

Message #1050
Rev. Jack C. Longley

"WHO WAS JESUS?"
{Matthew 16:13-20 and John 14:6}

Trinity Presbyterian Church
March 28, 2004

A medical student attending UCLA--a devout follower of an Eastern religion--was asked some penetrating questions.

1. "In your opinion, who is the greatest leader the world has ever known? Who has done the most good for humankind?" His response: "I'm sure Jesus has done more good than anyone who has ever lived. I would say He is the greatest leader!"

2. "Who do you think is the greatest teacher the world has ever known?" After carefully considering other great philosophers {Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Aristotle}, he replied: "The greatest teacher is Jesus!"

3. "Who in the entire history of humanity do you believe has lived the most holy life and set the greatest example to follow?" He replied: "There has never been anyone like Jesus!"

Since Mel Gibson's film production, "THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST" was released on Ash Wednesday {February 25th}, the life...death...and resurrection of Jesus Christ has undoubtedly impacted more people in our country--and in other countries of the world--than any one event in recent history.

...people are being confronted with questions about who Jesus' was...and more than that...who He is to them

...who would ever have believed that from a low-budget Hollywood production featuring little known actors in lead roles that Jesus would be impacting lives beyond our wildest imagination?

...it has grossed nearly \$300 million

...it is being discussed on radio/TV talk shows

...reviewed by film critics

...featured in major publications

...even the news media has given it unprecedented coverage

...and...the conversation centers around Jesus from Nazareth

...how/why would any man endure such a torturous death for another?

...who was this man who willingly laid down His life so others might have eternal life?

WHO IS JESUS?

Everyone of us must answer the question at one time or another! Lew Wallace, a famous general and a literary genius set out to write a book that would forever destroy the myth of Christianity. Wallace tells how he spent two years in leading libraries of Europe and the United States researching for information for his book. Before he finished the second chapter, he found himself on his knees crying out: "My Lord, and my God!"

Wallace found that the evidence proving the deity of Jesus that he discovered overwhelmingly convinced him that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the Savior the world. Later Wallace wrote "BEN HUR," one of the greatest novels ever written concerning the time of Christ that was later made into a Hollywood epic.

C. S. Lewis, writer and professor at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England, was an agnostic for years. He tried to convince himself for years that Christianity

was invalid. After a long process of seeking answers he became a follower of Christ and wrote...

"You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling whenever my mind lifted for even a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach to Him--whom I so earnestly desired NOT to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

C. S. Lewis became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. He wrote many books advocating his belief in Christ. One book has touched more lives than perhaps all the others combined, "MERE CHRISTIANITY," in which he wrote...

"You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; OR you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But, let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to!"

He concluded that Jesus is indeed more than a good moral teacher: He is the Savior of the world!

So, who is Jesus to you?

...a myth?

...a mere man?

...or...the Son of God?

Your response to these questions will determine your eternal destiny--AND, the quality of life you can experience on this earth.

JESUS WAS THE SON OF GOD

The question so often is asked: "How is Jesus different from Buddha, Mohammed, and Confucius?"

The answer is quite simple: Buddha, Mohammed, and Confucius never claimed to be God, but Jesus did!

...He made astounding claims

Again I quote C. S. Lewis...

"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg--or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse!"

Listen to a few of His claims--

1. In Matthew 11:27 He claims to be the Son of God...

"All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father. and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him!"

2. In Matthew 28:18-19 He claimed to have all authority on earth and in Heaven.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me; therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to obey everything I have committed to you..."

The Apostle Paul wrote confirmed this some years later... "God has rescued us out of the darkness and gloom of Satan's kingdom and brought us into the kingdom of His dear Son, who bought our freedom with His blood and forgave us all our sins.

"Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God. He existed before God made anything at all, and, in fact, Christ Himself is the Creator who made everything in heaven and earth, the things we can see and the things we can't...all were made by

Christ for His own use and glory. He was before all else began and it is His power that holds everything together.

"It was through what His Son did that God cleared a path for everything to come to Him--all things in heaven and on earth--for Christ's death on the cross has made peace with God for all by His blood!" {Colossians 1:13-17,20}

And, then in Hebrews 1:1-3 we read...

"Long ago God spoke in many different ways to our fathers through the prophets {in visions, dreams, and even face to face}, telling them little by little about His plans.

"But now in these days He has spoken to us through His Son to whom He has given everything, and through whom He made the world and everything there is.

"God's Son shines out with God's glory, and all that God's Son is and does marks Him as God. He regulates the universe by the mighty power of His command. He is the one who died to cleanse us and clear our record of all sin, and then sat down in the highest honor beside the great God of heaven."

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God!

Jesus claimed to be one with the Father!

The Scriptures affirm His claims!

But, who do you say that He is?

JESUS CLAIMED TO HAVE POWER TO FORGIVE OUR SINS

"Some men brought to Him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.'

At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'

'Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven?' or to say, 'Get up and walk?'

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...' Then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home!'"

{Matthew 9:1-6}

...none but God can forgive sins

...Jesus--one with God--claimed authority to forgive sins

And that, friends was the theme of Mel Gibson's "THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST."

...there was but one way that He could forgive our sins

...by becoming the Lamb of God--our sacrifice!

We read of this in Hebrews 10:5-7...

"O God, the blood of bulls and goats cannot satisfy You, so You have made ready this body of mine for Me to lay as a sacrifice upon Your altar. You were not satisfied with the animal sacrifices, slain and burnt before You as offerings for sin...See, I have come to do Your will, to lay down My life, just as the Scriptures said that I would."

CONCLUSION--WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO US?

1. Jesus offers forgiveness for our sins--Romans 3:23; 6:23

2. Jesus gives life meaning and purpose. Are you asking...

...where did I come from?

...why am I here?

...what will happen to me when I die?

Without a purpose for living people despair!

H. G. Wells lamented near the end of his life: "I have no peace. All life is at the end of its tether!"

Lord Byron said, "My days are in the yellow leaf, the flowers and fruits of life are

gone, the worm and the canker and the grief are mind alone!"

Henry David Thoreau said, "Most men live lives of quiet desperation!"

But, God has promised purpose to those who follow Christ...

"God has told us His secret reason for sending Christ, a plan He decided on in mercy long ago; and this was His purpose: that when the time is ripe He will gather us all together from wherever we are--in heaven or on earth--to be with Him in Christ, forever. Moreover, because of what Christ has done we have become gifts to God that He delights in, for as part of God's sovereign plan we were chosen from the beginning to be His, and all things happen just as He decided long ago. God's purpose in this was that we should praise God and give glory to Him for doing these mighty things for us, who were the first to trust in Christ!" {Ephesians 1:9-12}

Pascal, French physicist and philosopher wrote...

"There was once in man a true happiness of which there now remains only the mark and empty trace which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings...but these are all inadequate because the infinite abyss can only be filled...by God Himself!"

Is your life empty?

...are you seeking fulfillment...meaning...purpose?

Jesus Christ can fill that void and bring you "life abundant!"

3. Jesus brings internal peace and joy to a believer.

...only Jesus can bring forgiveness

...only Jesus can bring purpose

...and only Jesus can bring peace of heart and mind!

"My peace I give you...not as the world gives!"

4. Finally, Jesus promises power to live life as it was meant to be...His internal power of the Holy Spirit.

...He takes up residence within us

...He fills us with the Holy Spirit

Whom do you say that He is this morning?

He invites you to open the door of your life and receive Him by faith...and to become a child of God...

...sins forgiven

...life with meaning and purpose

...life with internal peace

...life filled with His power.