

## INTRODUCTION

A honeymoon couple was in the Watergate Hotel in Washington. The concerned bride asked, "What if the place is still bugged?" The groom said, "I'll look for a bug." He looked behind the drapes, behind the pictures, under the rug. Finally, he said, "AHA!" Under the rug was a disc with four screws. He got his Swiss army knife, unscrewed the screws, and threw the screws and the disc out the window.

The next morning, the hotel manager asked the newlyweds, "How was your room? How was the service? How was your stay at the Watergate Hotel?" The groom suspiciously asks, "Why are you asking me all of these questions?" The hotel manager replies, "Well, the couple in the room *under* you complained their chandelier fell on them."

What you don't know really can hurt you ... or others! What you don't know about Jesus could be hazardous to your eternal health.

Several years ago, there was a likeness of Jesus on the cover of *Time Magazine* with these words in bold type: **WHO WAS JESUS?** An article inside discussed how a group of "scholars" were participating in a "Jesus Seminar" on the West Coast. It was their job to strip away all the myth and legend about Jesus to find the *real Jesus*. So they entered the study with an anti-supernatural bias, not believing Jesus was divine. None of the respected conservative, evangelical biblical scholars were invited to the "Jesus seminar" only liberal, left wing theologians participated. These so-called scholars arrived at the conclusion that Jesus was a revolutionary teacher but He never claimed to be God or He never performed any miracles.

Their stated task was to search for the real Jesus. I am convinced their study was flawed from the start. They asked the wrong question. If you ask the wrong question you get the wrong answer. The pressing question is not "Who was Jesus?" The right question is "Who is Jesus?" He is still alive and well and living at this very moment. It would be an insult for me to talk about Mike while he is alive and ask someone, "Tell me, who was Mike Parks?" If you really want to find the real Jesus, look in the Bible. In this text today, we are going to learn some important things about the beginning of the ministry of the real Jesus. Let's look at Luke 3:21ff:

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought of Joseph, the son of Heli ..." [What follows in the legal genealogy of Jesus, we'll talk about this a little later.]

In this wonderful passage of scripture there are four areas of witness about who Jesus is. We will examine these four powerful witnesses, then I will ask you four personal questions from these areas. First, let's notice

### I. The personal witness of water baptism

We learned last week that John the Baptist was holding a desert crusade out in the area surrounding Jericho near the Jordan River. This fiery prophet had been so bold as to call his Jewish audience a "family of snakes." He was letting them know they all possessed the same sinful nature as the old Serpent, Satan. John had been demanding that everyone repent and be baptized in water. I am calling this "water baptism" because John also preached that the Messiah would "baptize people in the Holy Spirit and in fire."

In the middle of his crusade, John was faced with a personal dilemma. His cousin, Jesus, began His ministry by walking 70 miles from his home in Nazareth to come hear John preach. When John gave the invitation, he was surprised to see Jesus come forward and request baptism. He knew Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and the unblemished Lamb of God. John knew that the *only* person who didn't need to be baptized was the Lord Jesus. Matthew's account goes into a little more detail, so let's look at Matthew 3:13-15: Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

John correctly observed that Jesus should have been baptizing him, not the other way around. When Jesus said He was doing this to "fulfill all righteousness," it meant that it was the *right* things to do. What Jesus was saying is, "I need to go through this so I can replace you on the cross. In order to replace you, I must go through this life perfectly. I will obey my Father at every step." So, Jesus is my righteousness because He fulfilled all righteousness. In order to die for me, He needed to do everything perfectly. Now remember, Jesus didn't have to be baptized, but He was willing to do so for a reason that would help us. Hang onto that thought because we will come back to it a little later. Next we see another important witness to whom Jesus is:

## **II. The visual witness of the Holy Spirit**

When Jesus came up out of the water, He was praying. At that moment, John and the others standing there observed an amazing phenomenon. They could actually see a visible representation of the Holy Spirit settling on Jesus. The Holy Spirit isn't a dove, that's just the best way the observers could describe what they saw. Have you ever watched a dove as it gracefully swoops down and lands? It can be flying swiftly, but just before it touches down it flares its wings and it almost seems to hover for a moment. This is what the people saw that day. I believe there is more to the metaphor of the dove than we often understand. The way the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus gives us an understanding of how His power is to be used. The word "dove" occurs on Jesus' lips one time in the gospels, namely Matthew 10:16: "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." The dove bears witness to Jesus' purity, meekness and innocence. A dove is not majestic like the eagle or fierce like the hawk or flamboyant like the cardinal. This was a directive to Jesus from the Father: the Spirit with which I anoint you is not for ostentation or for earthly battle. He will be dove-like not hawk-like. So when God anoints Jesus with the Spirit in the form of a dove he directs him to use his power in meekness and tenderness and love. Which Jesus does. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest ... for I am meek and lowly." I have the Spirit of a dove not a hawk.

This special manifestation of the Holy Spirit was as much for the sake of the observers as it was for Jesus. It was also the Father's way of letting Jesus know it was time to begin His ministry to redeem the world. Who is Jesus? The Holy Spirit testifies He is the Son of God, the Messiah.

The next witness was:

### **III. The verbal witness of the heavenly Father**

Immediately after Jesus was baptized there was another witness to His divinity. There was a loud voice from heaven that declared, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Sometimes people are confused because they read that Jesus was the "only begotten" son (John 3:16) and then elsewhere the scripture says that we are "sons of God." (1 John 3:1) Even angels are sometimes called sons of God (Gen. 6:2) It is important to understand that Jesus is the Son of God in a way that neither angels nor mortal men can ever be.

If you do not believe Jesus is truly the unique, one-and-only Son of God, you cannot be saved. You cannot simply say He was a great teacher. The most important question you can answer in your lifetime is *Who is Jesus?*

Dr. Ron Richie: "The religious Jewish community of our Lord's day rejected the idea that Jesus is the Son of God. Unfortunately, nothing has changed throughout the years as we too have religious groups who do not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. Let us hear the official proclamations of a few of these:

Christian Science: "Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea." One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin."

Jehovah's Witnesses: "Jesus Christ is not God. He was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth ... His perfect life was laid down in death, but not for sin and in punishment."

Mormonism: "Jesus Christ by obedience and devotion attained to the pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a god, even in his pre-existent state. It is possible for us to follow his example and gain the same sonship."

The New Age: (which is nothing more than a rerun of Eastern mysticism): "The historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, is separated from the Christ consciousness which Jesus attained. Jesus is not the God-man, but one of a long line of "masters" along with Buddha and Krishna who had themselves realized divinity. Jesus of Nazareth then is no longer said to be the only begotten Son of God, the God-man, the Lord and Savior of the cosmos. He is merely one of the manifestations of God throughout the ages. Salvation comes by realizing that you are to "be still and know that you are God," and when you know that you are God you will begin to live Godhood." One Christian from India commented that her father was still practicing Hinduism with this statement, "he would much rather BE a God than serve One."

*Who is Jesus?* There are a lot of strange ideas out there and you must answer this question for yourself. But you would be wise to pay close attention to what God the Father said that day. There is another witness for Jesus in this passage and I call it

#### **IV. The historical witness of a strong family**

Starting in verse 21 we find the legal genealogy of Jesus' earthly family. When people read the Bible they often skip these kinds of sections but you may learn some interesting things if you will take the time to study such passages. In Matthew 1 there is another genealogy beginning with Abraham and moving forward through time all the way to Joseph, the step-father of Jesus. This genealogy is different for several reasons. First, Luke 3 traces Mary's family tree. We know this because in Matthew 1, Joseph's father is Jacob, and here we find the name Heli (who we know was the father of Mary). Another difference is Dr. Luke begins with Jesus and works his way backward but he doesn't stop with Abraham, he goes all the way back to Adam! Let's look at verse 23: "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought of Joseph, the son (literally the son-in-law) of Heli". Now why do you think Luke adds that little caveat about Jesus being Joseph's son "so it was thought?" The answer is obvious: Because Luke knew, as we must also affirm that Joseph was *not* the biological father of Jesus – God was!

