

Who Is the Christ?

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[0 : 00] So I have a son who is eight years old, and one of his favorite books when he was younger was a picture book called Kitten's First Full Moon.

And in this children's story, Kitten, who's this very endearing character, looks up and sees the full moon, and poor little kitten thinks it's a bowl of milk.

So the book follows Kitten's misadventures trying to get that bowl of milk that she sees up in the sky. Kitten ends up with bugs in her mouth.

Kitten falls off the porch. Kitten even climbs up a tree, and when she climbs up the tree, she sees the reflection of the moon in the pond below, leaps into the pond thinking she's found the bowl of milk, look, splash, she has only found water.

In the story, Kitten has a preconception, which seems like a very big word for Kitten, but Kitten does have a preconception. Her preconception is that the moon is a bowl of milk, and this belief guides Kitten's actions.

[1 : 18] Today, we are looking at this question. Is Jesus the Christ? Christ. Is Jesus the Christ? The Christ is another word for Messiah.

They are exactly the same word. They are simply translated from one language to the other. And the Messiah, the Christ, is the one who is foretold, the expected deliverer of the Jews.

And so we have that question today. Is Jesus the Christ? To answer this question, we are going to examine some preconceptions. A preconception. A preconception is a preconceived idea, a presumption, an assumption, a prejudice, a bias, an opinion performed beforehand.

And today, we are going to examine four preconceptions. Now, these aren't the same notions that people have about Jesus today. These preconceptions that we look at, we won't say, oh, that's some of the same things that I see people thinking.

But, we are asking the same fundamental question that the people at Jesus' time are asking. Is Jesus the Christ? The setting for this passage comes at a very challenging time of Jesus' ministry.

[2 : 34] We've seen in the previous chapter that Jesus, many of his disciples, have begun to turn away. They have found his teachings difficult and untenable, and they have gone their own way.

Jesus, who once had these many adoring crowds, has now looked up and seen his followers dwindle. And while the twelve still remain, the crowds no longer seem to be following him quite the same.

In addition to that, we now find in verse 1 that the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now people are trying to kill Jesus. Also part of our setting for our story today is the Feast of Booths, sometimes also called the Feast of Tabernacle.

This is an eight-day celebration. It's an eight-day celebration where the Jews remember they're wandering in the desert. After Moses has led the people out of Egypt in that miraculous escape and across the crossing of the Red Sea, they are then led into the wilderness.

And they will spend 40 years in the wilderness before they finally reach the promised land. And this Feast of Booths, it remembers God's provision for the people when they were in that 40-year journey across the wilderness.

[3 : 49] And it's called Feast of Booths because part of this celebration is that the people would live in temporary dwellings, hence the term Booths. Also as part of this festival is that people would go to Jerusalem.

So they would travel on their way to Jerusalem. With this setting in mind, let's look at our first preconception. And that's that Jesus wants to be popular.

As the feast begins, Jesus' brothers, those are the children of Mary and Joseph, they tell Jesus, go to the feast.

And we can see where their advice is coming from. Their advice is coming because many of Jesus' followers are no longer with him. The crowds no longer seem to be gathering around him. And so they have a plan for Jesus.

We see that plan in verse 4. For no one who works in secret, if he seeks to be known openly, if you do these things, show yourself to the world. We see their advice.

[4 : 51] Jesus, go to Jerusalem. That's where all the people will be. Be seen, Jesus. You've been working kind of in the backwoods of Galilee.

Now it's time to go big time. Go to Jerusalem. Go to the crowds. When you do the signs that you've done, think of all the people that will be following you. But this advice is based off of the preconception that Jesus wants to be popular.

Jesus' siblings think that he wants adoring crowds, just like he had earlier. But Jesus responds to his siblings in verse 7. He tells them, the world hates me because I testify that its works are evil. Jesus' message will not be enthusiastically received by these crowds. The reason Jesus' messages will not be well received is because Jesus is confronting people about their sin.

He's telling them that your works are evil. He is calling out their sin. He is calling out their failure to follow God completely.

[6 : 04] And this message will not be received. So the question that we have today, is Jesus the Christ?

Jesus' siblings here in this chapter, when they ask this question, is Jesus the Christ? They say, no. The Christ will be beloved by all.

