

What if, later today, you were introduced to someone and that someone said, "Hi, I am the bread that has come down from heaven." You would probably think to yourself, who let this nutcase roam the streets"

C.S. Lewis, in his book "Mere Christianity," makes the following statement about Jesus: *"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 with a man who says he is a poached egg--or he would be the devil himself. 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 fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."* Throughout the book Lewis argues for the truthfulness and importance of the Christian faith and basically says Jesus was either a liar, lunatic, legend, or Lord. This scene from today's gospel demonstrates these four possibilities.

First, you could come to conclusion that Jesus was a liar. At some point after the feeding of the five thousand Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and returns to Capernaum - Jesus second home. The disciples are called from this area. Jesus is no longer an unknown in town. They know him and his family and this is the point of contention with the leaders in the synagogue: "You are the son of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth north of here. How is it then that you say you are the bread which came down from heaven?" God did not drop you down from heaven like some Prophet on a winged chariot. The only conclusion you can come to is that Jesus is lying!

You cannot come from the womb of Mary and also come down from heaven. It's either one or the other but not both. Unless...Well unless...Joseph did such a thorough job of concealing Mary's situation that the unusual circumstances of her pregnancy never got out. We call these unusual circumstances the virgin birth. It is part of our creed, "born of the virgin Mary." Jesus is both born of man and born of God. Born just the way you and I have been born but conceived in the womb differently, not by the will or effort of man: He is the Son of God and Son of Man. This is what is lacking in the mind of the Jewish leaders and Jesus doesn't dare get into a conversation about HOW he has "come from heaven." If they did not believe based on the feeding of the five thousand, or the healings, or his power over the demons, they would not be convinced by a story of his virgin birth.

And here we land upon the second view: You can come to the conclusion that Jesus was a lunatic. Some of the Jewish leaders no doubt held this view. Take a look at some the claims Jesus makes:

- I have come down from heaven,
- I am the object of the prophet's teachings
- I have seen the Father
- He who believes in me has eternal life
- I am the bread of life,
- This bread is my flesh given for the life of the world.

Now, taking these claims into consideration, if this man is not God himself then he is an absolute lunatic. The last claim alone is enough to convict him: My flesh is given for the life of the world.

Really? How could you possibly do that? Of course we understand this as a reference to the Cross and to the Eucharist, but here again Jesus cannot go into detail about things still in the future.

This is what the Jewish leaders do not understand, not even his disciples understood it until after the resurrection. Jesus could not look the Jewish leaders in the eye and say, "Oh, and by the way, what I meant by that bread thing is that you all are going to crucify me on a cross and there will no longer be any need for the temple sacrifices because I will be the ultimate and final sacrifice for the sins of the world." Even if they understood what he was saying they still would have come to the same inescapable conclusion: Here is a lunatic. He is delusional. He thinks he is God.

The third option is attractive to a lot of people - that Jesus was just a legend. Now some people make the mistake of saying, Jesus never existed. You can't say that. The story of his life and his teachings was not concocted out of thin air. Historians agree that he existed. So what is meant by legend is that after his death on the cross a story developed that he was resurrected. The legend grew to include his divinity, his miracles, and his powers. These exaggerations eventually found their way into the writings we call the Gospels. Jesus the divine Son of God is the myth of storytellers not the fact of history. This is what is meant when Jesus is viewed as a legend.

The problem with this view is it is nearly impossible to go into the bible and separate the man, the message, and miracles. Look at it this way.

Why would the disciples commit their lives and give their lives as martyrs knowing that they had fabricated the supernatural aspects of Jesus' life. They would not go to their deaths for what they knew to be a myth. They would not devote their entire existence, giving up family and home, to perpetuate a lie.

Let's review our list of choices: Jesus is either a liar, lunatic, legend, or He is the Lord. And let me add here that these are your only choices. Left off this list are some attractive alternatives. Prophet is not on the list. Many would like to relegate him to this status. The entire Muslim world does. Teacher and Rabbi, is not on the list. Also off the list is moral teacher, sage, philosopher, or ethicist. Why are none of these on the list? It is because, as CS Lewis pointed out, Jesus has not left that option open for us. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. A great moral teacher would not call himself God. A rabbi who was merely a rabbi would not call himself Lord.

We are left with one option: He is Lord. He is who he says he is. That means the lesson he taught are true and the demands he makes are unavoidable. It means the Eucharist really is the offer of forgiveness and life.

The 1984 movie, *Places in the Heart*, is set in the South during the Depression of the 30's and is about a widow and three small children who struggle to survive raising cotton. She becomes a widow when her husband is accidentally shot by a young black man who is lynched for the crime that wasn't a crime. She's left virtually penniless and is about to lose her home through foreclosure.

Her only hope of keeping her life together is to make a decent cotton crop. This is where Moses comes along. Moses is an unemployed black man who lends her his expertise about raising cotton, and helps her make the crop that saves her farm. Eventually, however, Moses is run out of town by the Klan because he's seen as a little too shrewd in the eyes of the cotton gin operator. Other characters in the movie include a couple tragically torn apart by infidelity.

The film ends in a strange way. A congregation is gathered for worship, they share the lord's supper. As the people take the bread and the cup, suddenly you become aware that this is no ordinary congregation. The camera zooms in and you see the widow, as well as Moses, who was run out of town. The widow's dead husband is also there, and so is the young black man who shot him and was lynched for his crime. The banker who was about to foreclose on the farm is there, along with the operator of the cotton gin and members of the Klan. The couple is there whose marriage was torn apart, and there are also some black tenant farmers.

Without a word the film says this sharing of bread is the source of forgiveness and life. Clearly the lord is present here and he is the bread of life.