

“WHO IS THIS?”  
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Matthew 21:1-11  
April 1 & 2, 2023

“After six years given to the impartial investigation of Christianity as to its truth or falsity, I have come to the deliberate conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the Jews, the Savior of the world, and my personal Savior.”

These were the words of Lew Wallace, Governor of New Mexico, over a century ago. He had started out to write a book against Jesus Christ and in the process was converted to Christianity. He told a friend how it happened:

I had always been an agnostic and denied Christianity. Robert C. Ingersoll, a famous agnostic, was one of my most intimate friends. He once suggested, "See here, Wallace, you are a learned man and a thinker. Why don't you gather material and write a book to prove the falsity concerning Jesus Christ, that no such man has ever lived, much less the author of the teachings found in the New Testament. Such a book would make you famous. It would be a masterpiece, and a way of putting an end to the foolishness about the so-called Christ."

The thought made a deep impression on me, and we discussed the possibility of such a book. I went to Indianapolis, my home, and told my wife what I intended to do. She was a member of the Methodist Church and naturally did not like my plan. But I decided to do it and began to collect material from libraries here and in the Old World. I gathered everything over that period in which Jesus Christ, according to legend, should have lived.

Several years were spent in this work. I had written nearly four chapters when it became clear to me that Jesus Christ was just as real a personality as Socrates, Plato, or Caesar. The conviction became a certainty. I knew that Jesus Christ had lived because of the facts connected with the period in which he lived.

I was in an uncomfortable position. I had begun to write a book to prove that Jesus Christ had never lived on earth. Now I was face-to-face with the fact that he was just as historic a personage as

Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Virgil, Dante, and a host of other men who had lived in olden days. I asked myself candidly, "If he was a real person (and there was no doubt), was he not then also the Son of God and the Savior of the world?" Gradually the consciousness grew that, since Jesus Christ was a real person, he probably was the one he claimed to be.

I fell on my knees to pray for the first time in my life, and I asked God to reveal himself to me, forgive my sins, and help me to become a follower of Christ. Towards morning the light broke into my soul. I went into my bedroom, woke my wife, and told her that I had received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

"O Lew," she said, "I have prayed for this ever since you told me of your purpose to write this book, that you would find him while you wrote it!"

Lew Wallace did write a very famous book. It was a masterpiece and the crowning glory of his life's work. He changed the book he was originally writing and used all his research to write another book.

Now every time I watch the epic film made from that book and see Charlton Heston racing those four magnificent white horses in that amazing chariot race, I wonder how many who have seen *Ben Hur*, with its moving references to Jesus, know it was written by a man who wanted to disprove that Jesus ever existed, and instead became convinced that he was the greatest man who ever lived!<sup>1</sup>

Many in our world today wonder the same as Lew Wallace did so many years ago. When introduced to Jesus they question, "Who Is This!?" They may have been adamantly against Jesus being the Messiah of the world, but as they begin to question who Jesus is, as they learn more about His life here on the earth, they come to the same understanding as Wallace: "that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the Jews, the Savior of the world, and my personal Savior."

This is Palm Sunday weekend, when we remember Jesus' triumphant entry into the city of Jerusalem shortly before the Passover festival. It is a good time for us to ask the same question, "Who Is

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<sup>1</sup> (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 150

This?” As many doubt that Jesus was the Messiah, many also doubt that He even existed, and if He did, surely there’s no way that He could rise from the dead.

But on His way to Jerusalem, He had just raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany, just a little ways from the city of Jerusalem, and the people who were eye witnesses of that resurrection eagerly told many in the surrounding area what Jesus had done (John 11). Even the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, so they had begun to plot Jesus’ AND Lazarus’ deaths. They wanted to make a quick stop to this man who could even raise the dead back to life. But all the while the question burned in their minds, “Who Is This?”

Only once or twice during His three years of ministry had Jesus come right out and said that He was the Messiah to the people He mingled with. He had told the woman at the well near Sychar, in Samaria, that He was the Messiah, and she had told the whole town about Him so that they had all come out to hear Him and test the woman’s statement. It only took two days for the people to come to the same conclusion. *“They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world”* (John4:42).

And Jesus had told Martha, the sister of Lazarus, that He was the Messiah just before He had raised Lazarus up from 4 days sleep in death. *“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”* She had known Jesus for a much longer time, but she also believed. *“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”* (John 11:25-27).

And Jesus had also told His disciples three times that He would be arrested by the Jewish leaders, they would condemn Him to death and they would hand Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day He would be raised to life (Matthew 20:18-19)! They didn’t understand yet what He had to do to become the Messiah, the Savior. They, too, questioned “Who Is This?”