And Jesus is not. Jesus' siblings do not think he is the Christ. As we think about communicating Jesus to others, here are some things I want you to keep in mind.

The first thing is that his message is not a popular message. People are not really that interested in hearing their sins confronted.

People are not interested in hearing their failures brought before them. But let's not defang the message of Jesus. The message of Jesus, it's not all about rainbows, unicorns, and cupcakes.

[7 : 11] Jesus testifies against the evil of this world. And if we downplay Jesus' testimony against the evil of this world, we present a faulty caricature.

We don't accurately represent who Jesus is. The second preconception that we're going to look at today is that Jesus lacks authority.

The passage continues on, and we learn that Jesus decides to visit the feast. But he decides to go in private, and not publicly, as his sibling suggested.

At the feast, Jesus seems to be a popular topic of conversation. You can imagine if people from all across the area have gathered together in one place. And they've heard about the signs and wonders that Jesus has done, and the amazing things that are happening.

And so the people begin to discuss Jesus among themselves. But, they do so very quietly. Because as we said, Jesus doesn't bring a popular message, and not everyone is eager to hear about them.

[8 : 20] And we see in verse 13, but for fear of the Jews, no one spoke openly of him. So Jesus seems to be on everyone's mind, and even perhaps on everyone's lips, but not in open conversation for others to see.

As Jesus goes to Jerusalem, he teaches at the temple. It seems like we always find Jesus at the temple, don't we? If you read the story of Jesus, he always seems to be teaching, whether in the synagogue or the temple.

He just seems to can't get away from that desire to speak God's truth to people. And once again, we find Jesus, who has now entered the city very privately, but now finds himself in a public place to teach others.

After hearing Jesus, the Jews marvel. They are very impressed by Jesus, as is we often find. Whenever Jesus speaks and teaches, people marvel. They understand that he is someone who has great insight. And while they may not agree with him, they recognize his insight, and his knowledge, and his understanding.

[9 : 27] But these people not only marvel at what Jesus says, they marvel at his background, particularly at his lack of instruction. Jesus hasn't followed the cultural norms for teaching from the scriptures.

He hasn't been a part of some school of thought, or sat and learned with the other religious leaders. And yet he speaks with great authority. We see the people's confusion there in verse 15.

How is it that this man has learning, but he has never studied? People have a preconception. They believe that Jesus lacks authority.

And the reason they believe that Jesus lacks authority is because Jesus lacks training from the religious leaders. Jesus responds to this question of his authority.

And he says that the authority will come from either God or from the person, from the individual. As he fleshes this idea, let's see in verse 16. Jesus says, My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.

[10:38] Jesus says, The teaching doesn't come from me. It comes from God. Verse 18. He continues on in looking at this question of whose authority.

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks only his own glory. The person. The individual. So the question of authority.

Jesus says, Does it come from God? Or does it come from the person? He says the right choice is there in verse 18. The one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true.

The one who seeks the glory of God and not the glory of the self is true. After presenting this dichotomy, glory of God or glory for the self, Jesus directs an accusation at the religious leaders. There in verse 19. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. With this question lingering, whose glory do the religious leaders seek?

[11:45] Do they seek the glory of God? Do they seek glory for themselves? Jesus offers them an example from his own ministry. In John 5, we find that Jesus heals a man who has been an invalid for 38 years.

But the religious leaders showed great contempt for this action. And the reason they showed great contempt is because it had taken place on the Sabbath. We find Jesus, as he's responding to this question of whose authority.

Continue there in verse 16. And this is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus. Because he had done these things on the Sabbath. The religious leaders are greatly upset that Jesus would heal on the Sabbath.

And Jesus confronts them about this flaw in their thinking. Jesus says to them, look, the law has come to make people well. The law has come to put our relationship right with God.

And you're using it to worry about such little and petty things as what day a healing takes place?

Jesus says, consider the law. Consider circumcision. It says, when circumcision falls on the Sabbath, do you not circumcise the boy?

[13:06] The answer is yes, they do. Jesus says, if you can make one part of that body well, if you can make one part of that body right, then what's wrong with me making the entire body well, making the whole body well?

Well, as Jesus offers that example to the religious leaders, it becomes clear that Jesus has won the dispute.

