

Who Is Jesus Christ?

By

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What People Know

Amazing as it may seem to Christians, most people in the world know little or nothing about Jesus Christ. When I became a Christian in 1971 most people I talked with knew something about Jesus. Very few people followed Him, but they knew something about His Life. Christmas was still observed openly in communities and schools. Fast forward almost 40 years and most people I talk with know little about Jesus. Many young people today grow up in homes where no one goes to church, no one has a Bible, and no one knows about Jesus.

Go back 2,000 years ago and even fewer people knew about Jesus. He would have been a young teenager in 10 A.D. It must have been interesting for Jesus to attend classes at the local synagogue and hear teachers telling people about Israel's promised Messiah. The teachers were teaching about Jesus because He is Israel's Messiah! When Jesus was just 12 years old He stood in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem amazing the teachers of the Law with His knowledge of God's Word (*"And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."* – Luke 2:47)- appropriate because Jesus is the Word of God.

Jesus started His earthly ministry during an amazing time in Israel's history. A traveling prophet named John was calling people to repent of their sins. Israel had not seen a real prophet of God for 400 years. They had lots of teachers, but no prophets. The word prophet is from the Hebrew word *nabhi*. It means "to speak, to announce, to show, to declare." The idea of the word is of someone speaking on behalf of another. A true prophet of God spoke the oracles (Hebrew *dabhar* – divine word, utterance) of God. John (later known as John the Baptist) spoke the words God gave him and people listened to what he said. They recognized by what John said and the way he lived that he was a true prophet of God. They had read about Israel's historic prophets, but had never met one in person.

What was John's message from God?

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets: 'Behold, I send My

messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.' John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, 'There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'" Mark 1:1-8

Here's some background to what makes these verses so amazing. Most of Israel's prophets (pre-exile, exile, and post-exile) lived between the 9th Century B.C. and the 6th Century B.C. But there was one man of God who prophesied during the 5th Century B.C. (approx. 450-400 B.C.). His name was Malachi and he was the last Hebrew prophet before John the Baptist. The name Malachi means "my messenger." God had a message for Israel that would ring in their ears for 400 years before God spoke again through a new prophet. Malachi's message was simple and clear: "I have no pleasure in you", Says the Lord of hosts, 'Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.'" (Malachi 1:10). Malachi also wrote these words about what God had planned for Israel's future. It should look familiar to us.

"Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, 'Says the LORD of hosts. 'But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner's fire And like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. 'Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years.'" Malachi 3:1-4

Do you see it? God promised to send “my messenger,” another Malachi, to Israel. That was going to be John the Baptist. Do you remember what the angel revealed to John’s father, the priest Zacharias?

“Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, *‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’* and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke 1:13-17

The Prophet John was going to “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.” He would “make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” That’s exactly what Malachi said the next “messenger” would do. *“And he will prepare the way for Me.”* Notice carefully what we see here. Malachi prophesied that the next messenger would prepare the way for “Me,” meaning God since He was the speaker. John preached *“Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.”* Malachi prophesied that God was going to walk among the people of Israel. John prophesied that he was preparing the way of the Lord. Who was this “Lord?” John said, *“There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”* That One was Jesus Christ — the Lord God of Israel!

The fact that Israel did not embrace their Messiah when they saw Him is a stunning commentary on the power of sin. Malachi wrote to Israel that God loved them because they were His chosen people, but that God would punish them for their many sins against Him and each other. God also promised He would send them their Messiah, the Sun of Righteousness, Who would bring healing in His wings.

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“For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,’ Says the LORD of hosts, ‘That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do *this*,’ Says the LORD of hosts.” Malachi 4:1-3

Malachi prophesied about the coming of Jesus Christ centuries before Jesus was born to the Virgin Mary. John the Baptist called the people of Israel to repentance and pointed them to the One Who would bear their sins in His Body on the Cross.

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’” John 1:29-30

Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world! Isn't that exciting? We know — personally know — the Lamb of God. Wow!

One more thing about who Jesus is — God told the people of Israel through Malachi that He took no pleasure in them and would not accept an offering from their hand (Malachi 1:10). God also told the people of Israel through Malachi that through the promised Messiah God would once again be pleased with Israel: “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years.” (Malachi 3:4) That is the Lord Jesus Christ we love and serve. He is the One the world must know.

