

Who Is the Real Jesus?

At his baptism a heavenly voice proclaimed, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased* Matt. 3:17. After He resisted the temptations of the Devil, He began to heal the sick and lame, fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, and taught with authority. Yet at His hometown of Nazareth people dismissed His preaching saying, *Is not this the carpenter's son?* Matt. 13:55.

His disciples told Him that the crowds said he was John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Then Peter said, *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,* Matthew 16:13-16.

When he went up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John, that heavenly voice was heard again, *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!* Matt. 17:5. And He told disciples to keep quiet about it. When Jesus entered Jerusalem for the Passover holiday the crowds shouted *Hosanna to the son of David!* Matt. 21:9, hailing Him as a great prophet and maybe even a new king.

Within a few days, a Roman Governor asked the crowd, *What shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? ... but they kept shouting "Crucify Him!"* Matt. 27:21-22. He went from the hero of the crowds to the villain and was crucified by the authorities despite His sinless-ness. Hero or villain – who is He? Who is the real Jesus? Jesus himself still poses the question: "Who do you say I am?"

Many Faces of Jesus

No question is more important than this one – it's the central question of history. Who is Jesus Christ? Where did He come from? Why did He come? And what difference does His coming make in my life? Visit any Internet religious chat room and you'll find a bewildering array of opinions regarding Jesus. "A good man ... The Son of God ... A Prophet ... A Galilean rabbi ... A teacher of God's Law ... The Embodiment of God's Love ... A Reincarnated Spirit Master ... The Ultimate Revolutionary ... The Messiah of Israel ... Savior ... A first-century wise man ... A man just like any other man ... King of Kings ... A misunderstood teacher ... Lord of the Universe ... A deluded religious leader ... Son of Man ... A fabrication of the early church."

After Jesus asked His disciples, *Who do people say the Son of man is?* after he asked for the opinions of others, he put it to them: *But you, who do you say that I am?* In the end, each of us faces the same question. We can't get away with citing the opinions of others. You have to make up your own mind. Who is the real Jesus? You can avoid the question, or delay it, or postpone it, or stonewall it, or pretend you didn't hear it. But sooner or later your answer will be required.

I've heard that in the days before Elvis Presley died, he was reading a book called *The Many Faces of Jesus*. The title says it all: Jesus can be many things to many people, maybe whatever you want Him to be. Who do you say He is? And how does your answer stack up with the Bible? That's an essential second question because it is not enough to say, "I believe in Jesus." Millions of people claim to believe in Jesus, but

they don't have a clue about what the Bible says about Him... and the Bible is the best record we have.

The Bible is filled with answers to the question. One set of answers is in Philippians chapter 2. It's a short course on all the truth about Jesus Christ. In six verses His entire "career" is revealed. So, let's look at it.

I. Who He Was - Philippians 2:6

Jesus began in heavenly dignity: *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*, Phil. 2:6. Before Jesus came to the earth He existed as God in heaven. The Gospel of John says it like this: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*, John 1:1.

Being in very nature God... means that Jesus possessed the very essence of God. Whatever it is that makes God, God, Jesus possessed that. Whatever you can say about God, you can also say about Jesus. God's omnipotence, God's sovereignty, God's holiness, God's eternity, God's wisdom, and God's justice were all His. He was 100% God and nothing less.

This makes the next statement all the more remarkable. He did not regard His position as God as something "to be grasped." He didn't try to hold on to His glory but willingly laid it aside. He did not assert His rights although He had the right to. It gives us some insight into the mind of Christ. There was no pleading with the Father to "send someone else." He was under no compulsion. He voluntarily traveled the distance between heaven and the bloody cross.

II. What He Became - Philippians 2:7-8a

Jesus came to earth in humility. *But made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man*, Phil. 2: 7-8a.

We call this the "Incarnation"— God coming to earth in human flesh (that's what Christmas is all about). Some translations say, "He emptied himself." The eternal Son of God "became a nobody." Imagine a general taking off his uniform and dressing as a man on the street. You wouldn't know the difference. Is he still a general? Yes. Is he in uniform? No. Christ came wearing the clothing of a common man while bearing within Himself the high rank of Almighty God!