If Jesus' premise is accepted, that authority comes from God in seeking the glory of God, or authority comes from the person in seeking the glory of the person, the question then lingers, which authority do the religious leaders possess?

Jesus says that we are to judge with right judgment. Authority, Jesus will say, does not come from position.

It does not come from power. It does not come from status. It does not come from a title. Authority comes from right judgment.

[14:17] So is Jesus the Christ? That's the question we're asking today. Is Jesus the Christ? The religious leaders say, no, the Christ will be like us.

The Christ will be trained like us, and teaching like us, and instruction like us. So the religious leaders say, no, the Christ will be like us. Yet Jesus makes it clear that he is not like them at all.

The third preconception that we are looking at today is that the Christ has unknown origins. Jesus continues to teach in public, which leads to great confusion among the crowds.

Remember the crowds were discussing Jesus, but in private, for fear of being overheard. Yet there's Jesus teaching away. The people won't even talk about him in open conversation, but there's Jesus in front of everyone teaching.

And so there the crowds have a bit of a confusing moment as they look up and wonder, don't the religious leaders want him dead? There he is. It would seem easy to get, wouldn't it?

[15 : 28] So the crowds begin to think, well, maybe the religious leaders have come to believe in him too. Maybe that's why they're not harming him. Amidst this speculation, we find there in verse 27, this idea that is presented.

But we know where this man, that being Jesus, but we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from. So while they're considering whether Jesus is the Christ, they say, we won't know where the Christ comes from, but we know where Jesus comes from.

So this belief that they would not know where the Christ comes from comes from is part of their tradition that has developed. It was the idea that the Christ would suddenly appear on the scene. This great deliverer would suddenly appear, and they would not have an idea of where the Christ had come before, but would just suddenly be there to lead the people. Jesus responds, and he says, you do know where I come from, but I come from God.

So this preconception that the Christ has unknown origins creates a dissonance of thought among the people. While they do believe that the Christ has unknown origins, they look at Jesus, and they say, he sure seems like the Christ.

[16 : 49] He seems like the one. I think that's the one. So there's a dissonance of thought that emerges. And despite their misgivings, despite their concerns, some people believed in Jesus.

We see in verse 31, yet many of the people believed in him. They said, when the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done? So our question again of the day, is Jesus the Christ?

Some believe. Some do not. Let's take a closer look at some of those who believe. One of the interesting things I want you to see today is that those who do believe in this account, they believe, despite having absolute certainty, that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus doesn't quite fit their exact expectations. Still, they made the decision, the choice, to believe. To believe that Jesus was indeed the Christ.

Christ. The word believe comes from the same root word as faith. So the idea of believe and faith, and the scriptures are very similar.

[18 : 08] We find, in people that we know and meet, and people that you work with, and people that live near you, and friends that you have, that belief and faith is a stumbling block to following Jesus.

Sometimes people don't want to follow Jesus. They don't want to take that step of faith. And sometimes, as we think of this, we look and we say, the information is there, and yet, they choose not to believe.

And, as we communicate Jesus to others, we find that there are often questions to be had, concerns to be presented, reasons to not believe that they put before us.

Sometimes, we can't answer all the questions, and we can't delay all their concerns. But I would remind you, as you communicate Jesus to others, that if every question could be answered, belief would not be needed.

If every doubt could be put aside, faith would not be required. People in this account today, they believe in Jesus despite their questions and despite their doubts.

[19 : 32] People today also believe in Jesus. Despite questions, despite some doubts, people still believe. Now, I'm not espousing an irrational belief.

We'll talk more as we move through the message, this idea. But I do want you to know that as you communicate Jesus to others, we can't answer all the questions.

We can't answer all of their doubts. at some point, the person makes a decision to believe. Just like the people in this account made a decision to believe. Jesus didn't quite match what they thought the Christ should look like.

Jesus didn't quite match the ideas that they had grown up with, that they had developed, but yet, they believed. There's a certain irony to the people who doubted Jesus.

Jesus. They doubted Jesus because they said, we will know where, we will not know where the Christ comes from, but we know Jesus. He comes from Nazareth.

[20 : 36] The reality is that Jesus didn't actually come from Nazareth at all, did he? That Jesus was miraculously conceived and born in Bethlehem. Thus, they didn't even know where Jesus was from, even though they thought they did.

