

“ARE YOU THE CHRIST?”
I John 3:1-3, I Peter 2:18-25, Luke 22:66-72
May 30 & 31, 2020 Are You the Christ Series #5

Throughout the month of May, we've been looking at some vital questions that fit well here in the twenty-first century. They have to do with who Jesus is, not only when He lived here with us on the earth, but also for us today. Our understanding of who Jesus is shapes the way we live and think and have our being. So to use these questions to come to grips of who Jesus IS, is key to shaping our lives and our faith. It is important, then, to question; What sort of person Jesus is? Where does He get all His wisdom and authority from? What is the message that He is trying to teach us today? How does all this information reflect how we relate to others around us?

Today we focus on the 5th question put to Jesus with regard to who He is. **Listen to how this question comes to Jesus.** This is Luke 22:66-71 (READ Luke 22:66-71).

Jesus had spent His entire ministry explaining the Law of God to the people. He had demonstrated the love of God, He had taught His disciples what God expects in how we are to live, and He had changed the lives of so many people with His miraculous power. His whole ministry had modeled that He is the Messiah, the Promised One. Many people came to realize that He was who He said He is, but those in leadership in the Temple refused to accept Him. So Jesus was arrested, He was brought in before the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the Law, and He was questioned. They have sought this opportunity to find something that they can accuse Him of in order to get rid of Him because Jesus had openly exposed the misdirection of these church leaders away from God's Law.

Yet, they had seen His ministry. They had witnessed Jesus' teachings and His miracles, and they had found themselves on the sharp end of the stick when Jesus accused them of being blind guides, not conforming to the will of God. Even though there was a great expectation for the Messiah to come, it seems that the Leaders of the Temple did not want Jesus to be that Messiah. Though there was a great expectancy for the Messiah, in their minds Jesus just didn't fit the description.

So out of anger at Him confronting them, and out of jealousy about Jesus drawing the crowds

toward Him, these leaders had Jesus arrested and brought before them in an illegal trial in order to convict Him of something great enough to crucify Him. There at that “trial” the question comes to Jesus, “Are You the Christ?” **They demand to know!** But their demand is not to get the truth out of Jesus, for they already made up their minds that He was not the Messiah. They wanted to hear Jesus SAY that He was the Messiah so that they would have something to condemn Him for.

Jesus saw what they were up to and what they wanted to hear. He knew their hearts and their motives. So Jesus tells them, “*If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I ask you a question, you will not answer...*” (Luke 22:67-68). All they wanted to hear was Jesus say it Himself, that He was the Christ, and they would have their evidence. But Jesus goes on, “*But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right side of Almighty God.*” He is not only indicating that He is the Messiah, but also that He is the Son of God, too. Jesus opened up the envelope wider for the leaders of the Temple to see Him as He is, but they have already closed their minds to that. All they want is a conviction, nothing more.

It is rare when we hear Jesus say right out that He is the Messiah, the Son of God but we do have accounts of that happening. When John’s Gospel recorded the encounter that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar (John 4), the woman was prepared to accept the Messiah when He came. It was then that Jesus tells her, “*I am He, I who am talking with you*” (4:26).

At the time when Jesus questioned His disciples about who the people said that He was, it was Peter who spoke up and said, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!*” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus did not correct him, saying that He was wrong. Jesus answers Peter by saying, “*Good for you, Simon, son of John! For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was give to you directly by My Father in heaven*” (16:17). But Jesus then “*ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ*” (16:20). It was enough at that time that they knew that He was the Christ.

And then when Jesus heals the man born blind (John 9), after he was interrogated by the Pharisees at how he was healed, and then thrown out of the Temple because he proclaimed Jesus to be a prophet, Jesus asked him, “*Do you believe in the Son of Man?*’ The man answered, ‘*Tell me who He is*

so that I can believe in Him! Jesus said to him, ‘You have already seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you now’ (9:35-37). Jesus told people He was the Christ, the Messiah of God.

But for us, this is **A Very Real Question**. We can look at the historical record of what Jesus did. We can read about His teaching. We can study His miraculous works. We can look at His claims of being the Son of God. But we, too, must ask the same question of Jesus, “Are You the Christ?” And rather than condemn Him right out, we must consider everything said about Him so that we make up our own minds about Him. Is Jesus The Christ For Us?

The early church quickly decided that Jesus was the Christ. It came to the point that the position of Christ was no longer a descriptive title, but rather an integral part of who Jesus is. Jesus (who is) the Christ was quickly being called Jesus Christ. And Paul used the terms “Jesus Christ” and “Christ Jesus” interchangeably in identifying Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Promised Son of God. But while the apostles and the early followers of Jesus obviously answered the question, “Are You the Christ” with a resounding “Yes!” the question quickly comes a little bit differently for us. We, too, can claim Jesus to be our Christ, but the questions arise for us, “Who is *this* Christ? What does it mean that *Jesus* is the Christ? What does seeing that, saying that, and accepting that require of us?”¹

So let me lay out some answers to this question, “**Who is Jesus Christ?**” I know I don’t have anywhere near the time it would take to fully explain Jesus Christ, but let me give you three responses that I have come upon that easily give you a good response to that question.

