LORD, LIAR, or LUNATIC**?**

**In his book** Mere Christianity**, C.S. Lewis makes this statement, “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse.**

Even those who are not persuaded by Christianity often have great respect for Jesus. Among those who reject the idea that Jesus was God incarnate, there are many who are nevertheless followers of him to some degree. “Jesus was a great moral teacher”, some say, “but he wasn’t God”. According to this view, Jesus is to be followed as a great human being, but not as a divine one. This idea that Jesus was merely a great human being, i.e. a great human being but nothing more, is, as C.S. Lewis argued in Part 2 of [***Mere Christianity***](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0060652926/ref=nosim/existenceofgod-20), indefensible.

Jesus made the most astonishing claims, not only about God, society and ethics, but also about himself. He claimed to have the authority to forgive sins, to be the representative of all humanity, came to die in order to reconcile man to God, and to be the only way for people to attain salvation.

Faced with the fact that Jesus made these claims about himself, there are three things that we might say about him: Either Jesus’ claims were false and he knew it, or his claims were false and he didn’t know it, or his claims were true. None of these suggests that Jesus was a great, but merely human, teacher.

**The first thing** that we might say about Jesus is that his claims were false and he knew it, in which case he was a liar. If Jesus did not believe that his claims about himself were true, then when he made those claims, he was lying.

Jesus’ claims about himself were so central to his teachings, though, that if they were lies then he can hardly be deemed a great teacher. If Jesus set out to systematically deceive people about who he was and how their sins were to be dealt with, then he was among the worst teachers that have ever walked the earth.

**The second thing** that we might say about Jesus is that his claims were false and he didn’t know it, in which case he was a lunatic. If Jesus believed that his claims about himself were true, and they weren’t, then he was a delusional egomaniac. If an ordinary person believes himself to be God incarnate, then that person is, put quite simply, insane.

Again, if this were the case, if Jesus taught that this is who he was and was mistaken, then he was as bad a teacher as there has ever been.

**The third thing** that we might say about Jesus is that his claims were true, in which case he was, and is, Lord. If Jesus believed that his claims about himself were true and they were, then Jesus was not only a great human being, but was also God on Earth.

If we take Jesus seriously, then we must take Jesus’ claims about himself seriously. We cannot say that Jesus was a great teacher whom we admire and look up to, but that the most fundamental element of his teachings was a monumental error. Jesus was not a great, but merely human, teacher; he was either much less than this, or much more.

Those who respond to this argument by writing Jesus off as either a liar or a lunatic are, for all that has been said so far, just as reasonable as those who respond by accepting Jesus as Lord. This argument is an attack only on the view that Jesus was a great teacher, but not God; there is nothing in it that counts against the view that Jesus was a terrible teacher. In order to show that it is better to view Jesus as Lord than as either a liar or a lunatic, it would have to be demonstrated that there is some reason to take Jesus’ claims seriously.

Do we have any reason, though, to take Jesus’ claims seriously? Many have argued that we do, that we have the strongest possible evidence that Jesus knew what he was talking about when it came to the supernatural. There is, it is argued, substantial historical evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead, endorsing his claims to religious authority. The Resurrection, it is said, was a divine endorsement of Jesus’ teachings, God’s confirmation that Jesus’ teachings were true.