

WHO IS THIS MAN?



DEVOTIONAL | HISTORICAL JESUS VS. CULTURAL JESUS

MARCH 21, 2021

Discussion Starter: Do you think the identity of Jesus is important? Why or why not?

Key Passage: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Son of the living God.’¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’” (Matthew 16:15-18)

The Greatest Question

There is no more important question than, “Who is Jesus Christ?” Yesterday, today, and eternity depend on the answer. Get the answer right, and you will experience forgiveness, peace, joy, purpose, spiritual freedom, power, and eternal security. Get the answer wrong, and you’ll be separated from God today and forever, missing out on His good plans and purposes for your life.

Jesus once asked the disciples who others were saying He was (v.13). They replied that the crowds believed Jesus was a prophet like John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah (v.14). Then Jesus made the question personal, “Who do you say that I am?” (v.15).

Discuss: Before we go further into our text, how would you personally answer this question, “Who is Jesus?”

Peter spoke on behalf of the disciples, and his response was clear and decisive: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (v.16). What a great answer! Peter not only acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament (the title “Christ” means “Messiah”), but Peter also acknowledged Jesus’ divinity when he said, “*the son of the living God*”!

Historical Jesus vs. Cultural Jesus

Since the identity of Jesus Christ is the most important issue we face, we would expect Satan, the enemy, to twist and confuse the true identity of Jesus. Here is a sampling of the non-believing world’s misperceptions of Jesus—the “cultural Jesus.”

- Jesus was a good teacher and a moral man, but not God.
- Jesus promises health and material wealth to those who follow Him.
- Jesus loves us and therefore dismisses sin and Hell and allows everyone into Heaven.

Discuss: What are some other misperceptions of Jesus you see in our world?

However, Scripture refutes these misperceptions of the “cultural Jesus.” Let’s let Jesus speak for Himself and see who He says He is as the “historical Jesus”—the Jesus who truly existed in history and still lives today:

- **Jesus is God in the flesh—not merely a good teacher or moral man.**

In John 10:30, Jesus said, “*I and the Father are one.*” It was obvious to the Jewish religious leaders who heard Him make that statement that Jesus was claiming to be God! They even picked up stones to kill Him for blasphemy (John 10:31-33).

Think about it: If Jesus was *not* God in the flesh as He had claimed, then He could not be a good teacher or moral man as our non-believing world suggests! Jesus would be a liar—claiming to be God while knowing He really wasn’t—and no one could say that such a liar is a good teacher or a moral man. Or Jesus would be a lunatic—thinking He was God, yet He really wasn’t—and no one could say that such a lunatic is a good teacher or a moral man. So, either Jesus is who He claimed to be—God in the flesh—or He was a liar or lunatic, thus not a good teacher or moral man. So, Jesus gave us a choice: He is God as He claimed, or He is not—but we cannot claim He was merely a good teacher or a moral man.

Discuss: Explain in your own words why Jesus’ claim to be God is so important.

- **Jesus does not promise health and material wealth to those who follow Him. In fact, He tells those who follow Him to deny themselves (Matthew 16:24), expect persecution in His name (Matthew 10:22), and to focus on eternal treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).**

Discuss: How would you explain to a new believer what it means to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24)?

Discuss: How would you explain to a new Christian what it means to lay up for yourself eternal treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)?

- **Jesus does not dismiss sin and Hell; rather, it is *because He loves us* that He addresses our sin truthfully and warns us of the reality of Hell.**

The very first word Jesus used when He started preaching was “repent”: “*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’*” (Matthew 4:17), and He consistently warned about eternal judgment and Hell (Matthew 10:28; 22:33; Luke 16:23).

Discuss: How is Jesus’ addressing of our sin and warning of Hell evidence of His love for us?

For Further Study

The Case for the Real Jesus by Lee Strobel

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

“Who is Jesus?” articles at www.crosswalk.com