



The Christian faith hangs on how we answer this question: Who is Jesus? You see, at the core of our faith is a person, not a set of abstract ideas. Christianity isn't an "ism." It's not like Buddhism or Marxism. Those are abstract systems of thought that have become detached from their founder and reduced to a set of doctrines. In every religion in the world, you can separate the founder from his teaching and still be left with the essence of that religion intact.

Not so with the Christian faith. The connection between the person of Jesus and the message of Jesus is inseparable. John Stott wrote, "Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he was not who he said he was, and if he did not do what said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole structure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left."

We're taking a few weeks to examine the Apostles' Creed in light of Scripture. Today we come to the part of the Creed that begins to focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ. We ask, Who is Jesus? The Creed answers: He is Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord. That sounds simple enough. It just rolls right off the tongue. Some of us could say it in our sleep. But there's more to that than meets the eye!

He is the Messiah.

It starts with His name: *Jesus*. *Jesus* was His proper name, like Mark or Tad or Jane. *Jesus* reminds us He was a historical figure; the son of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth. *Jesus* was His first name and so we sometimes surmise *Christ* was His last name. Like His next door neighbors might say one day, "Oh, were having the Christs over for dinner tonight." Or "Aren't those Christs nice folks?" But *Christ* wasn't a name, it was a title. Today we'd say, "Jesus, the Christ." *Christ* means "anointed one," which is the Greek title for Messiah. The Creed thus affirms Jesus as the promised Messiah.

If you read the New Testament, that's pretty easy to figure out. Even hard-headed-foot-in-your-mouth Peter figured it out early on. In Mark 8 Jesus and His disciples are in Caesarea Philippi. He pulls them aside and asks, "*Who do people say I am?*" The disciples are quick to answer. Like good PR men, they've listened to the buzz of the crowd. Public opinion seemed to be good lately: Philip pipes up: "*Some say John the Baptist.*" There was a side

to Jesus that was every bit as hard core and straight-shooting as John. Nathaniel chimes in, "*Others say Elijah.*" Elijah performed miracles; so did Jesus. Next it was James' turn, "*And still others, one of the prophets.*" After all, he was a spokesman for God.

I think the disciples enjoyed this discussion. Like many today in university classrooms and coffee shops and radio talk shows, they liked to sit around and discuss what to make of the "historical Jesus." But Jesus wasn't interested in armchair theology, and so He asks a far more personal question: "*Who do you say I am?*" In the Greek "you" is placed at the very beginning of the sentence. He says, "**You**...who do you say that I am?" I can see the disciples begin to squirm. It might even make us squirm. But there comes a time you have to declare your own hand. So Peter spoke up and said, "*You are the Messiah (Christ).*"

What did he mean by that? The Jews were steeped in the idea of a coming Messiah. There were several strands of thinking related to the Messiah. When Peter confessed, "You are the Christ" he meant He was a king in the line of David. That's why He was called "the son of David." God promised David he'd always have a descendent on the throne. He said, "*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever*" (1 Sam 7:16). Jesus is the fulfillment of that. Peter understood He was a king.

But there was another strand of thinking related to the Messiah. On several occasions Peter would have heard Jesus refer to Himself as the Son of Man. This was Jesus' favorite way of speaking of Himself. When we hear "the Son of Man" we think of His humanity, but the Jews believed the Son of Man was a glorious figure who'd come at the end of time to judge the world. Daniel described Him like this, "*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 was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples 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*" (Dan 9:13–14). So when Jesus used that term it's packed with significance. Peter got that.

But that's not all. The Jews looked for Messiah to bring salvation. The name *Jesus* actually means "God saves." This is the name the angel told Joseph to name Him. He said, "*You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins*" (Mt 1:21). The Jews expected the Messiah to save them, but they

were wrong about what He'd save them from. Later that same afternoon, Jesus told His disciples He would soon suffer and die. Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him. "The Messiah can't die. Not now. Not like that!" Peter and his friends were looking for a Savior to conquer their enemies through a show of power, but Jesus conquered sin through an act of sacrifice.

