

March 16, 2003  
AM Service  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Who is Jesus?”

Matt 16:13-17, 20-27 & 17:1-9

A missionary working among children in the Middle East was driving her Jeep down a road when she ran out of gas. She had no gas can in her car. All she could find was a potty-chair. She walked a mile down the road to the nearest gas station and filled the pot with gas. As she was pouring the gas into the tank of her Jeep, a large Cadillac occupied by wealthy oil sheikhs drew up. They were absolutely fascinated at seeing her pouring the contents of the pot into the Jeep. One of them opened the window and said, “My friend and I, although we do not share our religion, we greatly admire our faith!”

Some people think that becoming a Christian – or as I prefer, a follower of Jesus – takes a blind leap of faith – the type of faith that would be needed in expecting a car to run on the usual contents of a potty chair. Now, surely a step of faith is needed to become a follower of Jesus. However, it is not a blind step of faith.

### **The Historical Jesus Christ**

I read that in a communist Russian dictionary Jesus is described as “a mythical figure who never existed.” But there is a great deal of evidence for Jesus’ existence. And not only from the Bible and other Christian writings, but also from non-Christians sources. For example there are Roman and Jewish historians that wrote about Jesus. Someone once said that we have more evidence for the existence of Jesus than we do for the existence of Caesar or Napoleon, yet we do not doubt their existence.

### **The Claims of Jesus Christ**

Most would not doubt that Jesus existed. However what must be considered is what Jesus had to say about Himself. Jesus never said the words, “I am God,” but there is little doubt from what He taught and claimed and did that He is God.

#### *Indirect Claims*

Consider His indirect claims. He claimed to have authority to *forgive sins* (Mark 2:5), He said that He was going to *judge the world* (Matt 25:31-32). And He said in effect, “If you want a *relationship with God*, you need to come to Me.” (Matt 10:40)

#### *Direct Claims*

There are more direct claims as well. In Matt 16:16 Peter says to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus does not deny it. Rather He tells Peter in v17 “You are blessed, Simon..., because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you.

Let me offer another example. In Mark 14:61-62 NLT (after Jesus was arrested) “... the high priest asked Him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed God?” (and) 62

Jesus said, "I am, and you will see me, the Son of Man, sitting at God's right hand in the place of power and coming back on the clouds of heaven."

Here Jesus is making the direct claim of being the Messiah / Christ the Son of God.

In other places He directly claims to Be God. Once the Jews were going to stone Jesus. He asked them why and they replied (John 10:33) "...for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." His enemies knew exactly what Jesus was claiming.

After Jesus arose from the dead one of His followers, Thomas, knelt before Him and exclaimed (John 20:28 NLT) "My Lord and my God!" And Jesus did not say to Thomas, "No, no, don't say that; I am not God." Instead (John 20: 29 NLT) Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway."

### **Who is Jesus Christ?**

In our text (v13) Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say (I am)?" (v14) They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then He asked them this very important question: (v15) "But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Some people say Jesus was a great teacher. Peter said Jesus is the Lord, the Messiah, God the Son. But what about you? Who do you say Jesus is? Jesus claimed to be the God the Savior of the world. Was He insane? Was He a liar and a deceiver? Or was He telling the truth?

C. S. Lewis put it this way:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic, on a level with the 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 mad man or something worse... but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Jesus is asking you today, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" This is the most important question you will ever be asked; and your answer is the most important you will ever decide and give. Some say He was just a man, a teacher, and perhaps even a prophet. Some say He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But what about you? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the World and do you believe that He is the Son of the Living God, the Lord God Himself? If you do, then I must ask the next question:

### **What is the Role of Jesus Christ?**

I find it interesting that after Jesus tells Peter that he is blessed because this truth, that Jesus is the Christ, was revealed to Peter by the Father in Heaven, He then warned Peter

and all his disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ. The reason for this, I believe, is that then and now people have the wrong idea of the role of the Christ.

Look at the next section (Matt 16:21-22) From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Peter is saying, "You are the Lord, the ruler, the King. You are going to be famous, popular and powerful. You are going to conquer the evil Romans and rein over Israel and I and your other followers are going to rule with you. We too are going to be powerful. We will get whatever we want. I've dreamed of how great it is going to be. Why are you talking about suffering, rejection and death, Jesus?"

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Jesus is teaching that the Father wants Jesus to go to the cross. The Father's will was that Jesus would die for the sins of the world. But Jesus would rise on the third day. Then, at the end of time, Jesus will come back to the earth with His angels, to judge and to reward each person according to their deeds. That is when He will reign over the earth. But Satan was using Peter to tempt Jesus to not go to the cross. Jesus could reign over the earth without going to a cross. Peter was seeing things merely from a human point of view, and not from God's point of view.

### **Our Role as Followers of Jesus Christ**

24 Then Jesus said to the disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. 25 If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life.

Some think that the role of the Christ is to give them everything they want. They want Jesus as long as there is no cross involved. They want peace, pleasure, power, position and possessions. But Jesus is saying that is not where life is. Life is not in those things (where most think life is found). Life is in knowing Him. Give up your selfish ambition for Jesus and His will, then you will find true life. For only Jesus can save our soul 26 And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul? 27 For (Jesus is going to) come in (great) glory (at the end of time) and will judge all people according to their deeds. Will our deeds reflect our selfish ambition or faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Lord, God the Son?

Who is Jesus? Is He the Savior? Then He can forgive your sin. Is He God, the Lord? Then He will come again to judge us according to our deeds. He does not exist to do your bidding but for you to do His. This is where you will find life.

In the last portion of our text, about a week later, Peter sees who Jesus is. Jesus is transfigured – His appearance changed - right before Peter's eyes. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. It was such a wonderful experience that Peter wanted to build some shelters and stay there as long as he could. Then a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

2 Peter 1:16-18 - We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Peter says these things I'm telling you are true I saw it with my own eyes. I saw the majesty of Jesus. He is the Savior. He is the Lord the Son of God. And Peter wanted to remind us of who Jesus is and His role to forgive sin and judge the world. And Peter wanted to remind us of our responsibility to add to our faith. Is Jesus your Savior and Lord? Then listen to Him! Many are in terrible situations today because they do not believe that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Or, though they believe, they want Jesus for the wrong reasons - selfish reasons. As someone once said, we want a "cosmic bellhop" who will do what we want Him to do when we want Him to do it. Jesus said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me." Some of us like Peter say, "Never, Lord!" because we see things merely from a human point of view and not God's.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is God! Who is God? God is love! Who are you? You are the one Jesus loves! What does His love mean? God loved us so much that He took His only Son, Jesus, wrapped Him in our skin. He had to cry when hungry. He had to learn to walk. He stumbled and fell. He sweat drops of blood. He was flogged, showered with spit and fixed to a cross as He whispered forgiveness for us all. This was His purpose. Then He calls us to a personal relationship with God so that we can share Him with others. This is our purpose. Have in mind the things of God.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.