

# Jesus Christ – Who Do We Say that He Is?

Matthew 16:13-16

1) **Who is Jesus Christ?** You may be surprised to know that the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth has been a subject of controversy from the start. Matthew, the Gospel writer says,

***"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'***  
(Matthew 16:13-14)

The disciples answered Jesus with a good deal of tact. They omitted other things that people were saying about Jesus, namely, that he was a blasphemer, a false prophet, and a madman.

2) Jesus' own straw poll was brought up-to-date by **George Gallup**, who polled North Americans as to their opinion of Jesus Christ. The vast majority of those who responded affirmed that Jesus lived. Beyond this, opinions varied.

- Some believed that Jesus was "divine" in the sense that he was uniquely called by God to reveal God's purpose to the world.
- About 10% believed that Jesus was divine in the sense that he embodied the highest human values.
- Others acknowledged Jesus as an important religious teacher but did not think he was divine.
- Finally, some 40% affirmed that Jesus was divine in the sense that he was God living among men and women.

3) **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 do.

a. We need to declare today that Jesus is more than the perfect teacher, moral example, compassionate preacher, or lovable wonder-worker that some suggest. He may be all of these, but above all, He is the Son of God. Through Jesus alone, we have access to God.

b. We call the Gospel "good news." Good news is always welcome, but the good news at the core of the Christian faith is something quite specific. Christians celebrate not just any good news. Mark opens his Gospel with this introduction:

**"This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."** (Mark 1:1)

c. The Good News is bound up with the Christmas joy about the birth of Jesus, and with his name:

**"Emmanuel" (which means 'God with us')."** (Matthew 1:23)

4) Last week I told you that at the heart of Christianity is a Cross, but it is **not the wood** we cherish – it is the one who was nailed to that wood. Today, I want to further delineate the faith to say that **it isn't just anyone hanging on that tree** that saves us – it is Jesus the God-Man.

a. This world that God has created has been corrupted by sin. Sin infects every one of us and separates us from God. Our sin of rebellion and disobedience alienates us from God. Sin has produced a wide chasm that exists between God and man. We all live under its curse.

It is impossible for us to have fellowship with God. In fact, we don't even try. The story of the Bible is not man's search for God, but God's search for man. We cannot have fellowship with God unless we have a mediator, a bridge over the chasm. That mediator is Jesus.

b. Through Jesus alone we have access to God the Father. Jesus' relation to humanity may be seen as a two-way bridge which spans the gulf between God and the world.

- The first span of the bridge touches the throne of God. Earth was not Jesus' original home. Before the beginning of time, He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. These three together make up the Trinity.
- The second span of the bridge touches earth in the virgin birth of Jesus. Belief in His virgin birth is not optional. It is vital. It affirms that God was incarnate in the infant son, Jesus of Nazareth. It affirms that Jesus was a part of the Godhead before His birth as a human being. In the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, God put on human flesh.

c. The phrase "truly God and truly man" is often used to affirm that Jesus Christ is equally divine and human – the God-Man. Jesus was not merely a wise and caring teacher, a countryside preacher, and a spiritual handyman who did lots of miracles. Nor was He some kind of spiritual essence floating around in carpenter's clothes. He was not pure spirit. He needed sleep, food, love, and baths.

d. Jesus is both God and man. He is the supreme representative of heaven and earth. Without this affirmation, one end or the other of the heaven-and-earth bridge would not be firmly planted.

5) I want to show you **four examples** – one for each Gospel writer – where Jesus demonstrated His humanity, and then displayed his deity.

a. In Matthew the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, we are told:

***"And immediately He made the disciples get into the boat, and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And after He had sent the multitudes away, He went up to the mountain by Himself to pray."***  
(Matthew 14:22-23b)

Prayer is a human activity. It is an expression of need. It is a declaration of adoration. You will never read in Scripture where God prays. Deity has no needs. There is no one higher to adore. Mankind prays because of an expression of a need to worship, to ask for strength, to request assistance, guidance, or whatever. And that's what Jesus is doing. In praying, He shows Himself to be a man.