I grew up in the Catholic Church saying, *I believe in Jesus Christ*. I memorized this Creed before my Confirmation. Like Peter, those words just rolled off my lips. I knew what to say, but I didn't know Him as the One who came to save me from my sins. But the time came when I saw my sin for what it was, and I cried out to Him to cleanse me and save me. And He did.

Sooner or later, Jesus asks each of us that same question He asked His disciples, "**You**, who do you say that I am?" It's not enough to repeat what others are saying; we have to come to grips with our own need. We have to personalize this. You can sit in church for weeks or months or even years. You can find it fascinating to talk about who this Jesus might be, but what He wants is for you to address Him, "**You** are the Christ. **You** are my Savior."

He is God's only Son.

But that's not all the Creed says about Jesus. It also says He's *God's only Son*. Peter had that right too. In Matthew's account of this same story, Peter answers the same question with these words, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Mt 16:16). The term "Son of God" is found 124 times in the New Testament. It's the most misunderstood of all the titles for Jesus. It's been the center of controversy throughout the history of the church. It raises all kinds of questions I doubt Peter had thought about: If Christ is the Son of God, how could He be one with God? This confronts us with the mystery of the Trinity. God is One, but He's not alone. On one occasion Jesus called Himself the "only begotten Son of God." But doesn't "begotten" mean He was born? This is why theologians have always said He was "begotten, not made." Yes, He was born into this world, but He's not a created being; He's eternally the Son of God.

To call Him God's "only begotten Son" means His relation to the Father is completely unique. Others may be called "sons of God" but that's different. In John 5, after Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders confronted Him. Jesus answered, "**My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.**" Jesus says He and His Father are so unified if the Father is working He's working (Sabbath or no Sabbath). But what they latched onto is how they called Him Father: "**For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**" They interpreted His claim to be God's Son as making Himself equal with God.

But Jesus didn't leave it that. He goes on and describes His unique relationship with the Father, "*...the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him*" (verses 19–23).

Notice how Jesus defines His sonship. Imitation: the Son only does what the Father does. Intimacy: the Father loves the Son and holds nothing back from Him. Power and authority: just as the Father gives life, so does the Son. Judgment: the Father has entrusted all judgment to His Son. Honor: the Son deserves to be honored just as the Father does.

So close was His identification with His Father that He constantly equated a person's attitude to Himself with His attitude to God. To know Him was to know God; to see Him was to see God; to believe in Him was to believe in God; to reject Him was to reject God; to honor Him was to honor God. This is why when we confess Jesus is God's only Son, we're saying He's all the God we'll ever need.

He is our Lord.

Jesus asked, "Who do **you** say that I am?" Peter said, "You are Christ, the Son of God." According to the Creed, Peter got two out of three right. The Creed adds one more thing. It says He's **our** Lord. The Jews had several names for God. *Adonai* was the name most often used for God. It means "Lord." For the Jew, *Adonai* is the Master of all. But notice one little word in the Creed that's easy to miss. It says **our** Lord. Not just **the** Lord. **Our** Lord is much more personal. When you say He's our Lord or even my Lord, you're saying He's your Master. You no longer belong to yourself; you belong to Him. You no longer have the right to call your own shots. Peter had a long way to go before he could say that. You can't say that and chop a man's ear off. You can't say that and deny Him three times. There's something about coming to grips with our own failure. It's like there has to be a breaking of our will. We have to come to the end of ourselves before we really know Him as Lord.

Thirty-five years ago I purchased a ring. I was 20 years old and I was broke, but I had a 1970 VW Bus. I loved that car. I traveled all over the universe in that car. It had curtains and a little ice box and you could fold the seat down and sleep in there. It was awesome. But my bride-to-be was so important I was willing to sell it and take the \$750 I got for it and buy a ring. And I gave it

to her. How much did that ring cost her? It didn't cost her a cent. But when she received that ring and put it on and married me, it cost her everything. Why? Because when she did that in a sense she became mine.