First, **Jesus Christ is a Jew**. I know that offends many people today, but Jesus is a Jew. Many think that He was the first Christian, but undoubtedly, Jesus is Jewish. Jesus, the Son of God, was born in Bethlehem to surrogate parents, Mary and Joseph, both of the lineage of King David, to fulfill the prophecy that the Messiah would be born in the land of Judea, in the town of Bethlehem Ephrathah (Matt. 1-2). Then they settled in the town of Nazareth, in Galilee, where Jesus grew up.

He was raised according to the Jewish tradition, Mary and Joseph “teaching” Him the Law of

¹ (R. Benjamin Garrison, *Are You the Christ?* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978] pg. 64)

God given to the people of Israel to order their lives in a way that would please God. Jesus participated in every bit of the life of Jewish culture, going to the Temple on the Sabbath, learning the Torah, and abiding by all of the guidelines set for the people of Israel. So at the age of 12, while celebrating Passover with His parents, Jesus amazed the Leaders of the Temple as He conversed with them and asked questions of them (Luke 2:41-52).

When Jesus began His ministry, He lived within the tradition of the Jews. He followed the guidelines of the Temple, abided by the Law in every way. He not only quoted the Scriptures, but He lived them. The Lord's Supper that He instituted with His disciples began right out of the Jewish tradition of celebrating Passover. In every way, Jesus followed the Jewish Law and fulfilled it.

We as Christians often have strange feelings about having a spiritual connection with Judaism. We want to claim Jesus, but we forget that Jesus was a Jew in every sense of life, culture and religious tradition. We have the Jewish tradition as a part of our ancestry, the Old Testament telling us of our roots as we have been grafted into the people of Israel through Jesus. And because we have forgotten our roots in Judaism, we need to be careful not to turn against our Jewish history by rebelling against God's favored people. We need to remember that Jesus Christ is Jewish, whose primary purpose was to reach the people of Israel with the Salvation of God through Him so that they could be the harbingers of truth. We who are Gentile Christians are blessed to be included into the family of God only after the Jews turned against Jesus. We are not to hate the Jews through anti-Semitism, but to embrace them as distant brothers and sisters who are "not far from the kingdom of heaven" (Mark 12:34). When we come to understand that Jesus is a Jew, we are saved from disrespecting God's people and sinning against God's Promised Messiah.

Second, **Jesus Christ is a Teacher and Example**. It is true that He is much more than just a teacher and example, but part of being the Messiah, Jesus is a teacher and an example, none the less. To elaborate on this, I want you to think back to when you were first learning how to write. When I was in grade school, the early classrooms always had the letters of the alphabet above the chalk board, giving

us the example of how each letter was to be formed. We first learned how to print the letters by following the example above the board, writing our letters according to the displayed pattern. And it became true as well as we began to learn how to write in cursive. Each letter above the board had the printed pattern as well as the cursive pattern that we were to follow so that our writing could be understood and legible. The danger always came when we began to forget to look at the letters above the board and only look at the letters we had previously written on our own sheet of paper. Our letters then became distorted because we were no longer looking at the example set for us, but on what we had previously written.

Likewise, the life of Jesus Christ is the “above the board” example for us to always keep in view and model our lives after. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and as long as we keep our focus on Him, our life mirror His example. But when we begin to look away from Jesus and gauge ourselves by what other people are doing around us, and we begin to pattern our lives after what others are doing rather than the pattern that Jesus set for us, we then begin to distort the example of Jesus and lose the example of how God desires for us to live.

Teaching is an important part of who Jesus is as the Christ. His purpose was to teach us about God so that we could live according to the pattern that God had set for us. Not only in His words spoken to us, but also through His daily example lived before us, Jesus helps us to connect with God so that we might follow Him in all His ways. He is the model that we are to pattern our lives after.

In teaching us about God, Jesus often spoke about what the Kingdom of Heaven was like so that we could learn the correct pattern to live our lives pleasing to God. He used illustrations like “*The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away*” (Matt. 13:24-25) to help us understand that we are living in a spiritual battle between good and evil.

Then He used the illustration, “*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than*

the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Matt. 13:31-32) to help us understand the benefit of having the Word of God in our lives and when we trust in Him, we are sheltered in the arms of His branches.

And He used the illustration, *“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened”* (Matthew 13:33) to help us understand that God’s Word in our lives fills us and transforms us to become pleasing to Him.

