

Chapter 1 – Are You There?

“Do Jewish people believe in Jesus?” I couldn’t believe he’d asked that; you would think that a seventh grader from a Catholic school would have known the answer. I saw our religion teacher roll her eyes. Our hostess at Shaar Emeth Temple was very gracious though, “We reformed Jews believe Jesus was a prophet. We do not, however, believe that he was the Messiah. When we read our Scriptures, what Christians call the ‘Old Testament,’ we don’t see Jesus in the prophecies. We interpret them differently and believe that Messiah is still to come. Another way our belief differs from Christians is that we don’t believe God will become human. Messiah will be a human being just like you and I.” Of course Jewish people didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah; didn’t *everyone* know that?

So why was I so disturbed when I came home from the synagogue? As I thought about it, I slowly realized that I’d never actually met someone who not only didn’t believe in Jesus, but had based their whole life on a system of belief that didn’t include him. Growing up in a Christian family and attending a Catholic school day-in and day-out didn’t give me much opportunity for contact with other belief systems. My classmate’s question really wasn’t so stupid after all. Yes, I’d known the answer with my head; but the implications had clearly never made it to my heart: the majority of the world did not recognize the person that I’d always been taught was its center. Why not, and even more, *why exactly did I?* If Jewish people didn’t recognize Jesus as the Messiah, then why did this Irish-German kid in the suburbs of St. Louis recognize him?

My parents were hit with a barrage of questions: Why do you believe in Jesus? How do you know he was the Messiah? If he was the Messiah, then why do we believe he’s God too? How can you be *sure*? Imagine yourself in their position – not easy questions for your thirteen year old to fire at you! They gave it their best shot, “It’s a matter of faith Shane. It’s not something you can prove absolutely; it’s what you know in your heart.” Beautiful, heartfelt...but of absolutely no help to me.

In the weeks that followed my field trip to the synagogue I started doing my own research. I read articles on Judaism and Christianity in our family’s *World Book Encyclopedia*, slowly branching out to read about Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. At the local library I discovered the philosophy