

Chapter 4.09 Jesus' Intent, Mostly-Was, and All-About

Review.

A person's "intent" is his-her own goals for his-her own program. "Mostly-was" is how other people understand that person's identity regardless of how the person might see him-herself. Of two high school teachers, one mostly-is a disciplinarian ("Mr. Woodcock") while the other mostly-is an inspiration ("Mr. Chips"). "All-about" is what the person does and the person's long-lasting effects. George Washington was all-about setting up a country of free self-governing people with realistic institutions, staffed by honorable honest self-limiting leaders. A teacher can be all-about his subject, or all-about shaping young people, or sometimes all-about both. The Blues Brothers were all-about two things: a mission from God to save the orphanage and spreading the culture of the blues. Often "all-about" can be decided only in retrospect. We do not yet know what Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama are all-about.

Real people are inconsistent in their intent, mostly-is, and all-about. Unlike normal real people, characters in literature, mythology, religion, history, and the news are unusually consistent because the people that tell their story make them so. The story tellers put consistency into stories so that the stories convincingly say what the teller wants them to say. Republicans speak of Ronald Reagan as if he always knew what he was doing, had exactly the necessary character to do it, and the world turned out just as it should have under his guidance - far from truth. Democrats say the same about Franklin Roosevelt and John Kennedy. Many people see Martin Luther King so. After George W. Bush, Republicans pretended he knew what he was doing all along, was-mostly a defender of freedom and decency, and was all-about making the world safe from terrorism. Usually high consistency indicates that a story has been heavily edited and it is not realistic.

Christians edited the story of Jesus to make him consistent in intent, mostly-is, and all-about, and to make Jesus' story consistent with what people want to get out of it. Not just standard Christians, but nearly everyone that tells the story, or has strong ideas about Jesus, edits his story to make him consistent so they can use him to validate what they want. I do that too but I try to do it as little as possible. This chapter does not force consistency and it tries to deal honestly with inconsistency in the story of Jesus.

This chapter summarizes my ideas about Jesus' intent, mostly-was, and all-about. I do not repeat conservative or liberal ideas. I do summarize some liberal ideas as a way of mild critique.

Jesus' Intent to Change the World.

Jesus intended to restore Israel, including features that have been explained in previous chapters: resurrection of the deserving dead, return of the twelve tribes, rebuilding of The temple in Jerusalem yet again after Herod, restoration of the proper boundaries of Israel, the leaving of all foreign powers from Israel, the presence of God in the temple, God speaks through the priests to all of Israel and all the world, Israel takes moral leadership of the world, all the peoples and nations of the world recognize Yahweh as the one and only true God, all the peoples and nations look to Israel for leadership, and everybody's heart and mind changes in accordance with the new Kingdom of God.

An integral part of the intended Kingdom of God was a change in the hearts and minds of people and in their resultant social relations. Jesus wanted people to follow the Golden Rule, love their neighbors, and recognize everybody as a neighbor. He wanted the rich to stop acting badly and to start helping the poor. He wanted people to see the effects of their own intentions and to start controlling their minds. He wanted people to see their own hearts, the bad and the good within them, and to correct their own bad before they went after another person. He wanted men and women to have only one spouse and to love that spouse all their lives. He wanted all officials to carry out the duties of their office fully and to do only that. He did not want to eliminate all differences in people but he wanted justice to prevail despite differences. Jesus intended full social justice.

The change of the world and the change in hearts and minds would go along together. The change in the world did not depend on completing the change in hearts and minds first. The change in hearts and minds could occur in some people before the general change of the world. The change in hearts and minds in some first people would start the general change in the world, and the special first people would serve as examples for everybody else during the change in the world.

Jesus' intentions would certainly bring an end to the world as we know it. They would not bring an end to the physical world. They would transform the physical world into something more spiritual. Human bodies would change. It is not clear if people would still be gendered and have some kind of sexual activity but Jesus said they would not marry and have children as before. All these changes indicate not just a change of hearts and minds but something much bigger.

