

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

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I. THE CONFESSION of PETER: A turning point in the Gospels

(Matthew 16:13-28; Mark 8:27-38; Luke 9:18-27; cf. John 6:66-69)

- A. The question of Jesus' identity has been repeatedly raised before this time by the disciples of John, the people of Nazareth, the scribes and Pharisees, the crowds, His disciples and Herod.
(John 1:41-49; Luke 4:22; Luke 5:21; Luke 7:16; Luke 8:25; Luke 9:9)
- B. The answer of the disciples gives you the gossip of the day. Various views of Jesus:
1. John the Baptist returned from the dead
 2. Elijah (the OT prophet who was taken to heaven by chariot!)
 3. Jeremiah
 4. Another prophet, yet a prevalent identification by the people is that of Jesus as someone extraordinary – on a different level from other men.
- C. Jesus wants to know more than what the crowds are saying. He wants his disciples' view. "Who do YOU say that I am? Peter's answer,
"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."
1. This is not the first time that the view of Jesus as Messiah has been raised. The question of His Messiahship was being raised all the time. It is not a bolt out of the blue.
 2. This is the conclusion of the process of encounter and discovery. Peter sees Christ with clarity and certainty as the Christ. Peter identifies Jesus as the long expected One who as to be the divinely appointed head of the people of God and bearer of God's rule. (The Messiah in Hebrew – the Anointed One.) A settled conclusion – not a hunch.
 3. Peter clearly sees Jesus as standing in a unique and special relationship to God. Jesus accepts and affirms Peter's confession as not coming from Peter alone, but as revealed from God.
 4. Peter's confession comes after he has lived with Jesus personally (Mark 3:13-161). He did not wait until all of his questions about Jesus had been answered before he started down the road with Him. Jesus calls Peter to follow, and he does, taking his problems and questions with him. As Peter moves out in obedience, a growing clarity and certainty comes as to who Jesus is.

Application: Sometimes we are tempted to think that: "I must wait until I get all my intellectual, theological, and doctrinal questions settled before I can begin to follow Jesus and give myself to Him. I don't have the Trinity worked out so I can't possibly become a Christian." That is not the way to gain certainty of faith. Certainty of faith came to Peter as he moved out in obedience to Christ, lived with Christ, walked with Christ, saw Him in action, and attempted to obey Him. Then he knew who Jesus was. This is very true today. It isn't that first I will settle all my questions, then I will move; I start to move as I see Christ now, and on the way I learn more, until I come to a place with more certainty in it. That's what Peter did.

- D. After Christ hears and affirms Peter's acknowledgment of Him as the Messiah, He tells them to tell no one. (Mark 16:20) *Why not tell?* Didn't Jesus want people to know He was God's anointed one – the Messiah?

The answer comes in Jesus' next words. *"From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples the He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, from the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

From that time, Jesus began to teach about His suffering and His death and His resurrection. Why from that time? Previous to that time, they weren't prepared for this. There were hints of it, but they were not prepared for this and they really are not ready yet. Peter says, "Oh, no!" "And Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to You'".

Just the thing that Jesus was weary of happens with Peter. When Peter said, "You are the Messiah", he brings with that a lot of previous ideas and baggage – a whole picture – "You are the nationalistic leader that will conquer Rome". "You are the one who is going to establish the Israelites as world rulers." "You are this kind of Messiah." Jesus immediately, as soon as the disciples acknowledge His Messiahship, definitely and firmly says, "I am going to suffer and die and be resurrected". He joins together Messiahship with suffering. They had not been joined previously in the popular thinking. The thought staggers Peter. The Messiah and suffering; the two just don't go together at all in the disciples' understanding, much less in the understanding of the people as a whole. Servanthood and suffering was the way the Messiah was going to go. It was just not expected.

To proclaim Jesus as Messiah without a corrected understanding of the Messiah, would be to ignite a riot of false hopes and expectations. The term Messiah had been so adulterated in the culture, and all kinds of wrong meanings were associated with it. Just to say the Messiah had come, that Jesus is the Messiah, without defining what kind of Messiah, would raise the wrong expectations, the wrong kind of hopes, and the wrong kind of responses. Jesus is seeking to avoid that kind of response to Him. In the Gospel of John, when Jesus feeds the 5,000, the crowds came and sought to make Him a king by force. Their intense desire was like a spark ready to explode and burst into flame. (Which it did just 30 years later with the whole revolt against Rome.) Jesus did not want to spark that fire.

- E. After Peter's confession and Jesus' teaching about His coming suffering Jesus tells His disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me".
1. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Who are you following? He is a suffering Savior. A suffering Messiah, and you yourself, if you follow Him will be involved in that kind of suffering. This is a radically new vision. It is not the pre-packaged picture that the disciples brought with them. And Jesus shapes it; and teaches them, and in love tells them this is what is going to happen. We see Jesus very plainly trying to tell them and warn them, but they did not understand. It was so contrary to what they were hoping for and what they expected.
 2. What will be the meaning of the death of Christ? Jesus had in His consciousness that His death would be a death for others. He was not going to die for Himself or as a martyr, but in the place of others. (Mark 10:45)

“For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

The idea of substitution, one dying in the place of others, is very much in Jesus’ consciousness at this time. You can see this in Isaiah 53 and the Messianic Servant passage in the Old Testament. Jesus had lived in these passages. There was conscious, deliberate awareness of his coming death. It wasn’t as a victim, or a martyr. It was a deliberate action in which Jesus was involved.

