

Series: DON'T CHECK YOUR BRAIN...May 28, 2006

JESUS AND ALL THE WANNABE'S
Luke 19:28-44

I. INTRO

- A. I'd like to do an experiment this morning—so I need a person to help me. I have several bills up here, and I want to see if someone can tell me which are real and which are fake (Monopoly money, money made on a copier, and the real thing).
1. Which of these three is the real thing? I'll give you all the time you need to examine them thoroughly. The reward will be that you can choose which ever one you want for yourself when we're done.
-Now, how do you **know** this one is real? How do you know the pink one isn't the real one? How do you know this one is copied—and not real?

-Anyone here ever gotten stuck with counterfeit money? Several years ago, our daughter, Kelly, got stuck with a counterfeit \$20 that got passed to her at U. of T. Since then, she's gotten thoroughly disenchanted with money. She won't touch it, make it, spend it—have anything to do with it. After all—maybe **all** money is counterfeit, right? How many of you think that's true?
 2. For someone to take the time and trouble and risk to create a counterfeit, there must be a genuine—and it has to be worth something, right?
Before some of the specialized markings on bills, people who handled money a lot used to go through extensive training in learning to spot counterfeits. Know how they trained them? They spent a **lot** of time studying and handling the real thing. Now they've trained photo-copiers to spot them. When I tried to photocopy this \$20, our church copier reported me to the RCMP and I was arrested and fingerprinted.
 3. We live in a world where there are lot of counterfeits and a lot of con artists. And it's very important to know what's real—who's real—and who's not.
- B. I believe there is a God. I believe He's left his fingerprints all over this universe—so much so that it would take **more** faith to believe otherwise. I believe this God created everything—and made me in His image—and, as far out as it sounds—**loves** me and created me for a purpose. I not only believe that God made us, but clearly revealed himself so we wouldn't go around trying to guess who He is, what He's like, and what He's up to. And I believe He showed up on this planet in the person of Jesus 2000 years ago—and I believe the evidence proves that beyond a reasonable doubt. That's what I want to talk about today.
1. But I also believe there are counterfeit ways to God. From a distance, they look real. They sound real. Sometimes they even **feel** real.

-Some people react to this by saying, “**Nothing’s** real. **Nothing’s** genuine. I know! I got scammed—and I got hurt! It’s **all** fake.” If we’d practiced that this morning with the money, we would’ve destroyed something valuable.

-Strangely enough, others respond by saying, “They’re **all** real—that is if you **believe** they’re real!” Try taking all three of these to the bank to pay a bill and see what happens.

2. When Jesus walked here, the best records, all written by eyewitnesses, said that Jesus made some astounding claims about who He was and what He came to do. They also say that he lived a perfect life and performed astounding miracles. The best records, both from the Bible and from secular historians, say His followers went to their graves, some by gruesome deaths, believing exactly what Jesus said. In fact, Jesus Himself was executed for His claims that He was God.

-Today, in a world where it’s politically correct to say that everyone’s right and no one’s wrong—I’m going to make the case for why I believe that Jesus and his claims **alone** are genuine. I would encourage you to do two things:

- a. First, don’t just take my word for this. Think, examine, wrestle with truth.
- b. Second, don’t just blow this off or postpone it indefinitely. See, if what Jesus said is true, then it is the most important truth in the world. It could totally change, not just your life, but your eternity.

II. WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HIMSELF?

- A. A lot of times, you can tell a lot about someone by what they say about themselves. The movie, **Catch Me If You Can**, was the true story of Frank Abignale, one of the world’s best con artists. Frank spent his whole life running from the FBI—because, see, if you’re faking it, people usually find out.

1. Jesus made **huge** claims about Himself. His claims are **very** different from those of Buddha, Mohammed and Krishna, or any other religious leader. They pointed to the way. Jesus said, “**I AM** the way!” They claimed to teach truth—that truth was revealed to them. Jesus said, **I AM** the Truth.” Buddha, Mohammed and Krishna claimed that if you followed their teachings, you would have a better life. Jesus said, “**I AM** the Life!”
 -Many founders of religions pointed to God; Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have **seen the Father**.” It’s very clear that by the end of Jesus’ life, the religious officials were very aware of his claims and were looking for a way to execute him. Not only did Jesus predict that they would execute him, and give a detailed description of precisely how that would happen--Jesus predicted something else that no other leader has been able to pull off. He said that the final proof for all his claims would be him walking out of his grave alive after being dead 3 days.
2. C.S. Lewis once made a comment that went something like this, “Either Jesus was a liar and con artist of the most evil kind, or he was out-of-his-mind crazy—one the same level as someone who thinks he’s a poached egg—or He was as He

claimed to be—God; Lord of all. Whatever you do, don't say something stupid and meaningless like 'Jesus was a wonderful teacher and great moral example, but that's all.' Jesus never left that as an option. ”

