

Why Worship Jesus? Matthew 17:1-9

Why do we worship Jesus and not another, or for that matter, nothing at all? It's a crucial question. If we have no answer to that question then we have no reason to be Christian. Fortunately, the answer to that question was revealed on a mountaintop 2,000 years ago, and it's still being revealed today. Matthew 17:1-9 tells the tale of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is what the Bible says:

"Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, 'Get up and do not be afraid.' And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, 'Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.'" (Mt. 17:1-9 NRSV)

From this one incident, we find four reasons for worshiping Jesus Christ. First, we worship Jesus because of his divinity; next, we worship Jesus because of his supremacy; then we worship Jesus because of his humanity; and finally, we worship Jesus because of his humility.

First, we worship Jesus because of his divinity. You see, Jesus' divinity was disclosed on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was disclosed by the light that shone through him and the name given to him. Yes, Jesus divinity was disclosed by the light that shone through him. You see, in the Bible, light is frequently associated with the manifestation of God's presence.

- According to Exodus 13:21, when God freed his people from their captivity in Egypt, he led them "in a pillar of cloud by day...and in a pillar of fire by night."
- According to Exodus 14:17, when God met Moses on the mountain and gave him the Ten Commandments, "the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain."
- When King David sang a song about God he said, "The Lord is my light and my salvation..." Psalm 27:1
- When the prophet Isaiah was consoling his people he said, "...the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory." Isaiah 60:19

- When Daniel was describing God he said simply, "...light dwells with him." Daniel 2:22
- And when the apostle John described God he said, "God is light and in him there is not darkness at all." 1 John 1:5

Yes, throughout the Bible light is often associated with the manifestation of God's presence. And when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, "his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white" in demonstration of his divinity.

And so we worship Jesus because of his divinity, disclosed in the light that shone through him and in the name given to him. For while he was on that mountain, his Father spoke in a thunderous voice saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved." We worship Jesus because of the name given to him. The Father called him his Beloved Son. You see, you and I become children of God through adoption but Jesus is the Beloved Son of God from all eternity. And he's the Beloved Son from all eternity because he shares one divine nature with his heavenly Father. In the words of the Nicene creed: We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

So we worship Jesus because of his divinity. In addition, we worship Jesus because of his supremacy. You see, because of his divinity, Jesus is supreme – he's superior to all other leaders, beings, and systems. We see this in the fact that Moses and Elijah appeared with him and then faded from him so that only Jesus was left behind. Those two great worthies of Jewish history pointed to but were surpassed by Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus is supreme!

The book of Hebrews makes this point time and time again. Hebrews begins with these words: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being..." Having referenced Christ's divinity, Hebrews establishes his supremacy.

- According to Hebrews 1:4-14, he's superior to the angels.
- According to Hebrews 3:1-6, he is worthy of more glory than Moses.
- According to Hebrews 6:13-7:10, he is superior to Abraham.
- According to Hebrews 7:11-28, he is superior to every other priest.
- According to Hebrews 8:1-13, he establishes a better covenant between us and God than the one God previously established.
- And finally, according to Hebrews chapters 9-10, he offers a better sacrifice to take away our sins than any other sacrifice ever offered on our behalf.

Yes, Jesus is supreme. The New Testament is unequivocal in declaring the supremacy of Jesus. And we are free to believe in the supremacy of Jesus Christ, even in the midst of a pluralistic world that would have us shave off the sharp corners of our confession. We are free to believe in the supremacy of Jesus Christ even in the midst of a pluralistic world that would have us make all others equal to Jesus and Jesus equal to all others. We are free to believe the supremacy of Jesus Christ just so long as we treat the adherents of other faiths, and those who have no faith, with the dignity and respect they deserve as persons created in the image of God, just as we expect them to treat us with dignity and respect though they may disagree with our confession regarding the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Like you, I have friends of other faiths and no faith at all. Unless or until they become Christian, I don't expect them to believe in the supremacy of Jesus. Unless or until I abandon my own faith, they don't expect me to believe otherwise. And yet, we are friends and colleagues and treat one another with the greatest of respect. Oh that the world were more this way! This is true pluralism at its best!