So when Jesus raised Lazarus from death and the grave, many who were there also believed that He was the Messiah, the One who comes to take away the sins of the world. Almost everyone who encountered Jesus saw that His words were true and believed that He was the Savior of the world. Yet not everyone had had an encounter with Jesus. But the rumors of Jesus were flying fast enough to get the attention of even the Roman leaders. And as they heard more and more of what Jesus was doing and teaching, they questioned, “Who Is This?”

The words of Psalm 118:15-16 were indeed coming true right before their very eyes, “*Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous; ‘The Lord’s right hand has done mighty things! The Lord’s right hand is lifted high: the Lord’s right hand has done mighty things!’*” Jesus was doing marvelous things because He is the Lord. And the people were beginning to notice. There were even some of the Pharisees that were becoming convinced that Jesus was the One they had been waiting for. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had become followers of Jesus, and others were certainly interested in who this man, Jesus, was.

So five days before the Passover festival, Jesus left the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and continued toward Jerusalem. Listen to the account as found in Matthew 21:1-11. (READ Matthew 21:1-11)

So Who is this that fulfills Scripture in everything He does? This account in Matthew is the exact fulfillment of Psalm 118:19-29 that we read earlier! Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, cried over it because He knew its fate in years to come, that it would be surrounded and destroyed. He is the One who entered the city gates to bring salvation to all who would believe in Him. He is the one who entered humbly, riding on the colt of a donkey, rather than on the powerful steed of the victor of battle. He is the One who came in the name of the Lord, who brings the Light of the Lord into the hearts of all who will listen to Him and received His words. He is the One that the people recognized as the Son of David, who would bring peace to all who would believe in Him. And everything spoken of hundreds of years before were unfolding, taking place just as they had been written about.

The people walking before and behind Jesus believed that He was the Messiah, for they had seen His miracles and heard His teachings. In every word of Jesus' teaching they heard the Scriptures explained. They heard the prophecy of the coming of the Lord's Messiah lifted up before them, and they believed because they saw Him with their own eyes heal the sick, give sight to the blind, provide food for the hungry, and bring release from the captivity of demons.

But the people of the city of Jerusalem who were not witness to the things that Jesus had done asked, "Who IS This?!" Who is this that comes into the city with no army protecting Him, but all shouting and praising God that He was the new King of Israel? Who is this that proclaimed to the Pharisees, "Even if all these people stop shouting, the rocks themselves would lift up their praise and sing for joy!" (Luke 19:39-40)?

Throughout the week, the question was asked over and over again, Who Is This? Who is this that can speak to a fig tree and curse it because it has no fruit on it, and the tree dies? Who is it that dares to go into the Temple and disrupt the business as usual? Who is this that drives out the merchants selling sheep and doves with a braided whip, overturning their tables and calling out, "*It is written, My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers*" (Matt. 21:13)? Who is this that heals the blind and the lame in the Temple courts and has children dancing around Him shouting, "*Hosanna to the Son of David*" (Matt. 21:15)?

Who Is This that dares question the leadership of the Chief Priest, Pharisees, Scribes and teachers of the Law? Who is this that openly rebukes those who should know better than to lead the people into a lifeless religion focused only upon satisfying their own personal interests? Who is this that stands up to the Chief Priest and Pharisees and confronts them of their hypocrisy? Who is this that claims for Himself, "*The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed*" (Luke. 20:17-18)? Who is this that loves all of the people enough to try to correct them and bring new life to them so that they can accurately follow the Lord in all that they do and say? Who is it that tries to correct the practices of the

church to bring it once more into alignment with the Scriptures so that they might once again find favor with God the Father?

Who is this that then humbles Himself even to His own disciples, to wash their feet so that they may be clean? Knowing even that one of those disciples would betray Him to those who seek to kill him, yet He washed his feet? Knowing that one of those disciples would deny even knowing Him three times, yet He washed his feet? Who is this that then puts Himself into the Passover meal, taking the unleavened bread, the hidden *afikoman*, and saying “*This is My body, broken for you, take and eat*” and then taking the cup of redemption and saying “*This is My blood, the blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Take and drink*” (Matt. 26:26-27)?

