

Q: How could Jesus be God? Wasn't he just a prophet?

This is a very good point... because if Jesus isn't God or God's son then all of Christianity is really worthless. But the issue is not what we want to believe, but rather, who did Jesus claim to be? And is his claim true?

Just some things to think about... would the religious leaders of Jesus' day have had him killed if he was just a prophet or teacher? Many considered him to be a good man and he had a lot of followers. It seems like what he taught, like love your neighbor, do good to your enemies, etc., and all of the healing and feeding the poor he did wasn't really worth having him imprisoned, beaten and crucified. So why were the religious leaders so mad at him? Was Jesus just a good teacher, or did he claim to be more?

Jesus claimed equality with God. In John 5 we read that Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath. And because he did this "work" on the Sabbath the religious leaders got upset at him. This is how John 5:16-18 reads:

"16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. 17 Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." 18 For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

He called God "MY Father" and not "OUR Father" indicating to the Jews that he was personally relating himself to God. And the Jews completely understood him as equating himself with God. This was blasphemous to the Jews and according to their law was punishable by death.

Jesus also acted as if he was God. According to Jewish theology only God could forgive sins. In Mark 2:5 we read where Jesus healed another man and after healing him he said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Here's the response from the Jews to what Jesus just said in Mark 2:6-7:

"6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

None could forgive sin except the one against whom all have sinned. Jesus must have thought he was God to act as God in forgiving people's sin.

Jesus called himself God. In John 10 we read where Jesus is teaching and in the middle of his teaching, in verse 30, he says, "I and the Father are one." That, of course, did not sit well with the Jews. John 10:31-33 reads:

"31 Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" 33 "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

Why were they wanting to stone him? Even though he was a man, he claimed to be God.

So even after all the healing, feeding and good things he taught, the Jewish leaders had him arrested. Why? If he was just a prophet and good man it doesn't make sense. Unless the Jews thought something else.

At Jesus' trial in Mark 14:61-65 we read:

"...the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 63 The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. 64 "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. 65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him."

The most confirming evidence of Jesus' claiming to be God was expressed in his response and in the reaction of the religious leaders. Look at what the high priest said, "Why do we need any more witnesses?" At that point the Jews were faced with two alternatives: that Jesus' assertions were outlandish blasphemy or that he really was God.

They chose blasphemy.

In most trials the accused are tried for what they are alleged to have done. This was not the case in the trial of Jesus. He was tried for who he claimed to be and for nothing that he had done. And so he was tried, convicted of blasphemy, was severely beaten, and died a torturous death on a Roman cross.

What was wrong with him? Why go through all of that? At any point he could have said, "Hey, just kidding, I'm not really equating myself with God. I really don't think I'm God. You just misunderstood what I was saying." But he never did. Why? Was he lying? Maybe he was crazy? Or was he really God?

Only 3 possibilities surface in the case of Jesus. Either he was lying about being God, or he was crazy (a lunatic) just foolishly believing he was God, or he really was God. There aren't logically any other possibilities. He hasn't left any others open to us.

Was he a liar? Could he be a good, moral prophet and teacher and yet make up all of these lies about his equality with God? No. He would be deceitful and untrustworthy. It seems by his miracles that he was backing up this claim, so a lot of people of his day continued to follow him. And even when he was arrested, tried, beaten and crucified, he never once changed the position of his claim to be God. See he died because of that claim. People will die a lot of times for what they believe is true. But never will a person die for what they know is a lie. He couldn't have been just a good teacher and then died for what he knew was a lie.

Was he crazy then? Maybe he mistakenly believed he was God because of some mental disturbance. After all, it's possible to be both sincere and wrong. Only crazy people think of themselves as God and are put in counseling or an institution because of it. But this one is hard to pin on him because of the clarity and depth of his teaching. He was incredibly consistent in his behavior and intellectually "wowed" the crowds that followed him. Many modern psychiatrists confirm the sanity of Jesus based on what he did and said. So it's unlikely that he was deranged.

So was he God? What do you think?

Christians don't believe Jesus is God because THEY say he is God. Christians believe Jesus is God because HE claimed to be and proved it. He proved it by raising himself from the dead. If Jesus raised himself from the dead, then it all makes sense. His claims to be God, his forgiving of sins and his teaching about eternal life being found only in him comes together at his resurrection. And if someone raises himself from the dead, thereby showing that he has power over death, then that's the guy I'm going to follow. We can totally trust him and what he taught if that happened. And we can trust his claim that he is God.

For evidence of his resurrection check out the following:

<http://www.leaderu.com/everystudent/easter/articles/josh2.html>

<http://www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth22.html>