ?

## Chameleon: Fight The Urge To Fit In (part 1)

Summary: We believe that Jesus Christ is God, Saviour and Lord of all creation; he is the perfect revelation of God as well as God incarnate, the only mediator between God and humanity.

Scripture: Romans 12:1–2; John 8:48–59<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

We have just finished a sermon series called, “Choosing To Love”, which had us focussing on Jesus’ command to love one another. We did this by exploring the apostle Paul’s famous chapter on love, namely 1 Corinthians 13.

The sermon series gave us an opportunity to reflect on Christian lifestyle. We practice such a lifestyle here, among our brothers and sisters-in-faith. As we perfect our love here, we are better able to love out in the world, where our neighbours are quite likely not to share our worldview.

Since that series focussed on Christian lifestyle, I thought it a good idea to turn our attention to beliefs that serve as a foundation for that lifestyle. If we do not see evidence of a Christian lifestyle, that is most likely due to a lack of biblical beliefs.

Sadly, there is lots of recent evidence revealing a lack of biblical beliefs amongst Australians.

### Where Have All the Christians Gone?

According to the recent release of census data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australians ticking the ‘no religion’ box in the 2021 national census increased and Christian affiliation dropped from 52 per cent in 2016 to 44 per cent in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

We also discovered from the 2021 Australian Community Survey,

Age differences are apparent in Australians’ views of Jesus and their belief in his divinity and resurrection from the dead. NCLS Research has discovered that while half of Australians acknowledge Christ’s existence as a human in history, even less see him as divine. And there are some curious differences between the generations.

The age group with the lowest belief in Jesus as a real person in history are those aged 18 to 34, while the group with the highest belief in Jesus’ existence are those aged 65 and over. Middle aged Australians, aged 50 to 64, are least likely to believe in Jesus’ divinity or resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

It appears fewer people believe in Jesus than in the recent past and what they believe about Jesus does not reflect the biblical truth about Jesus. Where have all the Christians gone? Are there no friends of Jesus in Australia?

### What & Why?

What we believe is very important, for as it is written,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1–2)

These verses, which form the theme for this sermon series, tap into the sad fact we won't be inclined to worship God, our creator, wholeheartedly and completely unless we realise some tangible benefit; yet there will be no tangible benefits unless our minds have been renewed with the capital-T Truth.

In other words, we cannot live a Christian lifestyle until we have biblical beliefs.

Like the chameleon whose skin colour changes to reflect its surroundings, more and more nominal Christians are conforming to this age, they are being urged to fit in with the spirit of this world.

I want to encourage you to fight the urge to fit in.

This sermon series is going to describe for you what is essential to believe, so to be a friend of Jesus.

Later in my sermon, there will be time for clarifying questions, should you have any. Keep that in mind, for the time being.

## What Is Essential About Jesus Christ?

As we explore what is essential to believe for Christian faith, we, of course, begin with the first pillar on which everything else is based:

We believe that Jesus Christ is God, Saviour and Lord of all creation; he is the perfect revelation of God as well as God incarnate, the only mediator between God and humanity.

As a doctrine, this statement about Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup> is a pillar of faith, for if Jesus is not who he said is and if what is written about him is not true, then anything that can be known about God is merely conjecture, and “we should be pitied more than anyone” (1 Cor 15:12–19).

There are six things this statement tells us about Jesus:

### Jesus Is God

The first thing we learn from this statement is that **Jesus is God**, which is a bold claim, to be sure.

Christians believe this because Jesus said he was God:

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

Here is a perfect example of how **the Bible was written for us but not to us**.

To our modern ears, this claim makes no sense. Jesus made this claim in the midst of a rather heated discussion with some other religious leaders of his time. They were finding it difficult to understand the truths he was trying to teach them. They accused him of being a lunatic.

When Jesus tried to help them understand that obeying his commands would result in eternal life, they brought in the example of Abraham as a counterpoint.

Abraham was the first person to which our creator God revealed himself and his Plan for the rescue, reconciliation, and restoration of humankind (Gen 12ff.) —in other words, our salvation. Judeo-Christian history properly began with Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their children.

