

Great Questions of the Bible: “What Think Ye Of Christ?”

Today, we come to, perhaps, the greatest question ever asked. Everything you believe and are hangs upon how you answer it. You may not think it's all that consequential, or that it's just a question of history. But it is very consequential, and I hope you'll take a few moments today and consider, not only the question, but how you will answer it, and the implications of your answer.

Matthew 22:41-42 “While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?”

You know, there are many opinions concerning Jesus today, but what do you think of Him? Did He live? Was He a man? Was He more than just a man? Was He the Son of God? What do you think of Christ? We'll look at history and sacred testimony for the answers.

Jesus Christ is without doubt the most influential name ever spoken throughout human history. Even the skeptic H.G. Wells acknowledged that to list the most significant people in the history of the world, Jesus Christ must top such a list. There is undoubtedly something incredible about a character whose name is commonly spoken on a daily basis in nearly every culture, all around the world, 2000 years after He lived. But, people look at Him in many different ways. Even during His life on earth, men had very different opinions of Jesus. The unbelieving Pharisees were asked on the occasion of the text that we read just a few moments ago, what think ye of Christ? Whose son is He? Well, they didn't believe Jesus was the Christ because of their pride, their spiritual blindness and their ignorance of the scriptures.

But many did believe that He was the promised Messiah and the Son of God, and many still believe that about Jesus. And many do not. Many say that He was just a man or just a social and political revolutionary. Some say He was one in a long line of prophets sent from God; a gifted, perhaps even inspired teacher. Some believe He was a mentally unstable man who thought that He was God, like some who appear from time to time in our day making silly and blasphemous claims.

So, who really was Jesus? And, what think ye of Christ? Some think that Christ was a mythical character. That is, they don't believe that the Jesus, whose life is recorded in scripture ever even existed, but that He was merely the imaginative creation of the Catholic church; wishful thinking of the part of crazy religious people. Some say that Jesus was a nice idea for the time, but not to be taken seriously, like people teach their children about Santa Claus.

Unfortunately, this view is gaining some traction among our increasingly atheistic and secularized society. And to me, it is really incredible that, supposedly serious people reject the historicity of Jesus, when there is a mountain of evidence that He indeed DID live on the earth. It's a sign of the desperation of skeptics to blot the influence of Jesus out of our society. They protest too much, because if Jesus is nothing more than a mythical being like Santa Claus, then why do they take the claims of believers so seriously? Why do they rage such a vicious and rabid attack on people of faith? They may say, because there are so many who believe it and they wield so much influence and power over our culture and our world that this has to be exposed and put down.

But, shouldn't that tell us something? Wouldn't it really be strange, even incredible, for a purely mythical character to be taken as a literal fact of history—not by some little fringe element in some corner of the world, but by the overwhelming majority of people on earth, and have such an impact upon society, for thousands of years? Men just 'dreamed Him up,' and yet billions of people since have claimed to believe in Him, and even claim to follow Him.

Friend, you can't date a letter, sign a contract, write a check, carve a tombstone, without acknowledging the birth of Jesus and admitting His influence on the entire civilized world. His life split history in two. Can you imagine how differently the history books would read? How different our music would sound? How different the art galleries of the world would appear? How different the literature of the ages would read if there was never a Jesus? Even the well known agnostic, almost atheist, Bart Ehrman, who has absolutely no interest in advancing Christianity, but a few years ago wrote a 361-page book debunking the mythicist views of Jesus and affirming His life and existence. You may not believe that He was the Messiah, and Mr. Ehrman doesn't believe that He was the Messiah; Mr. Ehrman doesn't really believe in God, but there is no denying that Jesus lived, according to this educated skeptic.

But what if we step back in time and allow history to testify about the matter? What if we were in a court of law with the very notion of a real Jesus on trial? What witnesses could be called? Well, some very convincing ones. You know, Roman history at the time of Jesus is sprinkled with testimony of Jesus' existence in the first century A.D. Trajan was a Roman Emperor at the close of the first century and the governor of a small Roman province by the name of Pliny, wrote to Trajan for his orders on how Christians were to be treated. This was a question that had arisen in the Roman Empire, and both he and Trajan in their letters sent back and forth, called the Christians "*followers of that Galilean.*" They didn't refer to Him as some mythical figment of men's imaginations. He was a person from a real place.

