

# Vixit

As much disagreement as there is about who Jesus was, there is at least one thing nearly *everyone* agrees on: the fact that he existed. It's really not debated by any legitimate scholars, regardless of their beliefs about him. Let me show you a few quotes:

*"I don't think there's any serious historian who doubts the existence of Jesus .... We have more evidence for Jesus than we have for almost anybody from his time period."*

– Bart Ehrman, *New Testament Scholar*

*"[The following is beyond reasonable doubt from everyone's point of view:] that Jesus was known in both Galilee and Jerusalem, that he was a teacher, that he carried out cures of various illnesses, particularly demon possession and that these were widely regarded as miraculous; that he was involved in controversy with fellow Jews over questions of the law of Moses; and that he was crucified in the governorship of Pontius Pilate."*

– A.E. Harvey, *former professor at Oxford University*

*"An ancient historian has no problem seeing the phenomenon of Jesus as an historical one. His many surprising aspects only help anchor him in history. Myth and legend would have created a more predictable figure. The writings that sprang up about Jesus also reveal to us a movement of thought and an experience of life so unusual that something much more substantial than the imagination is needed to explain it."*

– Emeritus Professor Edwin Judge, *Ancient History Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney*

So the question isn't so much "is Jesus real?" That part is pretty well settled. The question is more, "who was he *exactly*?" I think asking that question will get you a pretty broad range of answers at first. But probably one of the most popular answers today is something along the lines of, "he was a good teacher." Essentially he was a good guy and a pretty effective teacher who said several pretty profound and, in general, pretty controversial things about life.

But that conclusion skips over or ignores so much of what we find in Scripture. So I think a great place to start is looking at who *he* said he was. Just as a heads up, we'll be doing a bit of a survey of Scripture today, so I'm going to be hopping around a good bit to different passages, and I don't have time to read them all or put them up on the screen so feel free to reference some footnotes in the PDF later if you're interested. Jesus

claimed several significant things about himself during his ministry. He claimed to have authority to forgive sins<sup>1</sup>, he claimed he was going to replace the temple<sup>2</sup>, he claimed he was able to resurrect himself from the dead<sup>3</sup>, and several other significant claims. But we also see him ask his disciples in 3 of the gospel accounts, “Who do *you* say I am?”<sup>4</sup> And he confirms their answer that he is the Messiah, the long-awaited Savior. That’s a *big* deal.

Jesus also said that he lived sinlessly. Look at John 8:46 with me:

**“Can any of you prove *me* guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?”**

He claimed he lived his life *perfectly*. No slip-ups, no nothing. In this passage, even Jesus’ strongest opponents couldn’t find valid reason to argue with his claims about himself. John, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, is recounting an interaction Jesus had with some religious leaders who opposed him. They *did argue* with him and accuse him of things, but at no point were they actually able to point to any reason why they opposed what he said, other than they really didn’t like it. In this chapter, Jesus is going back and forth with some Jewish leaders about the claims he’s been making. They are pretty mad about what he’s doing and saying, and they do not believe in him. They don’t believe he’s the Son of God, and they don’t believe he has divine authority, so they are just fighting with him in this dialogue.

And he turns around and asks these people who are vehemently out to get him, “can you prove me guilty of sin?” And they cannot. It doesn’t make them any less mad, in fact it makes them even more mad. But they can’t refute his claim. **Think about how big of a deal that is. If I were to come up to you and say, “hey, I think your (insert a really significant person in your life: husband, or your roommate, or your best friend, or your father, whoever) is pretty much *perfect*. There’s not one thing they’ve ever done that they shouldn’t have and I just can’t think of any example of a time they should’ve done something and didn’t.” You would correctly laugh in my face. “Do you mean in the last 30 seconds? Even then that’s a stretch.”**

Of course you can prove *everyone* guilty of *something*. “Well my husband said he was going to do the laundry before I got home. That was in 2017, still hasn’t happened. So he’s a liar.” “My roommate said they’d finally wash all their dishes. Lo and behold, once

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 2:5, Luke 5:20, Luke 7:47-48

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:19-21

<sup>3</sup> John 10:17-18

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20

again they did not.” *Perfect?* It’s so easy to point out flaws in other people. And it’s super effective too, why do you think that’s the primary way people make political ads? Why bother trying to convince you that I’m great when I can show you how terrible the other person is far more easily? We have no problem pointing out shortcomings.