The next significant historical person to which our creator God revealed himself was Moses, who led the enslaved descendants of Abraham and Sarah out of Egypt.

Out of a burning bush, God told Moses his name was I AM (Ex 3:1–15).

Jesus responded to his interlocutors by stating he was not being a liar in his teaching, then landed this mic drop: “Before Abraham was, I am”.

Essentially, Jesus was telling these religious leaders he was not only greater than Moses and Abraham, but that he was himself the God who appeared to Moses and Abraham, and was worshipped by them. By calling himself, I Am, Jesus claimed to be God.

I recently watched a limited series on Netflix called *Inventing Anna*.

Under the assumed name Anna Delvey, Russian-born Anna Sorokin was able to con members of New York City's upper crust into believing she was a German heiress with access to a substantial fortune. She used this persona to receive hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash, goods and services, while working towards her goal of opening an exclusive art-themed club.<sup>5</sup>

In 2017, Anna was arrested for defrauding and intentionally deceiving major financial institutions, banks, hotels, and acquaintances in the United States for a total of \$275,000.

Would Anna have been able to start and run a successful club in New York? Quite possibly, yet, without her own money, she had to convince investors to back her. So, she was an audacious entrepreneur who had to become a con artist to achieve her dream.

Was she a liar? Most definitely. Was she a lunatic? Quite possibly. As a result of both, she was unable to become the lord of her own domain.

When Jesus claimed to be God, the religious leaders picked up stones to throw at him. They wanted to hurt him and, quite possibly, to kill him. In their minds, in claiming he was God, Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic. No other option was possible.

Yet, at this point in the story, Jesus was already well on his way to proving he was, in fact, God. That Jesus is God was finally settled with the empty tomb, out of which he rose from the grave —a feat no one but a divine being could accomplish.

Believing Jesus is God is essential for placing your faith in him and living a Christian lifestyle.

### **Jesus Is Saviour**

The second thing we learn from this statement is that **Jesus is Saviour**.

Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

To believe Jesus is Saviour is to understand the work of salvation is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By placing faith in him, the believer is able to share in all the saving benefits won by Jesus Christ through his obedience to God.

Put another way, placing one's faith in Jesus is to believe,

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

To say Jesus was unique is an understatement. He was, and is, uniquely positioned and capable of accomplishing the Plan of our creator God to rescue, reconcile, and restore humankind.

We will explore the topic of salvation more in a couple of weeks.

### **Jesus Is Lord**

The next thing this statement includes is that **Jesus is Lord**. Again, here is language we are not as familiar with these days because we do not live under a feudal system of government.

To believe Jesus is Lord is to recognise he has authority and dominion over the Church and the world on account of his divinity.

It has been reported,

Jesus came near and said to [his disciples], "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matthew 28:18)

In our day and age, we might translate “Jesus is Lord” to, “Jesus is the Monarch above monarchs ... the Prime Minister of prime ministers ... the Secretary-General of secretary-generals of the United Nations ... he is the Premier of premiers, the Mayor of mayors ...”, and so on and so forth. The biblical language is “lord” because that fit their context more so than ours, and that’s okay.

Whether we like it or not, we all have authority figures in our lives. Our parents are the first to set the limits of our behaviour early in our life. Our school teachers come next, letting us know when we can go out for recess and when we need to read a book. Our coaches and team captains tell us what position we must play and what jerseys to wear. The conductor waves his baton for us to play loud or soft. Our workplace supervisor dictates our monthly quotas and your Pastor tells you to get him a coffee ... and I want it hot and fast!

We might resist the directions of authority figures, but without such limits we would lack stability and there would be chaos in our lives, our institutions, and in our world.

You can dismiss Jesus, if you like, as a liar or lunatic, but Christians believe Jesus is Lord, that he has authority over our lives, our church, and our world. And so, we have no trouble singing, “God made him the boss of everything | ‘cuz Jesus is the mighty, mighty king!”