It wasn't others who proclaimed Jesus God, like Constantine—as *The Da Vinci Code* claims. Jesus claimed to be God and was worshipped as God. He even uses the OT name for God to refer to Himself, he says that He and the Father are One, He told his disciples to pray in His name, He said that to see him was to see the Father, He accepted Thomas's worship as *My Lord and My God*.

B. What if I were to stand up here and make the claims about myself that Jesus made about Himself. What if I told you that I was the Son of God, that I was one day going to judge the earth; or that by seeing me, you've seen the Father; or that you ought to give me the same honor you give the Father.

1. What if I claimed I was going to come in the clouds of Heaven, that I was going to raise the dead, and they were all going to be accountable to me. What if I told you that before this life, I had lived in glory with the Father--and if you needed your sins forgiven, to come to me. What if I accepted the worship of people and told them to pray in my name and baptize other people in my name?

-I can **guarantee** you that you'd think I had totally lost my mind. If you wanted to totally prove me wrong, all you'd have to do is talk to Lori. Man, **she'd** give you a list of my sins and failures—in fact, she's got the **master** list on that stuff. If you doubted her, you could talk to my mother. She thinks I'm amazing—but not that good. Oh, and talk to my brother and sister, and the kids who grew up with me.

-Know what's fascinating about Jesus? Not only did his mother, Mary, believe in him and become a leader in the early church, his brothers believed. One of them, James became **the** leader in the church and died claiming that Jesus was Lord of all. I love my brother, but if he started claiming to be God, I wouldn't die for him. I **know** better! If Jesus was a fake, or a liar, or nuts, **everyone** in that culture—especially Jerusalem—would've been able to prove it. What happened? They stood by helplessly as Christianity took the world!

2. Do you see what C.S. Lewis was trying to say? People who try to simply classify Jesus as an amazing teacher on morality, an exceptional guy, a wonderful example who was martyred at the height of his career have missed the entire point of the Bible, of history, of Jesus' teachings, and of all those who knew Jesus best. **There is no room in the middle! Jesus PLANNED it that way. He stated His identity and mission in such a way that you really have to fall one way or the other.** It's **true** or **false**—not multiple choice of fill in the blank.

a. Down through history, even when Jesus hasn't been declared God, he has been seen as one of the greatest, most honest, moral people who ever

lived. The Koran declares him to be a prophet, born of a virgin. Ghandi, a Hindu, had **huge** respect for Jesus and His teachings. Even His greatest critics in history always revered him for his pure life; for his honesty, integrity, truth-telling, and teaching about love.

There is no doubt that, at the absolute **minimum**, Jesus took morality to a whole new level.

- b. I've never met a liar who's taken morality to a whole new level—who can't even tell the truth about themselves, have you? This is my point. If Jesus was faking everyone out—and not telling the truth, he wasn't great moral teacher, he was a con artist of the worst sort. A phenomenal liar.
- c. One more thing. People will suffer and die for something they **believe** is true, but they won't do that for what they know to be a lie.

-If Jesus was lying about His true identity, what do you think would've happened about the time they literally stripped the skin and flesh off his back with the scourging, and were prepared to drive 7 inch iron spikes right through wrists and feet into the cross?

If Jesus was lying, I think about the time the spike was digging into the center point of his wrist and the hammer was raised, He would've said, "Wait! Stop! I have something important to tell you!" But he didn't. As they were driving nails through his hands, what he kept repeatedly saying was, "Father! Forgive them! They don't know what they are doing!" Right from the cross, he was telling people he would meet them in Heaven.

- 3. Now, you may be thinking, "Okay—so Jesus **wasn't** a liar—and there isn't any evidence whatsoever that he was crazy. Is there evidence to actually prove that he **was** who He claimed to be?"

III. WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

- A. I personally think that one of the most amazing facts about Jesus is how he fulfilled prophecies that had been made about him hundreds of years before his birth. There's a book called, **The Passover Plot** that says he carefully managed his life to fulfill prophecies.

-Read Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, and it describes his suffering and death in great detail. Given Jesus' popularity, how could he ever predict that he would be condemned, scourged and crucified? Let me list a few of the prophecies, dated by the most liberal of scholars to 150 years before his birth:

*Born of a virgin.

*Come from the tribe of Judah.

*Be a descendant of King David.

*Be heralded by a special messenger who would come in the power of Elijah.

*Have a ministry of miracles.

- *Be rejected by the Jewish people.
- *Die a humiliating death.
- *Be silent before his accusers.
- *Be mocked by people
- *Have his hands and feet pierced.
- *Be crucified with thieves.
- *Have his side pierced.
- *Be buried in a rich man's grave.
- *His clothes would be gambled for.
- *He would rise from the dead.

Jesus fulfilled all of those prophecies—and more.

- B Let's take it a step further. If someone were the Son of God, what are the kinds of things you would expect from them? Well, I would suspect that they'd live a perfect life—without sin. I would imagine that supernatural signs would accompany their life—that, at will, they would be able to do things only God could do and know things only God would know. Finally, they would have to have some way of escaping death. If someone is the Son of God—they shouldn't die, right?

-When you read about Jesus, you find that he didn't expect anyone to believe in him as the Son of God without there being any evidence. And He doesn't expect anyone **now** to believe him without evidence. So let's look at it.

1. So, did Jesus live a perfect life? Was he sinless? I mentioned this earlier. At one point, when Jesus was standing in front of a bunch of his accusers, he said:
Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me (John 8:46 NIV)?

-It was a free shot, and no one could say a thing. In fact, those who had been with him almost every day for three years **called** him sinless. Morally, there is no comparison between Jesus and the founders of other religions.

2. Second, if someone were the Son of God, you'd expect them to do supernatural feats--things no one else can do. Folks, even the people who hated Jesus couldn't deny his miracles. I mean, He didn't just cure sinus headaches and make legs grow to the same length. Blind people who had been begging in villages for 20 and 30 years were healed. Jesus interrupted funerals and raised dead children in front of astounded parents. One man Jesus raised, Lazarus, had been buried and decaying four days. With a single word, Jesus straightened limbs that had been paralyzed for years.

-And He didn't do this in the back rooms of hotels or behind curtains. He did it right out in the marketplace, in people's houses, out in fields with thousands of

people watching. No other religious leader, before or since, has had these kinds of miraculous signs attributed to them.

3. There is one thing that has stalked—and stopped every religious leader—from Buddha to Mohammed to Joseph Smith to Jim Jones. Can anyone guess what it is? Death. It had to shock Jesus' followers to see his life, see his miracles, watch him raise the dead—and then see the tide of public opinion turn against him. By the end of the week Jesus has apparently ended up like every other Messiah wannabe in that culture—dying slowly on a cross.

They forgot—as we would if we were in their place—his warnings that He **had** to be “lifted up” for people's sins. In the crisis, they forgot that he'd accurately predicted the details of everything that happened.

Especially, that in three days he'd walk out of the grave alive. Not resuscitated—resurrected—and it would prove every word He'd ever said, every claim He'd ever made, as true. And that's **exactly** what He did.

-The huge rock blocking the entrance, the seal of the Roman government, the contingent of soldiers—**nothing** could stop Him. Know why? Because He was **I AM**. The God who made everything. He didn't just appear to a few disciples—he appeared to over 500 people. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 55 A.D., 25 years later, he told them, “If you don't believe what I'm saying about Jesus' resurrection—ask one of the 515 eyewitnesses. Most of them are still alive.

-Now, this has created a huge problem for people ever since. Let's just write down what some of the views are on what happened here at that grave.

*Jesus didn't actually die on the cross—he passed out, or made a deal with Pilate.

*The disciples stole Jesus' body out of the grave.

*Hysterical women—who were the original witnesses—went to the wrong tomb

*His disciples wanted so badly to believe He was alive they experienced a mass hallucination, or had a powerful experience of **group think**

- a. Now, those are some of the popular theories that have been proposed. Do you see any problem with them? I do. If Jesus had just fainted on the cross—he would've been in critical condition. Between the beating, and what actually took place at a crucifixion—especially with Jesus being stabbed in the chest cavity with a spear, how could've he, in that kind of condition, inspired his disciples to believe he was raised from the dead in a new, powerful body? These Roman soldiers were experts in killing people. They knew whether they were dead.