But here Jesus is, looking his biggest opponents in the face, the ones who *most want* to expose him as a liar, being a fraud, and he says, “go ahead and try to prove it. I’ve shown you my work, show me yours.” And they are stumped. They can’t do it. Jesus lived *perfectly*.

And not only did he say it about himself, his closest friends and followers also backed it up. They saw his life up close and personal every single day, and they still claimed he was the Savior, the Messiah, the perfect Son of God. They witnessed his life and said he was worth giving up everything for. He was worth following because his claims were seen to be true. Even Jesus’ own half brother James came to believe Jesus was God in the flesh<sup>5</sup>. Those of you who have siblings, I want you to take a second to think about them. Now, what would it take for you to decide one of *those siblings* is the sinless, perfect, offspring of God? Not which one of your siblings think *they are* God. That’s different.

He didn’t get wrongfully frustrated when his friends messed up or when people didn’t understand him. He didn’t envy anyone. He never looked at anyone lustfully. He never lied, he never cheated, he never stole. He never struggled with pride or greed, he lived in complete perfection. And the closest thing to accusations of wrongdoing was when people said he was guilty of blasphemy because he claimed to be God (which if he was God, wasn’t blasphemy), and that he was born out of sexual immorality (which if his mother was a virgin, wasn’t true, but even if it was, that wouldn’t have been a sin he committed).

So today, I want to spend the rest of our time talking about why all that matters.

## Why does Jesus’ life matter?

Why does Jesus’ life matter? Or why did the way he lived his life matter for us? Why is it significant? Why is it such a big deal that Jesus is the only figure in all of history to both claim to be perfect and also have no one who is able to refute it? And more than that, why should we *want* Jesus to be more than just a good or ethical teacher? I think there’s 3 main takeaways for us today in regards to Jesus’ life. First:

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<sup>5</sup> James 1:1

## Jesus' life means he can be our example

Jesus' perfect life means he can be our perfect example<sup>6</sup>. 1 Peter 2 says, "Christ suffered for you, **leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.** 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'" Jesus himself says in John 13, "I have set an **example** that you should do as I have done for you." If you've been around here for any amount of time, chances are you've heard us talk about how Jesus is our example in all different aspects of life. I know it's become cheesy over the years but asking "what would Jesus do?" truly is the question we should always be asking.

Jesus shows us what it looks like to live how we were meant to live. He fulfilled every requirement, checked every box, did everything right. His life is exactly what we should be striving for. **When there are difficult people in our life, we look to the way Jesus interacted with and loved difficult people<sup>7</sup>. When we're faced with opposition or challenges, we look to the way Jesus responded with boldness and perseverance<sup>8</sup>. When we're faced with an incredibly difficult decision, we look to the way Jesus approached the Father in prayer and humility. We look at the way he laid down his desires and his comfort for the sake of others<sup>9</sup>.**

He shows us what it looks like to fully trust the Spirit. Whenever we have the question, "what am I supposed to be doing here?" we can look to Jesus as our example, because he did everything *perfectly*. Jesus' life is also beautifully freeing for us. **Jesus shows us what it looks like to live full of contentment. Jesus' example helps push back against the lie that we are defined by our circumstances or our life stage. Jesus wasn't married and didn't have children in a society that considered your lineage to be your resume. Jesus was essentially *homeless*, Matthew and Luke both tell us, "the son of man has no place to lay his head<sup>10</sup>." Jesus relied on those around him financially<sup>11</sup>, Jesus was opposed and rejected by influential religious leaders around him, Jesus was beaten and murdered, not lifted up and respected. Jesus shows us that we do not have to be enslaved to what the world around us thinks or says. We don't have to be driven by the desire for approval or material possessions or status or comfort. Jesus lived his life free from the weight of other people's opinions and criticisms.**

How beautiful and freeing is that? You don't have to be defined by anything other than the perfect identity and security offered to you in Jesus. And we can look directly at his life as an example of what it looks like to live in that kind of freedom. But Jesus' life isn't

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 5:1-2, John 13:15, 1 Peter 2:21-22

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 9:35-36, Luke 12:13-21, John 8:12-58

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 16:1-4, Matthew 22:34-39, Luke 6:1-11

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 26:36-44, Mark 1:35-39, John 17:1-5

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 8:19-20, Luke 9:57-58

<sup>11</sup> Luke 8:5-3

just an example for us in the way we can live our lives. Jesus' perfect life also means he can be our substitute.

