

Are You the Christ?

Luke 22:66-23:25

This past week I attended the funeral service for my Great Uncle Chuck. I'm guessing there were over 200 people. Half of them were milling around in a small parlor looking at pictures of him and visiting with family. I can't remember the last time I would have seen some of these relatives so I went up and introduced myself to my Great Aunt. A cousin once or twice removed standing near her took a look at me and said "no, it isn't really?" I told her I had a driver's license to prove it. Then she said she hadn't seen me since I was this tall. Her motion indicated that it would have been over 50 years ago.

I have a birth certificate, driver's license, social security card, bank cards, and an outdated passport which all verify my identity. But pictures and paper documents don't necessarily substantiate my claims to be Howard Paul Wideman. They could all be forged. But to my knowledge I have carried that name all my life. I have filed my taxes and donated blood under that name. I have been finger printed but not in association with a mug shot. So how do you know I am who I claim to be? Do you take my word for it or substantiate it through other methods to ensure I'm telling the truth about my identity? That brings us to our text for today.

Turn to Luke 22:66-23:25 where we are confronted with a very important question. It is a question people have asked for two millennia.

Jesus has been up all night. He has been betrayed, arrested, denied, beaten, and mocked. It is now daybreak on Friday. Events will happen quickly now. The religious council known as the Sanhedrin are meeting again to bring a conviction on the man they arrested the previous night. In their examination they ask one simple, yet profound question of Jesus. It is an important question because the answer has eternal ramifications. It is a question that every one of us will have to make a

decision about. That decision will either be yeah or nay. Is Jesus the Christ?

But notice what they did not ask.

They weren't concerned about His given name Jesus, although it's a name that means Savior. They weren't even interested in His occupation, which up until 3 years prior to this was a carpenter. They didn't question Him about His teachings or even about the miracles or how He came to be known as Rabbi having had no formal education. They were interested in only one thing: We find it in verse 67. Was He the Christ?

Christ is not a name, but rather a title. It means anointed. The Old Testament equivalent is the word Messiah. They weren't asking about His name, they were asking whether or not He was the Messiah, the anointed one who had been promised and prophesied about in the Old Testament. After His resurrection He was more frequently referred to as Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus, thus giving it the force of a proper name.

The Old Testament prophecies speak of a promise to David of a Messianic ruler who would reign forever over a kingdom. Isaiah refers to the Messiah as one who would suffer as the Redeemer.

And yet while He knew Himself to be the Messiah He did not disclose that even to His disciples until after Peter made his confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. And so while He may not have made a formal disclosure to them before this, certainly His teachings and miracles were all in some way confirming that He was the Christ.

Yet, here stood the Sanhedrin asking Him something that was quite obvious. Maybe like the multitudes they thought He was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or John the Baptist or one of the other prophets. Their question is one they should have known given the overwhelming evidence.

Are you the Christ? As learned as they were in the Scriptures all the evidence pointed to Jesus being the one fulfilling the promise of the Christ who would arrive on the scene to be their deliverer. However, their desire was for another type of deliverer and Jesus did not fit their mold. They didn't believe He was the Christ. Their interest in asking was merely to get Him to admit it so they could convict Him of blasphemy.

That view is held by others still today. Some even believe that He never even existed.

Philosopher Bertrand Russell once asserted that "historically it is doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about Him."

In fact many scholars want to discount the historicity of Scripture all together. If they can disprove one historical event, then it is easier to disprove the claims of the entire Bible as anything worthy of consideration for moral living or eternal life. In that way they can easily dismiss that Jesus is the Christ and of someone no consequence.

And then there is Thomas Paine, that great American Revolutionist and patriot. While he held Christianity in contempt he never questioned the historicity of Jesus, although he believed that His deity was mythological. He even claimed that there was no one else who exceeded the morality Jesus lived and taught.

But there are also many credible secular historians who believe in the existence of an historical Jesus.

F.F. Bruce said "The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic (obvious) for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar." meaning that Jesus is just as historically factual as Julius Caesar.

Josh McDowell in his book *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* writes "the historicity of Jesus

isn't just a matter of curious interest for the Christian. The Christian faith is grounded in history."

He then quotes New Testament scholar Donald Hagner: "True Christianity, the Christianity of the New Testament documents, is absolutely dependent on history. At the heart of New Testament faith is the assertion that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a real event in time and space, i.e., as historical realities, are the indispensable foundations of Christian faith. To my mind, then, Christianity is best defined as the recitation of, the celebration of, and the participation in God's acts in history, which as the New Testament writings emphasize have found their culmination in Jesus Christ."