There was a Roman historian--not a Christian apologist, a Roman historian--by the name of Tacitus, who recorded that Jesus was put to death under the reign of Tiberius Caesar.

Luke 3:1 "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee..."

Tacitus wasn't a friend to Jesus or Christians, but acknowledged that He was a real person who had begun a real and influential movement.

Then there was the famous Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. He was a Jew, born just a couple of years after the death of Christ, who never did accept Christianity. But he said in his famous *Antiquities of the Jews*, "Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call Him a man, for He was a doer of wonderworks. He appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine prophets foretold." Now, that's from a man who wasn't even a Christian!

Ancient men who DID believe, like Polycarp, who was a personal acquaintance of John the apostle, men like Clement, Ignatius... all wrote about the life and the teachings of Jesus. There's other written testimony by those who claim that they saw Jesus in His flesh and heard Him speak. How can anyone

seriously deny that Jesus was a real man? But what should we think of Him? Who was He? Where did He come from? What do you think of Him?

First, what did Jesus claim about Himself? Allow Jesus the opportunity to speak for Himself. Did He ever represent Himself to be a divine being? Did He claim to be deity? Where do we begin? He over and over and over again presented Himself to man as the Son of God. Of the four gospels, which all testify to His being the Christ, John's gospel really places the greatest emphasis on the words and works of Jesus illustrating His divinity and in the golden text of the Bible, said that Jesus declared this:

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

He said to the Pharisees,

John 8:23-24 "And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

John 8:56-58 "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

Now, here, Jesus says, Abraham knew about me. Abraham looked ahead in time and saw "*my day*." This confused them because Jesus was alive then, while Abraham lived thousands of years ago, but He was saying that He had seen Abraham. Jesus said, "*Before Abraham was, I am*." Not *I was*, but *I am*. The Jews understood what the Lord was claiming there. He was claiming to be God, eternal God, because when He said it, the Jews picked up stones and were ready to stone Him for blasphemy, for claiming to be God.

Then, just before He went to the garden to be betrayed and delivered over to be crucified, He prayed His great high priestly prayer.

John 17:5 "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

There's no doubt that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God: not a son of God in the sense of which all who are spiritually born into the family of God are sons of God, but literally, the only begotten of the Father; God manifest in the flesh. Now, that has life-changing implications. You can't be indifferent about one who claims to be the Son of God. If He was the Son of God, He was the Christ, the Anointed One, promised and sent of the Father for the purpose of redeeming and saving man.

John 14:6 "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

He didn't say, I'm *one way* to God, He said I'm *the way* to God. That's why people then and now revile Him so, because you can't find polytheism and pluralism and relativism in Him and in His teachings. He is THE means by which God, according to His eternal purpose and design, brought salvation to the human race and for Him to be your Savior and my Savior, we must receive Him, obey Him, believe Him, serve Him, bow to Him as Lord and King. What do YOU think of Christ? You see, if you think of Him what He claimed of Himself, He is not an option or an interesting philosophy; He is the Savior, He is your King, He is your Lord.

Matthew 16:13 "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

Matthew 16:16-17 "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

Peter said, you're *more* than the Son of man; you're the Son of God! Peter would later say this to his own countrymen when he preached the gospel on Pentecost:

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Jesus claimed to be greater than the great and royal noteworthies of the past. He said in **Matthew 12:42** that He was greater in birth, greater in eternal riches, greater in wisdom, greater in power, greater in authority than even the wise, rich, powerful King Solomon! Friend, if He is greater than Solomon, He is greater than Mohammed. He's greater than Buddha. He's greater than Confucius. He's greater than ALL men, because He was more than a man. He was more than a teacher and more than a prophet.

But how do we know that? Why would the Jews to whom Jesus came in ancient Palestine be expected to believe such a claim? Anyone could make the claim, but why should He be believed? Well, for one thing, their own scriptures pointed to Him. The Old Testament is one prophetic portrait of Jesus Christ, painted on the canvas of time, hundreds and even thousands of years before Jesus was ever born!

One time, Jesus put the Pharisees, who claimed to believe their Old Testament scriptures, on the horns of a dilemma. In the passage we read to begin this study, they were asked of Him, "*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?*" (**Matthew 22:42**). Now, at that point, He wasn't asking what they thought of Him; He's asking about their belief concerning the promised Messiah, whomever they thought Him to be. In other words, according to your view, when the Messiah comes, whose son will He be?