His deity is displayed in the next scene:

***". . .and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already far away from the land, battered; by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking upon the sea."*** (Matthew 14:23b-25)

Only man prays. Only God walks on water.

b. Mark records another occasion where humanity and deity were seen together.

***"And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, 'If You are willing, You can make me clean.' And moved with compassion. . ."*** (Mark 1:40-41a)

I can imagine this tragic man, with his bleeding stumps, saying to Jesus, "If you're willing, cleanse me." As a man, the Lord Jesus is moved with compassion over a fellow human being in need. But He doesn't stop with just humanity.

***"He stretched out His hand and touched him, and said, to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'" And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed."*** (Mark 1:41b-42)

Only God can do that.

c. Another great story occurred on the sea, according to Luke.

**"Now it came about on one of those days, that He and His disciples got into a boat, and He said to them, 'Let us go over to the other side of the lake.' And they launched out. But as they were sailing along He fell asleep. . ."**

(Luke 8:22-23a)

In Scripture, it's never said that God sleeps. In fact, it specifically says,

**"He who watches over Israel nether slumbers nor sleeps."**

(Psalm 121:4)

Yet, as a man, weary from the day, according to this passage, He falls sound asleep in the boat. That's when things started to happen:

**"A fierce gale of wind descended upon the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. And they came to Him and woke Him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'"** (Luke 8:232b-24a)

Now isn't that something. Newsflash to disciples! With God in the boat, you can't sink! But, apparently the disciples haven't connected all the dots yet.

**"And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm."** (v. 24b)

Only God could do such a thing! And the disciples are beginning to connect the dots. Look at their response.

**"Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"** (Luke 8:25)

d. John records the last example at the home of Jesus' friends – Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Lazarus has just died, and Mary blames Jesus.

**"If you had been here, my brother would not have died."**

(John 11:32)

Here's the man part of Jesus:

**"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled. . . 'Where have you laid him?' They said to Him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept."**

(John 11:33-35)

Tears are a human trait. It was a scene where any one of us would cry. This, however, only God can do.

**"He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.'"**  
(John 11:43)

I love the ole country preacher's comment that if He hadn't limited that command to Lazarus, every corpse in the graveyard would have come forth! Only man can weep in grief. And Jesus did. Only God can raise the dead. And Jesus did.

**6) It is for each of us to answer Jesus' question for ourselves.**  
**"Who do you say that I am?"** (Matthew 16:15)

a. Fortunately, as we have seen, we have Scripture to guide us, which is the final authority. But we also have the best Christian thinking from previous generations. It is especially important to pay attention to the early church creeds that have for centuries defined "orthodoxy" – that is, right opinion and right thinking about the identity of Jesus Christ.

The great achievement of the early church was to pull all the biblical material together into creeds in order to define, in the clearest possible terms, the relation of Jesus, the Son of God, to God the Father. The church fathers believed that right doctrine was linked to right worship. Parameters were necessary because some people were saying false things – heresies – about Jesus.

- The Ebionites denied the divinity of Jesus.
- The Docetists, by contrast, denied the humanity of Jesus.

Both of these heresies had very bad outcomes. Unless God became human in order to save humanity, the Gospel is ultimately rendered meaningless. Why? Humanity cannot save itself. But if he were not God, his death could have no saving effect.

b. The Apostle's Creed affirmed both his deity and his humanity. It says of Jesus, He. . .

*. . . was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.*

c. A man by the name of Arius declared that the Son was not an eternally existing person but rather the first creature that God made. That meant that the Son had a beginning in time. The Nicene Creed responded by declaring that Jesus is. . .

. . .of one substance with the Father.”

c. G. Campbell Morgan, a Bible preacher and commentator of years gone by, said this about the mystery of Christ’s incarnation.

*He was the God-man. Not God indwelling a man. Of such there have been many. Not a man Deified. Of such there have been none save in the myths of pagan systems of thought; but God and man, combining in one Personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation.*

7) **Who is Jesus Christ?** The God-man – the most unique Person who ever lived. The awesome Son of God! This is the Christ we worship and adore. This is the Christ we bow before and surrender our lives.

Have you done that? Will you?