- b. And how would the disciples have stolen Jesus' body with a well-armed group of soldiers guarding the grave. The earliest rumor spread was that they fell asleep. And slept through 11 men moving a 2 ton stone—right by them? And **why?** Every disciple except one died—most of them tortured to death—still declaring Jesus raised from the dead. Why would they die to perpetuate a lie about a teacher they knew was dead?
 - c. If it was the wrong grave, the Jewish and Roman officials knew where the right one was—they sealed it and guarded it. If they wanted to stop the talk about Jesus rising from the dead, right in the very city where he died, all they would've had to have done is paraded Jesus' body through the streets in a grave and that would've ended all the talk.
 - d. An experience of group think—a mass hallucination? Talk to mental health experts. They will tell you that, by definition, hallucinations are individual things. Again, if it was group think—the body of Jesus could've been easily displayed to wake everyone up.
 - e. And there's no way this was just the legend that arose hundreds of years after Jesus' lived. The creed about Jesus death and resurrection was old and well-circulated by the time Paul quoted it in 55 A.D. Legends **never** develop that quickly.
4. What you find, instead of any of this, is Jesus' followers. These are people who were, for the most part, too scared to show up at the cross—now bold, proclaiming Jesus' resurrection publicly—all through their lives, right to the point of their execution. In Peter's case, his wife was apparently crucified first. That's a reality check for most men. Friends, there is **no** other explanation for the church—and for the power of changed lives. This event split history into two big pieces. The evidence is so strong on Christ's resurrection, that many skeptics have chosen to follow Jesus Christ based on this evidence alone.

-Friends, **this** is the truth that really takes Jesus way beyond any other religious leader or teacher. Confucius? Buddha? Mohammed? Gone. Still dead. All of their followers agree—in fact, they visit their graves. But Jesus still lives. What he said would happen—happened. And that didn't just change first century disciples; He's **still** changing lives. He has changed my life.

- C. If what I'm teaching about Jesus as the Son of God is true—and I believe the evidence is overwhelming—it has huge implications for me, for you, and for every person who walks on this planet.
 - 1. Let me put together the whole picture for you that I've been talking about over these past weeks. There is a God. All we see didn't just happen. This God

wants to be known--and has left his fingerprints all over the cosmos. And now we have the equipment to see his design. This planet isn't just some hunk of rock that got thrown off on a huge explosion billions of years ago; it has been shielded and placed in precisely the right spot to support life. And it's the only one of its kind!

-But it's not just in the magnificent design of everything that we see God's touch; He's left his DNA in our hearts. As damaged as we get in a painful world, we **do** know right from wrong. And we have, in our hearts—in those quiet moments—a sense that we are spiritual beings. Of something in our hearts that will live forever.

a. But it's greater than that. There is huge evidence that life on this planet didn't just happen. The odds of life just **happening** are way too great. Giant satellite dishes scan the universe for signs of intelligence—and curled up in the DNA of every living cell is the equivalent of thousands of books of information.

Information like that doesn't just **happen** on it's own. God's design and creation shows purpose. Meaning. We have meaning.

b. But God didn't just leave his fingerprints and hope we'd figure it out some day. His Spirit spoke to people; carried them along as they wrote records revealing who God is. That He's not just all-powerful, awesome, all-encompassing; He's loving, compassionate, forgiving, kind—and absolutely pure.

-We need an explanation for evil and pain. It's there. We humans rebelled and threw this planet into chaos. These Holy Writings tells us what sin is, where the guardrails are, and why we wreck our lives when we ignore them. And the Bible tells this incredible story of how God prepared the world for a Messiah—an Anointed One. One who would come and verify everything God had said about Himself.

c. And then the amazing happened. This God who created everything, who breathed the first life into man, who spoke through prophets, moved through people—showed up. He humbled himself and became, uniquely, part of his creation. Born to a virgin—so no one would mistake who he was—laid in a manger—raised by two poor people.