While the world was waiting for the Big Change, believers would live according to what life would be like when it arrived. They would form communities to act as models of the Big Change and to help instigate it. People in the communities have to act toward non-believers as if non-believers are members too or else the ideals are meaningless. Jesus likely expected the communities to be focused around local Jewish temples, but not to interfere in normal Jewish religious life. He saw no conflict. I do not think Jesus intended full equality of wealth and status but he did insist on equality of person and on mutual respect, and he did insist that the rich help the poor. He did not want everybody to be alike; he wanted everybody to be useful, helpful, and respectful. Jesus did not intend sameness between men and women but he did insist that men and women treat each other with respect and that women have opportunities equal to men when it was safe. For example, Jesus likely sent women out as teachers, something ordinarily only men would do. I do not think Jesus intended the communities to become like modern churches or like any big Church; I do not know if any church has to go against Jesus' intentions just because it is any organized institution.

Jesus intended to defeat all evil. He thought at least some evil already had been defeated; more evil would be defeated while people were waiting for the Big Change; and any remaining evil would be eradicated with the Big Change. Jesus might have felt that he defeated Satan in some kind of personal struggle, and felt that his victory began the end of evil but had not yet wiped out all evil. It is not clear what evil meant to Jesus but probably it meant mostly social injustice. As long as any social injustice persisted, then evil had not been fully defeated.

Jesus enjoyed life, and intended to enjoy life. He wanted other people to enjoy life as well. He wanted

people to enjoy life even before the Big Change. He understood that people could be hurt by life, and he did not expect people to be frivolously happy in the fact of hardship.

Obviously the Big Change of the world based on the restoration and leadership of Israel did not happen, at least not as Jesus intended, or not on his schedule. Jesus was wrong about at least this much. Obviously Jesus did not defeat evil fully, and much evil remains for our time. Jesus was wrong about evil too because he was wrong about Satan being the source of the worst evil.

Jesus did not intend to save the world by dying and being resurrected. I doubt he would have understood how that would save the world.

Jesus did know that his mission would attract the attention of the authorities, and he probably knew he would have to deal with that someday. Because his mission was so peaceful, he probably thought that aura would deflect most harm. For a time, it did. He knew he might get in trouble although it is not clear he knew he might die. I think he did not anticipate being crucified. I do not think he went to Jerusalem, and picked a fight with the vendors, so the authorities would kill him, so he would be resurrected, so the Big Change would come. I think he went to Jerusalem out of frustration and out of hope that doing something dramatic there might encourage God to start the Big Change soon.

I do not know if God used Jesus' enthusiasm to get Jesus crucified, so people would believe in him as resurrected and divine, so the message of Jesus would ride on the new religion.

Mostly-was.

This gives my version of who Jesus mostly-was and then lists some of the many ideas about who Jesus mostly-was. People use ideas of who Jesus mostly-was to validate their way of life. They project onto Jesus a particular kind of person, usually the kind of person they wish to be or that they wish other people to be. They think that kind of Jesus would approve of how they live and of how they treat other people. Sometimes they make Jesus represent an ideology, as when pro-capitalists call Jesus the first real capitalist or when Liberals see Jesus as the first Liberation theologian or first feminist. I find some ways of seeing Jesus funny.

My Version.

I rest on the idea that Jesus was a great prophet, and that his identity as a prophet is determined by his message. Jesus was what his message says he was. He had the personality characteristics that are evident in the New Testament where he tells stories and interacts with common people.

I do not know if Jesus thought he was the Messiah because I am not sure what Jews at the time of Jesus thought of the Messiah or what Jesus thought of the Messiah. If the Messiah had to be from the House of David then it is very unlikely Jesus was the Messiah because Jesus was not from the House of David regardless of the contrived genealogies in the New Testament. If the Messiah was the person who restored Israel and changed the world to go along, but did not have to be from the House of David, then Jesus might have thought he was the Messiah and did convey that idea to some of his close followers. If the Messiah had to succeed in exactly that task, then Jesus was not the Messiah. It does not count as

succeeding in that task, toward Jesus-as-Messiah, if Jews restore Israel two thousand years after Jesus, in particular because they have not restored it as Isaiah prophesied. If the Messiah did otherwise change the world, such as by calling for the institutions of good self-government, then Jesus might be the Messiah but not the Messiah of prophecy in the Tanakh, the Messiah as understood in the New Testament, or as understood by the Church for many hundreds of years after Jesus.