And Jesus taught us by example, reaching out to the hurting (ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19), demonstrating grace to the afflicted (woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11), providing food to the poor (feeding the 5000 in Mark 6:33-44), giving good news to the outcasts (tax collectors and sinners coming to Him in Luke 15:1), and even restoring hope in impossible situations (healing a woman of her 12 year bleeding disorder and raising Jairus’ dead daughter in Luke 8:40-56). All of these examples and many more, Jesus lived according to the Law as a Jew and applied the Law to His life so that He could touch the lives of those around Him and invite them to follow Him.

In these teachings and life examples, Jesus invites us to follow Him and do the same thing to those around us so that we might make a great difference in their lives, too. It’s not enough for us to *know about* Jesus. It’s not enough to *understand His teaching*. For Jesus to be the Christ for us, we must not only learn from Him, but also put those lessons into practice in our own lives. You see, “unless we are very, very careful, we can come to presume that because we have heard about the teachings, we have done something about them. *Listening is not learning unless it leads to being*. We may listen to great and stirring sermons about peace yet never lift a finger for peace. We may listen to convinced calls for brotherhood and sisterhood without ever being convinced enough to *be the brothers or sisters* who are being called for.”² We must put these lessons into practice in our daily lives.

And we heard that in the first part of our reading in I Peter 2(18-21a), *“You servants must submit yourselves to your masters and show them complete respect, not only to those who are kind and*

² (Garrison, *Are You the Christ?*... pg. 69)

considerate, but also to those who are harsh. God will bless you for this, if you endure the pain of undeserved suffering because you are conscious of His will. For what credit is there if you endure the beatings you deserve for having done wrong? But if you endure suffering even when you have done right, God will bless you for it. It was to this that God called you...”

So if Jesus Christ as a Jew is our Brother, and Jesus Christ is teacher and example in the faith, then it is also true that **Jesus Christ is our Savior**. This is the third way I want to explain Jesus as our Christ.

I like the way that Benjamin Garrison states it. He says, “Some of the better theology ... these days comes from the pen of Charles M. Schulz. It appeared regularly in the guise of a comic strip entitled “Peanuts.” Schulz is responsible for such immortal lines as: “No problem is so big or so complicated that it can’t be run away from!” or “The wages of sin is ‘Aaargh!’” In one strip poor Charlie Brown has been forced by his friends to sleep outdoors in a cardboard box without a top. Charlie Brown lies there in misery, looks up toward heaven, and asks, ‘Why do I have to sleep outside in a cardboard box?’ Then, having a second thought, he quickly cries heavenward, ‘Don’t answer that!’

“Most of us, I suspect, really know in our innards why we have to be in the box and why we cannot fall asleep. We even surmise that we made the box ourselves, often without intending to. We know, when we are heart honest, that we got ourselves into our moral fix. And – most importantly – we finally find that we cannot get out of the box and back into the house on our own.

“When we discover that, then biblically speaking, we are ready to discover – and accept – Christ as Savior.”³ Jesus as Christ came from heaven here to earth to join us in this box we have created for ourselves, this box called sin. He loves us enough to bring to us the escape route from our prison where we are enslaved, inviting us all to go with Him beyond the walls of our box, to the freedom that God has called us to and created for us. Yet so many times it takes us being on our backs, looking up into the bleakness of the dark night that we can see the stars of hope. Jesus Christ as Savior saves us from

³ (Garrison, *Are You the Christ?* pg. 70-71)

ourselves, from this bondage to sin and death.

The last part of the reading of I Peter 2(24-25) highlights this very well. *“Christ Himself carried our sins in His body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by His wounds that you have been healed. You were like sheep that had lost their way, but now you have been brought back to follow the Shepherd and Keeper of your souls.”*

Jesus Christ is the Savior who has saved us from the sins of this world, when we put our trust and faith in Him. Once again, we can know about Jesus and be aware of His Salvation for us, but it takes us to put our faith and trust in Him as our Savior before we are able to find His Salvation for us. We have to act upon it, claim it, and then live it in full confidence that it is true for us. And that means that we have to turn away from the things of this world that call us deeper into the box that separates us from God. By obeying His teachings, by following His examples, and by dedicating ourselves in following Him in every aspect of our lives, we receive the key that opens the box and allows us to return home to the One who has set us free.

Jesus Christ as Savior has also saved us for living in this world in order to witness to those around us who have not yet found His saving grace so that they may also find that new life that He gives. We live in a world of hurting, desperate, dying people who need to hear about the Savior who has come to set us free from the box of our confinement because of our sin. How will they hear this news? It must come from us, those who have found Jesus Christ as Jew, teacher and example, and Savior.

Hear again the great words of I John 3:1-3. *“See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God’s children and so, in fact, we are. This is why the world does not know us: it has not known God. My dear friends, we are not God’s children, but it is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He really is. “Everyone who has this hope in Christ keeps themselves pure, just as Christ is pure.”* So it is ours to share this great Good News to the world.

So then, let Christ Jesus be your life and live for Him ‘til the whole world knows. AMEN