

How Shall We View Jesus?

University students are often assigned research projects. They do not always enjoy doing research. Perhaps there are two reasons for their attitude toward research. First, research is often hard work. Someone has said, "I do not enjoy reading, but I enjoy having read." Many students do not enjoy doing research, but they enjoy having done research. Second, much research is open-ended. Research sorts through what we know and what we do not know—and sometimes what we do not know is much more evident than what we do know. A student could well conclude some research project by saying, "Before I started this research project, I did not know anything about this subject. Now that I have completed this project, I know that no one knows anything about this subject!" Such a conclusion can be very discouraging.

All of us want to know the truth about certain key subjects. We are not satisfied with open-ended, inconclusive discussions about them. This is espe-

cially true of the subject of Jesus Christ. We do not want to hear someone's opinion about Him or a discussion of vague theories about Him; we desire to know the *truth* about Him. Our deepest questions about Him are specific and to the point: Who is Jesus? Is He really God's Son? What does He say about life and salvation?

The Bible is the only truly accurate book in this world. God gave it to us so that we can be sure about His teachings (2 Peter 1:3). God does not want us to go through life being inconclusive about Jesus. He wants us to know who Jesus is and what He came to do. He wants us to have the absolute truth about Him so that we can build lives of confidence and assurance upon that truth.

The Bible gives us the only authentic picture we have of Jesus. It tells us who He is in two ways: First, we see who He is by noticing what He is *called* in the Scriptures. Second, we see who He is by observing the *characteristics* which are attributed to Him.

Let us consider carefully what He is called in the Bible. If a man is introduced to us as a preacher and teacher by someone we trust, we know who that man is and basically what kind of person he is. The terms "preacher" and "teacher" give us a distinct picture of him.

The Scriptures do not leave us in doubt about Jesus' identity. He is specifically referred to in terms that cannot be misunderstood. As we study carefully what Jesus is called in the Scriptures, we learn who He is.

HE IS OUR SAVIOR

First, the Scriptures call Jesus "Savior." The word

“savior” refers to someone who rescues others from extreme danger.

The birth narrative recorded in Matthew mentions that an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph, who was to be the earthly father of Jesus. The angel said,

... “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20, 21).

As you can see, Jesus was not to be just any kind of savior; He was to be a unique Savior. If a man saves a child from a burning building, we call him a savior. If a man delivers food to starving people, he is called the savior of the people. Jesus, according to the Scriptures, saves us from our sins. He is our spiritual Savior.

Every responsible person must confront as his number-one difficulty the guilt of sin. Someone has said that if we were to tie tape recorders around our necks and record every word that came from our mouths in a forty-eight hour period, we could easily see that we are sinners. If we were to sit down and listen to each word, think of the motivation behind each statement, and ponder the tone in which we spoke, we would surely conclude that we did not always say what we should have said. Likewise, we could use a video camera to capture forty-eight hours of our lives on film. When we reviewed our every action and deed, we could easily see that we are sinners. We would be smitten with the truth that

we often do what we should not and often do not do what we should. We do not even need the Bible to tell us that we are sinners. When we look closely at our words and deeds, we know that we are sinners. The Bible, however, declares this truth about us in unequivocal language. Paul reminded Christians, “. . . ‘There is none righteous, not even one’” (Romans 3:10).

What can be done about our sin? We cannot forgive ourselves. Our sin is not only against others, but it is also against God. Who can help us with our most urgent need? Psychology cannot forgive us. Positive thinking cannot. Pretending we are not sinners will not save us. What can be done? God’s answer to our desperate condition is Jesus. Joseph was told that Jesus’ name was determined in heaven because of the function He would fulfill on earth. At His birth, the angel announced to the shepherds on a hill in Palestine, “For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The principal purpose in Jesus’ coming to this earth was to save us from our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3).

