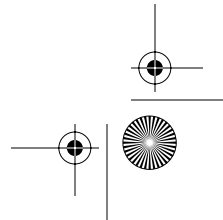
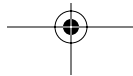
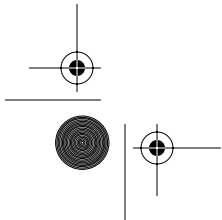
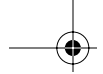


The Scandal of Jesus

Vinotb Ramachandra





InterVarsity Press
 P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426
 World Wide Web: www.ivpress.com
 E-mail: mail@ivpress.com
 ©2001 by Vinoth Ramachandra

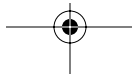
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ISBN 0-87784-051-2

Printed in the United States of America ∞

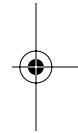
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What is beyond dispute is that Jesus of Nazareth is one of those perennial question marks in history with which mankind is never quite done. With a ministry of two or three years he attracted and infuriated his contemporaries, mesmerized and alienated the ancient world, unleashed a movement that has done the same ever since, and thus changed the course of history forever.

J . P . M E I E R



There is something about Jesus that from the beginning has been distasteful, even scandalous. In the Roman Empire crucifixion, though widespread, was viewed with universal horror and disgust. It was cruel and degrading, the victim often flogged and tortured before being strung up on a cross at a busy, crowded junction as a deterrent to the masses. It was the most humiliating form of

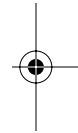


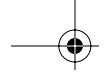


death in the ancient world, the penalty reserved for rebellious slaves and what today would be called terrorists against the state. Jesus suffered this penalty, and to discuss Jesus is to bring to mind this scandalous form of execution.

No Roman citizen could be crucified. Romans didn't even discuss the subject; they pretended it never existed. The great senator and orator Cicero declared that "the very word 'cross' should be far removed not only from the presence of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears."¹ Crucifixion was a way of obliterating not only victims but the memory of them. A crucified person had never existed. As a result, not a single ancient historian pays serious attention to any crucifixion. It is in this world that we meet a group of men and women announcing throughout the Roman Empire that among its forgotten, crucified nobodies had been the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

This message, if true, subverted the world of religion. It claimed that if you wanted to know what God was like and understand his purposes for his world, you had to go not to the lofty specu-





lations of the philosophers or the countless religious temples and sacred groves that dotted the Empire but to a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem. For the Jews a crucified Messiah (Savior) was a contradiction in terms, expressing not God's power but his inability to liberate Israel from Roman rule. For pagans, the idea that a god or the son of a god could die as a state criminal, and that human salvation should depend on that particular historical event, was not merely offensive—it was *madness*.



I cannot overemphasize the foolishness of such a message. If you wanted to convert the educated and pious people of the Empire to your cause—whatever that cause may have been—the worst thing you could do would be to link that cause to a recently crucified man. Such an association would be, to put it mildly, a public relations disaster. And to associate God, the source of all life, with a crucified criminal was to invite mockery and sheer incomprehension.²

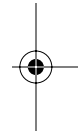
The message these men and women were spreading also subverted the world of politics. It claimed that Rome's salvation would come from





among those forgotten victims of state terror. Caesar himself would have to bow before a crucified Jew. Having crucified the Lord of the universe, the much-vaunted civilization of Rome stood radically condemned. Little wonder that the Christians' "good news" was labeled a "dangerous superstition" by educated Romans of the time.

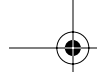
It is the madness of this "word of the cross" that compels us to take it seriously. No one can say that this was some pious invention, for the cross runs counter to all notions of piety. And no one can dismiss the message as mere self-promotion, for the early believers gained nothing from telling their story. There is something so absurd, so topsy-turvy about the Christian message that it gets under my skin. I am a Christian today because *it has the ring of truth in it.*³



Jesus' Background

Behind the riddle of the cross there stands the riddle of Jesus himself. Jesus was a Jew, born around 6 B.C. He spent the last years of his life mostly as an itinerant preacher in Galilee, probably with a home base in the town of Capernaum. His teach-



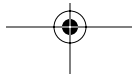


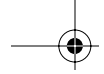
ing and his lifestyle attracted some but infuriated others.