As you read this genealogy, don't assume it traces every single generation back to the creation of the world. It is important to understand two things about this list: (1) The words "son of" doesn't really appear in the text, it literally reads in verse 24 "Heli *of* Matthat, *of* Levi ... and so on. (2) We know from comparing this list to historical sections of the Old Testament that there are some generations that are skipped. Sometimes, the word "OF" can refer to a father, grandfather, or great-grandfather. Centuries ago, a fellow by the name of Bishop Usher added up the ages of all the men on this list and declared that from Adam to Jesus was a little over 4,000 years, thus the earth was less than 6,000 years old. This theory was widely held for many years but it was based on a faulty premise; thus the conclusion was faulty.

There are some large "gaps" in this genealogy. Even so, I want to call your attention to some notable names that were legal descendants of the Lord Jesus. Skip down to verse 31 and you will see that Jesus was in the lineage of King David who was the son of Jesse. In verse 32 we see Boaz, who married the Moabite woman, Ruth, is also part of Jesus' heritage. Down in verse 34 you read the names of the Big Three: Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. In the last part of verse 36 you'll recognize the name of Noah, the son of Lamech, who was the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch. This genealogy goes all the way back to Adam, who is called a son of God. Before you scratch your head at that designation for Adam, remember the text literally reads, "Adam who was *of* God." This means God created Adam.

Now, every family tree usually has some bad apples on it but surely one who claims to be the Son of God must not be tainted by scandal. But look at the record! Abraham, father of faithful, came out of an idolatrous family; Jacob was a deceitful trickster; Judah whose tribal banner was the lion of the tribe of Judah, fathered Perez through an adulterous relationship with his daughter-in-law Tamar; Why even Rahab the prostitute shows up in the list in Matthew 1! Here is Boaz who caused scandal by marrying a foreign woman named Ruth but they became the

great-grandparents of David. David may have tended his sheep in the very fields used by the shepherds who came to Jesus birth, but he was a murderer and an adulterer, only forgiven by the grace of God.

Why do you think these people are mentioned? Because if everyone in Jesus' family tree was squeaky clean, we who have failed wouldn't be able to relate to Him. But for the prostitute who walks the streets of Dallas, New Orleans or Tyler is there any hope? Yes! God can change a prostitute into the progenitor of grace. He did it for Rahab. To the murderers and the rapists who are doing their time in the prisons, is there hope for you? Yes! God can erase the blot of your sin and make something useful and beautiful of your life. He did it for Judah and David. To the person who has built their entire life on a pattern of deceit and lies, is there any hope for you? Yes! God can change your name and your nature just like he did for old Jacob whose name meant "grabber." He changed it to Israel, which means "one who struggles with God."

Well, those four witnesses give a powerful testimony to answer the question: *Who is Jesus?* Now most preachers would probably quit here. But you should never leave a passage of scripture until you study it inductively, in other words, "What is God trying to say to me?" So please allow me to place four important questions before you. I'd like for you to seriously and honestly ask them of yourself and then give an answer Let me warn you: you aren't going to like the second half of this message as much as the first, because this section is going to demand something of you and you could possibly come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and that is often very uncomfortable.

## **IN LIGHT OF THIS TEXT:**

### **1. Have I followed Jesus in believer's baptism?**

There are some of you here today who haven't yet been baptized because you know that being baptized is not required to go to heaven. Your attitude is: "I don't really HAVE to be baptized. The main thing is to believe in Jesus, to trust Him alone for my salvation." You are correct, if you are truly saved, you will go to heaven when you die even if you haven't been baptized. But you need to look carefully at *why* Jesus was baptized. He said He did it because it was the right thing to do. I believe it is the right thing for every true believer to do: To follow Jesus in believer's baptism.

Have you been properly baptized? Let me share three words with you so you can check up on yourself. The three words are (1) Method (2) Meaning and (3) Sequence. We believe the Bible teaches that the proper *method* of baptism is by immersion. That is, by being dipped into the water until your entire body is submerged. We believe that the proper *meaning* of baptism is to identify with the Lord Jesus in His death, burial and resurrection. We believe the proper *sequence* is to repent of your sins first, place your faith in Jesus and then you are willingly baptized as a profession of your faith in Christ. You are demonstrating that Jesus is your Lord by being baptized. You are preaching a personal gospel sermon when you are baptized. Acts 2:38 says, "Repent and be baptized." Not vice versa.