A touching story is told of a soldier in Napoleon’s army. He had been a brave, loyal soldier. In between battles, he was in his tent reviewing his obligations and family concerns. He had listed on a sheet of paper the debts he had and the money he needed for the care of his family. A wave of discouragement swept over him as he realized that he did not have the money needed for his debts and family expenses. Deeply depressed, he wrote across the bottom of the page on which he had listed his financial obligations, “Who is there who could pay

all these debts?" Feeling defeated, he laid his head on his arm and went to sleep. Unknown to the soldier, Napoleon was making his way through the camp of his soldiers, checking their conditions and evaluating their strength. As he passed the young soldier's tent, he called for inspection, but no answer came from inside the tent. He walked over and looked inside. He saw the sleeping soldier and the pathetic question written across the bottom of the page. Napoleon reached down, picked up his pen, and wrote underneath the question, "I will," and then signed it, "Napoleon."

When we look at our debt of sin and our critical need for salvation, we also cry, "Who is there who can pay all these debts?" Someone far greater than Napoleon has answered, "I will." Jesus, the Savior of the world, through His death upon the cross, has brought to us the offer of complete salvation.

The Bible is clear that Jesus is our one and only Savior. Peter said, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). If you want to be saved from your sins that you might stand before God in an acceptable state, you must come to Christ (John 14:6; Mark 16:16). According to the Bible, He is our Savior.

AS THE CHRIST

Second, Jesus is called "the Christ," which means "anointed one." "Christ" in the Greek language is the same as "Messiah" in the Hebrew language. The New Testament identifies Jesus as the Promised One, the Chosen One of God.

The prophets had foretold that a special servant of God was coming:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this (Isaiah 9:6, 7).

Micah had prophesied, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity" (Micah 5:2). The New Testament proves that Jesus is that One whom the prophets had predicted was coming.

Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus was walking with His disciples toward Caesarea Philippi. As they walked along, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" His disciples said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matthew 16:13, 14). After their response, Jesus then asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered Him. He said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15, 16). Jesus complimented Peter for his answer. He said, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). In other

words, Jesus was saying, "Peter, you did not arrive at this conclusion upon the basis of what man has said. You have received this answer from God in heaven." This was a divine revelation, not a human deduction.

Think about how the New Testament refers to Jesus. As it calls Him "the Christ," it is identifying Him as the One, the special Chosen One of God. He is not the forerunner of the One; He is the One. He did not predict the coming of the Chosen One; He was the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the Chosen One. He was not just associated with the Chosen One, but He was that very One.

AS THE SON OF GOD

Third, Jesus is identified in the New Testament as the Son of God, the second member of the Godhead.

John the Baptist was chosen by God to prepare the way for the earthly ministry of Jesus. He did this work by preaching repentance and administering the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). John pointed the people who responded to his preaching toward the Messiah who was to come. In their repentance and baptism, the people were pledging to receive the Messiah when He came (Acts 19:4). As John fulfilled the mission which God had given to him, all Judea and all the districts around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him (Matthew 3:5). One day when John was baptizing people in the river, Jesus appeared on the banks of the Jordan. John, at this point in time, did not know for sure that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:29–31)—but he did know that Jesus was a better

man than he. That being the case, he responded to Jesus' request by saying, in effect, "I need to be baptized by You, but you want me to baptize You?" Jesus said, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). John was doing God's work. He was a God-sent man. Jesus desired to be completely submissive to God's will while on this earth. For this reason, He was obediently baptized by John—not because He had sins that needed forgiveness, because He needed repentance, or because He needed to receive the Messiah when He came. He was the Messiah, but He submitted to John's baptism to fulfill the will of God, to fulfill all righteousness.

As John brought Jesus out of the water following the immersion, the Spirit of God descended upon Him in the form of a dove. When John saw this miraculous occurrence, he knew that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:32–34). Then, a voice from heaven—the very voice of God—spoke, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Incorporated in these verses of the New Testament is God's testimony that Jesus is His Son.