Views of Jesus.

Which Jesus is most important varies by group and changes from time to time. The crusader of the middle ages is less important than the business man of our times. These characters blind us from seeing Jesus as he really was, including mistakes and limits. If you are a standard Christian and believe Jesus did not make mistakes or have limits, then these characters blind you from seeing Jesus. If you think Jesus was the first feminist, then you misunderstand both Jesus and feminism.

Rabbi ("teacher", not exactly like a rabbi in current Judaism, but close) Buddha Bodhisattva Zen master Yogi Ryshi (rushi or roshi) Wandering Cynic philosopher Magician Avatar Precursor of Mohammad Communard Messiah The Christ Complete and Perfect Son of God God Lord Founder of the Church Defender of the Church Son of Mary, Queen of Heaven, and her worldly instrument Prince of Peace Divine Warrior and Defeater of the Devil Crusader against any injustice Hyper moralist Wrathful Judge The Man With No Name in the Clint Eastwood movies Any of many modern fictional characters who combine wrath and honor Merciful judge who warns us not to judge King Elder Brother Ideal Son Kindly Father Prototype monk Rejecter of the physical world Rejecter of politics and worldly power Person who says "yes" to life and the world Ecstatic mystic Perfect man Second Adam Opposite of the Devil God of commitment, decisions, and consequences God of the hearth, of family values Anti-Jew Super Jew Forerunner of capitalists Condemner of the wealthy and powerful, friend of the poor Revolutionary freedom fighter Patron of our country, but not of other countries Patron of the New Israel, which is now made up of Christians Patron of our kind of people, our class, our country, our race, our gender Consoler to the lost, forlorn, imprisoned, and sick Carrier of secret knowledge about God, creation, and existence Embodiment of the archetype Wisdom Son of Divine Wisdom and her Representative

All-about.

What Jesus is all-about to particular groups of people usually depends on a vision of an ideal world that the people have or on a reaction against the bad world they believe this world to be. Jesus is all-about bringing in the ideal world. Ideal worlds do not often reflect real human nature and real social life. The ideal people that represent ideal worlds and bring them about are not realistic either. People use the ideal world to justify their way of life, and what they do to neighbors, in this real world.

My Version.

Jesus did not bring about his vision of the restored Israel and the Changed World. Jesus did give us the best available ideal. I do not repeat the specific points of his message here.

Jesus made possible a merger of Jewish ideas of the person, state, and social justice with Western ideas of the same things and with Western religion, science, and philosophy. He laid the foundation for the

important institutions of our time, including democracy and science, even if he was not a scientist and he had no idea of democracy in the modern sense. He gave us the modern idea of building a better world, and he convinced us that we each have a role in building the better world. He began the fusion of thoughts that led to today's ideas of the concerned good neighbor and the involved citizen. At the same time, he made clear that good neighbors and involved citizens are not intrusive self-righteous secretly self-serving busybodies. He increased the scope and urgency of tolerance and inclusion. He instituted the practice of judging people by their minds and their moral content rather than by superficial conditions and alliances. He began the fusion of ideas that led to today's idea of serving the world through our job, our profession, or our role in government. He began the reflective pro-active citizen. He began the chain of ideas that lead to all kinds of activism, and, when needed, to rebellion for social justice and to civil disobedience for social justice. At the same time, he made clear it is alright to accept help and alright just to be a decent person. Without him, we would have no modern schools, hospitals, charities, animal helpers, and organizations fighting for nature.

Even if you do not live in a society where you can work through government to build a better world, if you live in a tyranny, if you live in malignant religious ignorance, Jesus is still all-about building a better world in the scope that you can. You can be a better neighbor, build a better community, help animals, take care of nature, feed the hungry, visit prisoners, tend the sick, and enjoy life as much as possible. You can keep alive the ideas that are needed for a clear and free mind, hopefully ideas that one day are used to build clear and free institutions. You can be decent. You can stop poisoning other minds with stupid ideas, ignorance, and bad attitudes. You can be useful. Other religions teach similar ideals but Jesus laid a general foundation that can be used in various settings, to end some bad situations, and to build good situations.

