

Who Is Jesus Christ?

Memory Text: “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:20)

Setting The Stage: On August 19, 1920, the Carrol A. Deering (a five-masted schooner) prepared to sail from Norfolk, Virginia to Rio de Janeiro with a cargo of coal and a ten-man crew. Two days later the Deering left Newport News and later arrived in Rio without incident.

On December 2, the Deering left Rio and stopped for supplies in Barbados. It was next sighted by the Cape Lookout Lightship in North Carolina on January 28, 1921. On January 31, 1921, the Deering was sighted run aground on Diamond Shoals, an area off the coast of Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, which has long been notorious as a common site of shipwrecks.

Rescue ships were unable to approach the vessel owing to bad weather. The ship was not boarded until February 4, and it became clear that the ship had been completely abandoned. The ship's log and navigation equipment were gone, the crew's personal effects and the ship's two lifeboats were gone as well. In the vessel's galley it appeared that certain foodstuffs were being prepared for the next day's meal at the time of the abandonment.

The U.S. Government launched an extensive investigation into the disappearance of the crew of the Deering. Five departments of the government – Commerce, Treasury, Justice, Navy, and State - looked into the case. However the investigation remained largely fruitless.

When an Italian inquiry into the disappearance of the vessel Monte San Michele confirmed that there had been heavy hurricanes in the vicinity, most of the conspiracy theories were dropped and mutiny was generally accepted as the explanation for the Deering incident.

In July 1921, the consulate general in Portugal reported that a sailor named Augusto Frederico Martins was suspected as a member of the missing crew, until it was confirmed that he was a cook for the vessel Portugal. The investigation was closed in late 1922 without an official finding on the incident.

There were a number of popular theories about the incident. It seemed at first that an external force was responsible for the disappearance of the crew. On April 11, 1921, a man named Christopher Columbus Gray claimed to have found a message in a bottle floating in the waters of Buxton Beach, North Carolina; he swiftly turned it

over to the authorities. Gray later admitted the letter he had recovered had been forged.

No official explanation for the disappearance of the crew of the Carroll A. Deering was ever offered. The case is a favorite of paranormal and Bermuda Triangle hobbyists and has gained a reputation as one of the truly great maritime mysteries. The fact of the matter is that we will never really know.

It doesn't have to be that way when it comes to discovering who Jesus is. "Who is Jesus? The question is not a philosophical or a sociological gimmick. It gets to the heart of who humans are, even more important, what eternity will hold for them. People can admire the works of Jesus, honor His words, extol His patience, advocate His nonviolence, acclaim His decisiveness, praise His selflessness, and stand speechless at the cruel end of His life.

"Many may even be ready to accept Jesus as a good man who tried to set things right – to infuse fairness where there was injustice, to offer healing where there was sickness, and to bring comfort where there was only misery. Yes, Jesus could well earn the name of the best teacher, a revolutionary, a leader par excellence, and a psychologist who can probe into the depths of one's soul. He was all these and so much more.

"None of these things, however, come near to answering the most important question that Jesus Himself raised: "Who do you say that I am?" It's a question that demands an answer, and on that answer the destiny of humanity hinges." (The Book Of Luke, Adult Sabbath School Study Guide)

Sunday – Reactions To Jesus

Luke 4:16-30; 7:17-22

Luke 4:16-30. (v. 16) *Nazareth* – 64 miles north of Jerusalem, between the lower end of the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. First visit (spring of A.D. 29) here since he left in the fall of A.D. 27, nearly half his ministry is in the past. Second visit is recorded in Mark 6:1-6. Nathaniel asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) Jesus, the Messiah did!

Sabbath day – Jesus custom was to attend services on the seventh-day Sabbath, the Giver of the Sabbath, honoring the Sabbath as a man to give an example to all. *Stood up to read* – He had done it before as a child and His reputation in Judea now made his townsmen eager to hear what He had to say.

(v. 17) *Handed the book* – It was the duty of the synagogue equivalent of the early church deacon to take the sacred scrolls from off the ark and give them to the reader and then return them to the ark. The scriptures were read in Hebrew, pretty much a dead language at that time.

(vss. 18, 19) Jesus read from Isa. 61:1, 2. *Acceptable year* – Reminiscent of the year of jubilee when slaves were freed, debts were canceled, and land was given back to its original owner (see Lev. 25). But Jesus left out the words, “the day of vengeance of our God,” words that to the patriotic Jew was the climax of the entire passage. To them, salvation was for the Jews (because of nationality rather than submission to God) and retribution for the Gentiles.

