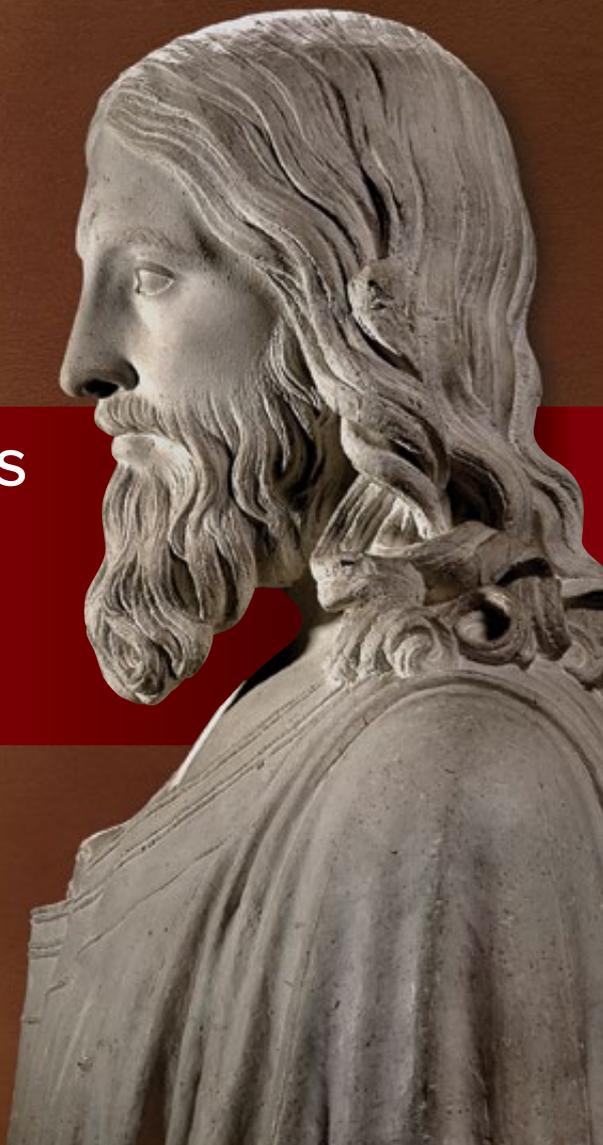


WHO IS Jesus?

Reflections
on the
Identity
of Christ

Carol Geisler



INTRODUCTION

A Question of Identity

Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13). The disciples suggested some popular opinions concerning Jesus’ identity. Jesus was thought to be John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or some other ancient prophet of Israel. Such speculation was not unusual: “Some of the people said, ‘This really is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Is the Christ to come from Galilee?’...So there was a division among the people over him” (John 7:40-41, 43). Speculation continues today. Many people believe that Jesus was and is exactly who he said he was, the Son of God who came to offer his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Others, including those following other religions, have their own ideas and opinions about Jesus’ true identity. But the question remains, the question that Jesus asked his disciples, the question that each of us must answer: “But who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

Carol Geisler, author



A Prophet

When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

John 6:14

When Jesus lived on earth, some people regarded him as a prophet. Others rightly thought that Jesus was the Prophet whose coming had been foretold by Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Today, too, some think of Jesus as only a prophet, a special messenger from God.

God uses prophets to bring his messages to people, and some prophecies foretell future events. Jesus was the Prophet foretold by Moses. With his sermons and parables, Jesus brought comfort and hope. He taught people about God, who loves the world he made and sent his Son to be its Savior. But Jesus was more than a prophet; he did not just come to bring messages from heaven about God’s love. Jesus embodied the love of God for the world. Jesus came to die. He offered up his life as a sacrifice, taking onto himself the penalty of death that we deserved for our sins, for our rebellion against God. Calling himself the Son of Man, a reference from the prophet Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14), Jesus announced his purpose, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus, in you the love of God for the world, the love of God for me, was made known. Amen.

Read John 8:26-30 and Mark 10:42-45.

A Wise Rabbi

A man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.”

Mark 10:17-18

Jesus is sometimes regarded only as a wise rabbi or teacher. The Jewish religious leader Nicodemus, having seen Jesus’ miracles, expressed the opinion that the rabbi from Nazareth was “a teacher come from God” (John 3:2). Jesus certainly was a good teacher, but he was so much more. He was also the very Son of God.

C. S. Lewis addressed this issue of Jesus’ identity, noting that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah many times. If such claims were false, how could Jesus be considered a good or moral teacher? If his claims of divinity and lordship were not true, Jesus would be a liar and not a good teacher. The man in the biblical account above called Jesus a good teacher. He was asking the right person about eternal life, but his question was flawed. The man asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” We do not do anything to receive an inheritance. Someone else has to die. Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, died on the cross so “that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:15).

Through faith in you, Lord Jesus, I have the inheritance of eternal life. Amen.

Read Mark 10:17-22 and John 3:1-16.

A Good Example

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”

Matthew 16:24

According to God’s Word, we are to follow the example of Jesus. We are told, “Walk in love, as Christ loved us” (Ephesians 5:2). Jesus left an example, “so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). It is right to follow Jesus, to live in a way that imitates his care, his compassion and his single-minded dedication to the work of God.

Yet, as we follow along in the life of Jesus, we learn that he did something we could never do, no matter how carefully we try to find our way in his footsteps. Jesus often told his disciples that he would be killed and on the third day raised from death (Matthew 16:21). His steps finally led him to the death he had foretold, his crucifixion on the tree of the cross. There he took onto himself the penalty of death that we deserve for our sins, bearing those sins “in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). Because of his wounds, we are healed and forgiven. Now, walking by faith, trusting in Jesus, we follow him through this life into eternal life.

Jesus, lead me through this earthly life until I live forever in your presence. Amen.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:21-25.

WHO IS Jesus?

Jesus asked his disciples for popular opinions concerning his identity and received a variety of answers. Still today, Jesus is a controversial figure of history. Was he merely a prophet, a miracle-working rabbi, a good teacher or an example to follow in life? World religions offer different opinions concerning the person of Jesus. But Jesus had much to say about his own identity. After hearing the opinions suggested by his followers, Jesus asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” That is a question that each of us must answer. Who is Jesus?

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