The Bible says when you get married you don't belong to yourself any longer, you belong to your husband or wife. If you don't believe me, try to ask my wife out for a date. That won't work for me. I won't allow that. I'll hurt you! Why? She belongs to me. Try to ask me out for a date. Same thing. She'll hurt you. She may hurt us both! Why? I belong to her.

In the same way, salvation cost us nothing. Jesus shed His blood for our sins, He paid our debt in full, and that cost us nothing. But when we received that, when we accepted Him into our life, when we put His ring on our finger, that costs us everything. We're no longer our own. We no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to Him. He's our Master (Lord). He decides what we do and don't do. Someone said, "He's either Lord of all or he's not Lord at all."

When you call Him Lord, that means you love Him. The Bible says to love the Lord with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. He is worthy of all your affection. It also means you trust Him. Proverbs 3:5 says, "**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding...**" This is hard for us to do. We all face trials. Sometimes life overwhelms us. We face things we simply can't handle. Paul talked about his troubles in Asia and said, "**We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself**" (2 Cor 1:8). When you face times like that, when you're so far in over your head you despair of life, He's still your Lord and you can trust Him.

But to really call Him Lord means you obey Him. This is hard too. No one does this perfectly. We're all a work in progress. But when I said my vows to Lynn 34 years ago I meant it. "To love and to cherish...To have and to hold from this day forward until death do us part." There was no turning back. I haven't loved her perfectly or cherished her perfectly but there's no question where my allegiance lies. When you call Jesus your Lord there's no question where your allegiance lies. And there are times when He asks you to do things you don't want to do. It doesn't make any sense. The world around you tells you to do something entirely different. But He's your Lord. He has the right to tell you what to do. He's either Lord of all or He's not Lord at all.

After His resurrection, Jesus met Peter at the Sea of Galilee. He asked him three times, "**Do you love me?**" Three times Peter said, "**Yes, Lord, you know I love you.**" Each time Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep.**" The third time He added, "**Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go**" (Jn. 21:18).

That's Lordship. It means we surrender to Him. It means obedience. A number of years ago a friend of mine was playing in a men's softball game. The umpire made a call that upset the coach. The coach didn't agree with the ump's interpretation of a rule. The game stopped, and a heated discussion ensued. Finally, the ump sighed as he pulled a rulebook from his back pocket and proceeded to read page 27, paragraph 3b, section 1. "As you can clearly see," he concluded, "this rule means that my call must stand." But the coach yelled, "You're not interpreting that rule correctly." The ump replied, "Uh, excuse me, I should know: I wrote the rulebook."

When we call Him Lord we're saying He wrote the rulebook! It's not enough to call Him Lord, we have submit to Him. Jesus said, "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven**" (Mt 7:21). It's not enough to just call Him Lord, or even to say the words of the Creed; you have to obey Him.

So when Jesus says in Matthew 6:26, "**Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?**" that means we do it. I struggle with that. Don't worry about material provision. He promises to take care of His own, but I still worry. I have a kid to get through college and a mortgage and car payments and taxes and insurance and all that stuff. Twice a month when it's time to do the bills my family runs for cover. Why? Because I get stressed out. I'm not fun to be around. It's called worry and it's a symptom of not trusting and not obeying my Lord. I'm working on that.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord. I've been thinking a lot about Tim Tebow this week. He's become the center of a storm, not because he believes in God but because he confesses Jesus Christ very publicly, clearly and confidently. Not everyone likes that. What I like about him is, from what I can tell, he walks his talk. It seems he not only calls Jesus his Lord, but he's submitted his life to Him as Lord. But just as it does today, throughout history the name of Jesus has polarized people. You can't be lukewarm about Him. He Himself didn't give us that option. He's either Lord of all or He is **not** Lord at all. We all have to make the choice. We know where Tim Tebow stands. The question is, where do **you** stand? "**You, who do you say that I am?**"

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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