We cannot understand the significance of Jesus apart from the Jewish world of the early first century. Fundamental to every Israelite's identity was a sense of belonging to a "called out" people. The Israelites were conscious of having been called by the living God to be a priestly nation, namely, one that would mediate the purposes of God to the rest of his creation.⁴ Israel was a confederacy of nomadic tribes forged into a nation after their deliverance from slavery and genocide in ancient Egypt. They knew this God who had redeemed them by his covenant name, Yahweh (from YHWH, Hebrew for "He is" or "He will be," cf. Exodus 3:13-15). For the people of Israel, Yahweh was not one among many tribal deities in the West Asian pantheon; he was no less than the creator and sustainer of the entire universe.⁵



Devout Jews in the time of Jesus wondered if Yahweh, the God of their forefathers, had abandoned them. Although they were living in the land of their forefathers—the land promised to them by Yahweh—they were ruled by a people who did





not worship Yahweh (the Romans). The Jews longed for the day when Yahweh would cleanse the land of the Roman idolaters and reestablish his own rule (Yahweh's kingdom) through his anointed priest or king (*messiah* in Hebrew, *christos* in Greek; literally, "anointed one").

Jesus' Lifestyle

Within this setting, Jesus announced God's project: to break down the barriers that keep people alienated from God and from one another. The "good news" that Jesus announced and embodied was addressed not to a religious elite but to the nonreligious—moral failures and social outcasts.

One of the most revolutionary of Jesus' actions was to share in table fellowship with those shut out of the religious community. His habit of associating with the "misfits" of Palestinian society drew hostile criticism from the religious authorities. The Jewish scholar Géza Vermès says that "more than any other" this aspect of Jesus' lifestyle distinguished him from "both his contemporaries and even his prophetic predecessors."

The prophets spoke on behalf of the honest poor.





and defended the widows and the fatherless, those oppressed and exploited by the wicked, the rich and the powerful. Jesus went further. In addition to proclaiming these blessed, he actually took his stand among the pariahs of his world, those despised by the respectable. Sinners were his table companions and the ostracized tax collectors and prostitutes his friends.⁶

Jesus broke down social barriers in forming around himself a community drawn from the marginalized peoples of Palestinian society. What the Pharisees—an influential school of Judaism—saw as sinful disregard of covenant ideals, Jesus saw as the birth of a new covenant, the visible expression of God’s liberating reign. In the table fellowship that Jesus and his disciples celebrated, to which outcasts and sinners were invited unconditionally, Jesus was enacting a parable. Here was a foretaste of the messianic banquet, when “many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11; cf. Luke 13:29). Life with Jesus seemed, for those who followed him, like a continuous celebration.



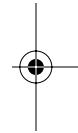


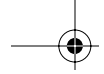
Jesus' Self-Understanding

Jesus' lifestyle and teaching are interwoven with the remarkable and often shocking claims he made concerning his identity and vocation. These claims prompted his critics to change their view of him from puzzlement to hostility and then to outright rage.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God—the great hope of Israel for God's saving presence—was breaking into the world, taking shape in and through Jesus' words and deeds. He offered men and women unconditional forgiveness for their sins. His teaching was not based on the invocation of rabbinic authority (the "teaching of the elders") or the classical Old Testament prophetic formula: "Thus says Yahweh." Jesus spoke on his own authority.

Jewish tradition did not invest the Messiah with the right to forgive sins. The Messiah, according to contemporary Jewish understanding, would exterminate the godless in Israel, crush demonic power and protect his people from the rule of sin, but the forgiveness of sin was never attributed to him. Jesus did not speak as a priestly or prophetic agent assuring God's forgiveness on the





day of final judgment, nor did he offer a provisional pardon to be later ratified by a higher court. He forgave sins on the spot, boldly and freely, without appeal to any authority beyond himself.