So why do we worship Jesus? We worship Jesus because of his deity and we worship Jesus because of his supremacy. But these are not the only reasons why we worship Jesus. Left alone, these aspects of his being might be reasons to fear or even despise him. But they are not left alone. His deity and supremacy are joined to his humanity and his humility.

You see, Jesus is not only the Son of God; he is the Son of Man according to Matthew 17:9. He's both fully God and fully man. He's divine and human too – and human in the best sense of the term; he's humane, kind, caring, and tender. We see his humanity demonstrated in his treatment of Peter, James, and John when he finds them cowering in terror on the ground after witnessing these events on the Mount of Transfiguration. And what does he do? He touches them and says to them, "Do not be afraid!" You see, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, as it says in Hebrews 4:15. Instead, he lays a hand on us in all of our weakness, our suffering, and our fear and says, "Do not be afraid!"

- Mike and Barbara do not be afraid.
- Bobbi and Nick do not be afraid.
- Christian and Cameron do not be afraid.
- Laura and Rebekah do not be afraid.
- Dave and Sue do not be afraid.
- Sig and Martha do not be afraid.
- Ted and Ann do not be afraid.
- Dave and Dianne do not be afraid.
- Whosoever you are and whatsoever your name, do not be afraid!

Why do I worship Jesus? I worship Jesus because of his deity and supremacy, but more than this, I worship him because of his deep humanity. For in my own hours of extremity, he has laid his hand on me and said, "Michael, do not be afraid!"

Yes, I worship him because of his humanity and I worship him because of his humility. Possessing deity and supremacy, it would have been easy for Christ to be haughty, but instead, he was possessed of the deepest humility. We see his humility demonstrated on the Mount of Transfiguration. Having experienced this awesome moment of transfiguration, the temptation must have been great to remain on the mountain and to bask in the glory of the Father's adulation and the disciple's adoration. In fact, Peter proposed that very thing when he offered to build three tabernacles, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, so they could remain there in the bright light of divine glory. But Jesus didn't cling to this moment of tremendous exaltation. Instead, Matthew 17:9 tells us that he left it all behind and went down the mountainside into the darkening valley below.

Yes, Jesus went down the mountain! And wasn't that always Jesus' way? Wasn't that the pattern of his life? Wasn't he always coming down to meet us? It started at his birth. When it was time for his birth, he left the glory of his heavenly home to be born a babe in Bethlehem's manger. Paul put it this way: "...though he was in the form of God, (he) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited (i.e. grasped, clung to, exploited for his own advantage), but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7)

Yes, Jesus came down...down into the valley of this world. But more than this, he went down into the valley of the shadow of death. As he was coming down the Mount of Transfiguration, he said to Peter, James, and John, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." Raised from the dead! Jesus left the exaltation of Transfiguration to walk that lonesome valley all the way to Calvary and a cruel crucifixion.

As he went down the mountain, he knew what lay before him. He knew that the fickle crowds would hail him one day and condemn him the next. He knew that Judas would betray him, the disciples would fail him, the religious leaders would arrest him, Pilate would convict him, the soldiers would beat him and nail him to a tree where he would be surrounded by curious, clowning, cursing crowds and would die in ignominy.

And all of that could have been avoided. He was, after all, the Son of God, and ten legions of angels were waiting on his command. They would have freed him had he called. But he didn't assert his divine right. He didn't slay his fomenting foes. Instead, he bowed his head in great submission and humbly bore it all. Yes, he humbly bore it all for you and me. Or as Paul puts it: "...though he was in the form of God, (he) did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied

himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” Death on a cross for you! Death on a cross for me! He died the death we should have died then rose again to eternal life which he shares with all who worship him! Isn’t that reason enough to worship him? It’s reason enough for me!

Why do we worship Jesus? It’s a crucial question. If we have no answer to that question then we have no reason to be Christian. Fortunately, the answer to that question was revealed on a mountaintop 2,000 years ago, and it has been revealed again today. We worship Jesus because of his divinity. We worship Jesus because of his supremacy. We worship Jesus because of his humanity. And we worship Jesus because of his humility.

My friend, do you really worship Jesus or do you merely attend worship services every now and then? I urge you to worship Jesus. Give him the worth-ship that is his due. In the words of Romans 12:1-2: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Echoing the words of Paul, I urge you to give your all to Him who gave his all for you! Amen.