## Jesus' life means he can be our substitute

In order to understand this concept, you need a little background information from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, we see instructions for sacrifices for God's people. We don't do this today, and honestly it seems pretty weird and archaic to most of us. But it was a very common practice. There's lots of commands in Scripture about it, but look specifically at [Leviticus 22:21](#), we'll put it on the screen for you:

*21 When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable.*

The sacrifices given had to be "without defect or blemish." Perfect sacrifices in order to satisfy the requirement of paying a debt. *It really makes a lot of sense when you think about it. A debt is incurred with sin. A debt that must be paid for. With any other debt, it can't be paid for with other debts. Imagine a guy is at a bar or brewery and he's got a tab open. And he has quite the night. He runs up the bill with quite a few drinks for himself, and he's got friends with him and he's telling them all to put their drinks on his. By the end of the night, he owes quite a bit of money. Let's say he leaves without paying. Card on file gets declined, tab is still open and unpaid. He comes back to the same spot next week and they obviously tell him he has to settle the tab. You have to pay your debt.*

Now imagine he says, "I hear what you're saying, and also put everyone's drinks tonight on my tab!" If they don't throw him out, they're at least going to look at him like he's a crazy person. "You can't take on everyone else's debt until you've settled your own. You owe too much to cover someone else's cost." But, if someone walks in off the street, someone who doesn't have *any* debt at the bar and has the capacity to pay would be able to come in and say, "hey, put everyone's tab on me. I'll take it." If Bill Gates or Rihanna or another very recognizable *billionaire* walked in and said they'd cover the cost of everyone in the room, no one is questioning them because *everyone* knows they can cover it.

They can take it on themselves because they don't have an outstanding debt. And that's exactly what Jesus did for us. Now, I do want to acknowledge this is probably the first time Jesus' sacrifice for our sin has been compared to a hefty unpaid bar tab, but I do think it's a helpful analogy. Look at how it's said in [1 Peter 1](#):

**18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**

Jesus was the perfect sacrificial lamb without blemish or defect. The one who was able to go before God and say, “I have no debt of my own, and I want to pay the price for them. I want to take their debt.” He was able to pay the price once and for all. Through his life, he proved he was able to take on the cost of the sins of the world.

That is something we *desperately* need. That should be the greatest news in the world to us. No matter how highly we might think of ourselves, we are incapable of covering our own debt. I talked about this a couple weeks ago in the sermon about pride, but the idea of a “good person” doesn’t exist.

In **Luke chapter 18**, we see an interaction between Jesus and a man often referred to as “the rich young ruler.” I’ll put it up on the screen, but we’ll start in **verse 18**:

**18 A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”  
19 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.**

This guy approaches Jesus and calls him “good teacher” as a sign of respect and admiration. But Jesus Jesus doesn’t acknowledge that he’s a “good teacher.” Jesus doesn’t thank the guy for this compliment. Jesus responds to this guy by saying, “there’s no such thing as good people or bad people, there’s only bad people and God. So I am either not a ‘good person’ or I am God.”

Jesus completely dismisses the “good person” myth. We are not able to be “good.” We have a *massive* debt. Just like the story I just told, our debt needs to be paid, but we are totally and utterly unable to pay it. That is the beauty of Jesus as our substitute.

Because of who Jesus is and what he did, we’re not defined by our mistakes anymore. We’re not reduced to the sum of our actions. The identifying thing about you isn’t liar, cheater, thief, drunkard, adulterer, failure, those things are no longer your identity. Do we still sin and fall short? Absolutely. But because of Jesus, we are not *just* our mistakes. That’s not the truest thing about us now. His perfect life means he can be our perfect substitute. And we’re going to talk more in detail about the beauty of that next week.