### **Jesus Is the Perfect Revelation of God**

Those who place their faith in him also believe **Jesus is the perfect revelation of God.**

When we cast our mind out to the heavens, we know there must be something more. This spiritual awakening helps us to realise we have a Sovereign Creator. But what can be known about this god who is beyond us, bigger than us, to be worshipped as much as to be feared?

Jesus said to him, “Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9)

When we consider Jesus, his character and his works, we behold God. Everything there is to know about God is present and perceptible in Jesus. Anything that anyone would tell you God is, if it is not consistent with Jesus’ character and works, then it is a lie.

This truth is gets even harder to imagine when we combine it with the next thing this statement tells us about Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus Is God Incarnate**

**Jesus is God Incarnate.** This is to say God assumed human nature and was fully present in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was no one less divine than he was human.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Let’s be honest: this can be a little hard to get our head around. How can Jesus be God when he is human?

For what the law could not do since it was weakened by the flesh, God did. He condemned sin in the flesh by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering (Romans 8:3)

It is not so important that we understand how the incarnation was even possible, but **that we accept it was necessary is essential!** Somehow, a perfect, sinless human was necessary, and it was necessary he willingly sacrifice himself so as to defeat the power of sin and the curse of death.

We may not understand it completely, but oh how thankful we are that Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us, am I right?

### **Jesus Is the Only Mediator**

The final essential thing we learn from this statement is **Jesus is the only mediator.**

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5)

A mediator facilitates communication between or among two or more parties in dispute. Connecting with our creator God is impossible except through the person and work of Jesus, the Christ, who serves as a mediator between us, and the only available mediator.

Jesus, as Saviour, makes our rescue by, reconciliation with, and restoration to our creator God possible, but that is only what we need. What we really want, what we so desperately crave, is relationship with our Father God.

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father!” (Romans 8:15)

Jesus, the Christ, is the one who makes our rescue, reconciliation, and restoration possible. As our mediator, Jesus then facilitates communication with God the Father, such that a relationship with our Creator is renewed. And as Jesus told his disciples,

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

There is much that can be said about Jesus, the Christ. What is *essential* for us to believe about him is that he is God, the Saviour, our Lord; he is the perfect revelation of God; he is God incarnate; and, Jesus is the only mediator between humankind and our Creator.

At that recitation, I am almost inclined to launch into song. How about you?

## Application

### We Need Role Models

Seven rugby league players created a significant cultural moment in Australia this past week when they chose faith over football.<sup>6</sup>

When faced with the choice to either wear a ‘pride’ rainbow jersey or stand down from one of their most important matches, these men did not waver in following their conscience.

There has been a lot of negative press surrounding the men’s decision not to play and they have been under significant pressure. Wherever you fall on the issue, the fact is the Pride symbol is about more than just human rights. It’s also a political symbol, celebrating and affirming the views, actions, and desires of the LGBTIQ community.

The players had not been consulted on the change of uniform and therefore stood their ground in refusing to wear it for this game. They were then excluded from playing and, as a result of their exclusion, Manly lost 20-10 to the Sydney Roosters.

In a nutshell, in the name of inclusion, the players were excluded because of their expression of faith in Jesus.

I share this story because the players commitment to following a Christian lifestyle is exemplary. When athletes are regularly, and often unwisely, held up as role models, these players fit the bill, in this instance.

We all need role models because, the fact of the matter is, no matter in which domain of life we are attempting to succeed, we learn from others before we can excel and progress in that field. So choose your role models wisely and well.

### Jesus as a Role Model

When anyone picks up a Bible and reads the Gospels, they will certainly admire Jesus for what he did and what he said. As a result, some would say Jesus was a wise teacher and others that he was a moral example. As such, Jesus then is a suitable role model.

Jesus was a wise teacher and a moral example. He was those things, but not merely a wise teacher and a moral example.

Jesus is those things and so much more.

## What Happens When Our Role Models Fail Us?

Of the domains of life in which we want to succeed, spiritual formation is just as important as being a better cook or basketball player or anything else. For spiritual formation, we look to the theological 'greats' to guide us in whatever steps we can take to draw closer to God, our creator.

