

## **Back to the Basics**

### **Jesus Christ: Who do YOU say He is?**

Over the past several weeks I have been preaching a lot about introductions. First, I introduced you to Absolute Truth – the Holy Bible and discussed the fact that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, and complete Word of God. Then I introduced you to God the Father by discussing His attributes of personhood and divinity. This was followed by an introduction of the Creation Story with mankind as God's crown jewel of Creation. Then, unfortunately, I had to introduce you to someone less pleasant - your sin nature - by discussing mankind's total depravity brought about by the Fall recorded in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation and blatantly disobeyed God's command. At the end of my last sermon, when all seemed hopeless due to our total depravity and helplessness to overcome it, I left you with the Good News of The Light which shines through our darkness and offers us hope. Today, I want to introduce you to The Light – Jesus Christ.

Who is Jesus Christ? It may surprise you to know that question has been asked ever since the first century when He walked on the earth. His identity has never failed to create a stir. Who exactly is Jesus Christ? The answers have varied from demon to deity. It is IMPERATIVE that we know the right answer. Otherwise, we do not know how to interpret what He has done. And if we are unable to interpret what He has done, we will never be able to give ourselves to Him as He invites us to.

This morning I want to introduce you to Jesus Christ by sharing with you the variety of opinions which existed during Jesus' earthly pilgrimage and then

walking with you through some Scripture passages which affirm the true identity of Jesus.

First, let's take a look at who the people of the first century thought Jesus was. Starting with...

**The Wise Men.** Jesus had been born in Bethlehem. The Magi (or wise men) had seen the star which prompted them to journey a long distance. Finally, they arrived at Jerusalem, anxious to discover His whereabouts. (Matt 2:1-2) *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.”*

There was no question in their minds; the birth of Jesus represented the birth of a king. The star was His star. Clearly, in their minds, He was “King of the Jews” and they had come to bow down and worship Him. Now here is a good source for you, let's look at who...

**God the Father** said Jesus was. At the age of thirty, Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Coming up out of the water, a voice broke through the clouds of heaven, announcing His identity: (Matt 3:16-17). *After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, <sup>17</sup> and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, “ This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”*

There was no question in God's mind. “*This is My beloved Son.*” Later, at what we know as the transfiguration on a mountain with some of His disciples, the same voice spoke yet again, making the same announcement (Matt 17:5).

The wise men, along with God the Father, had no question, “He is the King of the Jews.” “He is My Son.” But when it came to people on earth at the time, there were many who did not agree. Let’s hear from several of them.

**The Pharisees.** The BEST the Pharisees ever said of Him was that He was a teacher, a rabbi. (Matt 9:10-11).

*Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.* <sup>11</sup> *When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”* That was, no doubt, the most respectable title they ever used of Jesus – Teacher. They realized He instructed His followers. Their opinion of Jesus degenerated rapidly as you can note from their reference to Him in Matthew 9:34, “*He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.*” In other words, He gets His Power from Satan.

It is no surprise that the Pharisees did not look kindly upon Jesus, but not all of those confused over His identity could be listed among Jesus’ enemies.

**John The Baptist.** Many people are surprised when they discover that the one who baptized Christ became so despondent and disillusioned that he questioned His identity. Let’s see what John the Baptist says in Matthew 11:2-3. *Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples* <sup>3</sup> *and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?”* That is somewhat startling. Here is the same man who baptized Him. He is the proclaimer of the Messiah – the one who earlier declared: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World (John 1:27)*. But things have now changed. He is now saying he has serious doubts. In other words, “Your works don’t seem to square with the things You’re supposed to do as Messiah. I’m

beginning to wonder – just who are You? Not only did John the Baptist have doubts, but also...

**Jesus' own neighbors and immediate family.** You would think that His own family and friends from His neighborhood would get it. However, Matthew 13: 53-57 tells us a different story. *When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.*<sup>54</sup> *He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"*<sup>55</sup> *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?"*<sup>56</sup> *And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"*<sup>57</sup> *And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household."* Jesus' neighbors were unconvinced that He was anything special. In effect, they were saying, "Isn't He the one who played with our kids, worked in His father's carpenter shop? He's the same Jesus, what makes Him so special? He's just one of us!" They were confused. How dare You call Yourself the Son of God. You're just the son of Joseph." And if not being accepted by your neighbors isn't bad enough – even His own family did not get it! Flip over to Mark 3:20-21 *Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.*<sup>21</sup> *When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."* His own family thought He was crazy! Then there is...

**Herod the Tetrarch.** One of the officials in Jesus' day feared that He was John the Baptist, raised from the dead. (Matthew 14:1-2) *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the news about Jesus,*<sup>2</sup> *and said to his servants, "This is John the*

*Baptist; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.*” Herod was haunted by thoughts of JTB, because John had been the one who rebuked Herod for living in sin by taking his brother’s wife so Herod had JTB beheaded. What about the opinion of ...

**The General Population.** Matthew records a conversation Jesus was having with His disciples asking about His Identity (Read Matthew 16:14): *And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”* When it came to Jesus’ identity, many folks didn’t have a clue! What a mixture! Herod saying, He’s JTB raised from the dead. JTB in prison asking, “Are You really the Coming One?” Earlier there were Magi saying, He was King of the Jews and God the Father saying, He is My son. Now we have a group of people saying He is Elijah or one of the prophets of old back from the beyond.

In this same conversation in Matthew 16, Peter has one of his greatest moments when Jesus asks him about His identity...

**Peter the Disciple.** (Matthew 16:15-16). *He \*said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”* <sup>16</sup> *Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* Peter could not have been more right!

Finally, let’s go to the source and see who...

