

Who Is Jesus Christ?

“What’s the most important question to ask in life?” How would you answer that? If you Google that question, do you know what you get? You’ll get a very interesting set of responses. It seems that whole books have been written to answer this question about the most important question. One book was entitled, *“The Three Most Important Questions.”* Another book written by a pastor carried the title, *“Answers to the 7 Most Important Questions.”* An article in Forbes magazine was entitled, *“35 Questions That Will Change Your Life.”* I think there’s some “question inflation” going on here, don’t you?

And it so happens that even Einstein got in on the “most important question” derby by saying that he believed the most important question to ask was this, “Is the universe a friendly place?” That’s pretty good, actually, isn’t it?

None of these books or articles, however, not even the one from the pastor, included Jesus’ question of His disciples, which I think, because of who is asking it, makes it hands down the most important question any of us can grapple with. The question Jesus asked is:

Who do you say I am? (Matt. 16:15)

This is the most important question because it’s not just your life on earth that depends on your answer, but your life for eternity. Before we come to this table, I want us to examine this question from two angles: Who Jesus Is and What He Does. First...

I. Who Is Jesus – What Is His Nature?

Two weeks ago we examined our nature and we were reminded by the Bible what we already know from experience: that we are not perfect – not physically, not morally, not intellectually. We really don’t have to work very hard to convince most people of that truth.

But last week we argued that the Bible is to be trusted in all that it affirms because every way that it has been tested, it has proved to be without error. So, what does the Bible say is the nature of Jesus Christ?

Throughout this series I’ve presented what theologians call, “The hypostatic union” of Christ. I’ve used the term, “The only 200% man.” He was fully God and fully man, in one person. This is critically important because in order for Jesus to pay for our sin debt, He had to be sinless (something only God can be) and human. While this truth stretches our minds to the breaking point, I want us to see today “how” the Bible affirms this. There are several ways.

First, Jesus’ God-nature is declared in His pre-existence. Jesus Himself said:

...before Abraham was born, I am! (John 8:58)

By saying, “I am,” Jesus wasn’t just claiming pre-existence but He was also referring to the name God gave for Himself to Moses at the burning bush. Remember? Moses asked God, if he went to the Israelites in Egypt, who he should say had sent him? God said to Moses:

"I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." (Ex. 3:14)

In Hebrew, the term "I AM WHO I AM" is literally, "the One Who Always Is." So, Jesus was declaring His eternal existence by using the name "I Am."

But Jesus declared His eternal existence also when He said to the Jews:

I and the Father are one. (John 10:30)

By the way, this is a key verse to use with Jehovah's Witnesses when they come to your door because they don't believe that Jesus is God. But the Jews who heard Jesus say these words absolutely knew what He was saying because they immediately picked up stones to kill him. When Jesus asked why, they said:

...because you, a mere man, claim to be God. (John 10:33)

So, first, Jesus claimed to be God. But secondly, other people claimed He was God. One is the apostle Paul. And remember, Paul was taken to heaven and given special revelations there. He states:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God... (Phil. 2:5, 6a)

He also wrote in Col. 2:9:

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...

Not only Paul acknowledged this but so did the Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross who watched Him die. Matthew says:

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (Matt. 27:54)

Beyond this, Jesus' miracles, His teaching and ultimately, of course, His resurrection from the dead are all proofs of His divine nature. Jesus was fully God.

His full humanity is less questioned than His divinity, probably because we have a concise record of His birth and many, many witnesses. Not just Christians but even historical writers, like Josephus and even Mohammed, attest to Jesus' humanity. But what kind of a man was He? Let me answer that with 12 Bible facts:

Children loved Him (Mk. 10:14) and the demon possessed feared Him (Lk. 8:28)

He had compassion for the sick (Mt. 14:14) and contempt for the arrogant (Mt. 23)

He dined with sinners (Mt. 9:10) and saints alike (Lk. 19:2)

He wept at the death of a friend (Jn. 11:35) and rejoiced at the success of His disciples (Lk. 10:21)

He told spellbinding stories (Mt. 13:35) and stayed up all night praying before choosing His disciples (Luke 6:12)

He rescued a woman about to be stoned (Jn. 8:1-11) and He physically threw the Money-changers out of the Temple (Matt. 21:12)

It may be hard for us to understand but the Bible teaches one thing about Jesus: He was fully God and fully man. And not just any man; He was the model of what every man should be. Which leads us from who He was and is to what He did and does; from His nature to His actions. Let's call this...

II. The Work of Jesus - His Job Description.

Most of us work at a job where our responsibilities are written out for us in a document we call a "job description." Our success in that job is largely determined by whether or not we fulfill that list of duties. John Calvin, the reformer, was

probably the first scholar to examine Jesus' work in terms of categories of responsibilities. He found in Scripture three general areas that he called "offices." They were the office of Prophet, Priest and King. My Systematic Theology professor called these the *functions* of Christ's work and in good Baptist-preacher fashion called them the "The Three R's of Revealing, Reconciling and Ruling." Let's see what this all means.