Jesus brought hope and trust to many people. Jesus emphasized the idea that enjoying life is good under God. As a result, many people now enjoy life who might not otherwise.

Jesus laid the groundwork for common modern personalities: crusader for social justice, moralist, enthusiastic enjoyer of life, person who is not concerned with strong moral judgments, quiet tolerant forgiving person, ordinary Joe or Jane getting along with other people and living decently, giver of help, and receiver of help. These types do not fully blend. We cannot always find the right mix of these personalities in ourselves. Not everybody should have the same mix. Jesus recognized differences, and he would not want everybody to be the same. Different situations require different kinds of people and different mixes in the same person. I do not know how Jesus would advise people about all this. We should not find in Jesus only the kind of personality that we wish to be.

People now follow his message even when they do not realize they follow his message and who might even dislike standard Christianity.

Whether or not the world will turn out alright in the long run as a result of Jesus' life, I do not know. Definitely it has turned out better in many ways. Whether or not God used Jesus to achieve the good ends by having us believe in Jesus as divine so that we would carry his message, I also do not know.

The world might turn out alright not primarily because of Jesus. The big force in the world turning out

alright might be Greek philosophy, British Romanticism, Taoism, a scientific discovery, a lot of hard work by human beings with an evolved nature, or even the whine of moralistic atheists. Jesus still will have contributed something necessary even if Jesus is not the decisive factor. If the world does turn out alright, we probably will never know the decisive factor, so people will credit whatever suits them, including Jesus, science, or PC. If the world does turn out alright but not because of Jesus, I am not sure what that implies for his all-about.

Non-Standard.

The standard orthodox version can seem a bit bleak, and so people do not usually rest content with that. For example, they supplement it with the idea that Jesus is all-about bringing comfort to the world, and so he has a big heart. Or Jesus is all-about taking good believers to heaven with him when they die. I cannot review all the ideal worlds and ideal Jesus' that people dream of so as to make sense of this world and to validate their lives. What follows in subsections below are only a few examples. See also above on the identities of Jesus where each identity can imply an ideal world.

Perfectible World.

I tend to go along with this vision. The world has a lot of faults but it is getting generally better and it is perfectible. We can have a world where people have enough material goods if they are not too greedy and do not want large families, with justice, and with reward according to ability and effort. We can sustain science and the arts. This is roughly the world of Thomas Jefferson, Star Trek, and Star Wars before the Sith Lord. Jesus is the person who gave us the basic tools to build this world. He was all-about laying the foundation for this kind of world.

Return of the Righteous King: Restoring Peasant Justice.

Somehow the world has gotten out of whack. Honest people are poor and powerless. Disgusting bad people of the world are rich, powerful, and successful. Evil rules. A good king will return someday to set it all straight. When he gets power, he will not succumb to temptation and become one of the bad people. It is not clear how he will get power. After he does get power, then every honest person will have enough land to raise a family and throw a party now and again. Every honest tradesman and laborer will have work enough to stand equal with landowners. Nobody will cheat or rob or rape. Jesus is a combination of the major characters in "Lord of the Rings", in particular Aragorn, Frodo, and Gandalf. That is why the third book is called "Return of the King". Even citizens of a democracy tend to see their leaders in these terms too and to have unrealistically high expectations as a result. In most legends before modern times, the King was a man.

Opportunistic Avenger in a Fallen World.

The world has gone to shit and there is not much we can do about it. Every once in a while, we can clean up a particular situation but bad situations will still prevail. Sweetness, peace, and light do not work. We need cunning and decisive action. We need a hero for an hour. This is Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Jesus. This is the hero who stumbles into a bad town, gets caught up in it, gets unfairly accused and punished; but then cleans up the whole mess – and then moves on to the next one.

This is the rebel girl. This image is so common in popular culture that it does not require elaboration. The only surprise is that some people do not realize this myth long predates Jesus, how much this myth colored the story of Jesus in the New Testament, and how much the story of Jesus told in the New Testament colors the retelling of the myth for our modern times of unsolvable social problems. In the first Clint Eastwood spaghetti western, the man with no name rides into town on a donkey and then disrupts the town money changers. The woman's version is "The Quick and the Dead" with Sharon Stone.

Decency.