Jesus Christ Is — ??

The world knows very little about Jesus Christ. Hundreds of millions of people have never even heard His Name. Not so different than when Jesus walked with men and women on earth. Those who had heard of Him had different ideas about the true identity of Jesus.

“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 16:13-17

People living in Israel 2,000 years ago did not have television, they didn't have the Internet, they didn't have radio newscasts, they didn't have daily newspapers, they didn't have iPhones, they didn't text each other, they didn't have faxes, they didn't have Twitter or Facebook, blogs or forums. They learned about people and things by hearing it from others or seeing it for themselves. People living during the time of Jesus who knew about Him had either seen Him in person or heard people talking about Him. Who was this Miracle Worker, this Healer of all sickness, this Preacher of righteousness, this troublemaker? Some people thought He was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Some thought He might be Elijah or Jeremiah or another prophet sent from God. People were willing to believe that Jesus was a prophet of God, even one back from the dead, but they didn't accept that He was the promised Messiah of God. Jesus listened to His disciples' answers, then posed another question to them — a question we need to ask ourselves, “But who do you say that I am?”

The world is not going to get the answer right. Those who do know about Jesus may be willing to believe that He was a good man, a teacher of good things, even a prophet, but they aren't willing to believe He is Who He says He is. If they believe Who Jesus says He

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is, they have to make a life-or-death decision. Will they repent of their sins, trust Christ's death as payment of the penalty for their sins, and receive Christ as their Lord and Savior? Or continue in their sin until they die and face Jesus as their Heavenly Judge?

Jesus cares very much what His followers believe about Him. *"But who do you say that I am?"* Simon Peter answered Jesus' questions and said, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Peter got it! He understood that Jesus was far more than what the world believed about Him. And where did Peter get this amazing insight? *"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" God revealed the truth about Jesus to Peter and the Lord blessed him.*

That's what God does. He reveals His Truth about His Son to everyone who will listen and follow. We are in agreement with our brother Peter centuries ago. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. When people ask us who is this Jesus we love, we tell them Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is more than a great teacher, more than a good man, more than a great leader. He is **The Christ, the Son of the Living God!**

Now What?

We know from God's Word that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, but now what? Some might even ask, so what? Does the fact that God sent His Son to Israel 2,000 years ago have any impact on our world today? If the answer is based on what the majority of people believe, the answer is no. However, the answer is not based on what most people believe. It's based on what's true.

The truth is that what Jesus did when He walked on the planet Earth 2,000 years ago is as relevant now as it was then. Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost, and He's still doing it today (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for those in prison and recovery of sight for the blind, and to release the oppressed, and He's still doing it today (Luke 4:18). But, you say, Jesus is in Heaven? He's not walking on Earth anymore. How can He be doing these things now? Good question.

Jesus is walking across our world today through us. We are His hands, His feet, His arms, His legs, His mouth, His lips, His tongue, His heart. Jesus lives His Life and touches the lives of everyone who will listen through us — His children.

“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might

become the righteousness of God in Him.” 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Did you see it? The Love of Jesus Christ for the lost and poor and blind and imprisoned and oppressed of this world “compels us” to tell everyone about His supreme Love and amazing Grace. It is as though “God were pleading through us.” The word “pleading” is the Greek *parakalountos*. It means “to come to the side of another for the purpose of giving aid, help, comfort, to encourage, beseech, exhort, appeal, plead.” It’s the idea of someone pleading with another person to do something that is vital for their lives. The word is used in the New Testament for the ministry of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Apostles, and others who believe in Jesus Christ. God has given us the same ministry He gave His Son 2,000 years ago — the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul follows that with, “we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” The word “implore” is *deometha*. It means “to desire, to long for.” It demonstrates a strong desire and longing that leads to beseeching, even begging someone to do something they need to do for their own good. As Christians we come to know and understand God’s love for the world. His love becomes our love for the lost. He pleads through us and we implore others to be reconciled to God. God first reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, then gave us the ministry of reconciliation — “and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

What is this “ministry of reconciliation?” We know that “ministry” (*diakonian*) means “service,” but what do “reconciled” and “reconciliation” mean? The verb and noun are both used here in 2 Corinthians 5. The word “reconciled” comes from the Greek *katallasso* and means “to change, exchange.” The word “reconciling” comes from the Greek *katallage* and also means “an exchange.” Change or exchange what?

