

## “Who do men say that I am?”

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### Confession

In Christ Jesus all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (*Colossians 1:16-19*)

### Songs:    *by Chris Bowater*

Jesus at your name we bow the knee (x3)

And acknowledge you as Lord

You are the Christ, you are the Lord

Through your Spirit in our lives we know who you are

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### *by C Cloninger, LL Johnson, T Fettke*

He is Lord, He is Lord, He is risen from the dead and He is Lord

Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord

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### Prayer

Gracious Father, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Ancient of Days, to whom all praise is due, accept my thanks for your ongoing lovingkindness and tender mercy through Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour. Amen.

### Scripture Readings

- Matthew 16:13-20
- Hebrews 1:1-4

### Prayer for Suffering Christians: (Barnabas prayer for 30/4/2023)

Lord Jesus, we remember Your humility and eagerness to learn from teachers and grow in knowledge and wisdom.

We pray for those whom You have called to further study of Your Word at Bible colleges around the world. We ask for financial provision for those who have made great sacrifices out of their poverty to commit themselves to their studies. Please give them perseverance to accompany their zeal, understanding as they grapple with difficult but rewarding truths and insight into how to apply their knowledge. Above all, cause their hearts to be warmed with love for You as they study and for those to whom You call them to minister.

(*Luke 2: 40, 46; Romans 12:11*)

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Hymn: (MHB 246) *by Charles Wesley*

1. Earth, rejoice, our Lord is King! Sons of men, his praises sing;  
Sing ye in triumphant strains, Jesus the Messiah reigns!
2. Power is all to Jesus given, Lord of hell, and earth, and heaven,  
Every knee to him shall bow; Satan, hear, and tremble now!
3. Angels and archangels join, all triumphantly combine,  
All in Jesus' praise agree, carrying on his victory.
4. Though the sons of night blaspheme, more there are with us than them;  
God with us, we cannot fear; fear, ye fiends, for Christ is here!
5. Lo, to faith's enlightened sight, all the mountain flames with light!  
Hell is nigh, but God is nigher, circling us with hosts of fire.
6. Christ the Saviour is come down, points us to the victor's crown,  
Bids us take our seats above, more than conquerors in his love.

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Message “Who do men say that I am?”

On a casual reading of Scripture there seems to be quite a contrast between what the four biographical gospels have to say and what much of the rest of Scripture has to say about the nature and personality of Jesus Christ. The combination of what the writers of the OT say about the coming Messiah and the resounding declarations of Jesus Christ in parts of the NT gives an extraordinary and imposing portrayal of a figure with a majesty and glory that goes far beyond, and in apparent contrast to, what was realised on this earth during three and a half years of ministry, perhaps epitomised in the entry into Jerusalem, “humble and riding on a donkey”. The two images can be hard to reconcile. In fact, some don't like to even try. Is it really the same person?

It seems Jesus understood the paradox. After working with his disciples for some time he was aware that people would come to different conclusions about who he was. “Who do men say I am?” he asked them. The question implies that the answer was not immediately obvious. The answers that were given on this occasion reinforce the different conclusions that people had made. And note that none of these answers, John the Baptist, Elijah, or another prophet, included the possibility of the fulfilment of the prophetic declarations of the coming Messiah. In fact, Jesus' response to Peter's subsequent declaration of Him being the promised Messiah was that such an understanding was not possible apart from a revelation by God himself. The disconnect between people's perception of who Jesus was and who he really was could only be resolved by revelation, not by trying to work it out.

The pictures of Jesus ...

- placing his hands on children and blessing them (Luke 18:15ff),
- welcoming their mothers,
- feeding the thousands because of his compassion (Matt 9:36),

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- healing the sick (Matt 8:14ff, et al), and
- rebuking the arrogance and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of the day (Matt 23),

all present a particular perspective of Jesus that is comforting and pleasing to our sense of what Goodness and Love and Righteousness should look like.

But Scripture also presents an apparent and perhaps disturbingly different portrayal of this same Jesus ...

- We are told the Angel of the Lord (presumed by most commentators to be a reference to Jesus – a theophany) put to death 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35).
- Daniel saw Him: “Like a son of man, coming with clouds of heaven ... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples worshipped him. His dominion is everlasting and will never be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13).
- John saw Him: “With justice he judges and makes war ... He treads the winepress of the fury of God Almighty” (Rev 19:12,15).
- Jesus himself several times referred to terrible judgments to come, of which he would be the overseer (Matt 13:36ff; Matt 25).

So His question was, and still is: “Who do you say I am?”

Scripture records several different responses to that question in addition to Peter’s ...

- Many could not answer the question at all. Most in Jerusalem during the triumphal entry couldn’t (Matt 21:10). The disciples after a storm couldn’t (Mark 4:41). The Pharisees couldn’t (Luke 5:21). The guests at Simon’s house couldn’t (Luke 7:49). Herod couldn’t (Luke 9:9). They didn’t know, or perhaps didn’t want to know, who he was. Their collective response was “Who is this?”.
- The tenants knew He was the heir, but their response was “let’s kill him” (Matt 12:7).
- The king’s subjects might have known the correct answer, but their response was “We don’t want this man to be our king” (Luke 19:14).
- Some concluded he was a deceiver (John 7:12).
- Others concluded he was demon possessed or raving mad (John 7:20).

Yet others came to an altogether different conclusion ...

- There was Peter’s of course: “You are the Christ”
- John the Baptist recognised him to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).
- Andrew recognised him as “the Messiah” (John 1:41).
- Some recognised Him as a good man or a prophet (John 7:12) while others went a step further and thought He was the Christ (7:41).
- The centurion concluded “surely this man was a son of God” (Mark 15:39).
- The evil spirits had no doubt; “Jesus, Son of the Most High God” they screamed (John 5:7).

So who do you say Jesus is?

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I mentioned a disconnect between people’s perception of who Jesus was and who he really was. A similar disconnect is with us today, slightly different but comparable in its form and outcome. The Scriptural and historical portrayal of God and his workings do not conform to what many think God should be like. And this lack of conformity produces the same responses as they did in those who, two millennia ago, saw and heard Jesus. And still today the conclusion that Jesus is the Christ, the One who takes away the sin of the world, is only by Holy Spirit revelation.

So who do you say Jesus is?

The wonderful fact is that to answer that question with the correct answer “He is Lord” is of itself evidence that the Holy Spirit has worked and is working in your life. Scripture tells us so (1 Cor 12:3 and Matt 16:17).

And such a confession combined with believing that this same Jesus is alive brings a host of benefits that is condensed into one word: salvation.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Hymn: “Cornerstone” by Edward Mote and Rueben Morgan

1. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly trust in Jesus name

*Christ alone, Cornerstone*

*Weak made strong in the Saviour’s love*

*Through the storm He is Lord, Lord of all.*

2. When darkness seems to hide His face I rest on His unchanging grace

In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil.

3. When He shall come with trumpet sound, oh, may I then in Him be found;

Dressed in His righteousness alone, and faultless stand before the throne.

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### Blessing

May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Warren Mack