The world is not a decent place now but it could be a decent place. People could have decency in their hearts instead of selfishness. Jesus is all-about converting people to decency and thereby making a decent world.

Family Values.

The world is all-about raising decent families among other decent families. The world is all-about children, kin, neighbors, and community. We have perverted natural drives such as sex so that they no longer serve decent family values. If you do not have a family, then you are not a real person and are not saved. Having a family saves you; especially it saves men and teenage girls, who otherwise would be wild and bad. Jesus is all-about restoring decent family values. Jesus is all-about setting up strict monogamy and marital fidelity. That is why he denied divorce and why he preaches to children. He did not condone adultery when he told the accusers of a woman adulterer, "he who is without sin may cast the first stone"; he told the woman to stop committing adultery.

Effusive Love.

"All you need is love, everybody". Love can cure everything. If we only love other people enough, they will love us back just as much. Love applies to everyone equally. Then everybody would love everybody else. If we only understood how much we are alike, how much everybody is in everybody else, how nature is all of a piece, then we would all behave very well to each other. There would be no competition, no divisions between people, no groups, no excluding, and no pain. Jesus came to teach us all this. He is all-about universal love. He is the agent of love, and he will build a loving world.

Immanent Transcendent.

God made the world; the world is not the same as God. Yet God loves the world. God wants to appear in the world that he made. God wants to show what godliness is like to creatures that cannot experience full godliness directly. God wants to come into the world some way. God wants to be both creator and created. Jesus is all-about the incoming of God in the world. After God, through Jesus, shows himself in the world, everything changes. Love, intelligence, decency, beauty, science, self-consciousness and many other wonders come into the world when God comes into the world in the person of Jesus. For a quasi-scientific version of what happens when an author (creator) appears in his own book (creation), see "Godel, Escher, and Bach" by Douglas Hofstadter.

Liberal Social Justice.

The main problems of the world are social and economic but they can be solved. We need social justice. God commanded social justice. Jesus is all-about making sure social justice prevails in this world. He gave us standards, and he will not let us forget those standards until we have achieved enough social justice. The people that block social justice, or that benefit from injustice, either will have to convert or they will be condemned and cast aside.

Jesus as Capitalist.

"Greed is good". Selfishness can be harnessed under the right socio-economic-political system to provide the greatest good automatically. Under this kind of system, people automatically learn responsibility and other good virtues. Under this system, justice automatically prevails. This system is called "capitalism". It would save the world if only we would allow it to run rampant. This is what Jesus is all-about. He came to teach capitalism, and to found the institutions that capitalism needs to flourish. We can see this in his parables in which he teaches people to work hard, and in which he says that God expects a return on efforts above the initial investment in those efforts. We can ignore any faults of capitalism. We can ignore what Jesus had to say about the rich and the poor.

God of Decisions and Commitment.

Some ideas of mostly-is and all-about particularly reflect their times. The stress on Jesus as God of the hearth (family values) reflects that people now have few children but invest a great deal in each child. Each child is "my precious". Anything that might undermine success for each child, including competition from the poor, must be blocked off.

Recently I have had many people explain Jesus to me as the god of decisions, commitment, responsibility, and consequences. Christians understand responsibility. They understand that other people rely on them. They understand what happens when they let other people down, such as by having pre-marital sex. Jesus as the god of commitment etc. might be a peculiarly modern character, around only since about the late Renaissance and the beginning of capitalism. He is a god for business people, professionals, skilled laborers, soldiers, professors, doctors, teachers, and other people who have to make decisions and live by the results. He is a god for the proud working class, the middle class, and the upper middle class. A recent version is the "What Would Jesus Do" movement. This is the god that parents invoke when they lecture their children about the dangers of marijuana and sex, and of the bad consequences to themselves and others, such as pregnancy, low test-scores, and an unfulfilled life.

Theological Imagination.