We could cite many secular and religious scholars who prove the historicity of Jesus, that there was such a person who lived 2,000 years ago.

So when we read about Him in the New Testament we must conclude that He existed historically. We must also then conclude the authenticity of the Old Testament as being factual from an historical perspective. To say that the Bible is historically accurate but is not true in regard to the many recorded miracles it describes is to seriously undermine the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture.

We cannot dismiss the miracles as being something that can be scientifically proven while at the same time accept the accuracy of historical events. When we read in Scripture that God spoke and something happened, we must believe that it happened just the way Scripture says it did. Otherwise it cannot be trusted.

At the time of Jesus' existence some 2000 years ago only the Old Testament scriptures were around. If the religious leaders believed in the authenticity of

the history of the Old Testament and in the prophecies that came true regarding the nation, why then did they question the identity of the Christ?

There are many Old Testament prophecies around the Messiah. Consider for a moment this startling fact. The probability that Jesus could have fulfilled even eight prophecies would be 1 in 10¹⁷. That's 1 with 17 0s following. That is enough silver dollars to cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep. Then consider the improbability of blindfolding a man spinning him around a few times and tell him to go find one of those silver dollars that has been specially marked – on his first try. Yet, Christ fulfilled all the Old Testament prophecies completely.

Are you the Christ? they asked.

The facts were indisputable, yet there they stood unconvinced.

United States Senate Chaplain Richard Halverson wrote: “The real problem with Jesus Christ is not that folk *can't* believe in Him—but that they *won't* believe in Him.”

That, my friends is where the Sanhedrin were who questioned Jesus. They had all the Old Testament markers given by the prophets. They studied them religiously. Those markers would authenticate the identity of the Messiah when He came. They were diligent students of Scripture. Why else would the Scribes have been able to identify the location of Messiah's birth place some 30 years earlier when asked by King Herod on behalf of the Magi?

I want to suggest an answer about why they rejected the Old Testament prophecies. It wasn't for lack of evidence. It wasn't for lack of instruction. They willfully and deliberately *chose* to reject it.

The problem isn't in the evidence or even the lack of evidence. The problem is in the heart. It's a choice. Many people choose not to believe no matter how convincing the evidence is.

When Jesus was asked by the Sanhedrin if He was the Christ He gives His response in verse 67. He was straight with them. They chose to reject Him. “If I tell you, you will not believe.”

Warren Wiersbe writes: “Jesus knew the hearts of His accusers, their unbelief, and intellectual dishonesty (Luke 20:1-8). It was futile to preach a sermon or enter into a debate. They had already rejected the evidence He had given them and more truth would have only increased their responsibility and their judgement (John 9:39-41).”

Matthew Henry adds: “There are none so blind as those that will not see.”

That is the strongest negative form of the word that Jesus could have used. No matter what evidence was presented they would continue to reject it. Their eyes, ears, minds, and heart were closed. It didn't matter how many convincing proofs Jesus gave them, they would persist in ignoring and rejecting the evidence, and that rejection would be to their eternal peril.

John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on His name.”

I John 5:11 “If you have the Son, you have life; if you don't have the Son, you don't have life.”

From that verse we can then infer the opposite as well and state it this way: “Those who reject Him will not become the sons of God.”

But who were they rejecting: Jesus the historical guy or Jesus the Messiah?

I think the answer is obvious. If Jesus was not the Messiah, the Christ, then there is no eternal hope for us. According to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah, the Christ would take on all our sin, He would suffer in our place.

John Blanchard has estimated that “since the dawn of civilization, there have been about 60 billion people that have walked Planet Earth. He continues by noting that of those 60 billion people, only a handful have made any real, lasting impression, have actually changed the world. And, in that handful of people, there is One who stands head and shoulders above all of the others—and His name is Jesus. More attention has been given to Him; more devotion has been given to Him; more criticism has been given to Him; more adoration has been given to Him; more opposition has been given to this one person than all of the others. Every recorded word that He said has been more sifted, analyzed, scrutinized, debated—every word—than all of the historians and the philosophers and the scientists put together. Yet, He was here 2,000 years ago. And, after 2,000 years, there is never one minute on this earth that millions are not studying what He said. Think about it: Here’s a person who lived in a miniscule, tiny little land two millenniums ago; and yet, His birth divides the centuries—AD, BC; Before Christ and Anno Domini, the year of our Lord.