The apostle John said that we have been given three testimonies that Jesus is the Son of God. He said, "For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement" (1 John 5:7, 8). The Holy Spirit testified that Jesus is God's Son by descending upon Him in the form of a dove after Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit also gave this testimony at other times in the Gospels. The "water" must refer to the baptism of Jesus, when the Father declared from heaven that Jesus is His Son. The "blood" to which John referred must

represent Jesus' death. The miraculous events which surrounded the Crucifixion testified to Jesus' deity. John said, "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son" (1 John 5:9). If three honest men were united in testifying concerning a certain truth, we would accept their testimony—and so would any court of law in the land. How much more should we accept the testimony of God! He has given testimony concerning His Son—a testimony of the Spirit (in the form of a dove at His baptism), of the water (when the Father's voice was heard at His baptism), and of the blood (when the miracles occurred at His death).

Who is Jesus? The Scriptures leave no doubt about the answer. The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus is God's Son. Jesus cannot be ignored. To ignore Him is to ignore God.

AS LORD

Fourth, the New Testament calls Jesus "Lord." He is our Supreme Ruler, with all authority from God.

After Jesus' resurrection from the dead, He appeared to His disciples, demonstrating that He had really arisen from the dead. Jesus told His disciples,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18–20).

Ten days after Jesus' ascension to the Father, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles. On that day, the Day of Pentecost, Peter spoke to a large crowd which had gathered. He gave evidence which proves that Jesus is the Christ. As he reached the climax of his sermon, he asked his hearers to conclude that God had made Jesus both "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Paul, after describing the way Jesus humbled Himself to become man and obeyed even to the point of death, wrote,

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11).

Paul also wrote of Jesus, "And He [God] put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22, 23).

What does the Lordship of Jesus mean to us, according to the New Testament? In practical terms, it means that we are to submit to Him. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). He further said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21). Are you willing to submit to the teachings of Christ? Second, it means that we must give Christ priority in our lives. We must give Him our loyalty

and our love. He is the only Lord honored by heaven, and He must be the only Lord enthroned in our hearts.

Someone has said, "In each heart, there is a cross and a throne. If I place myself on the throne, I must put Christ on the cross. If I put Christ on the throne, I must put myself on the cross." No one can have two Lords. If you say "yes" to the Lordship of Christ, you must say "no" to your own will and wishes. No one can have two masters; you will love one and hate the other (Matthew 6:24).

The New Testament says that Jesus is Lord. God has placed everything under His feet. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

CONCLUSION

Who, then, is Jesus? The only completely accurate book in the world says that He is our Savior, the Christ, the Chosen One of God, the Son of God, and our Lord. This is the truth about Him. You do not have to wait for other research to be done before you can know for sure who He is. The Bible tells us the absolute truth about Him.

Jesus' coming into the world divided the calendar into B.C. and A.D. Matthew 25:31–46 says that He will divide the human race, the saved from the lost. Pilate thought that Jesus was standing before him for judgment, but in reality Pilate was standing before Jesus. On the final day of the world, the saved will stand on the right of Jesus' throne, while the lost will stand on the left of His throne. Your response to Jesus will make the difference as to whether you stand on the right or on the left. You can only stand on the right through His salvation.

He said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). You will either come to God through Jesus, or you will experience eternal doom. He came that we might have life (John 10:10); without Him we abide in eternal death.

Jesus invites us to come to Him for salvation. Other religious leaders invite you to come to their systems or their teachings. Only Jesus, the Son of God, can invite you to come to *Him*. He said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

STUDY QUESTIONS

(answers on page 263)

1. To what does the word "savior" refer?
2. How is Jesus a unique Savior?
3. What does "the Christ" mean?
4. How do we know that Jesus is the Son of God?
5. To what do the Spirit, the water, and the blood refer in 1 John 5:7, 8?
6. What did Peter ask his hearers to conclude about Jesus in Acts 2?
7. What does the Lordship of Jesus mean to us in practical terms?

WORD HELPS

city of David—Bethlehem.

crucifixion—death by hanging on a cross; a Roman form of execution. Jesus, though guiltless, was crucified for our sins.

King of kings and Lord of lords—a reference to Jesus and His greatness. He is above all others.

Pentecost (Day of Pentecost)—the Jewish feast of weeks, also known as Feast of Harvest; the day the church began (Acts 2).

submission—obedience to God and His Word.