

"THE CHRIST AND HIS CROSS"

I. Introduction

A. Who is Jesus?

1. People in our culture have many different ways of answering that question.
2. Church historian Stephen Nichols wrote a book about this several years ago in which he chronicled how "America has its own quest for Jesus..., fashioning him into something more palatable to American tastes and acceptable to American sensibilities." [*Jesus Made in America*, 10]
3. There is the liberal Jesus, whose ethical teachings and moral example are taken (in a highly selective sense) to be the essence of the Christian religion.
4. There is the prosperity Jesus, who offers you your best life now.
5. There is the therapeutic Jesus, who is always there for you as your personal friend, and comforter, and healer.
6. There is the social justice warrior Jesus, who confronts oppression and calls for the creation of a just society.
7. There is the hipster Jesus, who drinks craft beer and celebrates the various aspects of city life.
8. The list could go on and on.

B. Of course there may be some elements of truth in these and other conceptions of Jesus, but they all misrepresent Jesus in one way or another.

1. They are manmade versions of Jesus.

2. And the problem with that is that a manmade Jesus has no power to save.
3. The only Jesus who can save us is the real Jesus, the Jesus who is revealed to us in the Bible.
4. It is the real Jesus who is set before us in these verses from Luke's Gospel.
5. As we study this text today we will see that Jesus is the biblical Christ, he is the suffering Christ, and he is the risen Christ.

II. Jesus Is the Biblical Christ

- A. Our passage begins by telling us that Jesus and his disciples finally got a break from the crowds and found a quiet place where they could pray.
 1. And on that occasion Jesus asked the disciples this question, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"
 2. Jesus had been conducting his public ministry for some time now, perhaps as long as two years.
 3. He had performed many miracles and had proclaimed the arrival of God's kingdom with great authority.
 4. Now he wanted to know what people were saying about him.
 5. The disciples responded by telling Jesus that there were various theories circulating among the people about his identity.
 6. Some said that he was John the Baptist, others that he was Elijah, others that he was another prophet from of old who had been brought back to life.
 7. These were the theories of the people who had great respect for Jesus and thought very highly of him.

8. Unlike the Pharisees, the crowds were welcoming Jesus enthusiastically.
 9. They believed that Jesus had been sent by God, and they were right about that.
 10. Nevertheless, their theories about Jesus's identity were inadequate.
 11. John Calvin points out how this underscores the weakness of the human mind, which "not only is... unable of itself to understand what is right or true, but even out of true principles it coins errors."
 12. This is what the crowds were doing.
 13. They grasped the truth that Jesus was from God, but they took that truth and used it to coin errors about ancient prophets returning from the dead.
- B. After hearing the disciples' report on what the crowds thought about him, Jesus then asked them, "But who do you say that I am?"
1. Peter, acting in his frequent role as spokesman for the twelve, responded to this question by saying, "The Christ of God."
 2. In saying this, Peter was confessing that Jesus is the Christ whom God had promised in his Word.
 3. Jesus is not a Christ of human imagining.
 4. He is the biblical Christ.
- C. We tend to think of "Christ" as a part of Jesus's name, but it was not originally so.
1. At first, "Christ" was not a name, but a title.
 2. It is the Greek word that translates the Hebrew title "Messiah," which means "anointed one."

3. This is the word that is used in Psalm 2 to refer to the king whom the Lord installs on his holy hill and gives authority over the nations.
 4. In the Old Testament, Israel's prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil in order to signify the fact that the Lord had commissioned and approved them for their particular task.
 5. As Israel's history progressed, the people began to look forward to the coming of an anointed ruler descended from David who would be the fulfillment of God's promise in 2 Samuel 7, a ruler who would build a house for God's name and whose throne God would establish forever.
 6. God revealed that he would work through this ruler to rescue his people from their enemies, to restore them to righteousness, and to establish his kingdom over all the earth.
 7. In confessing Jesus as the Christ, Peter was saying that Jesus is the eschatological deliverer and king who was promised in the Old Testament.
- D. Jesus's identity as the Christ means that he is the true and perfect fulfillment of all three of the offices to which people were anointed in ancient Israel: the offices of prophet, priest, and king.
1. Jesus is the supreme Prophet, who through his Word and Spirit perfectly reveals the will of God for our salvation.
 2. Jesus is the one true Priest for his people, who has set us free by the sacrifice of his body and who continually pleads our cause with the Father.
 3. And Jesus is our mighty King, who graciously subdues us to himself, governs us by his Word and Spirit, guards us against all our enemies, and keeps us in the freedom that he has won for us.

