

J E S U S,
T H E G R E A T
I A M

Stanford E. Murrell

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Printed in the United States of America

Jesus, The Great I AM
ISBN: 978-1-946971-52-4



www.ichthuspublications.com

Dedicated to the Memory and Teachings of

Dr. R. C. Sproul

1939–2017

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Foreword

While browsing through the books of a local Barnes and Noble in Melbourne, Florida, I became intrigued when I came across a work with the title, *The Great Philosophers: From Socrates to Foucault*. I have enjoyed reading this work, but was curiously surprised at the absence of Jesus of Nazareth being numbered among the “great philosophers,” in light of the attempts to define philosophy. While the word philosophy literally means “love of wisdom,” there is no broad based consensus of a working definition.

Some believe philosophy is best viewed in terms of abstract subject matter. It attempts to answer such questions as “What exists?” “How do we know?” “What are we going to do about it?” “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” “Where am I going?” “How should I live my life?”

Others believe philosophy is best understood in terms of methodology. The method should be careful

and systematic thinking, giving reasons for the conclusions, and allowing those conclusions to be focused. Anyone can give a reason for something being right or wrong, but the view becomes philosophy when it is rooted in reason.

There is a third view of philosophy. It is best understood as an attitude, or a way of life. Socrates, for example, died believing the unexamined life was not worth living. This understanding of philosophy stands in contrast, and sometimes conflicts, with a systematic methodology, or metaphysics and epistemology.

I would suggest, in Jesus Christ, all three of these approaches to philosophy converge, which is not surprising, for all truth is God's truth. Jesus said, "I am The Way, The Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

In light of this reality, the absence of Jesus listed among the greatest philosophers is not only highly peculiar, it renders the work manifestly deficient. As absurd as it would be to write a book on the history of the United States without ever mentioning George Washington, for example, it is even more bizarre not to chronicle the wisdom of Jesus in a book about wisdom.

For those lovers of wisdom who lean towards metaphysics and epistemology, hear Christ, as He cries out, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak” (John 12:46–50).

For those lovers of wisdom who enjoy methodology, study the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 5—7, and you will find a systematic way of thinking, with rational conclusions, for all that is articulated.

And for those who believe philosophy is best comprehended and understood in an attitude, or way of life, “Behold the Man.” He has astonished multitudes.

The nineteenth century preacher James Allen Francis noted in his famous essay, “One Solitary Life”,

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never set foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He had no credentials but Himself.

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying—and that was His coat. When He was dead, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the

human race, and the leader of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as that One Solitary Life.¹

All the philosophies of life are united in Christ. All other philosophers are lesser luminaries of that One Solitary Life. Jesus alone stands as the great, “I AM.”

To foster appreciation for the “I AM” statements of Jesus, the purpose of His coming, the celebration of His presence, the profound doctrine He taught, and the purposeful manifestation of His glory are briefly noted so that He might be praised.

Be this, while life is mine,
My song of love divine:
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Sing this eternal song
Through all the ages long:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

¹ As quoted in Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

1

Jesus, Why Did You Come?

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the

same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, ‘Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, ‘Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.’ And they came with haste, and found Mary, Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds

returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Luke 2:1–20).

In 1809, the international scene was filled with violence and turbulence. The French ruler Napoleon was marching through Austria; blood was flowing freely.

Despite the social carnage and political upheaval, important births were taking place. For example, William Gladstone was born that year. He was destined to become one of England’s finest statesmen.

That same year in England, Alfred Lloyd Tennyson was born to a poor minister and his wife. The child would one day greatly affect the literary world in a marked manner.

On the American continent, the jurist and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Not far away in Boston, a baby was born who would grow to be a poet and a writer of horror. Edgar Allan Poe began his eventful, albeit tragic, life.

It was also in that same year of 1809, that a physician in England named Darwin and his wife,

named their child Charles Robert. He would one day go on a voyage aboard a ship named the *Beagle* and return to give the world his theory of evolution, the idea that all plants, animal, and man are descended from one common ancestor.

That same year produced the cries of a newborn infant in a rugged log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky. The baby's name? Abraham Lincoln.

If there had been news broadcasts at that time, these words might have been heard: "The destiny of the world is being shaped on an Austrian battlefield today."

But history was actually being shaped away from the battlefields of Napoleon and his men in the cradles of England and America.

In like manner, the citizens thought taxation was the big news during the days of Caesar Augustus. But a young Jewish woman cradled the biggest news of all in her arms: the birth of the Savior.

Today, the gospel has captured the hearts of more than 2.2 billion people who profess to be Christian. As attention is turned to the Advent story, a fundamental question arises: "Jesus, why did you come?" The Bible records the answer.

First, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to fulfill the promise God the Father made in the Covenant of Redemption. When Adam, acting as the Federal Representative of mankind, fell in the Garden of Eden, he condemned not only himself, but all of humanity to a godless state of existence. The Bible says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Every person who is born into the world, is born with the plague of all plagues clinging to the soul, and permeating every fiber of existence. That plague is sin. What does sin do to self and others?

- Sin darkens the understanding.
- Sin perverts the emotions.
- Sin dominates the will.
- Sin moves men to love darkness rather than light.
- Sin creates chaos and confusion.
- Sin destroys the moral compass of the will while exalting pride, selfishness, and greed.
- Sin causes the body to burn with illicit desires, while trying to silence the conscience warning of a certain damnation.
- Sin defies God.

- Sin destroys relationships.
- Sin demands servitude and gives only death as wages in return.

Despite all the wars that have been waged, all the tears that have been shed, all the promises that have been made, all the self-loathing that has been expressed, the power of sin is still present.

Despite all the self-help programs on the market, despite all the professional counseling in the country, despite all the prisons that have been erected, despite all the personal shame that tormented souls carry in private, sin is still alive and well on planet earth.

Because sin is so pervasive and strong, if any soul is ever to know redemption and forgiveness of sins, then the question of sin must be confronted.

Because of infinite grace, in the same spot that sin was first conceived, God entered into a Covenant of Redemption with man.

God promised that one day Someone would come to reverse the works of unrighteousness, thereby allowing souls to be reconciled and have fellowship with the Sovereign, based upon the righteousness of justice satisfied. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5:20).

The long wait for the fulfillment of the Covenant of Redemption began with great hopes and many expectations. But these expectations gave way to a patient waiting. During the waiting period, the Law came with all of its rituals and ceremonies. These rituals and rites served a purpose, which was to remind individuals that by the works of the Law no flesh can ever be justified in the sight of God. Moreover, the shedding of the blood of animals did not take away sin, for they were not perfect either, having been touched by the same plague that afflicts mankind.

Realizing this, religious men such as the Pharisees grew desperate. They hoped against hope that somehow the righteousness of God could be obtained by the blood of bulls and goats in association with many good works.

And yet, as David Clark noted, “Every smoking altar, every bleeding victim, every ascetic privation, every priestly intervention was a testimony to the guilt of sin, and the need of [a more perfect way for the] remission [of sins] . . .”

Lest mankind utterly despair, the prophets appeared to remind the people of the Prince who was to come, who would make a Covenant with His

people. Finally, “in the fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), at the appointed moment, the Messiah did appear suddenly in His holy temple. Later, He went and stood on the edge of the Jordan River to be baptized, in order to be presented as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Upon hearing the Messiah had come, throngs of people in Palestine rushed to receive Christ, though others drew back. There were some who refused to believe that Jesus was the Anointed One. “But to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on His name” (John 1:12).

Tragically, there are still those who choose not to believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. They cannot believe that Christ is truly Emmanuel—God with us—despite abundant evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

There is the evidence of the virgin birth, the influence of His personality upon the world, and the personal testimony of many. Regarding the Virgin Birth, it is a great mystery, but the Bible tells us that Jesus was born without personal sin, and without the imputation of Adam’s sin.

How God could be both true deity and true humanity has occupied the conversation of theologians and Church Councils for centuries (Chalcedon A.D. 451). The Bible simply records the facts, without explanation, and calls upon the heart to believe in the miraculous because it is true.

The baby in the cradle of Bethlehem was also the Eternal Son, and as the Eternal Son, Jesus had something to say to the Father the night of His birth. And this is what Christ said when He came into the world: “Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:5–7).

Later, Roman historians would record that the world had been waiting for Someone as special as Jesus. Suetonius noted, “There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world” (Suetonius: *Life of Vespasian*, 4:5). Tacitus tells of the same expectation declaring “there was a firm persuasion . . . that at this very time the East was to grow powerful, and rulers coming from

Judaea were to acquire universal empire” (Tacitus: *Histories*, 5:13).

The Jews had hope “about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth” (Josephus: *Wars of the Jews*, 6:5, 4). In the fullness of time, God brought forth His Son (Galatians 4:4).

What a Son Jesus would prove to be. The totality of his life was a constant demonstration of His deity. By that life He became *The Man Who Changed the World*. Dr. Herbert Lockyer explains.

More than 1,900 years ago there was a Man born contrary to the laws of life.

This Man lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity.

Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived: That was during His exile in childhood.

In infancy He startled a king: in childhood,

He puzzled the doctors: In manhood, He ruled the course of Nature, walked upon the billows as if pavement, and hushed the sea to sleep.

He never wrote a book, and yet all of the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him.

He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined.

He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students.

The names of the past, proved statesmen of Greece and Rome, have come and gone.

The names of past scientists, philosophers, and theologians, have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more.

Though time has spread [in centuries] between the people of this generation, and the scene of His crucifixion, yet He still lives.

Herod could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him.