In declaring to people the forgiveness of sin Jesus bypassed the temple with its divinely instituted priesthood and sacrificial system. If we keep in mind that the temple represented the very identity of Israel as a nation (it served as the focal point of Israel's political, cultural and religious uniqueness), then this revolutionary disregard posited an unprecedented authority. To add to the provocation he performed a symbolic act of divine judgment in the temple precincts, following it up with a message of impending doom on Jerusalem (Mark 11:12-19; 13:1-2). Israel had failed in its calling to be God's agent of healing for the nations, and its temple had become an object of national idolatry. Here Jesus parted from Jewish nationalists who advocated fanatical violence against Rome. Jesus saw the present occupation and future destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies as God's just punishment of a people who had forsaken him, the very God whose name





was constantly on their lips.

Jesus further expressed his identity by reshaping Israel—the covenant people of God—around himself. In choosing and commissioning twelve disciples to be his apostles (authorized representatives), he created a representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. He even declared these twelve to be future judges of Israel (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). He did not include himself among the twelve but stood above them, implying that he understood himself to be sent by God to gather and liberate the true Israel to fulfill its calling in the world. His apostles, unlike the prophets of old, would actually taste the power of God’s kingdom through their association with him: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it” (Luke 10:23-24).



Even to call men and women to personal loyalty, expressed in costly discipleship, is to make implicitly an outstanding claim. Jesus drew sharp lines between loyalties to him and to others: “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead”





(Matthew 8:22); “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37-38; cf. Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:25-27).

How high a self-understanding is involved here can be seen when such words are read in their monotheistic, Jewish context. The words of Jesus reinterpret the Old Testament traditions which shaped the pattern of Jewish national and individual life for centuries. His word is set above the law of Moses and the tradition of the elders as the means to life (cf. Matthew 5:21-47; 7:24-27). He calls people to put him before every other relationship in life and even to be willing to give their lives away for his sake. And he makes his case in a culture imbued with the passionate conviction that God is the source and owner of the whole world and that allegiance to this God comes before everything and everybody else.

Moreover, Jesus spoke of himself not only as judge of Israel but as the one to whom *all nations* will give account at the end of history (cf. Mat-





thew 25:31-46). Even more remarkably, the basis of judgment will be the nations' response to *him*—and expressed in their response to those with whom he has identified himself. The matter-of-fact way in which Jesus assumed the rights and prerogatives of Yahweh startled his contemporaries and often provoked the indignation of the religious authorities.

Although Jesus anticipated that his suffering and death would resemble what had befallen other prophets in Jerusalem, unlike them his death would be the climax of his God-given vocation, having redemptive significance for Israel. It would be a “ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45), the inauguration of a new covenant between God and his people through the forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 26:27-28; cf. Isaiah 53:12; Jeremiah 31:31-34). At his last meal with the disciples before his crucifixion Jesus spoke of his coming death as a new exodus, freeing his disciples from the slavery of sin and bringing them into a new relationship with God. His shed blood would be the sacrifice to end all religious sacrifices.

Thus we cannot separate the teaching of Jesus





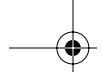
about what was involved in following him from how he saw himself in relation to God, Israel and God's world. Jesus' pronouncements on discipleship imply a profound self-understanding.

Jesus' Challenge

What, then, are we to make of Jesus Christ? The one thing we cannot say is that he was *merely* a wise teacher, for we have seen that it is impossible to separate the content of his moral instruction from the self-conscious authority that is *presupposed* by that instruction—an authority that surpasses that of any Jewish prophet or ancient sage. If what he believed about himself was not true, then he can hardly be a moral exemplar for the rest of us. If we hesitate to acknowledge the truth of his claims, then logically we are compelled to dismiss him as either a fraud (thus claiming that the whole edifice of Christianity is built on a gigantic hoax) or a megalomaniac, a self-deceived fool.