-All through his life, all he did was heal, teach about the life that **could** be in God's Kingdom, rebuke the religious leaders who had mis-identified, and mis-interpreted God. And when this person, Jesus—fully God, and fully man—revealed who He really was—**God**—we didn't believe him. We hated him, called him a blasphemer, attributed his miracles to Satan. Then we beat him, nailed him to a cross, and spit on him while he died.

-But that wasn't the end of him. He rose from the dead. He proved that what he had said about life and said about Himself was true. There was a purpose to his death. Instead of us having to pay the penalty for our own sins, **He** died in our place—so we could have life.

-And that's God's offer to every human being—forgiveness and **life**. But here's the deal. We can't find forgiveness and life on our own. It's only through Him. That's what He meant when He said, ...***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6 NIV).***

-That's not meant to be restrictive; it's just **true**. The sin problem that has created so much sorrow and evil—for thousands of years—is immense. Profound. So huge that it took God on a cross to solve it. It's meant to be embrace all people; that the way is now open for everyone; good people and failures; murderers, thieves, rapists, prostitutes, terrorists—and the extremely religious. Anyone who will come.

2. That has huge implications for my life and yours. I want to tell you at the outset the incredible truth of what this story of Jesus is saying. Jesus is **for** you! He is more **for** you than anyone in your life has ever been or ever will be. You have the freedom to say "no" to Him. But if you accept His offer; if you will belong to Him, if you will believe in Him, you will become the person you were created to be, the person you've always wanted to be. I'll tell you what Jesus does when he's invited into our lives.
 - a. He offers us hope for our relational world. I've never met anyone who has their entire relational world together—except Jesus. He offers to help us build the relationships we most want, with friends, with our children, with spouses. He is the author of relational intelligence. Know why I say that? Because, through his Spirit who takes up residence in our lives, He helps us become outrageously loving, patient and kind people over time. Want your relational world to be whole? That's what Jesus wants for your life.
 - b. Jesus, if we will allow Him, offers us power to live with character; with integrity. He helps liars to stop lying; he helps people who are fearful to live with courage; he helps people who live double lives to live one life. He helps us find freedom from sexual patterns that destroy our hearts and hurt others. He helps us start keeping our promises—really; He helps us live with distinction and make the kind of difference in others that He made in us.
 - c. And Jesus doesn't just help us know how to live; he helps know how to die—and live beyond the grave. A lot of religious leaders have a lot to say about how to live a better, more peaceful life.

How to appease God and help others. But not a single one has ever come back to tell us whether they were right—or just guessing. Jesus came back. With the death rate still hovering around the 100% mark here on this planet, I think what Jesus says about how to die, about how to leave this life with peace and enter the next with confidence and joy is pretty important. In fact, it's the most important information you can receive.

3. Know what the truth is? Today, right now, Jesus stretches his arms out to you. He offers you the life he died to give. All you have to do is receive his embrace. Say, "Jesus, I want the life you came to give." And I believe some of you will do that this very day.

-What concerns me is the other alternative—the **only** other alternative I know of. It's to keep your arms crossed—and to, in essence say, "No thanks, Jesus. I've got my relational world covered—man, I've got that all together and I don't want you messin' around in it. I'm fine with my character—I've got that all worked out myself—I've lived a near perfect life, and I don't need your help. And I've got the eternity thing all figured out to. I'll be fine. Don't worry about me. I'm not afraid of dying or meeting God." And if you turn God down on his offer—you're turning down the **only** One who has the power to give life.

-You might be thinking, "Now, Ken, why'd you go and say this stuff. You goofed up my weekend." It's because I know how critical this is. It's **the** most important decision you'll make.

—And I know...I **know...**that **nobody** can be saved by their religion—not even Christians. The alternative—eternity separated from God is unthinkable, and I long for everyone to find life—and hope—and meaning.

IV. CLOSING

I believe the evidence is **very** clear; that Jesus did in fact live, that He performed miracles, taught with brilliance, fulfilled prophecy and claimed to be God. I don't think saying that he was a liar, or crazy fits any of the evidence. Jesus split history in half. The evidence, I believe, shows that God for some crazy reason **loves** humans—and showed up on this planet—and that He's still giving hope, changing hearts, and freeing us from the messes we get ourselves into. Because of Jesus, people have found happiness and peace--even in the most awful of circumstances.

-But you know what? Now **you** have to decide. You have to decide who Jesus is. And you have to respond one way or the other. My prayer is that it will be with open arms!