

Who is Jesus Christ? A high school boy who used to be in a Sunday School class I taught seriously entertained the thought that Jesus was an alien from outer space come from a more advanced planet than ours. A seminary professor insisted that Jesus was a magician who dabbled in the occult. A Presbyterian elder once told me he believed Jesus was the son of God but went on to say he believed we are all sons of God. Another man praised Jesus as a tremendous teacher who came to tell us that God is love in contrast to the angry God of the Old Testament. A confessed practicing homosexual tries to convince me that Jesus was gay. Others are convinced that Jesus was a revolutionary, a women's liberation advocate, a capitalist, or a socialist.

Who is Jesus? Despite all these answers, the Bible is really the only primary source for our knowledge of Jesus. Any attempt to answer the question which ignores or dismisses in a cavalier fashion what the Bible says about Jesus is simply intellectually naive. The Bible contains historically reliable first century descriptions and explanations of who Jesus is from the standpoint of men and women who knew and loved Him. The Apostles' Creed contains a summary of what the Bible tells us about Jesus. The phrase we are looking at today is taken almost directly

from one verse in our Scripture lesson where Paul writes, "God... has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord." Every week we affirm that fact when we say, "I believe in... Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord." This tells us four essential biblical facts about Jesus which all Christians are bound to believe.

First, the Creed refers to the man Jesus. Jesus was a common name given to Jewish babies in first century Palestine. We know of at least 50 Jewish men who were contemporaries of Jesus who were also named Jesus. Several are mentioned in the New Testament such as Jesus Justus and Simon bar Jesus. This underlines the fact that Jesus was a real man who had a very ordinary name in his day. When we repeat the Apostles' Creed every week we are bearing witness to our faith that Jesus was and is a real man.

This truth is pointed out all through the Bible. On the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said, "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God... this man was handed over to you... and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death..." Luke tells us that, like every man or woman, Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. Think of that! Have you ever thought of Jesus in terms of a man who increased in wisdom? who grew

in favor with God? The Bible goes on to tell us that "He had no beauty or majesty to attract" people to him, "nothing in his appearance that" people should desire him." Like all men he got hungry, he got angry, he felt compassion, he ate and drank, he grew tired and slept and, at times, he was severely tempted; tempted to doubt who he was; tempted to use his gifts and abilities for self-centered reasons.

Jesus was a man. He was fully human. This is something terribly important for us to believe and understand whenever we repeat the Apostles' Creed. I believe in Jesus the man. This is every bit as important as believing that He was God in the flesh. More than any other book in the New Testament the letter to the Hebrews draws attention to the importance of the humanity of Jesus. We read, "Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same.... He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest.... For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted." And again we read, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

This is a wonderful fact for me. When I was in high school I can remember reading the Gospels in the New English Bible which had just come out. As I read it those passages that spoke of the humanity of Jesus seemed to capture my attention for the first time. It almost brought tears to my eyes. Jesus was a real man. He is someone who can understand me. He was once a baby. He was once a teenager. He was once a young unmarried man. He can understand our temptations, doubts, and fears. So I would urge each one of us, and especially the high school students to sit down and read one of the Gospels from beginning to end. Often teenagers feel that no one understands their temptations, their fears, their hopes. But Jesus does. Whenever we repeat the Apostles' Creed, remember then that we are confessing our faith that Jesus is and continues to be a real human.

Secondly, Jesus is the Christ. We believe that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied by ancient Jewish prophets long before his actual birth. Christ is a Greek word and Messiah is a Hebrew word. They both mean the same thing. They both refer to the Redeemer of God's elect. When Adam and Eve fell into sin in the Garden of Eden they fell under God's wrath and curse. They became slaves to sin. And we

who are the sons and daughters of Adam are born slaves to sin, born under God's wrath and curse. But God came to Adam and Eve in the Garden and promised them a Redeemer, a Saviour. He promised that one of the descendants of Eve would crush the Devils head and destroy his power. He would redeem God's elect from their sins and remove God's wrath and curse from off them.

Throughout the Old Testament God's people hoped that the Messiah would come soon and redeem them from their sin and slavery. Sometimes the Messiah was spoken of as a prophet like Moses who would speak to them the Word of God. Sometimes he was spoken of as a priest who would come and make a perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people. Sometimes he was spoken of as a king who would come to destroy all God's enemies and rule the world with justice and inaugurate an era of peace. Sometimes he was spoken of as a suffering servant rejected, scorned, and murdered by his own kinsmen. It was prophesied that he would be born of Virgin and be called the Mighty God, Wonderful, Counselor, the Prince of Peace.

