

Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

¹⁹ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

²⁰ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “The Christ of God.”

²¹ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²² And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” (NIV84)

Theme: What you need to know about Jesus.

1. Who he is.
2. What he does.

One of, if not the most well-known verse of all the Bible (John 3:16) is clear: **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** But what does it mean to believe in Jesus? Well it means to believe in who he is and what he has done. But who exactly is Jesus? And what did Jesus do? Many people have their own answer to these questions—you can get all sorts of differing thoughts and opinions. But only one really matters—what the Bible says about him. Today Jesus teaches us what we need to know about him—who he is and what he does.

Jesus was traveling north of the Sea of Galilee when he asked his disciples a question. **Who do the crowds say I am?** His disciples had been among the crowd. They had heard the reports. **Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.** John the Baptist, of course, was Jesus’ cousin. Famous for baptizing many and being a good preacher of law and gospel. Elijah was a well-known prophet who lived around 900 years before Christ. There was a prophecy in the Old Testament that made it seem as if Elijah would come back to this earth. Others thought he could be some other prophet from the

Old Testament. Matthew mentions in his gospel that some thought he may have been the prophet Jeremiah.

Notice that none of the people mentioned were still alive on this earth. John the Baptist had already been beheaded. Jeremiah had died centuries before. And Elijah was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. So they thought they had come back in some shape way or form as Jesus. All of these people had high opinions of Jesus, they knew he was a great man—something special. Even though they respected him, they ultimately were wrong about him.

Sounds like people today. Take Muslims, for instance. They claim to “respect and revere” Jesus. They call Jesus a messenger of God. They talk about Jesus performing miracles and they never mention him sinning. Yet they deny that he died on the cross. And they say he wasn’t really God. Or what about the Jehovah Witnesses? They say Jesus is the Son of God. But he is not God; he is better than us, but not equal to God. Then there is the Mormons. They loudly proclaim that Jesus is divine. But they also believe that each and everyone can be divine. They say that at one time he was just like one of us, but he earned his way into becoming a god. And we can eventually become like him one day. So he is one of many gods.

This is really no different than the opinions of people today. You can ask this question on the street, and you’d get any number of different answers. Who is Jesus? Some may say he never really existed. He was a figment of the imagination. Others will say he was a good man who did many good things. But his story got embellished over the years, so we can’t say for sure exactly who he was for sure. Others will go so far as to say that Jesus was a prophet of God—perhaps even the greatest prophet. But that’s as far as they go.

Jesus didn’t just ask his disciples what thought of him, he asked his disciples who they thought he was. Peter spoke for all of them. **The Christ of God.** Truer words have never been spoken. Christ is the Greek name for the Hebrew name, Messiah. They both mean the Anointed One. Or the Chosen One. The one God chose before the beginning of the world. He is the one who God promised Adam and Eve that he would defeat Satan. He is the one promised to Abraham, that one if his descends would bless the whole world. He is the one

promised to David, that one of his sons would reign as king over all forever.

And Peter didn't just call him Christ, but he called him the Christ of God. Matthew's account has a little more detail. **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** Jesus is the Son of God. And if Jesus is the Son of God, that means he is God. That goes in line with the rest of Scripture. We have numerous passages that call Jesus God. From the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah, **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** From Thomas his disciple after his resurrection, **My Lord and my God!** Or the writer to the Hebrews, **The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.** The Apostle Paul points out that Jesus is both God and man, **Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!**

Jesus is both God and man. The Bible makes this perfectly clear. Perhaps this is no more evident than in the name Jesus uses for himself in verse 22. It's the name he used for himself more than any other—81 times in the New Testament: the Son of Man. It's a reference to Daniel 7:13-14. **In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.** The Son of Man is given the power, authority, and honor of God forever. So even when Jesus calls himself the Son of Man he is calling himself God. So Jesus himself confirms that he is both God and man at the same time. And he still is and will be forever.

The Bible is clear and emphatic: Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is God. And because Jesus is God and Christ, we also know what Jesus has done.

We've already established the fact that Jesus is the Christ. He is the promised Messiah. But what does that mean? He is the one God chose to save the world from their sins. For that is what we are—sinners. We have been that way since the time we were conceived. Born into sin. Born as God's enemies. Born as those who hated him and wanted nothing to do with him. Or sinfulness leads us to commit sins against God day after day. Constantly we do nothing but sin against God. So we deserve his wrath and punishment. And since we are sinners and enemies of God, we are helpless to save ourselves from eternal damnation.

But that is not what we think by nature. We have the tendency to think that we can save ourselves. That there is something we must be able to do to earn eternal life. What Paul says in Ephesians: **we are dead in our transgressions and sins** is offensive to our ears. We'd like to think that we are pretty good people—that there is a little bit of good in each one of us. So they teach that we are saved by what we do. It's work righteousness. That is the conclusion you must come to if you deny that Jesus is God. That is ultimately the teaching of the Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, and so many more. And so they take away from Jesus being the Christ, by thinking that can save themselves.

Christianity is different than every other religion in that we can't do anything to be saved. For Jesus has done it all for us already. We may have been conceived and born into sin, but Jesus wasn't. He was born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit. So he wasn't a sinner nor an enemy of God. And throughout his life he never sinned against God's commands. Yet he was betrayed by one of his followers. Arrested and put on an illegal trial by his own country men. They then took him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. He had him mocked and ridiculed, beaten, and flogged.

And eventually, Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion. Nailed to a cross. Jesus suffered greatly on that cross. Not just from physical pain, but because he took all our sins upon himself. He became guilty of everything we have done wrong. And so he was forsaken by his heavenly Father. He suffered through the pain and agony of hell. But he went through it all willingly for us. Suffered, forsaken, and died so that we wouldn't have to. For on that cross he not only took away our sins, but he also gave us his perfection—his holiness. As Paul said 2

Corinthians, **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

That all would have been for naught, however, if Jesus hadn't also been raised from the dead. As Paul says 1 Corinthians, **if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.** Three days after he died, he rose from the dead. Death could not hold him done. It had no power over him. Christ defeated death. And now he lives forever. He is in heaven, watching over his whole creation. And soon he will return to take us to live with him in heaven forever.

Christ is called **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** If Christ is the first, than that means there are more to follow. His resurrection is a guarantee that we too will rise from the dead. As Christ said, **Because I live, you too will live.** On the Last Day Christ will come again and raise all people from the dead. Those who have been dead for thousands of years—by now their bodies have decayed, returned to dust, they will be raised from the dead. Even though we die, we will live. All believers will live with him forever in heaven. And so we will have a perfect life—a perfect life that will not end. And so through Christ, we don't have to be afraid of death—for it holds no power over us.

That is who Jesus is. That is what he has done. This is what Christians have confessed this throughout the ages. And yet there are many who don't. Some have never heard about Christ. They have no clue who he is and what he has done for them. Others have heard. But they deny, reject, and doubt.

And so we spread the Word. At the time of our text, the time wasn't right to spread the gospel. But that has changed. Jesus had told us to **go and preach the good news to all creation.** That's the good news of who Christ is and what he has done. That he is our God and Savior—the Christ of God. So we spread his Word. And we don't care what others think of us. We don't mind if they look down upon us or mock us. It also doesn't matter who they think Jesus is. For only what the Bible says about him matters. Jesus is God. He is the Christ. And therefore he is our Savior. Amen.