Then, He entered humanity at the lowest level— He took "the very nature of a servant." He didn't merely appear as a servant. He took on Himself all that a servant is and does. He didn't stop being God. He laid aside His outward glory without laying aside His deity.

If you and I had seen Him in the first century, we wouldn't have said, "There goes the Son of God." He was "found in appearance as a man." No different from anyone else. His full identity was hidden until His resurrection.

If you say He is the Ideal Man, you are right. If you say He is only the Ideal Man, you are wrong! If you say He is the Great Physician, you are right. If you say He is only the Great Physician, you are wrong! Jesus is always "more than." He's more than a teacher, more than a healer, more than a miracle-worker, more than a rabbi, more than

Mary's son, and more than a man. He's Immanuel—God with us. He was as much God as God is God, He was as much man as man is man.

III. What He Chose - Philippians 2:8b

Jesus chose to sacrifice Himself, for the sins of the world. *He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Phil. 2:8.*

We've sanitized and domesticated the cross. We gold plate it and wear it around our necks. We hang crosses in our sanctuaries and put them on our steeples. Yet it was a punishment so barbaric that the Romans reserved it for the very worst criminals. It was designed to be torturous, agonizing, and absolutely shameful. It was reserved for those who had committed something despicable.

To the Jews it was the worst possible fate and anyone dying that way was cursed (see Deut. 21:23; Galatians 3:13). So, here's Jesus, He came from the highest rung – heaven, equality with God – and went to the bottom rung – despised and forsaken. Why did He do it? Why did He shed his blood on the cross?

Yellow Fever was long a deadly scourge of tropical lands, striking and killing millions in Africa and South America. In June 1927, blood was taken from a 28-year-old Nigerian man named Asibi, who was suffering from a relatively mild case of the disease.¹ He survived, and from his blood, with its antibodies, scientists were able to develop a successful vaccine. By 1953 56 million Africans had been vaccinated, saving their lives.

In a mysterious way we cannot understand, that is exactly what the blood of Jesus Christ did for us. His blood saves the lives of untold millions of people. His blood is the perfect "vaccine" against the disease called sin. *The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin, 1 John 1:7.*

He bore the shame of the cross for our sakes. What a shame that so many then did not know who He really was. What a shame that so many today do not know who He really is. Is there someone you know who does not know Him? Couldn't you make the introduction? Who might you invite to Easter services next Sunday?

IV. What He Gained Philippians 2:9-11

He completed His mission and returned to heaven in glory. *Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, Phil. 2:9-11.*

God gave Him back all that He relinquished when He left heaven to come to earth. And He came back with something more: His humanity. He left as the Son of God and returned as the Son of God and the Son of Man. The new man, who reversed the bad choices of the first man, Adam. The new man who chose to follow God's purposes for all men and women. We now have a man in heaven, Christ Jesus, who is our Advocate and Friend... and who knows what it's like to live on this earth.

God has ordained that He will be universally recognized as the Lord of heaven and earth. Just as it says, He has, "the name that is above every name" and one day "every

¹From *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2892770/

knee will bow” and “every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” People didn’t recognize Him when they shouted “Crucify him!” Many people today still don’t know who He is. But a day is coming when that will change forever.

All creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth [angels and saints in heaven, those living on earth, and the dead, the demons, and Satan Himself under the earth], even His enemies will recognize Him. This is not universal salvation, but it is universal confession. All will confess that Jesus is rightfully Lord. Jesus will have the last word! Here is our choice:

You can bow before Him today as your Savior, or you can face Him one day as your Judge. But you cannot escape Him. Jesus said, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*, Matt. 11:28. Rest from the torment of sin and dread of judgement and death. Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may well be the day of Judgment. He gave Himself for you. Won’t you come to Him?

Jesus also said, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* Matt. 28:19. There are many who still do not know the real Jesus. It is for you and me to share Him so that they may have salvation from sin in this life and inherit life eternal.

The real Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible, who alone can save you from your sin and give you life eternal. Is He real to you? What difference does He make to you? This is the Jesus we call Savior and Lord; who is worshipped by millions in every nation, from every race and tribe and tongue, on every continent. If He’s the real deal, what will you do this week to get real with Him?

***God, hasten the day when every knee shall bow – even my knee - and every tongue confess – even my tongue - that Jesus Christ is Lord to Your glory forever and ever.
Amen.***