He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of Heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by devils, as the living, personal Christ, our Lord, our Savior, and our God.²

“Jesus, why did you come?”

Listen to Christ as He says, “I came as the Son of the Living God to offer myself as a Perfect Sacrifice,

² Republished as “The Incomparable Christ”.

to honor the Covenant of Redemption, first stated in the Garden of Eden.”

“Lord, is that the only reason why you came?”

“No, I also came to destroy the works of the Devil” (1 John 3:8).

Lying is a work of the Devil, as Satan lied in the Garden of Eden. “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, ‘Yea, hath God said, “Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said unto the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, “Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.”’ And the serpent said unto the woman, ‘Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:1–5).

St. Augustine reminds us that, “When regard for truth has been broken down, or even slightly weakened, all things will remain doubtful.”

A.W. Tozer warned, “The unattended garden will soon be overrun with weeds; the heart that fails to

cultivate truth, and root out error, will shortly be a theological wilderness.”

Murder is a work of the Devil. We read of how Cain, motivated by Satan rose up and murdered his righteous brother Abel. “In this the children of God, are manifest, and the Children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:10–12).

Moving men to pride is a work of the Devil, manifested in the Divine narrative of how the Evil One moved David to number the children of Israel. “And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel . . . And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. . . . And the Lord spake unto Gad, David’s seer, saying, ‘Go and tell David, saying, “Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things: choose thee One of them, that I may do it unto thee.” . . . And David said Unto Gad, ‘I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the Hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies: but let Me not

fall into the hand of man” (1 Chronicles 21:1, 7, 9–14).

The nation of Israel paid a terrible price for the pride of one man. Someone has said that we are never more like Satan himself than when we are filled with pride. Pride can make individuals unwilling to repent, unwilling to say, “I’m sorry,” unwilling to tell the truth about things that all the world knows to be different. The Bible declares that God will always resist the proud, but He will give grace to the humble.

Betrayal is a work of the Devil, reflected in the fact that for 30 pieces of silver Judas betrayed the Son of God after the Devil had entered into him. “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his Disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it.’ And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, ‘That thou doest, do quickly’” (John 13:23–30).

There are many forms of betrayal such as a contract not honored, or re-negotiated, a friendship

abused for selfish purposes, and a willingness to advance one's own agenda at all cost. The story is told of William Tyndale and how he was betrayed. Tyndale was the first person to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English. He wanted to make a Bible for the common people. He thought that a plowboy of ten with a Bible could know more than the Pope himself without the Scriptures. But the church officials stepped in to forbid Tyndale from giving the Bible to common people. Tyndale continued his work in secret, until, in 1535, a friend betrayed him. He was taken prisoner to the English castle of Vilford, where he still tried to continue his work. He was unable to finish his translation because he was sentenced to die a heretic's death. This involved strangulation and burning at the stake. On October 6, 1536, he spoke his last words, "Lord, open the eyes of the king of England." William Tyndale was a victim of betrayal and treachery.

Now Christ has come to destroy all the works of the Devil. And where Christ puts forth His strength, He overthrows the Evil One, as well as sin. John teaches those who are born of God are not in bondage to sin (1 John 3:9).

This, however, does not mean believers are endowed with angelic purity, though the Pelagians and the Cathari taught that during the days of John Calvin in the 16th century. Nor does it mean that believers are entirely sanctified, so that they are without sin, as some of the followers of John Wesley teach.

What it does mean, by contrast, is that “in the end of regeneration, sin will be destroyed and all who are begotten of God will live righteously and godly because God’s Spirit corrects the lusting of sin” (John Calvin).

“Jesus, why did you come?”

“I came to destroy the works of the Devil.”

“Lord, is that all?”

“No, I also came to seek and to save that which is lost, and to give eternal life to all who will believe.” Because eternal life is a relationship with the Living Lord, based upon faith in all that Jesus claimed to be, the content of belief is important.

George Whitefield was preaching to coal miners in England. He asked one man, “What do you believe?”

“Well, I believe the same as the church.”

“And what does the church believe?”

“Well, they believe the same as me.”

Seeing he was getting nowhere, Whitefield said, “And what is it that you both believe?”

“Well, I suppose the same thing.”

The coal miner lacked real content for faith. The content of faith is the gospel (1 Corinthians 1—3). The object of saving faith is Christ. But faith in Christ must not be in the abstract. It must be personal and real.

“The life of Christianity consists of possessive pronouns,” says Martin Luther.

It is one thing to say, “Christ is a Savior”. It is quite another thing to say, “He is my Savior and my Lord.” The devil can say the first, but only the true Christian alone can say the second.

“Jesus, why did you come?”

“I came to honor the Covenant of Redemption. I came to destroy the works of the Devil. I came to seek and to save the lost. I came to give eternal life. I came so that individuals might say, ‘Jesus is my Lord and my Savior.’ Amen.”

*** *End of Free Sample* ***