(v. 21) *Began to say* – as a visiting rabbi it would have been expected of Him to deliver a sermon. Luke gives the main points of the sermon here. *This day* – their pride was offended, but more than this Jesus had just suggested that He was indeed the fulfillment of this prophecy – He was the long-awaited Messiah.

(v. 24-27) *Assuredly/Verily* – “Amen” – “I swear in advance to the truthfulness of what I’m about to say.” In Judaism you needed at least two witnesses to verily a fact, but Jesus witnessed to the truthfulness of His own sayings – He speaks on His own authority and an authority that exceeds what the Old Testament prophets had. This is an incredible claim - oneness with God.

Luke 7:17-22. What was John’s question about Jesus, and why did He ask it? The question was, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” John’s disciples questioned Jesus’ ministry and John was disturbed that his disciples should have doubts. If they did, how would they encourage faith in Jesus as they ministered to the people?

John didn’t fully understand the nature of Christ’s kingdom, or why he hadn’t been set free, but he wasn’t going to express those concerns. Instead he sent his disciples to see Jesus with the question so their own faith might be bolstered as they witnessed the miracles performed, and perhaps his would be too upon hearing the report. John’s question could be rephrased, “Are you the type of Messiah we should be looking for?”

“It is worthy to note that the supreme evidence Christ offered of His divinity was the perfect adaptation of His ministry to the need of human suffering and lost humanity.” (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 760)

Monday – Son of God

Luke 1:31, 32, 35; 2:11

Jesus is the God-man – 100% God and 100% man. He is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is both divine and human. There are many things we cannot fully explain in life but that doesn’t mean they don’t exist or they aren’t so.

Luke 1:31-35 (cp. vvs. 32, 33 with Isa. 9:6, 7). What do these verses tell us about who Jesus is? According to Isaiah the “mighty God” was to occupy the throne of

David to administer his kingdom (the eternal kingdom, not a restored Davidic kingdom – John 18:36). He is the Son of God!

The various names and titles given Christ in the Bible are designed to aid our minds in understanding His relationship to us, and the various aspects of His ministry. As a son is subordinate to his father, so Christ, who is One with the Father, voluntarily humbled Himself and accepted a position subordinate to the Father.

The Father confirmed Christ's Sonship at His birth, at His baptism, at His transfiguration, and again at His resurrection. John the Baptist testified that He was the "Son of God," and the twelve came to recognize him as such. The evil spirits admitted He was, and Jesus claimed He was. It was that claim that brought about His death.

Luke 2:11. *Christ our Lord* – Akin to saying Jesus Christ, which is a confession of faith in the union of the divine and human natures in one Person (not a curse word). He is the Lord of the Old Testament who answers to Jehovah, or Yahweh.

It is important to know that Christ was God in the flesh, otherwise His life was just a life to emulated with no promise of power, and His death was just a heroic death without the promise of cleansed guilt and sin (His death would not have been vicarious). He had to be God, for no one but the Lawgiver could atone for and forgive the sin of the lawbreaker.

Tuesday – Son of Man

Luke 5:24; 6:5; 7:34; 9:22, 44, 56; 11:30; 12:8; 18:31-33; 22:22; 69

Jesus often referred to Himself as the "Son of Man." Mentioned 80 times in the Gospel's and 25 times in the book of Luke. OT prophets were referred to as the "son of man." The "Son of Man" came with clouds to the Ancient of Days in Dan. 7:13, a designation of Christ. Jesus was the Son of Man in a historic sense and in a higher sense.

The title designates Him as the incarnate Son of God. It points to the miracle by which the Creator and creature were united in one person. It testifies to the fact that sons of men may indeed become sons of God (see John 1:12; Rom. 8:14). The humanity of Christ means everything to us (see Selected Messages, vol. 1, p. 244). **Heb. 2:14, 15.**

The use of "Son of Man" in Luke provides various insights into the nature, mission, and destiny of Jesus.

1. Human with no worldly address (Luke 7:34; 9:58) – "Eating & drinking...no where to lay His head."
2. Used to assert His divine nature and status (Luke 6:5) – "Lord of the Sabbath."

3. Came to “seek and save that which was lost,” (Luke 9:56; 19:10) by being “killed” and being “raised the third day.” (Luke 9:22)
4. Provides a complete picture of the suffering Messiah for the sins of the world – cross (Luke 18:31-33); betrayal (Luke 9:44); death (Luke 22:22); crucifixion and resurrection (Luke 24:7); mediator (Luke 12:8).
5. Returning King (Luke 9:26; 17:24, 26, 30)

Wednesday – “The Christ of God”

Luke 9:18-27

Around the middle of A.D. 30, about 2 ½ years into Christ’s ministry, Jesus withdrew from public ministry to Caesarea Philippi (about 25 miles from the north of the Sea of Galilee) for about half a year where He devoted His time to instructing His disciples.