Who is this then that leads His disciples out to the Garden of Gethsemane and prays all night for the courage and strength to become the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world? Who is this that the disciple Judas leads men from the Temple to arrest Him? Who is this that is illegally tried in the middle of the night by the Pharisees and Sadducees? Who is this that is presented to Pilate, seeking the death sentence from him so that they could crucify Him? Who is this that endures torturous flogging to the very inch of His life, and the guards and Roman soldiers mock with a crown of thorns and a stick scepter, and then spit upon? Who is this that endures horrible crucifixion on a cross, yet does not condemn or curse, but rather forgives those who put Him on it? Who is this who cries out, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*” (Luke 23:46), with His final breath? WHO IS THIS!!!!?

For those who question it, the simple answer is, This Is Jesus, the Son of God, Our Savior, Our Redeemer, the One who opens the gate of Heaven for all who will believe so that they might have eternal life. This Is Jesus, the only perfect man of earth, who is God in the flesh, God in human form, willing to give His life as the perfect sacrifice in order to pay the price of our sin so that we do not need to fear death, but by believing in Him we receive life.

This is Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary at the appointing of God the Father, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day rose again from the

dead having paid the penalty of our sins with His own life so that we could be with Him in heaven in the presence of our Holy God, innocent once more through His broken body and poured out blood. This is Jesus, the One who gave His all so that we could be with Him when this life is over.

This is the One who brings new life to those who are dead in their own sins. This Is Jesus, who has all authority over heaven and earth. This is Jesus who speaks and the winds and waves obey Him. This is Jesus, who commands and the demons leave their human host. This is Jesus, who brings healing to all those who are afflicted, who straightens and strengthens backs, who restores feeling in paralyzed legs, who restores the use of withered hands, who touches those who are sick and their sickness leaves instantly, who calls out to epilepsy and causes it to cease, who blesses the simple meal of a small boy and makes it into a feast for thousands of people.

This is Jesus, who looks into our souls and calls out forgiveness to those who have lived outside of God's commands. This is Jesus, who gives hope to the thief and changes their heart so that they see the opportunity for generosity rather than for greed. This is Jesus, who confronts us in our sins and tells us, "*Who is here to condemn you? Go and sin no more!*"

This is Jesus, who calls us out of drug abuse, who calls us out of prostitution, who calls us out of pornography, who calls us out of abusive words and actions, who calls us out of alcoholism, who calls us out of the darkness of dishonesty into the light of truth, who demands that those who are called by His name to live their lives as witnesses to those around them. This is Jesus, who heals cancer, who removes tumors, who mends broken bones and protects from deadly accidents. This is Jesus, who calls us to be the ones God has created us to be, men and women, male and female, righteous and holy in His sight, rejoicing in all that He has made us to be.

This is Jesus, who weeps with us when we are sad or hurting, who grants us greater insight to all of the opportunities around us to be faithful, who provides us peace when the troubles of the world afflict us, who invites us into His arms to be held closely during the times of great disappointment and sorrow. This is Jesus, who gives us the courage each day to face life unafraid, who gives us the

endurance we need to withstand the struggles and hurts of life, who opens our minds to new possibilities when things don't go the way we expect them to go, who gently leads us into greater things as we give Him our hand and allow Him to guide us through the dark valleys into the light of new possibilities.

Once we consider who Jesus really is, and all that He has to influence and correct our lives, we have the opportunity to put our trust in Him as our Savior, our Messiah, the Son of God. When we give ourselves into His control, we see that He doesn't lead us into death, but directs us toward life. We see that He is the One who answers prayer, bringing about even greater things than we could ever hope for. HE is the one who responds to our question, "Who Is This" with the invitation to come and see, so that we can explore and find the wonderful nature of God Himself through Him.

On that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem to be received as "*the Son of David, the One who comes in the Name of the Lord*" (Matthew 21:9), He came knowing that His time on earth was coming to a close, and that His mission of life for all people was coming to completion. He faced the human suffering that would come to Him, and He boldly went on toward the goal of salvation for the whole world - for you and for me.

Who is this? This is Christ, the Lord! Let's pray.

Father, in our world today, it is so easy for us to become distracted away from who Jesus really is. There are those who adamantly proclaim that Jesus is a fake, a fraud, a man who didn't even exist, but we know that He is real, because He lives in our hearts today. Continue to open the eyes of those who are blinded by the things of this world as if they are what give life to us. Allow them, us, to see the need for more than material things, but rather the spiritual assurance of Your great love for us, through Jesus. Enable us to see the need for us to turn to You, to let You be our God as we recognize Jesus as our Savior. Enable our minds to come to rest in knowing Jesus as the One who comes in the Name of the Lord. Grant us the humility and the courage to bow before You and let Jesus become our Savior, so that we might find real life through Him. Keep calling us to Yourself, Lord, so that we might find Your way, through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. AMEN.