

First Christian Church
Pastor's Class: Foundations of Our Faith
Lesson #5: The Person of Jesus

Who Is Jesus Really, Anyway?

Jesus is central to Christianity in a way that is unique among all religions/faiths. In no other religion is the central leader/figure in the same place of significance as Jesus is in Christianity. What is the difference between Jesus Christ and every other religious leader? What do we believe about Jesus?

I. Jesus of Nazareth: Fully Human

A. His Life

1. Jesus was a genuine historical figure.
 - a. He lived and died in Israel, in a province of the Roman Empire.
 - b. This was attested by historical records.
 - (1) Some of those records were made by his followers (gospels, references to him in letters).
 - (2) Some of those records were made by non-Christian writers of history (e.g., Josephus, a Jewish author, and Suetonius, a Roman author).
2. He was a real human being, fully human in every way, with one exception.
 - a. He experienced all of normal life: birth, growth, physical pain, deprivation, emotions, work, learning, relationships, loss/grief, temptations (Hebrews 2:14-18).
 - b. When people saw him, they knew him to be a Jewish carpenter/mason, and referred to him as such (Mark 6:3).
3. He was fully and truly human.
 - a. One of the earliest heresies that the church faced was Gnosticism which denied his humanity (1 Timothy 2:5).
 - b. The church insisted that Jesus was genuinely and fully human (1 John, especially 1:1-3; 4:2-3; 2 John 7; also Luke 24:39).
4. The single exception to being exactly like one of us was that Jesus committed no sin; he was perfectly innocent (and perfectly virtuous).
5. In his years of ministry in Galilee, he was recognized as a teacher (a rabbi), a prophet, and a miracle worker (healer)—none of which were thought to indicate that he was divine by those who knew him.
 - a. He was called “rabbi” by his followers and others (e.g., Matthew 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26).
 - b. He was called a prophet by the crowds (Matthew 16:13-14; 21:11, 46; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 6:14; 7:40, 52), and referred to himself in a way that indicated he thought of himself as a prophet (Matthew 13:57; Luke 13:33).

- c. He referred to the miracles he performed as works that his Father, God, had given him to do (John 5:19, 36; 10:25, 32, 37-38).

B. Messiah

1. The OT contained many prophecies of a savior figure, the “anointed one,” who would come and save his people and inaugurate the fullness of the kingdom of God.
 - a. “Messiah” = “Christ” in Greek (not Jesus’ last name)
 - b. Like kings and prophets before him, the Messiah was anointed for a task.
 - c. Anointing symbolized God’s choice, empowerment, and approval.
2. Son of David (2 Samuel 7:12-13): The Messiah would be a royal heir, someone descended from David.
3. King and Son of God (Psalm 2:6-7): He would be the king who ruled over Israel as God’s “son”—his representative.
4. Servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 52:13-53:12): He would fulfill a particular role in the salvation of Israel, a role described in several passages in Isaiah.
 - a. He would bear the sins of others.
 - b. His death benefits others vicariously.
5. Jewish expectation in the first century:
 - a. Not a uniform expectation: there were many various ideas about who he would be, what he would be like, and what he would do.
 - b. Most expected a warrior deliverer.
 - c. Some expected two Messiahs (e.g., the Essenes): one royal, one priestly.
6. Jesus—claimed the role/identification (though not usually openly or explicitly).

C. Savior

1. Jesus came to save people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).
 - a. He offered his life as a ransom/propitiation; a sacrifice for sin.
 - b. The goal of his life was not to establish a system of religion/ethics, nor to end the problems of poverty/disease.
2. The deliverance he offered was not from Roman government but from the tyranny of sin.
3. He paid the penalty for sins (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 2:2).
4. He defeated the power of death, hell, sin, sickness (Colossians 2: 15; Revelation 1:17-18).

II. Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the Son of God: Fully Divine

A. Encountering God in the Person of Jesus

1. Against modern heresies (and some ancient heresies as well) which deny Christ’s deity and try to reduce him to a good man, or a perfect man, or a demi-god, or a human with unusual “God consciousness,” etc., Christian faith insists he is uniquely and fully deity.

2. The early church recognized that in Jesus Christ they encountered not someone who knew God, but God himself (without denying that he was also fully human).
 - a. Paul wrote that the fullness of deity dwells in him (Colossians 1:19; 2:9).
 - b. Thomas recognized the resurrected Jesus as his Lord and God (John 20:28).
 - c. The apostles designated Jesus as “God” (Titus 2:13, 2 Peter 1:1).
3. Jesus himself was the source of their understanding.
 - a. Note especially his claim to be able to declare sins done against God forgiven (Mark 2:1-12, especially verses 5,10).
 - b. He claimed to have a unique sonship/relationship with God, whom he referred to in the most intimate way as “Abba.”
 - c. Jesus uniquely reveals God because he is fully God (John 1:18; 14:9).
 - d. The Jews recognized his claims and regarded them as blasphemous (John 5:18; 8:58 [“I am”]; 10:25-33).
4. This was shocking in Jewish monotheistic society, almost beyond comprehension.
5. The mystery of incarnation is the central and unavoidable mystery of Christianity (John 1:1-3, 14).

B. Lord

1. The disciples’ understanding of and reference to Jesus as “Lord” points to two significant ideas: deity and supremacy over all.
 - a. The word, “Lord,” was the term used in the OT/Judaism in place of the name of Yahweh.
 - b. By transferring the title to Jesus the Christians signaled their identification of Jesus with the God of Israel (Yahweh).
 - c. This led to serious conflict with the Roman Empire which insisted that “Caesar is Lord,” a presumably unchallengeable status.
 - d. The basic and earliest Christian confession we find in the NT is that (Jesus) Christ is Lord.
2. The resurrection established his lordship (Philippians 2).
 - a. All must eventually recognize this, and bow in submission to him.
 - b. The return of Christ will manifest his lordship over all humanity.

C. Implications for Us

1. If Jesus is fully human, then he is someone to whom we may easily relate.
 - a. He is able to sympathize with us in our struggles and help us when we are in trouble or tempted to sin (Hebrews 4:14-16).
 - b. He is a model for us to know how to live (Hebrews 12:1-3; 1 Peter 2:21-25).
2. If Jesus is Messiah—then he is the (rightful) King of Israel.
 - a. Christianity is Jewish in its roots (though not necessarily in *culture*) and cannot be severed from those roots.
 - b. Jews can be Christians without ceasing to be Jews.
 - c. Christianity and Christian faith is inseparable from the OT—the record of the promise and preparation for Messiah.

3. If Jesus is Savior—not merely teacher—I must ask for and receive his salvation.
4. If Jesus is the unique redeemer (God-man)—then he is the *only* mediator/redeemer between God and people (1 Timothy 2:5-6).
 - a. Neither the church nor its leaders may stand in his place.
 - b. The holy or revered figures of the past (“the saints”) cannot redeem us or mediate on our behalf.
5. If Jesus is Lord—I must bow and submit to him.
6. If he is God—I must worship.

The center of the gospel and the foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. For that reason, we are not ashamed to preach Jesus; He is our message:

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)