

## The Legacy of Jesus

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On an old tombstone in an Indiana cemetery reads this epitaph:

*Pause stranger, when you pass me by,  
As you are now, so once was I.  
As I am now, so you will be,  
So prepare for death and follow me.*

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

*To follow you I'm not content,  
Until I know which way you went.*

What is the measure of a person? When our time is up and we pass on, what will we leave behind?  
What is the true legacy of Jesus?

Some suggest that Jesus' true legacy was his preaching style

- Matt 7:28-29 seems to suggest this
- But Jesus employed rhetoric that was commonly utilised by the OT prophets
- He also used the *midrashic* methods of the Rabbis of his day
- His preaching style was not entirely unique

Some suggest that it was the novelty of his teaching

- Much of what Jesus said had already been said by the Jewish Rabbis before him – the parallel is uncanny – many of his teachings can be found in the *Talmud*, the *Mishna*, and in the rabbinic works of Hillel, Shammai, and other rabbis
- The Golden Rule (Matt 7:12) also occurs, using similar phraseology, in other religions: *Mahabharata* 5:1517 (Hinduism), *Udanavarga* 5:18 (Buddhism), *Analects* 15:23 (Confucianism), *T'ai-Shang Kam-Ying Pien* (Taoism), *Sunan* (Islam), and *Talmud* (Judaism)
- His ethical and moral teachings have direct parallels in many great religions

Some suggest it was his messianic self-claim

- Simon Bar Kochba, 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BC claimed to be messiah
- Some self-proclaimed "Messiahs" are mentioned in Acts 5:35-37
- Contemporary self-proclaimed "Messiahs" – Jim Jones, David Koresh, etc.
- Self-claim is a weak legacy at best

Some suggest it was his handling of the establishment of his day

- Sadducees: priestly class – lived by a political agenda of collaboration with the Romans – experts of the Committee (Sanhedrin) system of governance – masters at manipulating the Committee to achieve their aims and then claiming that the results were the hand of God, as illustrated in the trial of Jesus (Matt 26:57-67) – Jesus refused to defend himself before the Committee – Martin Luther also refused to abide by the Committee's actions
- Pharisees: practitioners of legalistic religiosity who emphasised religion as 'show' – masters of religious labelling and accused Jesus of loving sinners (Matt 9:11; 11:19) – driven by morality-based (law) religion – Jesus espoused a relational-based religion (Matt 22:37-39) – the whole Protestant movement was based on a similar scheme

- Zealots: religious terrorists of Jesus' day – lived by violence justified in the name of God – Jesus preached about non-violence (Matt 5:38-42) – Mahatma Gandhi also taught non-violence

Jesus' real legacy was **who** he left behind

- He left behind a group of men who had given up everything for him
- He left behind a group of men whom he personally mentored
  1. he handpicked them – Mark 3:13-19
  2. he preached his longest sermons to them – Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7); Olivet Discourse (Matt 24-27); Upper Room Discourse (John 14-16)
  3. he prayed his longest prayer for them – John 17
  4. he gave them over 3 years of intensive together time
- He left behind a group of men who became his agents – Matt 10; 28:18-20
- He left behind a group of men who valued his mission above all else – Acts 4:19-20

An old Church tale relates of the time when Jesus returned to heaven after the resurrection. There at the pearly gates were gathered the angels. However, there was no jubilation, only an air of perplexity. Jesus looked at the perturbed faces of the angels and asked, "Why are you all so glum?" To which the angels replied, "Who will finish the work that you have started on planet earth?" Jesus replied, "I have left behind some men to do that!" The perplexity on the angels' faces deepened as they uttered in astonishment, "Them? You expect them to finish the work you started?" Again Jesus replied, "Yes. Them"

Jesus' real legacy even today is **who** he leaves behind.