Every biblical scholar in the world will agree that the word "baptize" means to "dip" or "immerse." I am proud of other churches that have started baptizing by immersion, even though it is not part of their denominational history. For instance, my good friend John Ed Mathison is pastor of the exciting Frazier Memorial Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. They give converts a choice and he told me the majority of their converts to Christ request immersion. They used to have to borrow a Baptist Church to baptize in, but a few years ago, they bought a Church of Christ which adjoined their property. They turned the building into a family life center but they kept the baptistry so they could baptize by immersion. John Ed said one night he was baptizing in that gym and he looked over at the basketball goal near the baptistry. He burst out in laughter because there was a sign on the backboard that said, "NO DUNKING ALLOWED!" He said he went ahead and "dunked" anyway!

For obvious reasons, we do not believe that when little babies are sprinkled it does not constitute Christian baptism. It's not just the method (sprinkling); it's the sequence. They haven't had a chance to personally respond to the gospel. We don't believe Christian baptism is correct even for a consenting child, teenager, or adult if it is done by sprinkling, because you lose the meaning. Consider Romans 6:3-4: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order than, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

You may object, "But baptism isn't all that important!" It is not the most important thing in the Christian life but it was important enough for the Lord Jesus to set a good example for us. Let me ask you again as clearly as I can: Have you been baptized by immersion after you placed your faith in Jesus Christ?

Some of you have gotten your baptism out of proper sequence. You were "dunked" at some previous time in your life but later you were truly born again. If you weren't baptized again *after* you were saved, your baptism is out of sequence and you need to be baptized. Here's the second question:

## **2. Have I received the power of the Holy Spirit?**

Now you may feel pretty good because you could answer the first question in the affirmative. "Yes, I have been baptized since I was saved." But notice what happened after the baptism of Jesus: the Holy Spirit came upon Him. You may think that the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus was a unique experience that was reserved for Him alone but you would be wrong. Throughout the New Testament we are taught we must depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to function as believers. We don't just need the power of the Holy Spirit for special tasks like preaching, teaching, or going on mission trips. We need the power of the Holy Spirit for the simple, basic demands of the Christian life: to forgive others, to love others, to praise God in all circumstances, to encourage and help others. Those are things we cannot do in the strength of our own flesh.

The Holy Spirit probably won't descend upon you like a dove. When you become a Christian, you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means that you surrender

control of your life to Him. It's not you getting more of the Holy Spirit, it is the Holy Spirit getting more of you!

You may say, "How can I receive the power of the Holy Spirit?" Did you notice what Jesus was doing when the Holy Spirit descended on Him? First, He was being obedient to His Father in being baptized. That's a good place to start. Notice the steps again in Acts 2:38: "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." If you are being willfully disobedient to the Father about your baptism, do you think He is going to fill you with His power?

Next, don't miss the fact that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit descended on Him. It may be so simple you've missed it but if you need the power of the Holy Spirit: Ask God!

Look at what Jesus said in Luke 11:13: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

John Piper: "What should obedient children ask from their heavenly Father? The Holy Spirit. Not that we or Jesus did not already have the Holy Spirit within us – even the weakest believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). But the Holy Spirit is infinite and always has more of himself to give and his means of manifesting himself are so varied there is always some new experience awaiting those who go hard after his fullness."

Here's the third question:

### **3. Am I seeking to please God alone?**

The heavenly voice said, "This is my Son, whom I love. With Him I am well pleased." Can you honestly say that pleasing God is your prime consideration in life? You've heard the old adage; "You can't please all the people all the time." It's certainly true. Some time ago, a person who attends another local church spoke to me and said, "I don't know how you can possibly please all those people at Green Acres!" My reply was, "I can't! I don't even please my wife most of the time! There's no way I can please all the folks in our church!" We got a laugh out of that, then I said, "I decided years ago, that rather than trying to be a people-pleaser, I would devote my life and ministry in trying to please God. After, all, He's the only One to whom I am going to be ultimately accountable for what I did." And that really is my desire. I never intentionally try to displease or offend people. But I've discovered through the years that if I try my best to please God, that most of the people around me who are also trying to please God, those dear folks will generally be pleased as well.