Our fourth preconception that we're going to look at today is that Jesus speaks only about the physical world. The religious leaders of the day, they finally decide that they are going to arrest Jesus.

They've heard enough of him. And so they send officers out to arrest Jesus. And then Jesus speaks to the people about this. There in verse 33, he says, I will be with you a little longer and then I am going to him who sent me.

You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come. And there's confusion among the people as they hear Jesus speaking this.

Like, where's Jesus going? He says he's leaving somewhere? Is he going to see the Greeks? Yes. And the confusion results because they think Jesus is speaking only about the physical world.

[21 : 53] But we know that Jesus speaks spiritual truths. And Jesus, as he says, where I am going, that you cannot come and that he will be leaving.

He's looking forward to his ascension. He's looking forward to a time that is to come. And so while Jesus speaks to a time that is to come, to a spiritual truth, the people are confused because all they think is in terms of their physical reality.

we see Jesus then on the very last day of the feast that he declares to the people there in verse 37, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

This passage, this idea that Jesus says, let him come to me and drink, that whoever believes in me, as the scriptures have said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

This idea connects perfectly in with the feast of Booth that the people are celebrating. A significant part of the feast of Booth was a water rite that remembered Moses' deliverance of the people as they were in the wilderness.

[23 : 13] And one of the great things that they needed was water. And God, working through his leader Moses, provides water for the people in the wilderness. And Jesus comes and his teaching reflects upon that moment of God's deliverance through Moses for the provision of water.

But Jesus says, you come to me and there will be living water. It's an eternal water. There will be no more thirst. Come to me. So the question that we have been looking at, is Jesus the Christ?

We do find that some believe, as we have seen, and we see even more believe there in verse 40.

This is the Christ. We have people who have answered that question, yes, Jesus is the Christ.

Christ. They believe Jesus after hearing his proclamation about the need to believe and that he is the living water. But these people, they did not understand what he meant.

These people did not understand what he meant because Jesus, as he looks to himself as this living water, he's looking ahead to his work on the cross. There on the cross, Jesus will come and take the sins of people upon him.

[24 : 39] And he will take those sins and he will be, go with him as he's put up onto the cross and there he is crucified. And there he is put to death. And these religious leaders who have conspired against him will have their day of victory as they think, we have finally put an end to Jesus.

We have finally put an end to this man who teaches but doesn't have the same authority that we have. We have finally put an end to this man who teaches and people follow and believe him.

Is he the Christ? They will say, look, we put him in the grave. He's dead. But we will know that's not the end of the story of Jesus. Right?

Because the grave couldn't hold him. The grave held everyone else but it could not hold Jesus. And Jesus will defeat the power of death. Because he was sinless.

And death had no claim upon him. Jesus will be resurrected back to life. And Jesus will continue to live.

[25 : 44] And unlike other people who have cheated death, Jesus will never face death again. He has faced death once and he has defeated it. And when we believe in Jesus, we take part of that.

We take part of that resurrection that Jesus has that puts us right with God. That makes our relationship with God as it should be. And so when Jesus comes and he says, come to me for the living water.

Come to me and drink. He says, come to me. I am the one who will defeat the power of death. I am the one who will put you right with God. So is Jesus the Christ?

As we have seen, some answer, yes. Yes, Jesus is the Christ. But some don't believe. Some don't believe. Finally, we see that the religious leaders, they have come to arrest Jesus.

The religious leaders response then is to send out these officers to arrest Jesus. But as these officers go out to arrest Jesus, they fail to do so. With this lingering question, is Jesus the Christ? [27 : 00] These officers go and they see Jesus teaching and they see him speaking and they say, can't do it. And of course they come back to their superiors and the superiors say, where's Jesus?

Like, we didn't do it. Like, and they say there in verse 46, no one ever spoke like this man. They've seen something special and unique about Jesus.

And of course the religious leaders have great condemnation. They say, what? Have you been tricked to? Have you been tricked? Amidst the anger on the part of the religious leaders, we find Nicodemus emerging.

Nicodemus is a character who emerges three times in the book of John. And in the book of John, Nicodemus is a bit of a subplot. If you'll follow the three instances of Nicodemus' appearance, you'll have the story of John mostly laid out for you.