**Jesus Himself** said He was. Turn to Luke 24. Jesus has gone to death and beyond. He’s come out of the grave and is speaking to His disciples. In verse 44, He says, *“These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* This is one of the few times Jesus took people through the Scriptures and explained Himself to them from the Law, the Psalms,

and the Prophets. “You see that? That was a reference to Me. You see this? That is spoken of Me. You see what the Prophet said? I fulfill this.” <sup>45</sup> *Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,* <sup>46</sup> *and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,* <sup>47</sup> *and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.* <sup>48</sup> *You are witnesses of these things. “Men you have had a unique privilege – to have lived during transition. You’ve seen me carry these things out. Now I’ve come back from the grave. And I’m declaring to you, “This is truth. I am who I claim to be, undiminished deity, true humanity, in one person.” Or as John put it, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”*

The Word became flesh. God became Man. And as man, He lives among us, and we give Him glory. No question. He is the Son of God. C.S. Lewis succinctly put his finger on the real issue regarding the identity of Jesus:

*I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.*

Here you are hearing this information – perhaps realizing for the first time that the evidence is undeniable. Or you may be thinking, Hmmm, OK, maybe there is something here. I can see enough to believe that they were confused, yet I need more evidence to be convinced.” To help you seal the deal, I want to take two examples from the Gospels where Jesus Christ revealed Himself as both God and Man. In these examples Jesus demonstrated His humanity – then immediately on the heels of that displayed His deity.

1. Here is a familiar story to start off with – Jesus walking on water. Matthew 14:22-23 tells us, *Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.*<sup>23</sup> *After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray...*

We see Jesus’ humanity as we find Him in prayer. You will never read of a place recorded in Scripture where God prays. Deity has no needs. Prayer is an act of mankind. Humans pray. Prayer is an expression of need. It is a declaration of adoration. God adores no one. There is no one higher to adore. He is self-contained, self-sufficient. All glory resides in Him. But mankind prays out of an expression of a need to worship, to ask for strength, to request assistance. And that is what Jesus is doing. In praying He shows Himself man. His deity is displayed in the next scene of this same passage *...and when it was evening, He was there alone.*<sup>24</sup> *But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.*<sup>25</sup> *And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.*

It seemed to the disciples that Jesus came out of nowhere, walking toward them on the water. They screamed “Phantasma!, Phantasma!” That’s the word Matthew uses. It is from that word we get our word “fantasy, fantastic, or phantom.” It’s as

if they yelled, “It’s an apparition, a ghost!” And so naturally Peter says, “If there is the Lord walking on water, I’m going to try it too!” So he stumbles out into the water, and he soon goes under. He can’t pull it off. Later, in the boat we witness this conversation recorded in verses 32 and 33, *When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.*<sup>33</sup> *And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”*

Only man prays. Only God walks on water. According to Matthew, Jesus Christ did both.

2. The next illustration comes to us from the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Dr Luke’s Gospel starting in the 22d verse, *Now on one of those days Jesus and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” So they launched out.*<sup>23</sup> *But as they were sailing along He fell asleep...*

I’m a Soldier, not a sailor. My only experience with sailing involves gigantic cruise ships where, most of the time, it was difficult to tell you were on the water. However, I can tell you that I ALWAYS sleep better on these ships. The gentle rocking of the ship is very soothing and makes one comfortable. Sleep seems very natural there. But, in Scripture, it’s never said that God sleeps. In fact, it specifically says, “He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” Man sleeps. Here, as a man, weary from the day, He falls sound asleep in the boat. That’s when things started to happen:

*...and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger.*<sup>24</sup> *They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!”*

“Master, Wake up! We are going to die!” Even the disciples were a hard group to convince - they had already witnessed Jesus feeding the five thousand, but they

hadn't learned the lesson of His power. They had seen him walk on water and heal the sick, but they hadn't been convinced of His deity. So here they are in a boat with God in the flesh and they are afraid they are going to sink. Do you really think your boat is going to sink with God on it? And suddenly, with a word, everything is calm...

*And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.*

Only God could do such a thing! Wait, this gets better! Look at the disciples' response. It's great!

*And He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"*

Doesn't that sound like strong believing followers? Can't you just see Peter, the fisherman, mumbling in his beard, "Even the winds and the waves obey Him." This is GOD. Yes, Peter, the One you woke up just a minute ago is indeed God. Never doubt it, in the tragic storms of life He specializes in calming waves and silencing winds...Jesus is God.

I could have gathered up materials from all over the world and never have had enough time to relate to you all the stories with convincing, irrefutable evidence that He is who He claimed to be – namely, Immanuel – God come in human form to die, and to be raised, that we might see how magnificent He really is.

Jesus Christ: Who do YOU say He is now? The God-Man – the most unique Person who ever lived. The awesome Son of God!

Scripture tells us to have faith like little children. Sometimes we adults just can't express ourselves as completely as little children. In closing this morning, I want to share with you this one story I read about an event that happened in a Christian school:

*A kindergarten teacher was determining how much religious training her new students had. While talking with one little boy, to whom the story of Jesus was obviously brand new, she began relating His death on the cross. When asked what a cross was, she picked up some sticks, and fashioning a crude one, she explained that Jesus was actually nailed to that cross, and then He died. The little boy with eyes downcast quickly acknowledged, "Oh, that's too bad." In the very next breath, however, she related that He arose again and that He came back to life. And his little eyes got big as saucers. He lit up and exclaimed, "Totally Awesome!"*

You don't know the full identity of Jesus if your response is, "Oh, that's too bad."  
You know His identity only if your description is, "TOTALLY AWESOME!"

That is MY Jesus!