Do you know what a lot of people believe about God? They believe God needs to change His Mind about them. Is that the “ministry of reconciliation?” Do we help God understand that people are really not as bad as they seem? That He shouldn’t be so hard on them? That He should let everybody into Heaven no matter how they live their

lives? No. That's not the ministry of reconciliation. Paul explained it well in Romans 5:10:

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

A couple of important points here:

1. We “were enemies” of God — that means somebody’s going to have to “change” to make a new relationship work well ... something has to happen to bring peace between enemies ... we are the ones who were lost ... we are the ones who were in need of salvation — it’s not a matter of God changing His mind about us — we have to change our mind about Him.
2. We “were reconciled to God” — we are the ones who “change,” but God is the One Who changes us — that’s the significance of the passive form of the verb — God made the reconciliation possible through the death of His Son — He did the hard work and we benefitted from it.

Is God going to change His attitude toward sinful humanity? Not at all. His attitude toward sin today is the same as when He saw Adam sin in the Garden of Eden. God told Adam he would die if he disobeyed God. Adam disobeyed and died and so will we. That’s what sin does — it kills. It also makes us an “enemy” of God. But fortunately for all of us who will trust God, He made a way for us to “exchange” our old sinful man for a new man, a new creation: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” That is what it means to be reconciled to God. Old things have passed away, all things are in the process of becoming new! We were once enemies of God, now we live under His protection and provision. He is now our Heavenly Father. We call this the “exchanged life.”

One of the most wonderful parts of 2 Corinthians 5 is this: “... *that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.*” The word “imputing” is the Greek *logizomai* and

means “to reckon, take into account.” It’s the idea of something being written down as a way of keeping an account of what someone owes. Every person who has ever been born has an account with God. Every human being “owes” God and nothing they can do or say will ever be able to pay the price they owe Him. We don’t have enough money, power, possessions or prestige to pay God back for what sin did to our relationship. The cost of salvation is too much for us to even make the first payment. Only One Person can pay the price, and He already did — on the Cross.

The Bible often talks about our life being written about in books in Heaven. Nothing we’ve thought, said or done is forgotten. It’s all written in the book of our life. The question is, will our name be written in the Lamb’s Book of Life? The result of not being listed in that Book is a terrible thing.

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 20:11-15

So, how do we make sure that our names and the names of our family and friends are written in the Book of Life? I call it R&R — Repent and Receive — Repent of sin and Receive Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:3 about fellow Christians whose names were written in the Book of Life: “*And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*” These were people, just like you and me, who God had reconciled, “not imputing their trespasses to them.” Our trespasses, our sins, have not been written into our personal spiritual books. Everything that would have been held

against us before God in Heaven has been erased in Christ! Not one sentence, not one word, not one vowel or syllable of any sin we've every committed will ever be held against us because God in Christ reconciled us to Himself, not imputing our trespasses to us. And if that's not enough, God wrote our names in the Book of Life. Now, that is amazing Grace!

Who better to be involved in a **ministry of reconciliation** than people who have been reconciled? We know what it means to be enemies of God. We know what it means to be a lost sinner. We know what it means to be spiritually blind and poor. We also know what it means to be loved and forgiven by God. We know what it means to be reconciled to God. We know what it means to be the children of God. We know what it means to be at peace with God. Who better to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation than people who have experienced reconciliation!

But where does the power come from for this ministry? Directly from God Almighty! "... *that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.*" God is the One Who is reconciling the world. He does the amazing work of drawing sinners to Himself and convincing them of their sin, of Christ's righteousness, and of the judgment of God. Look at what Jesus promised those who follow Him.

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."
John 16:7-11

God sent the Son, Who paid the penalty for our sins. The Son sent the Holy Spirit, Who convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. What is the sin? "... *because they do not believe in Me.*" This is how vital it is that everyone place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit of God is present in the world today convicting

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people of their sin. Our ministry is to tell people of God's Love for them, but also of the coming judgment where He will sentence unbelievers to eternal darkness and torment. It's not a popular message, but it is urgent and important.

Let's pray for each other this week. We have eternal work to do.

In Christ's Love and Grace,

Mark McGee

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