We've seen Nicodemus who was a Pharisee, was a Pharisee, he was among the religious leaders. And he comes to Jesus first in John chapter 3.

[28 : 18] And he comes to Jesus in secret. And he comes to Jesus with questions. Jesus, I need to understand more. The second appearance then of Nicodemus is here.

And the third appearance of Nicodemus, I'll let you find that one on your own. So Nicodemus here in his second appearance says to the religious leaders, there in verse 51.

Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? Nicodemus realizes that Jesus' teachings contrast to their current notions, a contrast to their current beliefs. It doesn't fit in well with what they've been taught before. But he refused to simply discount Jesus because of this contrast. He offers this suggestion to the other leaders, to his fellow religious leaders.

Let's hear more from Jesus and give us ideas, consideration. Of course, the religious leaders, they refuse this suggestion. The religious leaders have a flaw.

[29 : 29] Nicodemus' suggestion exposes this fatal flaw of the religious leaders. It is this. The religious leaders have much knowledge but no understanding.

They have knowledge but no understanding. They have much knowledge of God that comes from the study of the scripture. They studied the scripture extensively. But they have no understanding of God's character.

They're oblivious to the nature of God. So what does it look like to have knowledge but no understanding? I'll tell you a little bit of what it looks like.

It looks like me when I am trying to cook. So when it's my turn to cook around the house, my meals tend to start in a packaged, frozen dinner.

And I take out that frozen chicken that's already been seasoned and cooked and heated up. And then I take out the vegetables that are frozen and I pile them on. And then I take out the sauce that came in the package and squeeze it on.

[30 : 34] Heat it up and I have developed a meal. I have knowledge of how to provide a meal for the family. But if you were to give me the raw ingredients there in the kitchen, some chicken and vegetables and things to make some sort of sauce, I could never reproduce that.

I don't have understanding of these things to be able to reproduce that meal. If you were to put me on the farm and say there are the chickens over there and there are the crops over there, I most certainly could never reproduce that meal.

I have knowledge of how to cook. I really don't have any understanding of how to cook. The religious leaders in the same way. They have much knowledge of God, but they do not have understanding.

That's what happens when Jesus comes is he exposes their lack of understanding. If we want to gain an understanding of Jesus, let's follow the advice of Nicodemus.

He says, let's give Jesus a hearing and learn what he does and consider belief. And how are we going to do that in our contemporary context? I wish I had some special advice for you that you say, that's the greatest advice I've ever heard to understand and understand more about who Jesus is.

[31 : 59] But really the advice is quite simple. Read your Bible. Read your Bible. Next thing I would say, come to a worship service.

It's nice to see you all. So come to a worship service. These are two of the greatest ways that we have to develop an understanding of who Jesus is.

You remember Kitten? We talked about Kitten when we started. Yes. Kitten, she thought the moon was a bowl of milk. In the story with Kitten, the moon is either a bowl of milk or it is not.

In the same way, Jesus is either the Christ or he is not. So what do you say? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?

There may be concerns that you have. There may be perhaps misunderstandings that you have. There may be questions that you have. These need not keep you from making that decision to follow Jesus.

[33 : 11] As we've seen today, when asked, is Jesus the Christ? We've seen people who said, it's not quite what I expected. But that's the one.

That's the one in whom I believe. Kitten, Kitten went home. I've got to tell you how the story of Kitten. Kitten went home.

And Kitten, as she goes home, she finds a bowl of milk waiting for her on the porch and lapsed that milk up, happy to have finally found the milk that she was looking for. Jesus says to us, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

Today, the question, is Jesus the Christ?

What do you say? Remember, you can choose belief because perhaps like those officers who were sent to arrest Jesus, you realize there is something special about him.

[34 : 20] Or perhaps you realize you have a spiritual thirst that only Jesus can satisfy and you make that decision to say, yes, Jesus is the Christ.

Let me close the sermon in prayer. God, we come before you grateful that you have sent Jesus.

Grateful that you have sent Jesus on our behalf so that we can have a relationship with you. God, we come, we are thankful for his word.

God, and we acknowledge his goodness and his authority and his sovereignty over us and our lives. Amen. Amen. Thank you. Thank you.