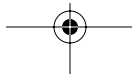
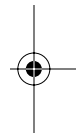
Avoiding Jesus' challenge by attributing all his truth-claims to the pious imagination of the early Christian community does not get us very far. It still begs the question: What was it about Jesus of





Nazareth, compared to other messianic claimants and charismatic figures in Palestine and elsewhere, that led to such outrageous claims about him being made—and believed—within a generation of his death? We are faced with the same choice, this time with regard to the Christian church: *Someone* said the things attributed to Jesus, and that someone was true, false or deluded.

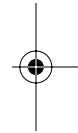
Even the most skeptical of scholars accepts that the four New Testament Gospels were complete by the end of the first century, while a great many would bring that date forward to a little over one generation after the crucifixion. This small time gap between the events reported and the writing down of the tradition (parts of which, of course, were circulating orally and even in written form well before their final compilations) is itself unique in the history of religious movements. We search in vain for parallels of such rapid developments among followers of other significant leaders. Moreover, consider modern leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, Oscar Romero or Stephen Biko. They had large public followings and died as martyrs for their beliefs





and practices. They were deeply mourned, but any group today attributing to these leaders either miracles or claims to divinity would have to contend with living contemporaries who knew better. Similarly, the Christian church could not have made the outlandish claims that it did about Jesus while his contemporaries were still alive—unless those claims were admitted by a wider audience to go back to Jesus himself.

Why is the charge of megalomania so difficult to stick on Jesus? The lifestyle of Jesus and the values he embodied strike even the most hardened skeptic as eminently sane, indeed deeply attractive. Here is a man who describes himself as “gentle and humble of heart” and stoops to wash the feet of his disciples in an act of menial service. No contemporary of Jesus, nor any serious thinker since, has accused Jesus of being insincere or hypocritical in his relations with either friend or enemy. Gandhi and King both drew their inspiration for dealing with those who opposed them from the example and teaching of Jesus. Jesus’ lifestyle of lowly, compassionate service toward the sick, vulnerable and oppressed continues to at-





tract many people to him from diverse cultural backgrounds. This combination of *an other-oriented lifestyle* with *self-directed claims* makes Jesus utterly unique.

When we explore the great religious traditions of the world, we come across many great figures who impressed their contemporaries with the other-centeredness of their way of life. They lived lives of exemplary courage, compassion and sacrifice. But such people made no grand claims for themselves other than to be pointers to the truth. One noted authority on Buddhism observes that Guatama the Buddha “saw himself as simply preaching the Dharma [truth].”⁷ Indeed, in the Mahayana tradition, Buddhahood is an ideal state open in principle to all life-forms. Likewise, in Islam, Muhammad is simply a prophet, albeit the final prophet, in a long tradition of prophets and messengers commissioned by God to turn people away from idols. In these cases there is no call to personal allegiance, no claim to be communicating anything other than a word from God or an insight into ultimate reality.

We also come across many people who make





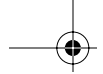
great self-centered claims, but these claims do not impress us for very long. Julius Caesar, Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin and Pol Pot have disappeared into the mists of history, but their brutality and self-aggrandizement seem to fit quite naturally with the megalomaniacal claims they made about themselves. But here Jesus stands out as different. You can search the religious traditions of humankind—indeed I would go further and invite you to search all the great literature of humankind—and you will not come across one like Jesus, who makes seemingly the most arrogant claims concerning himself and lives in the most humble and selfless manner conceivable. Jesus of Nazareth simply blows our imagination.



Jesus' Resurrection

Furthermore, Jesus was not *remembered* by his disciples the way martyrs and sages from the past live on in the collective memory of a people. Jesus' followers did not make pilgrimages to the hill on which he was crucified or the tomb in which his corpse was laid. Something happened soon after Jesus' death that transformed a defeated and deso-



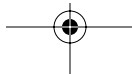


late group into a totally new movement, one characterized not by nostalgia but by hope.

