

So this is it, the final question in our series on “Looking for Answers to Life’s Biggest Questions.” I think we’ve saved the biggest and most important for last. The question is “Why Jesus?” The answer is not “Why not Jesus?” The answer is far more significant and important than that.

The question of why should we believe in one “god” over another has been with us for a long time. Greek and Roman mythology is filled with stories of the battle of the ‘gods.’ The Old Testament reports an ancient account of the “Battle of the Gods” that took place when Ahab was King of Israel and Elijah was the Lord’s prophet. (1 Kings 18) It was a true test to see if Baal or the Lord was God. The challenge was to see which “god” could light the fire for a sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal went first. Despite pulling out every trick in the book, their god couldn’t do a thing. Then Elijah went. He prepared the sacrifice, had everything drenched with water two times and prayed, *"O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."* (verses 36-37) God answered that prayer and consumed everything with the fire He sent from heaven. The Lord God won even though there was no real battle. Baal never showed up because Baal never existed.

The Bible teaches us that there is only one true God. But that doesn’t prevent us from having to face a Battle of the Gods in our world today. We have to admit that there are a lot of different “gods”, a lot of different competing religions in our world today. Desiree Cooper, a columnist for the Detroit Free Press (11/19/08), claims that there is another entrant into the “Battle of the Gods” called Spirituality. Spirituality may be defined as caring about the condition of others and the world. It is also about finding God in nature, music, friends and community service. So where does Jesus fit into this picture?

Jesus makes some rather astonishing claims that are recorded in the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to John. Jesus claims that God is His Father (verses 17-18). So that means that He is the Son of God, not just a child of God. Jesus claims that He is the giver of life (verse 21), that our lives now and eternal life are gifts that we receive from Him and through Him. Jesus claims that He is the Judge (verse 22), that ultimately He is the one who decides our final fate. Those are claims that only God can make.

So Jesus claims to be God. Is that true? So people doubt Jesus. Others deny His claims. How about you? One day Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do people say that I am?"* They answered, *"Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say you are one of the other prophets."*

(Mark 8:27-28) At that time most of the people respected Jesus but didn't believe in Him. Is the same true today? Some say that Jesus is only a legend, no more real than the Greek and Roman gods. But that is not true. History proves that Jesus actually lived, that he was a great religious leader in Israel. Others say that Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is a lie. But if Jesus is a liar, how can He be a great religious leader? Why would we want to follow a spiritual leader whose greatest teaching is a lie? If Jesus isn't a legend or a liar, then is He Lord?

One way to answer that is by looking at the difference between Christianity and all other religions, between Jesus and all other so called "gods." By the way, we can include spirituality in this list. The difference is clear.

Other religions want to help find the truth. That means we have to go searching, working for it ourselves. Jesus says that He is the Truth. We don't have to search for it. He gives it to us. Religions tell us to find our own salvation, whether it is by trying to be a good person, by helping others, or by following a set of prescribed rules and rituals. Jesus gives salvation. He knows that we can't save ourselves, that we will never be good enough. He knows that no amount of personal or financial sacrifice will make us acceptable. Jesus is the one who makes us acceptable to God. He paid the price to rescue us from sin and death, and that is salvation.

Other "gods" want to help us find life. Jesus is life. Other gods claim that they can help us find the door to whatever eternal destination they offer. Jesus says He is the door. Finally, all of the so called gods, all of the religions in the world give us a set of rules and rituals to follow. They tell us what we have to do to make our self acceptable to god. But Jesus says that He has DONE everything for us. When Jesus announced from the cross, "It is finished," he proclaimed the Good News that the price for sin had been paid in full.

Jesus' claim would be meaningless today if He didn't rise from the dead. If Jesus had died on the cross and didn't rise from the dead, then He is a Liar. But Jesus rose from the dead. It is a historical fact that Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter Sunday morning. Not even Jesus' enemies dispute that fact. They paid the soldiers guarding the tomb to lie and say that the body had been stolen. Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote these words about Jesus:

*Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works – a teacher, of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day. (The Antiquities of the Jews, Chapter 3:63-64)*

Josephus wrote that Jesus rose from the dead. The Disciples saw the risen Lord, believed in Him, and were even willing to die for Him. Would you die for a lie? I wouldn't. Why would they. The

resurrection proves that Jesus was not a liar, an imposter. The resurrection validates Jesus' work and guarantees our resurrection, too. Because Jesus lives, we live also. The resurrection shows that Jesus has the power to make the difference for us and in us. Nothing is impossible with God.

So why should we believe in Jesus? Believe in Jesus because He is who He says He is. Believe in Jesus because He won the ultimate battle on the cross. It wasn't a battle of the gods. It was a battle with sin and death and he defeated them both. Believe in Jesus because His words are true. Jesus said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6) Amen.