

# THE REASON FOR OUR HOPE

by

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### LIAR, LUNATIC OR LORD OF ALL?

JUDGED BY HUMAN STANDARDS of success, the life of Jesus Christ was a pathetic failure. Born in a manger, He was buried in a borrowed grave. His family was poor, and for thirty years He lived in an obscure village of Palestine working as a carpenter. His own brothers thought He was mad and tried to dissuade Him when He started out to preach. His teachings were hated and scoffed at by theologians of that day. Some of His followers came from the lowest level of society. His intimate friends misunderstood Him and in the end, like cowards, let Him die alone at the hand of His enemies. He never wrote a book. He never commanded an army. He never addressed a senate or spoke to an applauding parliament. He never occupied a throne. At the age of thirty-three He perished in torture and disgrace, nailed up against the sky between two thieves.

Yet Jesus Christ spoke about Himself in a way that is simply astonishing. He asserted that He was a teacher whose doctrines should be accepted unquestioningly;

- That He was the perfect example of human character and conduct;
- That He was an absolutely sinless Being;
- That He was able to work miracles such as no other man had ever wrought; that He would rise from the dead;
- That He would be the final Judge of the world;
- That He was equal with God in power and authority.

Indeed, He even asserted that He was God! Yes, He commanded His disciples to love Him, obey Him, follow Him, sacrifice for Him, believe in Him, worship Him and, if need be, die for Him exactly as they would for God.

Now in the light of these assertions, what are we to think concerning Jesus Christ? Faced as you are with these amazing claims and all their implications, what is your opinion regarding Him?

One thing at least you must admit, as every reflecting man is compelled to do: This strange Carpenter of Galilee who somehow steps across twenty centuries and breaks into our lives even today, cannot be pushed to one side as a profound teacher and nothing more; or a courageous martyr and nothing more; or a religious genius and nothing more. For if Jesus was and is really God as He claimed to be, you cannot with knowing condescension dismiss Him as a mere teacher or a mere martyr or a mere genius. To dismiss God in that way is blasphemy!

If He really was and is Deity incarnate, you must fall before Him in adoring faith and love and surrender. On the other hand, however, if Jesus Christ was not and is not really God as He claimed to be, how can you possibly look upon Him admiringly as the noblest example of the good life, a life of unselfish humility and lowly service? If His claim is false, you must agree that this Galilean Carpenter was either a liar or a lunatic. Certainly! Of necessity He must have been one or the other if He was not Deity incarnate.

Now, which was He? A liar? Is that what He was? Not according to David Strauss, the world-renowned German scholar. Listen to the opinion of this man who was far from being a Christian:

“He represents within the religious sphere the highest point, beyond which posterity cannot go; yea, whom it cannot even equal, inasmuch as everyone who hereafter should climb the same height, could only do it with the help of Jesus, who first attained it. As little as humanity will ever be without religion, as little will it be without Christ; for to have religion without Christ would be as absurd as to enjoy poetry without regard to Homer or Shakespeare . . . He remains the highest model of religion within the reach of our thought; and no perfect piety is possible without His presence in the heart.”

Nor was Jesus Christ a liar in the opinion of Theodore Parker, the distinguished American Unitarian.

“That mightiest heart that ever beat, stirred by the spirit of God, how it wrought in His bosom! What words of rebuke, of comfort, counsel, admonition, promise, hope, did He pour out! Words that stir the soul as summer dews call up the faint and sickly grass. What profound instruction in His proverbs and discourses! What wisdom in His homely sayings, so rich with Jewish life! What deep divinity of soul in His prayers, His actions, sympathy, resignation! Try Him as we try other teachers. They deliver their words; find a few waiting for the consolation, who accept the new tidings, follow the new method, and soon go beyond their teacher, though less mighty minds than he. But eighteen centuries have passed since the tide of humanity rose so high in Jesus: what man, what sect, what church, has mastered His thought, comprehended His method, and so fully applied it to life?

“Let the world answer in its cry of anguish. Men have parted His raiment among them, cast lots for His seamless coat; but that spirit which toiled so manfully in a world of sin and death, which died and suffered and overcame the world, — is that found, possessed, understood!”

Well, then, if Jesus was not a liar, was He a lunatic? Was He a deluded fanatic? George Bernard Shaw, to whom nothing and nobody was sacred, ventured to assert that Jesus is “a man who was sane until Peter hailed Him as the Christ and who then became a monomaniac . . . His delusion is a very common delusion among the insane and . . . such insanity is quite consistent with the retention of the argumentative cunning and penetration which Jesus displayed in Jerusalem after His delusion had taken complete hold of Him.” But was Jesus Christ really a lunatic? William E. Channing, another famous Unitarian, has this to say in that regard:

“The charge of self-deluding fanaticism is the last to be fastened on Jesus. Where can we find traces of it in His history? Do we detect them in the calm authority of His precepts; in the mild, practical, beneficent spirit of His religion; in the simplicity of the language in which He unfolds His high powers and the sublime truths of religion; or in the good sense, the knowledge of human nature which He always discloses in His estimate and treatment of the different classes of men with whom He acted? . . . The truth is that remarkable as was the character of Jesus, it was distinguished by nothing more than by calmness and self-possession.”

Moreover, if we can trust the judgment of William Lecky, one of the most noted historians of Great Britain Jesus Christ was not a lunatic. Here is what Lecky writes:

“It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character which through all the changes of eighteen centuries has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love; has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments and conditions; has been not only the highest pattern of virtue, but the strongest incentive to its practice . . . The simple record of these three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.”

Was Jesus a lunatic? Not according to William Lecky who spent his life in an attempt to destroy organized Christianity!

And if you are still in doubt as to this point, consider these words of John Stuart Mill, one of the keenest philosophers of modern times:

“About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which must place the prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast.

“When this preeminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in picking on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life.”

And John Stuart Mill, like William Lecky, had little use for Christianity.

Whenever anybody seriously argues with me that Jesus was an extreme pathological case, I like to point out how strange it is that the most learned, cultured, critical intellects of all ages have bowed in reverent homage at the feet of this young fanatic, addressing Him as Master. And, whenever any critic insists that He was demented, I like to exclaim, “Would to God that the whole world were affected with His kind of insanity!”

Well, then, since Jesus Christ cannot be pushed aside as a liar or waved away as a lunatic, what conclusion must we draw? Jesus Christ is what He claimed to be! He is the Lord of glory, Deity incarnate, God humbling Himself to become man in order to redeem His lost creation. And since that is so, it is blasphemy for us to talk patronizingly about Him as a teacher or a martyr or a religious genius. Instead, we must fall down at His nail-pierced feet in adoration and faith, exclaiming, “**My Lord and my God.**”

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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