Yet some of the theological greats we rely on as role models had some unsavoury beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

Consider John Wesley, the founder of Methodism.

John Wesley was remarkable. In his effort to preach the gospel, he is estimated to have traveled between 360,00 and 400,000 miles, mainly on horseback. He preached over 40,000 sermons. Standing at only 160 cm and weighing in the vicinity of 60 kgs, Wesley left an indelible mark on church history.

Nevertheless, Wesley held to some strange beliefs. He believed that church buildings should separate men and women, and he believed in ghosts and other paranormal phenomena.

Trained as a lawyer, John Calvin was hailed as a master theologian. As such, he played a significant role in the development of Reformed theology, a theology that still flourishes today. Calvin was a second-generation Reformer, following the path laid by such as Martin Luther.

Nevertheless, Calvin held to some strange beliefs. He believed that executing unrepentant heretics was justifiable, that the Eucharist provides an undoubted assurance of eternal life, and he believed it was acceptable to lambaste his opponents with vicious names, which I won't repeat here because we are in mixed company.

A final example I'll share is the shocking beliefs of Clive Staples Lewis, a more modern spiritual giant and role model for myself and others here, I'm sure. The esteemed Reformed Anglican J.I. Packer called Lewis, "our patron saint".

Lewis was a well-known Christian author and apologist, yet he believed it was possible those in hell might journey toward grace after death; therefore, he believed in purgatory and praying for the dead. He also believed *The Book of Job* wasn't historical and the Bible contained errors, although this will only be shocking to fundamentalists.

I share these examples with you because while it is natural for all of us to have role models, and to even be a role model to others, the fact is our role models sometimes fail us.

Do we cancel our role models for their transgressions? Do we dismiss their great ideas and insights when they fall short in other areas of their life? Should we be rejected because we are not ourselves perfect always and everywhere?

## Conclusion

In every area of our life we stand on the shoulders of giants.<sup>8</sup> And there is no giant of faith and life who is capable of holding us up more than Jesus.

Jesus was a wise teacher and a moral example, but not merely so. He is a role model you can trust without hesitation because he is so much more.

Jesus is God, the Saviour, our Lord; he is the perfect revelation of God; he is God incarnate; and, he is the only mediator between humankind and our Creator.

Place your faith in him because he is like no other and has accomplished more for you than anyone else could.

Fight the urge to fit in with the worldview and lifestyles of those around you. Commit to live your life with this essential belief about Jesus Christ forming a pillar that transforms your thinking and disposes you to worship and fear our creator God, who is beyond us, bigger than us, yet all around and wants us to be with him forever.

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
- 2 Annie Lim, “Aussies May Be Losing Their Religion but Not Their Need for Hope and Love”, *Eternity News*, 29-Jun-2022, <https://bit.ly/3BqRQu6> (accessed 29-Jul-2022).
- 3 “Middle aged Australians most sceptical about Jesus”, *NCLS Research*, <https://bit.ly/3zGc01A> (accessed 29-Jul-2022).
- 4 To be fair, this name is a misnomer, for it gives the impression the surname of Jesus is “Christ”, whereas Christ is more correctly understood as a title. Therefore, he really should be referred to as “Jesus, the Christ”.
- 5 “Anna Sorokin”, *Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3OJiqS8><https://bit.ly/3OJiqS8> (accessed 29-Jul-2022).
- 6 “I stand with the Manly 7!” , *Australian Christian Lobby*, <https://bit.ly/3zd7MNL> (accessed 29-Jul-2022).
- 7 Frank Viola, *ReGrace* (Baker Books, 2019).
- 8 “This concept has been dated to the 12th century and, according to John of Salisbury, is attributed to Bernard of Chartres. But its most familiar and popular expression occurs in a 1675 letter by Isaac Newton: ‘If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.’” ~*Wikipedia*, <https://bit.ly/3bceJ9G> (accessed 29-Jul-2022).