

Home > Features > Family

Religion column: Real or not, Jesus is the best example to follow

The culture he was born into had much the same concerns that we have today — staying alive and healthy, having good relationships, making a living

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A dialogue:

"Do you mean to tell me you follow Jesus Christ?"

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"Sure! Who else in history would you choose to follow?"

"But you talk as if he really did miracles and rose from the dead. I can't accept that."

"Okay, I'll tell you what. Let's set that aside for now. Even apart from the miracles, who would you suggest as a better example than Jesus to follow?"

"Well, I still have a problem. We don't know if he really lived, or if anything the Bible says about him actually happened."

"It sounds like you've been listening to some Internet atheists. Even nonbelieving historians say there's no doubt that Jesus lived, and that much of the New Testament is genuine."

"How much of it is true, though? How can I be sure?"

"I could offer you some helpful information on that, but for now, why don't we set that aside, too? Let's just deal with what the New Testament says about Jesus, whether you think it's all true or not. I believe his life as depicted there is still the greatest model of all time to pattern our own lives after."

"Are you agreeing with me, then, that we don't really know about the miracles, and we can't know how much of the Bible is true?"

"No, I'm not saying that, but I'm willing to start where you are in this discussion."

"Well, I appreciate that. So, what makes Jesus such a great example? Why should I think I could learn anything from ancient Iron Age stories? What about the Enlightenment? What about modern science? What could a carpenter and his fishermen followers possibly have to offer me today?"

"That sounds like what I would call historical chauvinism. The Native Americans didn't experience the European Enlightenment or lead the Scientific Revolution. Would you say, 'What could they possibly have to offer me?'"

"Oh, no, that would be really intolerant on my part!"

"I thought so. And I agree. Here's one thing (there are many) that makes Christ a great example to follow, even apart from his miracles. The culture he was born into had much the same concerns that we have today — staying

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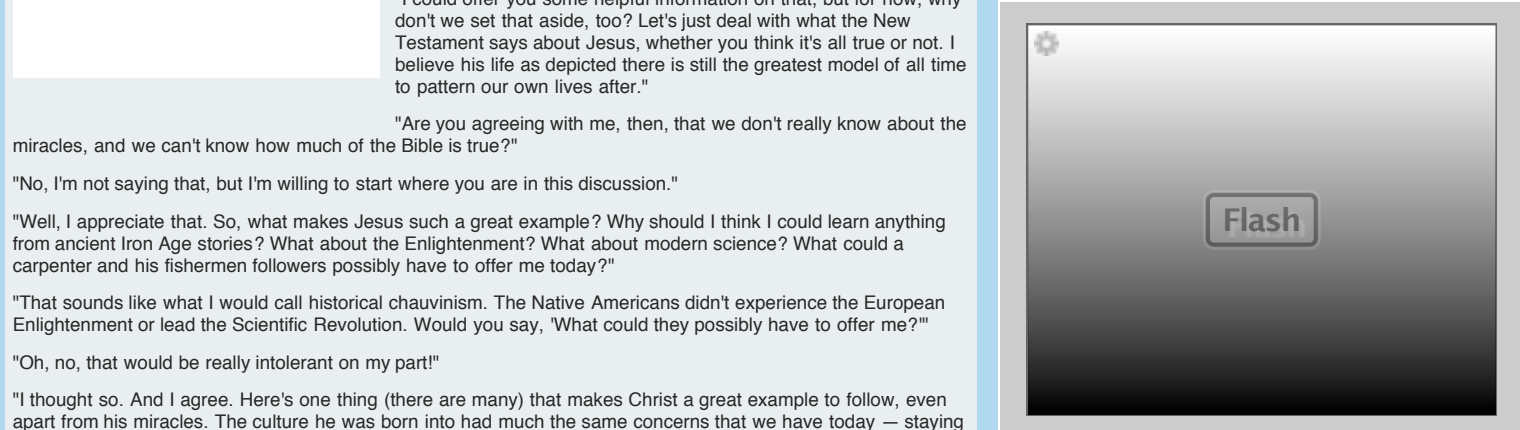
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alive and healthy, having good relationships, making a living, dealing with conflicts, power struggles, and politics, and so on. But they were a lot more anxious than we are about doing the right thing. They believed in God, and they had laws upon laws, restrictions upon restrictions, that they thought were essential to making it with God. It was a rule-bound system, a burden of perfection, and it was impossible to live by."

"Okay, I can accept that. What else?"

"Jesus fulfilled the law of God, but with grace and freedom. He kept asking his followers, 'Why are you anxious? Why don't you trust?' The people listened to him because he practiced what he preached. He was much more than a miracle worker, he was a moral leader who followed the highest possible standards, yet always with joy. No one else has ever lived a life of such high moral excellence yet with such a relaxed sense of grace—meaning freedom, love and forgiveness—as he did."

"That doesn't sound like what I've heard about Jesus!"

"Have you read the New Testament for yourself?"

"Yes, but it was a long time ago."

"I think you would find it worth reading again. The Gospels of Luke and John would be great places to start. You'll find out Jesus is not the same as you thought he was — and you might even discover it really does make sense to follow him."

Tom Gilson is the director of strategic processes for Campus Crusade for Christ. He can be contacted through his weblog at <http://www.thinkingchristian.net>.

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Danthrax at 8:32 PM May 14, 2010
What a horrible article, I mean really?

Bible stories depict Jesus as a meglomaniac, probably schizophrenic, and a person who saw violence as an exceptable means of displaying faith. I would also point out that you are stating an abject lie to say anybody "knows" he existed, or any credible majority has any evidence for concluding thus.

Unless religious violence is a good thing, this mythological figure, Jesus, was not a peaceful person:

"Matthew 10:34, Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."

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