I have fun choosing a character for Jesus (mostly-was) and imagining what society would be like if that character dominated, or what kind of a world people want who believe in that kind of character. What do people really want when they see Jesus as the Divine Warrior who conquers the Devil or as the god of commitment, decisions, and consequences? What kind of a world do family values people really want when they make Jesus the god of the hearth? What kind of a world would we have if Jesus were the prototypical monk and everybody had to aspire to be a monk as well? It is fun to go the other way around too. What kind of a world (all-about) would be wanted by a business person, middle class family, Gen-X

family, habitual rebel, or PC person? What kind of Jesus (mostly-is) would he-she imagine to justify that world? People create a mostly-was to support the all-about and to support their way of life. What kinds of Jesus would people exclude from any “mostly-was” so as to protect their all-about? The Jesus’ of family values cannot really also be the Jesus of the poor, so the Jesus of family values is often also the Jesus of capitalism but not the Jesus of Luke’s blessings and curses.

More seriously, what kind of world, and what kind of Jesus, would people want that have real trouble in this world? Is it unrealistic to think Jesus might really be like what they want or might really be able to imagine what they need? What kind of world and what kind of Jesus do the victims of ethnic discrimination want? As an Asian woman in the American South, my wife has been the victim of discrimination from Blacks and Whites. Is it unrealistic to think Jesus might be able to understand what the victims of discrimination need? I cannot dismiss ideas about Jesus because they do not entirely fit in with my picture above.

Brief Argument With Liberals.

Orthodox or not, the traditional (Conservative) Christian understanding of Jesus’ intent, mostly-is, and all-about are fairly straightforward and easy to get. The idea of being magically saved is a bit mysterious, and it is not clear what Christians think will happen to the world; but those are quibbles in the overall framework. I disagree with traditionalists, and I strongly suspect their motives, but at least I know where they stand.

In contrast, the Liberal view is murkier. To the extent they are clear, liberal ideas of intent, mostly-is, and all-about might be inspiring but are not very realistic. I do not get a clear sense from liberals of what Jesus was all-about. Waiting around for the incoming of God to convert everybody to universal love does not seem a good prospect. If the only ways we can get social justice are through revolution or through waiting for Jesus to wander in and clean up the town, then we are in trouble. It might be that Jesus wants us to crusade for the rights of illegal aliens, gay people, women, and the poor, but that cannot be all he is all-about. Since Romanticism of the late 1800s, and especially since the middle 1900s, liberals have been against science, and they have not found ways to use our institutions to solve deep problems of social justice. They have not accepted the realities of capitalism, both benefits and faults. I think we have to work through politics, science, and business to achieve the kind of world that Jesus is all-about. When Liberals cut off normal political institutions and cut off science as ways to achieve social justice, inclusion, and love, then they really obscure what Jesus might be all-about.

Because Liberals are not clear what Jesus is all-about, instead they often stress his mostly-was. They stress identities such as the incoming mystic shininess of God or rebel revolutionary. They try to find evidence that he was a feminist, gay, the incarnation of the Gnostic Sophia-Wisdom, or a misunderstood magician. Liberal scholars do so in part because, as honest scholars, they have to focus on real evidence, and historical evidence is not usually clear on all-about. Liberal theologians do it to provide backing for their particular agendas – just as Conservatives do. They substitute the latest “ism” for common sense and then make out Jesus as the original spokesperson for that “ism” all along. His mostly-was becomes his all-about. Without a clear idea of what Jesus is all-about, these pictures of mostly-was are unconvincing and unbelievable. For example, if Jesus was all-about universal love but universal love does not work, then what? What does it mean to say that Jesus was the incoming

shininess of God? To push the point for clarity: If Jesus was gay, then what? Does he want everybody to be gay? Does his idea of universal love and acceptance come only because he was gay? Do all gay people automatically think like Jesus? If we are not gay, then are we unable to believe in universal love?

I strongly encourage liberals to get a good sense of the realities of the world and human nature, the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism, the truth of science, and of how our political and economic institutions work. You do not have to lose your idealism or your zeal when you find out facts. Get a clear idea of what Jesus is all-about for this kind of world. Then tell us. Lead us. We need good leadership from people who have a clear sense of what Jesus is all-about for this world.

What If Jesus Knew?

“What did Jesus know, and when did he know it?”

Suppose Jesus knew the only way his message could get across is if people believe he was God, died, and he was resurrected. People had to believe Jesus died and was resurrected even though he was God. Suppose Jesus was not God but did know fooling people this way was the only way his message could get across. It does not matter if he was resurrected or not. Does the fact that Jesus knew, and went along, make any difference? It does make a difference in his intent. Other than that, I don't think it does make much of a difference. It does not make any difference in his mostly-was (prophet) and all-about. The fact that Jesus knew and went along with God fooling humanity does not lead me to think any the less of Jesus although it still saddens me about God and about people.