Pastor Adrian Rogers once stated in a message Jesus “never wrote a book that we know of; and yet, library after library could be filled with the volumes, the multiplied millions of volumes, that have been written about the Lord Jesus. He never painted a picture, so far as we know; and yet, the world’s greatest art, the world’s greatest dramas, the world’s greatest music, the world’s greatest literature has Jesus Christ as its source. Jesus never raised an army, so far as we know; yet multiplied millions have died for Him. He never traveled very far from His birthplace; and yet, His testimony has gone around, and around, and around the world. He only had a handful of little followers that followed Him there, in His ministry; and yet, today, over 30% of the world’s population names His name—the largest such grouping on Earth today—Jesus of Nazareth. A ministry of only three short years—public ministry; and yet, here we are, 2,000 years

later, saying, “Jesus, Your name is wonderful,” because His name is. He had no formal education. He didn’t attend the university or seminary; and yet, thousands of universities, and seminaries, colleges, and schools are built in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And, in my estimation, in my humble but correct opinion, no one can call himself, herself, educated who does not understand Jesus Christ.

The great historian Kenneth Scott Latourette said this: “Jesus has had more effect on the history of mankind than any other of His race who ever existed.” To explain Jesus Christ is impossible; to ignore Jesus Christ is disastrous; to reject Him is fatal. Understand who Jesus Christ is: To know Him is to love Him; to love Him is to trust Him; to trust Him is to be radically, dramatically, and eternally changed, to be transformed. I’m talking about who is Jesus. Human speech is too limited to describe Him. The human mind—too small to comprehend Him; and, the human heart can never really, completely, totally absorb who Jesus Christ is.”

The religious leaders refused to acknowledge Him as the Christ of God. Their rejection would mean their eternal destruction.

Jesus continued by stating that they not only would not believe but after this they would see Him, the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God. That was a place of power, a place of authority, a place of honor, a place reserved for the Son of Man. In that claim He inferred His deity, that He was equal with God.

They pressed Him further with another question. “Are you then the Son of God?” His answer: “You are right in saying I am.” About this John MacArthur notes “The Lord used a form of reply familiar to the Rabbinical mind by which He accepted the question put to Him as His own affirmation.” He didn’t have to make that claim because they already made it for Him in their question.

That claim closed their trial. They needed or wanted no further testimony. Their charge against Jesus was blasphemy and so they ushered Him off to Pilate for execution. The charge of blasphemy deserved death according to Leviticus 24:10-16. Now notice that their original accusation was blasphemy but that was not the charge they brought against Jesus who now stood before Pilate. They said He was guilty of opposing taxes, which we know is not true. He said we should pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and pay to God what belongs to God.

They also accused Him of claiming to be Christ, a king. Both accusations would raise the eye brow of Rome who demanded payment of taxes and who dealt swiftly and harshly with anyone attempting to overthrow the government.

Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king. Jesus gave a similar response to Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say."

We aren't told whether Pilate had heard of Jesus prior to this meeting. We do know that Herod had heard of Jesus. We're told that Herod wanted to see Jesus in order that He might perform some miracles. In spite of Herod's efforts, Jesus did not respond.

Before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, before Herod, and before the mob, they all rejected that Jesus was the Christ. The one who could give them eternal life.

Rather than proclaim Him as the Christ, they pronounced that He be crucified.

Rather than call Him Messiah, they called for His murder.

John MacArthur adds "they were not concerned about evidence, fairness, truth, justice. By rejecting the truth about Jesus, they condemned themselves to hell."

Verse 25 sums up the position they all took related to the question the Sanhedrin asked: "Are you the Christ." Notice what it says. "He (Pilate) released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will."

Pilate gave in to their wishes. Even if Pilate understood who Jesus was would not have changed the destiny of Jesus the Messiah. This is why He came – to die for our sin. And if they are right that He was just a man and not Messiah, then we are to be pitied above everyone else because we have believed a lie, Jesus is still in the grave, and we are still lost in sin.

Jesus is the Christ, the one who was in the beginning with God, the one was God.

John 1:10 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name; He gave the right to become children of God."

That, my friends, is the Christ.

It would be my prayer today that you stand convinced that Jesus is the Christ and that you believe Him to be the only way to gain eternal life, but knowing that truth is not enough. What difference does He make in your day to day life?