II. THE SELF-DISCLOSURE of JESUS

His teaching about Himself

His claims – verbal and demonstrated about Himself.

His character and qualities – sinless, giving love.

A. His teaching about Himself used 3 primary terms – Messiah, Son of God, & Son of Man.

1. Messiah (See Mark 14:6; John 1:43ff)

Jesus acknowledged his right to this title, but did not use it publicly because of probability of misunderstanding.

2. Son of God

Today we use this term popularity as meaning Jesus’ divinity and Son of Man refers to his humanity. That is not the most common term, but it is used and appears a number of times in the Gospel accounts.

The term appears on the lips of the demoniacs again and again. The High Priest uses it and the centurion at the cross uses it; we heard it in the baptism accounts and at the Transfiguration.

Also we have Jesus’ very familiar use of “Father” when addressing God – “my father’s house”.

There are three crucial passages where Jesus uses that title for himself.

- (a) The parable of the wicked husbandman, (Mark 12) Very clearly Jesus is talking about Israel, the nation, and the prophets who had been sent. Jesus rated himself above the prophets. Prophets are servants or slaves, but then comes the Beloved Son, one who stands in a unique relationship to the Father, the one who is the heir of all things. Very clearly Jesus is referring to himself. Judgment will come on the nation because of the way they treated the Beloved Son.
- (b) Mark 13:32 “But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Again, Jesus puts himself in a unique place above the angels, in a unique relationship with the Father, as the Son.
- (c) Another major passage occurs in Matthew 11:27. “All things have been delivered to me by the Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Jesus makes a sweeping claim to stand in a unique relationship between the Father and men and to have exclusive prerogatives to reveal the Father.

3. Son of Man

- (a) Humiliation – e.g., The Son of Man must suffer many things. (Mark 8:31)
- (b) Exaltation – e.g., You shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven. (Mark 14:62)

The Son of Man is an ambiguous term with several possible meanings. One primary meaning arises from Messianic material in Daniel 7:13f. In Daniel’s vision he sees:

“Behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and his glory and kingdom.
That all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
And his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.

In the inter-testamental period, one strong interpretation of this passage was of the coming Messiah as a high, anointed, divine figure coming into human history with sovereignty that was universal in scope. Jesus appropriates this messianic term to Himself and uses this as His self-designation to be understood by those with ears to hear. This is why when we use Son of Man merely to refer to Jesus’ humanity, we miss a major point. It is more appropriately used to refer to His kingly function and divine authority. The crucial idea in the Daniel passage is that of sovereignty. Once again Jesus takes the sovereignty of the Messiah and links it with the motifs of the suffering servant. (Mark 10:45)

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

The disciples were swept out of their spiritual depths when they heard this kind of language. It took them a long time to understand what Jesus was trying to teach them.

B. Jesus’ Claims, Demands, and Declarations

1. Jesus exercises authority in many ways.

Over sin	Mark 2:1-12
Over nature	Mark 4:35-41
Over sickness	Mark 1:29-34
Over demons	Mark 3:20-27
Over the Sabbath	Mark 2:23-27
In His teaching	Mark 1:21-27; Matt. 5:22,28

2. Jesus makes demands that are not just for ethical obedience, but for total commitment to Himself. He calls for a total response to Himself. This distinguishes Jesus from all other religious figures in Islam, Buddhism, etc.

(a) They pointed outside of themselves and said, “There is the truth. Do it.”

Jesus said, “I am the truth. Follow me.”

(b) They say, there is the way of enlightenment or Nirvana or whatever.

Jesus says, “I am the Way”.

(c) They give laws or keys to life.

Jesus says that He has and can give life in Himself.

“I have come that you may have a life and have it more abundantly.”

“I am the life.”

Jesus constantly and consistently points to His own importance for people.

(Luke 12:8) “Everyone who shall confess me before men,
him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.”

(Matthew 10:4) He that receives you receives me,
and he that receives me receives him who sent me.

(Matthew 10:37f) He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,
and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me,
and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Jesus puts himself above all normal human relationships. “I must mean more to you.”

He knows himself to be uniquely authorized by the Father and He makes these kinds of claims:

“Follow me; learn of me; come to me; forsake all and follow me; be my disciples.”

This is not just advocating keeping the Golden Rule. Jesus lays very personal kinds of demands and claims on those who would be his followers. This is different from other religions. Christianity is Christ.