Well, they did know enough about the scriptures to know that He would be the son of David. That's what the Old Testament taught about the Messiah, that He would be the descendant, the son of King David; that He would one day reign upon the throne of David. But then Jesus asks the next question, that puts them in a corner:

Matthew 22:43 "He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord..."

Well, what's He talking about? Look back at **Psalm 110:1**.

Psalm 110:1 "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

David, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called the Christ who was to come, his Lord. Now, think about it: how could the son of David turn around and be David's Lord? What did Jesus mean by that? What did David mean by that? It's because David's son would also be the Son of God. He would not only be the Son of man through David, but also the Son of God born of a virgin, conceived of the Holy Spirit. You see, if those Pharisees believed their own scriptures, they had to acknowledge that.

Well, here Jesus stands before them, claiming to be the Son of God. They couldn't accept that because they had determined that they were going to reject Jesus. But at the same time, nobody could dispute that Jesus was the Son of David. That was a matter of national genealogical record, which is even spelled out for us in the genealogies written in the gospel. Add to that the fact that Jesus fulfilled prophecy after prophecy after prophecy of the Old Testament right before their eyes. So, you see, Jesus had them in a corner, from which they could not escape.

Matthew 22:46 "And no man was able to answer him a word..."

Jesus' teachings, His works, the details of His earthly life, His miracles—of which there were multitudes of witnesses, even secular historians as we noted, like Josephus, acknowledged that He worked wonders before the people. Ultimately, His resurrection from the dead, of which there were hundreds of witnesses in the forty days following it. Friend, the evidence is absolutely overwhelming! There are hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament that specifically point to something that happened in the life of Jesus.

Now, skeptics try to explain that away, saying that Jesus arranged things to fulfill those prophecies, that He knew what the prophecies said, and He thought He was the Son of God, so He lived and He spoke in order to make it all fit, but it was just a great deception. Well now, if He was just a man, did He choose the place of His birth? The prophet Micah wrote that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem 700 years before Jesus was born and cradled in that lowly manger. You say, oh, but there were a lot of people born in Bethlehem. Well, 1400 years before He was born, Moses wrote that the Messiah would descend from the tribe of Judah (**Genesis 49:10**). Over 500 years before Jesus lived on earth, Daniel wrote that the promised one would be rejected by His own people, just as Jesus, born in Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, was all throughout His life (**Daniel 9:26**). I'll tell you something else Jesus couldn't have orchestrated if He was just a man, and that's how He died. 1,000 years before Jesus came, David graphically and prophetically portrayed the crucifixion of Christ in **Psalm 22**. Read that Psalm. Friend, do you realize that crucifixion had never even been heard of when David wrote that psalm? Yet, it so vividly speaks of His hands and feet being pierced. In fact, crucifixion wasn't even practiced until hundreds of years later. The mockery of the soldiers around Jesus was prophesied.

Psalm 22:7 "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head..."

The fact that they stood at the foot of the cross and gambled for Christ's clothes was also foretold in that chapter, 1,000 years before it happened.

Psalm 22:18 "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

Did Jesus look down from the cross and tell them to do that so that a prophecy could be fulfilled? Really?

Someone says, well, it was all just a coincidence. Well, we might believe that if we were talking about one, two or even a dozen prophecies. But hundreds of them, spoken over the course of hundreds of years before Jesus was born, and they're ALL fulfilled in the documented life of Jesus? Now, what think ye of Christ?

Friend, how you answer that question has tremendous ramifications. You can't just wave it off and dismiss it. It is worthy of your very serious investigation. You may not believe today, but it IS. It is not a question about which you can be neutral; you're either for Him or you're against Him. You cannot be indifferent about Him. If you're not for Him, you're against Him. You either believe Him or you don't believe Him. He was either the Son of God or He was a liar. He was either the Christ, the Son of the living God or He was a lunatic. You either believe Him or you don't believe Him. You can't take the position that he lived and was the Son of God, then turn around and deny His authority in your life, because if you say He is the Son of God, then you're saying that everything He said is true. If you say that He is the Son of God, then you're saying He is the only way to heaven, and He is the King and Lord of your life, and that's where the rub comes; that's the real reason that so many reject Him and put Him off.

But, here, today, He stands in the courtroom of your heart right now. You've heard the evidence, the arguments have been weighed. So, what think ye of Christ? I hope you'll put your faith in Him and obey His gospel today, being baptized into His death, burial and resurrection, and come to know Him living in your heart.