At the heart of early Christian preaching lies the claim that Jesus was *resurrected* by God, that over a period of forty days after his crucifixion he encountered them in a physical body that was recognizable as that of the man they knew before. Further, after that period he continued to guide, “indwell” and empower them through his Spirit. All the earliest accounts of Christian origins are agreed that what distinguished the new “Jesus movement” in its Jewish and Greco-Roman environment was that it proclaimed not a new religion or ethic but rather a new *event*—namely, the resurrection by God of the crucified Jesus—and the implications of that event for the world.



Those who are skeptical about such claims have, once again, some tough questions to face. For example, although we have much evidence of anti-Christian polemic from Jewish and Roman sources in the early years of the Jesus movement, we find no one disputing the claim that the tomb in which the body of Jesus had been laid was empty. What reasonable hypothesis, other than the early Chris-



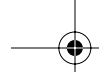


tian proclamation, can account for this? The first eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus were, according to the Gospel writers, women. Is it likely that such a story was fabricated in a Jewish milieu where the testimony of women would not have been permissible in a Jewish court of law? Also, *something* happened to compel the early disciples of Jesus to break with a centuries-old sabbath tradition and worship God on the first day of the week. *Something* happened to make these Jews, within a few years of the death of Jesus, ascribe to him titles that they traditionally ascribed to Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, and to address prayers and worship to him as they did to Yahweh.



Nor does it make any historical sense to assume that the disciples of Jesus were so crushed by his death and the failure of their dreams that they fantasized Jesus' being raised from death as a way of coping with their painful situation. The Jewish world of the first century was awash with revolutionaries with messianic pretensions, most of whom were put to death by the authorities. Nowhere do we hear of their disappointed and dispersed followers projecting their broken dreams





into claims about their hero being raised from the dead. That option was not available to them. The followers of a failed revolutionary had to give up the revolution or else find another leader. Jewish language about “resurrection” was not about a private spiritual experience; it was about a physical and public event. In the Jewish worldview, “resurrection” marked the final conquest of death, the dawn of a new world order, the supreme manifestation of God’s justice, mercy and power in history. The question that cannot be evaded, therefore, is this: Why did the earliest disciples use the language of resurrection in relation to Jesus *if not because of the fact of his resurrection?*



Jesus’ Relevance

We return where we began: to the foolishness of the cross. If such an absurd, improbable and scandalous message is true, what difference does it make today to our lives and to the kind of world in which we live?

The message of Jesus and his cross is as subversive today as it was in the first-century world. The subversion shows up in three areas.

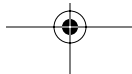


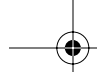


1. The subversion of traditional religion. The story of Jesus subverts the stories of salvation that we find in other world religions. All these stories (especially the dominant schools of Hindu, Buddhist and New Age philosophies) offer us liberation—freedom from the shackles of our humanness. The way to ultimate transcendence lies in breaking free from our individuality, physical embodiment and entanglements in this meaningless world of historical existence: the ordinary, everyday world of work and home. Our humanness gets in the way of transcendence, or union with the divine.



But the cross speaks of a God who is entangled with our world, who immerses himself in our tragic history, who embraces our humanity with all its vulnerability, pain and confusion, including our evil and our death. Here is a God who comes to us not as a master but as a servant, who stoops to wash the feet of his disciples and to suffer brutalization and dehumanization at the hands of his creatures. In identifying with us in our humanity he draws the human into his own divine life. So what this means is that the closer we get to God, the more human



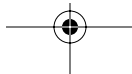


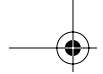
we become, not less. And our created, physical bodies have a future. In raising Jesus from death, the Creator was affirming our humanity: this historical, embodied existence has a future.

So our salvation lies not in an escape from this world but in the transformation of this world. Everything good and true and beautiful in history is not lost forever but will be restored and directed to the worship of God. All our human activity (in the arts and sciences, economics and politics) and even the nonhuman creation will be brought to share in the liberating rule of God. This grand vision centers on the cross of Jesus Christ. There a vision of future hope opens up for the world.

