

## Who was Jesus Christ?

*(Based upon the Christmas Epistle, Hebrews i. 1 ff., and the Gospel, St. John i. 1 ff.)*

Who was Jesus Christ? This question arises with amazing frequency, even in a world that considers Him dead and buried, sharing the fate of all mortal men. There seems to be no way to shake Him off. No one seriously believes that He wasn't a historic figure at all, but simply an invention of a group of Jews bent on starting a new sect based upon a fictional leader. There is just too much excellent testimony to the contrary. But if He was real, what *was* He? A great moral teacher? The zealous leader of passionate devotees who died a martyr to His own cause?

He remains an absolute enigma. No one denies that He ranks among the greatest of exemplars. No one questions His kindness and goodness. Everybody knows that Jesus was gentle and meek, and loving-- all of the qualities most men will acknowledge are terribly absent in themselves. Few can summon themselves to hate or criticize Jesus. What is there to hate? How are we to despise a figure of such innocence? It would be like hating a child!

And although many might accept any of the above categories that are complimentary to His Person, His claims to divinity prove the greatest problem. Normally, we look askance at anyone who says such things. I could say many things about myself that would damage my credibility, but if I claimed to be God, very little that I said or did afterward would be taken seriously. Men might well complain that if only Jesus had been content merely to rank Himself among other great Jewish teachers, and therefore remain simply one more offering among the great smorgasbord of sources of guidance to which the world has looked for wisdom and example, we would have no problem with Him.

But Jesus defies all categories. He is a source of intense disturbance to each and everyone on some level. For those who would reduce Him to an easygoing, smiling benevolence, His fierce denunciations of His enemies are utterly out of place. To others who would represent Him as an anti-establishment rebel who personifies all who justly reject arbitrary authority, His passive submission to His captors is incomprehensible. His purity and simplicity only accentuates our own coarseness and proud hypocrisy. His righteous anger, on the other hand, fills us with fear and resentment. What right, we ask, has any man to set himself up as the moral arbiter of all others? "Just who does Jesus think He is?!" cries nearly every human soul who has on some level interacted with Him.

For those of us who have been privileged to meet this Jesus personally by faith, however, the entire matter is totally transformed. We recognize the phenomenal dilemma that is posed by the apparent contradictions of His Person as the purest of evidence that this Man is God in the flesh. There is no other way to comprehend such extremes, other than by falsifying Him, which

is the inevitable default position that the unbelieving world reaches when it attempts to come to terms with Him. Only God can humble Himself below the soiled and sinful feet of all men and give Himself a willing sacrifice for their sins. Only God could proclaim through human lips with incontrovertible words of authority that some day the entire world will be held accountable to Him at the Judgment.

But most significantly of all, in this very Man, God represents Himself to us as One who can be loved in the most personal way-- through Jesus, God is accessible, and near, and intimate, and among us. He is indeed one of us, having robed Himself in our own human flesh. How can this possibly be? As the Apostle Peter wrote to all who have come to Christ by faith:

*1 Pet 1:8 ...whom having not seen, you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.*

For us, He is no enigma-- He is the Object of our love and adoration. He is our Friend, our Brother, and yet our Lord and Master. We readily concede that there is yet so little we know of God, and so much that is infinitely beyond our reckoning, no matter the level of our intelligence or learning, or the length of time we have been in Christ. But the matter of who Jesus Christ was, and far more importantly for us, *who He is*, is permanently settled. It matters not whether our understanding of Him is as basic and elementary as that of an unschooled individual who, in spite of any limitations, is far more aware of who God really is than another who boasts great theological knowledge, but is spiritually dead. The problem of Jesus for such a one is solved.

Let the world continue to strive with the Lord. Let them make movies about Him, and Broadway plays. Let them joke about Him, discuss Him, reject Him, or attempt to remake Him. Let them try to vigorously suppress every thought of Him, only to see Him reappear for examination with incredible persistency in some new light.

As St. Paul put it, *He has been made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption...*(1 Cor. 1:30).

He is ours, and we are His.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*