QUESTION:

Do you think Jesus was a great moral teacher?

If you think this is the case would you mind blogging about it. Fundamentalist are using C.S Lewis approach in this matter. Apparently they are happier if people call Jesus a lunatic vs. a great moral teacher.

RESPONSE:

I think this question is going to require at least a couple of posts: one on Jesus as a moral teacher and one on the claim by C. S. Lewis and others that if it’s true that he was a great moral teacher then we cannot very well think he would flat-out lie about the most important aspect of his teaching: his personal identity as God. (That latter is what lay behind the end of the question.)

So first, Jesus as moral teacher. As it turns out, this is a complicated question. The short answer, of course, is that Yes, Jesus was a great moral teacher. The complicating factor is that Jesus was not a great moral teacher in the sense that people today think of great moral teachers. That’s because the basis for morality for Jesus – the very heart of why he taught morals – is completely different from what people today think of as the basis of morality.

So let’s start with today. Most people today who teach morality teach it for the sake of all of us and for the good of society. If people were to behave morally, the thinking goes, society will be better for all of us for the long haul. There would be no hateful and harmful activities toward others if we all behaved in the way we should, not murdering, stealing, betraying, harming, screwing the other person to get ahead, and so on. If we all behave morally, we will all get along for the long haul, and life will be better for us both as a society and as individuals within it.

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