You will not find hope for the world in any religious systems or philosophies of humankind. The biblical vision is unique. That is why when some say that there is salvation in other faiths I ask them, “*What* salvation are you talking about?” No faith holds out a promise of eternal salvation for the world the way the cross and resurrection of Jesus do.

2. The subversion of modern utopias. The story of Jesus subverts the stories that have domi-

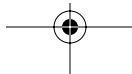


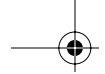


nated the West for the past two hundred years—stories of human self-mastery, self-autonomy, self-realization and perfectibility. Such stories have been exported to the rest of the world in the name of capitalism or Marxism or unlimited faith in education or science and technology to solve all our problems and bring about a universal peace. What gets in the way of such dreams? It is the awkward and bitter fact of human sinfulness. Sin is our enslavement to self, a radical bent to our human nature. At the same time that we search for truth, we run away from truth. And when we find what we call truth, we often use it to assert our power over others. We also worship our human creations, turning them into idols behind which we hide from the living and true God.

Again, the cross offers a different vision of ourselves and our world. God not only affirms our humanity but exposes and judges our human sin:

The same revelation in Jesus Christ, with its burning centre in the agony and death of Calvary, compels me to acknowledge that this world which God made and loves is in a state of alienation, rejection and rebellion against him. Cal-



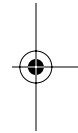


vary is the central unveiling of the infinite love of God and at the same time the unmasking of the dark horror of sin. Here not the dregs of humanity, not the scoundrels whom all good people condemn, but the revered leaders in church, state, and culture, combine in one murderous intent to destroy the holy one by whose mercy they exist and were created.⁸

At the foot of the cross, then, a new vision of humanity opens up, one that takes both the reality of human evil and the dignity of human agents more seriously than any humanistic ideology.

3. The subversion of postmodern tribalism.

The story of the cross subverts the fragmented stories and tribalisms of the postmodern world. Postmodernism has come to mean many different things in different contexts, but one thing that is agreed on as part of a general “postmodern sensibility” is a suspicion of all overarching frameworks of meaning. We believe no longer in history but in histories, no longer in story but in stories. But these little histories and stories can be as oppressive as the big ones. We are left with nothing outside of ourselves to judge our actions, let alone





the actions of others; we are left to the tyranny of our own communities. We have no shared language or framework of understanding to make communication with others possible. The postmodern self implodes inward: there is nothing given about me, therefore I am left to my own devices to form my infinitely malleable persona.

For many people, young and old alike, consumerism becomes the way of constructing an identity. We shop for a self. Our clothing, houses and cars tell the story of who we are becoming. It is not insignificant that the fashion world now calls itself an identity industry. Like a screen saver on a computer, a postmodern self is constantly changing into new configurations. Others pursue a self through therapy or sexual intimacy or New Age techniques. Still others use cyberspace and virtual reality as means to self-creation, and virtual communities give credibility to this crafted cyberself.

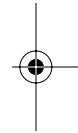
However, even on the Internet no less than in our physical neighborhoods we gravitate toward those who resemble us. If the modern humanist self imposed a false and suffocating universalism on others, the postmodern self is estranged from





those who are truly “other.” We may recognize them—even tolerate them—but we cannot communicate with them.

The message of Jesus tells us that God takes us as we are—with all our brokenness and fears, our failings and inadequacies, our families, cultures and occupations. We don’t have to make or change ourselves to be loved by God. But even though God accepts us as we are, he doesn’t leave us where we are. He moves us on a journey, giving our culture, our work and our background (everything that makes me *me* and you *you*) a new direction. He links us to people with whom we would never associate if left to ourselves. Some of these people we may have disliked, considered inferior or been unable to talk with. But the cross brings us all down to the same level and raises us up as the children of God. The same act that reconciles us to God reconciles us to our neighbors, even to our enemies. So from the cross there emerges a new human community in which barriers are broken down while diversity is honored, and new identities are being formed as we interact in the presence of the risen Jesus.