The first function of Christ was that of a Prophet. As we've said, the work of a prophet is to REVEAL the truth, the Word of God. Jesus called himself a prophet when he said in His hometown of Nazareth:

...a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house. (Matt. 13:57)

Of course, others recognized that He was a prophet as well. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, it says that the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered:

...This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. (Matt. 21:11)

So, why would God the Father give Jesus the assignment of being a prophet? Well, as we've said, a prophet's job is to reveal the Father. (Which, by the way, should help you to identify "false prophets." False prophets shine the light on themselves. False prophets are out to make a profit. A real prophet's motive is solely to shine a light on the Father.) And Jesus's prophetic work was uniquely different from that of every other prophet in one important way: (Dr. Millard Erickson)

He had come from the very presence of God. His preexistence with the Father was a major factor in his ability to reveal the Father, for he had been with him. So it is said by John, "*No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*" (Jn. 1:18 RSV) ⁱ

The second function of Jesus' job description is that of Priest, Reconciler. The book of Hebrews spends significant time demonstrating this truth. Heb. 3:1 says:

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.

Why would God the Father send His Son, (who, remember, is fully God), to be a high priest? Listen to me carefully – this is extremely important! God sent Jesus to be High Priest because the Law of Moses will tell you you're a sinner, but it can't save you; it can't make you clean before God which is required for you to live with God. In the Old Testament, God appointed a High Priest to make sacrifices for the people's sin. The Hebrew word for this process is *kaphar*. In English, it's "atonement." It literally means "to cover." The sacrifice was offered as a covering, a substitute, for the sinner. God then saw the atoning sacrifice and the penalty no longer had to be exacted from the sinner. The sin-debt was paid by the sacrifice through the process of *kaphar*, atonement.

But there was one rather large problem with all this: God later revealed that the animal sacrifice system actually didn't work, it didn't really cause Him to forgive their sins. This is something like making a promise to someone and they say, "Really? Are you really going to do that?" And you say, "It's as certain as the fact that the sun will rise tomorrow." What we mean by sunrise is that the day will begin, it's as certain as that. But technically, the sun doesn't rise, it doesn't move; the earth

moves. So, even though the sun doesn't rise, the day will begin but it isn't dependent on the sun rising but on the earth moving.

In the same way, God will forgive sins through a process of atonement, but it won't be because of the blood of an animal. In Ps. 40, King David said:

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire...

Burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. (Ps. 40:6)

God said through Isaiah: (Is. 1:11)

I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

Hebrews explains it: (Heb. 10:1-4)

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? ...But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

So, what does this have to do with Jesus being a High Priest? Heb. 5:1, 4-6:

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." (Ps. 2:7) And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (Ps. 110:4)

Who's Melchizedek? Stay with me!! What does he have to do with anything?

Hebrews 7 explains it. Melchizedek was a priest in Salem (which became Jerusalem!). Abraham gave an offering to Melchizedek even though he wasn't a Jewish priest. Melchizedek represents the need for a priest outside the Levitical order of Aaron. Listen:

...what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.

And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him:

The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:

'You are a priest forever.' (Ps. 110:4)

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest...(Heb. 7:15, 16, 20-22, 26, 27; 8:1a)

God sent Jesus to be a priest because we desperately needed one! The Old Covenant didn't work!! If He hadn't come as the perfect Priest, our sins would not be

atoned for nor would those of the people in the Old Testament who offered animal sacrifices. Only a perfect Priest, dying a human death for us, could accomplish atonement. But He did come, He did die, He was raised to life again. Have you asked God to have that sacrifice be your *kaphar*, your covering? Is Jesus your priest?

The last office, the last function in Jesus' job description is that of Ruler. The prophet Isaiah predicted that one day the people of Israel would say...

**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be upon his shoulders...**

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom... (Is. 9:6, 7b)

The angel Gabriel said to the teenaged Jewish virgin, Mary: (Lk. 1:31-32)

**You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him
the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most
High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David...**

This is clearly a great blessing if you're Jewish. But what if you aren't? Paul describes how Jesus is the king of a kingdom open to all, not just the Jews:

**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is
Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who
calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32)." (Rom. 10:12-13)**

Though Jesus is the reigning King of the Universe today, He is essentially reigning in exile. There is a usurper on the throne of this world - Satan. Jesus calls him "*the ruler of this world*" (Jn. 12:31). Paul calls him "*the god of this age*" (II Cor. 4:4). But Jesus makes it clear that He will return to this earth one day and remove the usurper and establish His reign forever. On the last pages of my Bible it says:

**I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from
God... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the
dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his
people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will
wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or
mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed
away." Behold, I am coming soon! (Rev. 21:2-4; 22:7)**

In the Hebrews 4 passage, it affirms again that Jesus is our High Priest. Then it says:

**For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our
weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just
as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of
grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to
help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:15, 16)**

So, how do you answer Jesus' question: "*Who do you say I am?*" He wants to be your Teacher, Savior, and King. Is that who He is for you? Let's pray...

ⁱ Dr. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983, 1984, 1985), p. 764