Luke 9:18. After revealing His authority over nature (Luke 8:22-25), His power over demons (vss. 26-35), His strength over diseases (Luke 5:12-15; 8:43-48), His ability to feed 5,000 (Luke 9:13-17), and His power over the death (Luke 8:51-56), Jesus confronts his disciples with two questions, the last of which is all-important.

Luke 9:20. “Who do you say I am?” As the spokesman for the group, Peter declares, “You are the Christ of God,” or “Christ, the son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16) How you answer this question will make a difference in where you spend eternity.

Jesus definitely claimed to be God (John 10:30; 14:1, etc.). So every person must answer the question: Is His claim to deity true or false? Either He is Lord, liar or lunatic.

If, when Jesus made His claims, He knew He was not God, then he was lying. But if He was a liar, then He was also a hypocrite, because He told others to be honest, whatever the cost, while He, at the same time, was teaching and living a colossal lie.

More than that, He was evil, because He deliberately told others to trust Him for their eternal destiny. He would also be a fool, because it was His claims that led Him to the cross. If Jesus was a liar, a con man, and therefore an evil, foolish man, then how can we explain the fact that He left us with the most profound moral instruction and powerful moral example that anyone has ever left?

If it is inconceivable for Jesus to have been a liar, but could He have thought He was God but have been mistaken? After all, it is possible to be both sincere and wrong. But we need to remember for someone to believe He is God, especially in a culture that is fiercely monotheistic, and then to tell others that their eternal destiny depends on believing in him, reflects the thought of a lunatic. Was Jesus?

Christian philosopher, Peter Kreeft presents this option: “Jesus has in abundance

precisely those three qualities that liars and lunatics most conspicuously lack: 1) His practical wisdom, His ability to read human hearts; 2) His deep and winning love, His passionate compassion, His ability to attract people and make them feel at home and forgiven, His authority; 3) His ability to astonish, His unpredictability, His creativity. Liars and lunatics are so dull and predictable. No one who knows both the Gospels and human beings can seriously entertain the possibility that Jesus was a liar, or lunatic, or bad man.”

If Jesus is not liar or lunatic, then He must be Lord. Other self-proclaimed gods and saviors have come and gone upon history’s stage, but Jesus is still here, standing head-and-shoulders above them all. The modern historian Arnold J. Toynbee spent page after page discussing the exploits of history’s so called “saviors of society” – those who tried to prevent some social calamity or cultural disintegration by heralding the past, or pointing people toward the future, or waging war or bartering peace, or claiming wisdom or divinity. After covering such individuals for some 80 pages in the sixth volume of “Study of History,” Toynbee finally comes to Jesus and finds there is no comparison:

“When we first set out on this quest we found ourselves moving in the midst of a mighty marching host; but as we have pressed forward on our way the marchers, company by company, have been falling out of the race. The first to fail were the swordsmen, the next the archaists, the next the futurists, the next the philosophers, until at length there were no more human competitors left in the running. In the last stage of all, our motley host of would-be saviors, human and divine, has dwindled to a single company of one by gods; and now the strain has been testing the staying power of these last remaining runners, notwithstanding their super human strength.

At the final ordeal of death, few, even of these would-be saviors-gods, have dared to put their title to the test by plunging into the icy river. And now we stand and gaze with our eyes fixed upon the farther shore, a single figure rises from the flood, and straightway fills the whole horizon. There is the Savior; “and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand; He shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied.” (Toynbee, Study of History, p. 278)

Thursday – The Transfiguration

Luke 9:27-36

Luke 9:27-36. Of the three accounts Luke is the only one who mentions the reason Jesus, Peter, James, and John climbed the hill – to pray. Christ’s burden centered on how to ready the disciples for what lay ahead.

Transfigured – “metamorphosis” – “to change into another form.” With Moses and Elijah present the scene represented the coming of Christ claiming those who both died in Christ and those who, having never died, lived for Christ. The authority of

Christ is confirmed again in the words of God, "Hear him." Without obedience and loyalty there can be no discipleship.

Appeal: Jesus humanity means everything to us, as does His divinity. The God-man Jesus Christ is our only means of salvation, our only hope, our only surety, our only source of strength. May we embrace the fullness of Jesus each and every day.