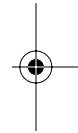


Jesus' Call

So Jesus still speaks today. He calls to us no less than to his first-century audience, bidding us to come to him whose burden is light, to take from him rest that is deep and eternal, water that is refreshing and life-giving. He also invites us to be empowered for a new way of living marked by sacrificial service and the pursuit of justice and reconciliation in the world. But how you respond to that call across the centuries is as personal as it is crucial.

Reflect. Have you seen yourself in this booklet? Have you thought of God as the first-century religious leaders thought of him? Have you wondered where God is, whether he has forgotten or forsaken his world? Have you been scandalized by the idea of a God who willingly suffers, who humbles himself to serve us, his creatures?

How do you relate to God today? The message of the cross is about the extraordinary lengths God will go to heal the rift between you and him. Take some time to consider what barriers you have set up for God to cross in reaching you. Tell God what you discover. Ask him to deliver you





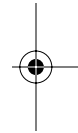
from the prison you've built from these barriers.

Investigate. Have you read the Gospel accounts of Jesus? Have you discussed Jesus with those who follow him? Have you considered whether your lifestyle unconsciously reflects the idolatry or self-centeredness that Jesus challenged?

How can you learn more about this curious Jesus and the message he brings? Reading the Gospels is a good first step. Followers of Jesus would likely be thrilled to talk with you about the God they serve. There is also a wealth of literature explaining the significance of Jesus and the barriers present in our current culture; some books are listed below.

Act. How long will you wait to begin this journey? What keeps you from pursuing God in the same way that he pursues you?

God is humble of heart and will not coerce your faith. Though he pursues you, he will not dominate you. He waits to liberate you. A single step toward him such as those mentioned here will begin your adventure together. Jesus' resurrection assures us of the eventual triumph of God over all that is evil, false and ugly, and he invites you to experience





that day today and to live with him as a sign of that day, wherever he calls you to be.

Notes

¹Cicero *Pro Rabirio* 5.16, quoted in Martin Hengel, *The Crucifixion of the Son of God* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 134.

²This was indeed the experience of the first Christians.

³Readers who want a fuller discussion of the material in the four subsections should read my *Faiths in Conflict?* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), chap. 3, and the references cited there.

⁴Cf. Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 4:6-8, 32-39; 7:6; Joshua 4:24.

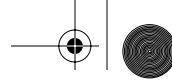
⁵Cf. Deuteronomy 10:14-15; Psalm 24:1; 47:7-9; 95:4-5; 148:4-6; Jeremiah 10:10-13; 27:5.

⁶Géza Vermès, *Jesus the Jew* (London: Collins, 1973), p. 224.

⁷Richard Gombrich, "Introduction: The Buddhist Way," in *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, ed. Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich (London: Thames & Hudson, 1991), p. 13. In a famous simile, the Buddha compared his doctrine to a raft (*Majjhima Nikaya* 1:134-35). One uses a raft to cross a river, but only a fool would carry the raft after the river is crossed, so the Buddha's teaching is intended to help his followers across the ocean of samsara (the course of life); once across, they should go their way without depending on his words.

⁸Lesslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 175.





Further Resources from InterVarsity Press

The following books explore further the questions surrounding Jesus and Christianity. Also visit InterVarsity Press <www.ivpress.com> or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship <www.ivcf.org> for online resources and information on groups and activities in your area.

Blomberg, Craig. 1987. *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*.

Everts, Don. 1999. *Jesus with Dirty Feet*.

Pippert, Rebecca Manley. 2001. *Hope Has Its Reasons*, revised edition.

Ramachandra, Vinoth. 2000. *Faiths in Conflict?*

Ramachandra, Vinoth. 1997. *Gods That Fail*.

Wright, N. T. 1998. *The Challenge of Jesus*.



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