But Jesus' impact doesn't stop at paying our debt. He is able to do ongoing work on our behalf.

## Jesus' life means he can be our mediator

Take a look at [Hebrews 4 verses 14-16](#):

*“14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

There's a couple really important things going on in that passage, so I'm going to try to quickly go through everything and explain why it matters so much. First, let's look at verse 15. It says Jesus is our high priest **“who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.”** Jesus understands what it means to live in a broken world. Jesus understands what it means to face trials, to face suffering, to face pain. Jesus knows exactly how it feels to be *tempted in every way*. Jesus can empathize with and relate to us on such a deep level. He's not distant or removed. He was right here in the trenches. He *gets it*.

**“Yet he did not sin.”** Jesus understands everything we're going through, so he can deeply and personally relate to us. But he also lived perfectly. Which means he can stand face to face with God as our high priest. A high priest was appointed to offer sacrifices once per year for himself and for God's people to pay for their sins. His job was to act as the go-between for God and God's people. But the author of Hebrews tells us we have “a *great* high priest who has ascended into heaven.” Other places in the book of Hebrews, we are told that Jesus mediates and he intercedes between us and God. He *advocates* for us.

This is such a beautiful picture because Jesus is both intimately and personally connected to us, but also possesses the utmost authority. This would sort of be the equivalent of your best and closest friend in your whole life who is also your lawyer in a courtroom where they are very closely connected with the judge.

Or it could be compared to a healthy family relationship. My wife Sara and I are having our first child in about 8 weeks. For quite some time, he is not going to be able to speak for himself or stand up for himself in any way. So as his parents, we will be able to speak and act on his behalf for his good. And as his parents, we are going to be the ones who

are best equipped to do that. We will know him deeply, and we are going to care about him and love him deeply, and we are going to be the ones who are *responsible* for him.

So in any situation that comes up involving my son, I am going to advocate for him and mediate and intercede for him. I am going to protect him and be his representative because I have the ability and authority to do that for him. *That* is what Jesus does for us. Jesus is able to go before God the Father on our behalf and say, “I have already paid their debt. I have taken care of the cost, and now you can count my righteousness as theirs.” Jesus’ perfect life gives him full authority to approach God’s throne and speak *for* us. He is able to be our mediator.

If Jesus was only human, he may be able to relate to us, but there would also be no hope for us. He would have sinned, he would have fallen short, and he would have been just another guy. And if Jesus was only God, he could show us exactly what holiness is, but it would be utterly unattainable for us. He would be so far out of reach for us that we could never dream of drawing close to him. But that’s the beauty of who Jesus is.

So I want us to really think about and ask ourselves that same question Jesus asked his disciples. Who do *you* say Jesus is? Because based on what Jesus said about himself, there are only 3 options for us to land on. Jesus has to be exactly who he said he is and be Lord, or he was making it all up as part of an elaborate ruse and was a liar, or he was a lunatic who spent his time spouting nonsense. Those are the only options. Take your pick.

We can’t pick and choose different aspects of Jesus’ life that we want to hold onto or disregard. We can’t just say Jesus seems like he was a good guy who had some profound thoughts here and there and not also acknowledge all the things he said about himself. The claims he made were too massive and too consequential to be overlooked. He had to be telling the truth, or he had to be insane.

The reality and beauty of Jesus’ life offers us so much more than an interesting historical figure who had a few profound ideas. Jesus’ example shows us what it’s like to not sin. Jesus’ substitution means he stands in our place when we do sin. We aren’t able to live perfectly, and his life means we have nothing to prove. And Jesus acting as our mediator gives us a Savior who understands what it means to exist in a broken world, who understands what it means to be rejected, who understands what suffering is. Jesus’ life gives us an advocate to the Father with full authority who cares deeply for us and wants to be in relationship with us.



So what are we going to do in response? Because not doing anything isn't an option. We can't look at Jesus' life and walk away unchanged. Look at everything he said and everything he did. We can either accept him or reject him. And how beautiful is it that he welcomes us with open arms? How incredible it is that he looks at us and says, "I did this all for you." He wants to be your example, he wants to be your substitute, he wants to be your mediator, he wants you to accept him. Because he loves you so deeply.