

WHAT IS YOUR VERDICT ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?
Mt. 16:13-18

INTRODUCTION: In a secluded spot far from curious and hostile eyes, Jesus asked the twelve men who had been with him from the beginning this surprising question: "Who do men say that I am?" Simon Peter, acting as spokesman for the group, replied: "Men are not agreed in their opinion concerning you; some say one thing, some another. But they are all agreed that you are a great man, worthy to be ranked with the greatest of the prophets." That answer fell across the Master's face like a shadow.

Then, looking earnestly into the eyes of his apostles, Jesus put this question, "Who do YOU say that I am?" Again, it was Simon Peter who made the reply: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And THAT answer fell like a sunbeam across the face of Jesus. "Blessed are you, Cephas; out of men like you, and on the confession you have just made, I will build my church, and the forces of destruction will never overcome it."

I. Two opinions of Jesus Christ:

A. From the day of that conference near the city of Caesarea Philippi, on the Mediterranean coast of the Holy Land, to the present, there have never been but two basic opinions concerning Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem that there have been hundreds of ideas of his person, but all these can be reduced to TWO.

1. According to ONE, Jesus is a man, a great man, towering like Mt. Everest above the other peaks; but only a man: a Palestinian Socrates, or Confucius, or Buddha, but still a man.

2. According to the other opinion, he is the MESSIAH, the desire of nations, the Son of the Eternal, the unique Son of God, the only one of his kind, "unparalleled," the second person of the divine trinity.

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From its beginning, the christian church has held the higher of these two opinions. Of course, the lower conception of Jesus as a mere man is easier to grasp. If Jesus is only a man of great genius, only an exceptionally noble teacher, we can understand him better. But if he stands in a class by himself, and if he combines in his person attributes of both God and man, he creates a problem and a challenges for us.

However, we are not after easier conceptions; we are after the TRUTH. It may be necessary to adopt the higher and the more difficult conception to explain the facts of Christ's miraculous birth, life, miracles, death, and resurrection, all of which must be accounted for.

"Who do men say that I am? Who do YOU say that I am?" These questions are inescapable. Christ compels a verdict. Life can not be lived at its triumphant best until we make up our minds about HIM.

C. It is a fact that Jesus lived a fully human life.

This may seem to you to be obvious, but it was not to all of the first followers of Christ. Immediately after the ascension the church had to deal with the heresy which claimed that Jesus only pretended to be human—that he was a God masquerading as a man.

The early church had to fight, NOT for the DIVINITY of Jesus, but for his HUMANITY. Some doubted that he was a real man and said that he only SEEMED to possess a human body, and to suffer and to die. The church has rightly fought that heresy vigorously.

Our problem today may be the opposite. Few doubt that Jesus was truly human, with a human body like our own; that he grew hungry and weary, and experienced all our human emotions. True humanity is not a denial of divinity.

We start, then, with this truth—that he lived, that he was truly human, that he understands our frailty, and our temptations and trials.

But church history and our christian experiences tell us that he is more than human. He is a transcendent personality, God in the flesh.

Christian conviction has taken Simon Peter's words and affirmed, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

As Paul declared, in his tremendous phrase, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We claim that He is the King of Glory and the incarnation of God Himself.

He himself was unmistakably aware that he was both human and divine.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life," he said. Either this is intolerable egotism, or madness, or it is the truth.

He associated himself in a unique way with God.

"I and the Father are one," he said.

He came to this world as the incarnate God to be the Savior of the world.

D. In what way then is Christ the Savior? Let's try to express it simply and definitely; Christ is the Savior because he changes men and women, boys and girls, who commit themselves to him, and to his way of thinking of God, of mankind, of his church, and of life.

Christ forgives all of their sins on the basis of their repentance and faith, and he calls and empowers all his children, men, women, boys, and girls, to serve him, to proclaim his gospel to others, and to minister in his kingdom as the Spirit leads them individually. And with each call to serve and minister comes the call to PREPARE to give our very best to him.

Jesus is the Savior because he shows us God. He is the Lord of his harvest because he alone deserves our full and complete allegiance.

Jesus said, "He that has seen me...has seen the Father." We don't lay hold of this concept of the deity and Lordship of Jesus, so much as we are laid hold of by this idea.

Then, and only then, we are saved from all loneliness, despair, guilt, and inadequacy.

II. Two ways for the believer to go after becoming a Christian:

A. Give him a minor place or a marginal place in your life.

Many Christians seem to do this.

They profess to trust Christ as their Savior. Only God himself knows for sure whether or not they really do this or not. They seem to be enthusiastic about living for the Lord for awhile, but their enthusiasm cools, and their faithfulness diminishes, and they take the easy road and drift away and seem to lose interest in spiritual things. They are like the rocky ground in the parable of the sower.

B. Or, on the other hand, you can really make Jesus the Lord and Master of your life, and ACT in accordance with your profession.

Pilate said, "What, then, shall I do with Jesus?" You must not only DECIDE or give your verdict about Jesus; you must DO something about him. You must trust him or reject him.

Whenever you come face to face with Jesus Christ, you face the greatest moral challenge of your life. You never realize just how great it is until we come within a genuine personal christian experience. Only as we freely consent to follow Christ and live with Christ can we come to know who he really is.

You cannot know who Christ really is until you come within his circle. There is a self-authenticating quality about him. But each one of us must find it for ourself and decide that verdict and unconditionally surrender our heart and life in the privacy of the inner life. No one else can make that decision and commitment for us.

CONCLUSION: The conclusion of the matter is found in the words of the writer Emil Ludwig concerning the task of making a literary personality live. He said, "If an author is to make a subject live, he must live with him, think with him, and eat with him. Unless you have a certain mad, furious and passionate relationship to your subject, you can never make him live in the minds of others."

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Now I say, isn't this OUR challenge as christians, to live so close to Jesus Christ, and to get to know him so well, so intimately, so passionately, that we can make him live in the minds and lives of others with whom we associate day by day?

Ask, "Who is this Jesus? Who do YOU say he is? What is your verdict?"

Then, "What will you DO about him?"

In the RIGHT ANSWER, the RIGHT VERDICT, and in the RIGHT DECISION, and the RIGHT COMMITMENT, is the power of God for the remaking of your life and the remaking of our generation for the glory of God.

If we render the right verdict and do the right thing about Jesus Christ, then what was important to him will be important to us. What were the two very important things Jesus left for his followers after his ascension. The New Testament was NOT one of these two things. The books of the NT had not been written then. What were these two things?

One was the Holy Spirit. He said, "When I depart, I will send the Comforter to you." The second important thing was the Church.

He said, "Upon this rock (the rock of confession that he is the Son of the Living God, and so the Lord of All) I will build my church.

And so, upon his confessing followers, upon US and our CONFESSION of his deity and lordship, he is still building his church today. If you want to be a part in the continuing ministry of building his church, a moderate church, not given to extremes, not chained to the past, not requiring you to submerge your intelligence under ancient superstitions, yet confessing boldly the deity and lordship of Jesus Christ, then come and be a part of us and a part of this great work for the glory of God. Come now while we rise and sing.

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