III. Jesus Is the Suffering Christ

- A. Jesus responds to Peter's confession that he is the Christ in a surprising way: he strictly charges the disciples to tell this to no one.
1. Of course this was only a call to be silent for the time being.
 2. Later, after his resurrection, Jesus would commission the apostles to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.
 3. The reason why he did not want his messianic identity to be broadcast at that point in time was because the people had the wrong ideas about what the Messiah would come to do.
 4. Even the disciples had mistaken notions about this at this point, as was made clear by their desertion of Jesus when he was arrested.
- B. In the first century, the Jews were looking for the same kind of Messiah that many people are looking for today: a Messiah who would procure earthly happiness for them.
1. They were looking for a deliverer who would restore the old theocracy and renew their political and economic fortunes.
 2. They were looking for a Messiah who would lead them to a military victory over Rome.
 3. To adapt a popular slogan, they wanted someone to "make Israel great again."
 4. They were certainly not looking for a Messiah who would be crucified by Rome.
 5. But Jesus knew that suffering had to come before glory for him.
 6. The reason why this was the case was because of the nature of the deliverance that he came to secure for his people.
 7. He came to redeem us from sin and from all the miseries that flow from sin.

8. The only way he could secure such a salvation was to have our sins imputed to him so that he could bear the curse that we deserve.
- C. This is why Jesus tells his disciples that he “must” suffer and be rejected and be killed.
1. Take note of that word “must.”
 2. Jesus did not die an unwilling victim.
 3. His death on the cross had to happen in order to bring God’s plan of redemption to fulfillment.
 4. As we see in the great prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53, “it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” (Isa. 53:10)
 5. In that verse, the phrase “the will of the LORD” is used twice, and both times it refers to God’s plan of redemption.
 6. Jesus had to subject himself to death on a cross in submission to the will of God in order to be made the executor of the will of God for our salvation.
 7. Jesus had to die on the cross in order to receive the authority to put God’s gracious plan into effect.
 8. This is what enabled Jesus to speak these words when he gave the church its Great Commission: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”
 9. Jesus had to die before the gospel could be preached to the ends of the earth, and his death ensures that the church’s disciple-making mission will succeed.

IV. Jesus Is the Risen Christ

- A. The last thing that Jesus says about himself in response to Peter's confession that he is the Christ of God is that he will be raised on the third day.
1. Jesus did not remain dead.
 2. Death did not have the final say over him.
 3. Far from being a mark of failure, the cross was the moment of decisive victory.
 4. Man's destructive action in crucifying Jesus was reversed by God's action in raising him.
 5. As Jesus told the apostle John when he appeared to him on the island of Patmos, "I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (Rev. 1:18)
 6. The risen Christ is the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of kings on earth.
 7. God has put everything in subjection to the risen Christ.
 8. Jesus's resurrection declares that the end-time kingdom of God has already been inaugurated.
- B. While this is certainly true, the writer of Hebrews points out that, "At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to [Jesus.]" (Heb. 2:8)
1. Instead, through the eyes of faith, we presently see Jesus crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death.
 2. That passage in Hebrews 2 reminds us that there is a vital connection between suffering and glory.
 3. Jesus has been crowned with glory and honor "because of the suffering of death."

4. His pathway to glory went by way of the cross.
5. And in the same way, there is a connection between suffering and the advance of the gospel.
6. It is through the proclamation of the message of the cross, a message that is weak and foolish in the eyes of the world, that Christ's kingdom is advancing in this present age.
7. One day, the majestic glory of the risen Christ will be revealed to all people.
8. One day the announcement will ring out, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).
9. But in this present age, Christ's kingly glory can only be seen by those who look to him in faith and receive the grace that God pours out on us because of the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf.

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus's question 'who do you say that I am?' is the most important question that you will ever be asked.
- B. And make no mistake, Jesus does ask that question of you.
- C. The way you answer that question will make a difference for all eternity.
- D. If you ignore the question or if you answer it by trying to make Jesus into something other than what he really is, you will be broken by his rod of iron and you will suffer everlasting torment and disgrace in hell.
- E. But if you confess Jesus as the Christ of God, then you can know for certain that your debt has been fully paid by him and that he has secured an inheritance for you in his everlasting kingdom.

- F. And because you know this to be true, your life in this world will be transformed.
- G. You will no longer live for yourself.
- H. You will live for Jesus, because you know him as the One who loved you and gave himself for you.