I suspect that Jesus suspected he was going to get in a lot of trouble with the authorities, and might even be killed. I doubt he thought he would be resurrected. I doubt he thought his death and his resurrection, if any, somehow magically save people apart from his message and apart from a relation with God in the Kingdom of God.

Assume Jesus was only a person, but still did know what was necessary to get the message across. Only a unique person could have known this, and could have had the kind of relation with God to carry this off. Does that matter? To me, it does not. The central point is still the message. It might change Jesus' mostly-was if we could figure out the appropriate category for such a person. I don't think we have to do that. The fact that Jesus might have known makes me think Jesus is amazingly interesting, and I hope I get to meet him after I die. That is enough for now.

Some Christians, or followers of Jesus, might use this “take” on the situation to argue that Jesus is qualitatively distinct from all the other prophets, is automatically distinct from all the other prophets, and that we should pay attention only to Jesus. This view can even be used as evidence that Jesus is God. We can forget about Moses, Mohammad, and everybody else. I think to argue this way would be a mistake but I don't point out here what all is wrong with this. Muslims sometimes argue this way about Mohammad. If you want to argue this way about Jesus, that opens the door to arguing this way about Mohammad. If you want to argue this way about Mohammad, that opens the door to arguing this way about Jesus.

If we assume that Jesus knew, when did he know and how did he know? It is unlikely that he knew as a child. He had to learn while he was growing up. How did he learn? It is unlikely he learned by scouring the scriptures (Tanakh, Old Testament). It is unlikely he learned because John the Baptist told him so, or because any other teacher told him so. Jesus would have to "intuit" his status and mission, or God told him. It is worth thinking through the implications of those alternatives. I do not go through it here.

In some ways, the easiest solution to this puzzle is the traditional standard Orthodox Christian theory: God did not fool humanity to get across the message because God did not fool humanity. Jesus was God. Jesus always knew although the idea might have taken time to develop in his human maturing mind. Jesus really was crucified to save us magically and really was resurrected to save us magically. We don't have to think anything less of God or Jesus for fooling us. I suspect that this line of reasoning, in the decades after Jesus' death, helped push people along toward the idea that Jesus was fully God.

This doctrine is only a solution if we create a puzzle by assuming that Jesus' death and resurrection automatically saves people in some magical way, the death and resurrection are as important (or more so) than the message, and Jesus knew about the importance of his death, resurrection, and deification. If we do not think so, then we have no puzzle to explain other than that God had to fool Jesus and humanity in order to get across the message. That is a big puzzle but it should not push us to desperate measures. For me, it is easier to think Jesus was a prophet who served God as best he could, and that God had to connive to get the message across.

Suppose Jesus was God and knew everything. If I mistakenly believe Jesus was not God, and did not know what God was up to, but I still do what Jesus and God wished, then I will be alright. Suppose Jesus was God, and I believe that, but I do not do what Jesus and God wished. Then, no matter what I believe, no matter how correct my belief, I will be in big trouble. I will be like the demons. I choose to trust my God-given intellect as best I can, follow the message as best I can, and trust God to understand.

(C.S. Lewis said in several books that either Jesus was a colossal demonic liar or else Jesus really was God. There are no other alternatives, and we have to choose one. Lewis preferred to believe Jesus was God. Lewis' argument is a version of the traditional Christian argument as stated above. Lewis based his argument on Lewis' belief that Jesus said he was God, said he would be crucified and resurrected, and said his crucifixion and resurrection magically save people. Lewis took the New Testament at face value when it had Jesus say all this. I think Jesus did not say any of this, especially Jesus did not claim to be God. The early Church writers put these claims in Jesus' mouth because it served their needs and likely because they had come to believe it. If Jesus did not make these claims, then we are not forced to choose between Jesus making an accurate claim to be God versus Jesus being a colossal demonic liar. Because I don't have to make that choice, I can see Jesus as a prophet telling as much of the truth as he understood it.)