It's important for us to realise that the Old Testament people of God were saved on the basis of their faith in this Messiah God had promised. They were not saved because

they were born to Jewish parents. They were not saved by keeping the law of Moses. They were not saved because they celebrated the Passover and the other Old Testament Holy Days. They were not saved by the sacrifices they made in the Temple. They were saved only on the basis of the Messiah's, the Christ's, future death for them on the cross and that salvation was appropriated only through repentance and faith in the coming Messiah who was their true prophet, priest, and king. The true Jews were the remnant who steadfastly placed their faith in the coming Messiah.

And so it is today. When we confess our faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, we are joining the number of those who are the true Jews. We are identifying ourselves with that Old Testament remnant who believed God's promises. When we repeat the Apostles' Creed we are saying that we believe that Jesus is the Messiah prophesied by ancient Jewish prophets and through faith in Him we enter God's covenant community with all the privileges and responsibilities of that calling.

Thirdly, when we repeat the Apostles' Creed we bear witness that Jesus is God's only Son. The Bible sometimes speaks of angels as the sons of God. Luke called Adam the son of God. God called Solomon his son on the day of his coronation. The whole nation of Israel was called the sons

of God. In Genesis 6 we read where the sons of God married the daughters of men. That means that God's elect people had intermarried with pagan women. And as I pointed out last week the Bible speaks of those whom God has chosen to save as his adopted sons and daughters.

But there is never any doubt in Scripture about the unique relationship Jesus had with God the Father. Jesus is God's unique son. Jesus is God's only natural son. "Just as I am human and my children are human, so God is divine and Christ is divine. In a mysterious but utterly real way, Christ is God. He and the Father are one. This involves the whole question of the Trinity-- the doctrine that within the unity of one God there are three distinctions or 'persons'..... the uniqueness of the relationship between 'God the Father' and Jesus Christ consists in the fact that Christ is fully divine as well as fully human."

"You and I are not divine, nor will we ever be. We are things that God has made. Even if we come at last into heaven, with all our sins and imperfections purged away, we shall still be creatures, not little gods." And the saints who are now in heaven are not divine nor will they ever be. The Blessed Virgin Mary remains a woman in heaven. St. Paul and St. Peter are still men, not divine. We respect these saints as men and women God has used for His glory. But we

worship Christ as God.

"If you read the New Testament carefully you will see that in His teaching, Christ is always careful to distinguish between 'my father in heaven' and 'your father in heaven'. To Christ the two relationships were quite different. We will avoid a great deal of confusion if we make the same distinction." (Chad Walsh)

This might sound abstract and irrelevant to some of you. But imagine, if you will, that you are overwhelmed with a sense of your sinfulness. You feel God's wrath and curse upon yourself. You look at your helpless condition before God and fall into despair. But then you hear the Gospel. You hear that Jesus Christ is God's only Son. In him you discover that God can be gracious. You see in Christ not only a man who understands but God who can save you. Only God can save. In Jesus Christ, God's only Son, you discover a gracious God willing and able to save you.

Finally, whenever we repeat the Apostles' Creed we confess Jesus as Lord. "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord." To begin with He is the Lord. He is called "The Lord of Glory", "the Lord from heaven", and "the Lord of Lords." The full implication of this title when applied to Jesus, though, is seen when we know that it is this word which was used in the Greek translation of the

Old Testament, the Septuagint, for the name, Jehovah.

When the early Christians refer to Jesus as the Lord they were making the startling assertion that he was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. The earliest Christian creed was the two words, ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ, ^{Christ} Jesus is Lord. It was a confession of faith in the unique and eternal deity of Jesus.

Think of that! There are not two gods; the Old Testament God of wrath and the New Testament God of love. There is one Lord who is both severely just and loving and this one Lord is the Jesus Christ of the New Testament and the Old Testament Jehovah. Let us, therefore, avoid making a distinction between the Old and New Testaments. The same God who thundered forth from Mount Sinai was incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the Creed and our text of Scripture do not call Jesus Christ the Lord, but our Lord. Jesus Christ is, or ought to be, our Lord. Jesus is not only the Lord, it is God's purpose that he should be our Lord. As we come to a conclusion let me then ask you these questions: Is Jesus Christ, God's only son, your Lord and Master, not just in theory but in practice; not just in word but in deed? I know that we politely refer to him as Lord and we repeat the Apostles' Creed every week, but he still says to us

as he did to his contemporaries, "Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" Again he says, "Not everyone that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

Is Jesus Christ really your Lord? Do you begin every day kneeling as a servant before his Lord asking him what his will for us today is? When we read in Scripture his commands, are we quick to obey him? God has called us into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Have you listened to that call and responded and submitted yourself to Jesus Christ as your Lord?

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