3. The “I” Sayings

a. Jesus does not just point outside of himself. He repeatedly points to himself especially in the “I AM” passage in John’s Gospel.

i. In the sharp encounter with the Jews in John 8 (especially verse 58), Jesus claims the divine name.

ii. The Jews took up stones to throw at him for blasphemy.

1. “I AM” is the holy, unutterable name of God in the Old Testament.

2. When Moses said to God, “tell me your name”, the answer was “I AM”. Jesus is making an absolute claim to be Lord of the universe. His audience understood him. They wanted to kill him for it.

- b. In many other places Jesus used “I” in such a way as to call attention to himself and his claims.

I am the bread of Life	John 6:35
I am the good Shepherd	John 10:11
I am the door	John 10:7
I am the vine	John 15:1
I am the light of the world	John 8:1
I am the resurrection and the life	John 11:25
I will give you rest	Matthew 11:28
I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it	Matthew 5:17
I came not to call the righteous but sinners	Mark 2:17
I came not to bring peace but a sword	Matthew 10:34
I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life	John 14:6
You have heard it said of old... but I say to you	Matthew 5
And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me you evildoers.”	Matthew 7:23

Jesus places himself at the center of what God is doing in history. At the last supper Jesus identifies himself as the fulfillment of God’s promises in Jeremiah 31:31, for a new covenant “this cup is the new covenant in my blood”.

Jesus displays extreme self-centeredness.

C. The Character of Jesus

In all Jesus’ actions and relationships with people, He displays such quality of life and purity of character that He can publicly ask: “which of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46) He displays compassion and love reaching out in care to heal and weeping at the tomb of a friend. He was sinless, holy, pure, and both Judas and Pilate declared His innocence.

His death was of such an unusual character of words, “Father, forgive them.” that the centurion at the cross is forced to the conclusion, “Surely this man was a son of God”.

Self-confident, but not selfish, Jesus’ life of love, humility, strength and servanthood has challenged men morally from that day this.

III. THE THREE POSSIBILITIES

Check one: Jesus was either...Deluded _____, Deceitful _____, Divine _____.
People in that day responded to Jesus in these three conclusions as do people today.

- A. Deluded – misguided – well-meaning, but mistaken – is the view taken by Judas in “Jesus Christ Superstar”.

“Jesus, you are starting to believe the things they say of you.
You’re starting to believe this talk of God is true.”

All of the Gospel records smash this view. Jesus initiates – He is not a passive responder. Men and women for 2,000 years have faced Jesus and found themselves compelled to change their lives. The ring of truth and authenticity stands in the Gospel records as a claim against us. As they did, we find ourselves coming to Jesus to judge Him, and instead we find Him judging us! Never has a man seemed more sane, more calm, more “together” than Jesus. His words have the ring of reality, and His insights penetrate. He saw the fall of Jerusalem and within 30 years Jerusalem fell. No, delusion is an inadequate possibility.

- B. Deceitful – a fraud perpetrated by James and the disciples. This is the view of the Passover Plot. One insurmountable problem with this view is that you don’t die a fraud. And the disciples underwent great hardship and suffering, and (with one exception) all died as martyrs for their faith. Crucified, murdered, stoned, exiled, and imprisoned; fraud doesn’t furnish a basis for that kind of commitment and suffering. The Gospel records and human realities preclude the possibility. It would be the only fraud in the world perpetrated not to gain something, but to lose all.

- C. Divine

1. This is the alternative that the disciples and we are shut up to. It is the only one that makes sense of the data, and this in accord with all that we know of Jesus. He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. We join with Peter in his confession.
2. The decisive determinate of which possibility – deluded, deceitful, or divine – is the Resurrection of Jesus. In the resurrection you have God’s answer to the question: “Who is Jesus?” This is the divine vindication of all that Jesus has claimed. It is the Divine “Yes” to Jesus’ life and His death. We see the transformation in the lives of the timid, fearful disciples as they see the Risen Lord. 3,000 were converted in one day because God raised Him from the dead. The resurrection is the key to Jesus’ place in history and in the church. Those who witnessed it and those who proclaimed it knew that God, in raising Jesus, had declared Jesus’ worthiness to be that Savior and Lord. He is our Savior and Lord.

“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10-11)

IV. OUR RESPONSE

Who do you say Jesus is?

If we do reach the conclusion with Peter that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, then we *must* go on to hear Jesus' teaching about the cost of discipleship.

If we merely say Jesus is divine and end it at that, we have evaded God's word to us.

Christian response is not just a "head trip". Jesus lays a demand on us to take up a cross and follow Him. He says that our whole lives must be involved in this. Often we have a counterfeit Christianity – neat belief, easy and simple. But Jesus doesn't say: "That's great, Peter, you believe. Now let's go sit under a tree somewhere and ponder spirituality." No, He says, "I am going to Jerusalem to suffering and death and new life. The cross is in front of us, and I want you to come with me." Really acknowledging who Jesus is, involves us in that kind of self-denying and life-finding discipleship.

And until we have moved into that, we have not fully decided who Jesus is.