If you haven't discovered it yet; you cannot serve God and mammon. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters." You will generally devote your life to trying to seek the approval of God or the approval of man and you cannot have both exclusively. Galatians 1:10 is a powerful verse: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."

No one enjoys criticism but you will often be criticized if you make it your goal to please God alone. There is a quotation from Abraham Lincoln that has given me great comfort in those times in my life when I have been criticized.

In the middle of the Civil War, Lincoln was the target of much criticism. He wrote: "I desire so to conduct the affairs of this administration that if at the end, when I come to lay down the reins of power, I have lost every other friend on earth, I shall, at least, have one friend left, and that friend shall be down inside of me [and I would add "in heaven"]. I do the very best I know how; the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing it to the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me will not amount to anything. If the end brings me out all wrong, then a legion of angels swearing I was right will make no difference."

What is "the end" for a Christian? When we stand before God will we hear Him say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Here's the final question:

#### **4. Do I know and appreciate my spiritual heritage?**

Unless you are really into genealogy, you don't have to trace your roots as far back as Dr. Luke did for Jesus. But you should be aware and be appreciative of those who are two or three generations before you. The Bible teaches that family is important. Look at this verse in 1 Timothy 5:3-4. The early church took care of their widows, they provided for all their needs. But they only did this if a woman had no other living family members to take care of her. In this passage we will all learn an important principle: "Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion in practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God." Look at that phrase, "repaying their parents and grandparents." Have you done that? Are you doing that? Have you ever taken time to contact your parents and grandparents and just say, "Thank you" for how they provided a great spiritual heritage? Not all of you had that, your parents or grandparents never took you to church: Don't be bitter. Let go of your resentment. All that means is those of us who had a good spiritual heritage should be much more thankful, because it is rare.

As I prepared this message, I thought back about my family. We had some real skeletons in the closet! I won't tell you about them. Instead, I remember the both my godly grandmothers. My mother's mother, Me Ma was a spirit-filled Methodist married to an alcoholic husband who never went to church but she never missed a Sunday. My father's dad died when he was 12 (he always told me he drank himself to death), and my grandmother outlived another husband; then she married a preacher and she was so proud of me when I surrendered to preach. She told me she had been praying for many years that God would call out a preacher from her family. Until she died in 1982, she and Papa Jack would spend hours every morning listening to my tapes and praying for me. I wish I could say, "Thank you grandmother."

My parents took us to church for as long as I can remember. My dad was a hunter, fisherman – a good old boy who always hurried out of church so he could light up his next cigarette. But when I was in the 8th grade, he got so excited about the Lord he started reading and marking up his Bible at home and he led our family in a devotional time around the breakfast table. He was still rough around the edges and his cigarettes finally killed him but God had done a work in his heart. I realized this week that I don't ever remember saying to my mother or dad, "Thank you for leading me spiritually. Thank you for taking me to church even when I didn't want to go." They are both in heaven now, and if you can hear me folks, "Thank you for being a good family for me."

Chances are many of you still have the opportunity to say thanks. Don't let another day go by without calling or hugging those family members and saying, "Thank you for the kind of family you provided for me."

## CONCLUSION

Are you still trying to answer the question "*Who was Jesus?*" Or have you come to the place where you are seeking to answer *Who is Jesus?* He is the Son of God and He wants to be your personal Lord. You can experience His life when you trust Him with your life and your future. Are you willing to follow Him? Will you trust Him as your Savior? Will you follow Him in baptism? Will you rely on the power of the Holy Spirit? Will you seek to live the kind of life where you seek God's approval? Only then can you fulfill what God intended for you from the very moment that He brought you into this world.

## OUTLINE

### I. THE PERSONAL WITNESS OF WATER BAPTISM

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. *Matthew 3:13-15*

### II. THE VISUAL WITNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### III. THE VERBAL WITNESS OF THE HEAVENLY FATHER

### IV. THE HISTORICAL WITNESS OF A STRONG FAMILY

In light of this text:

#### 1. Have I followed Jesus in believer's baptism?

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. *Romans 6:3-4*

#### 2. Have I received the power of the Holy Spirit?

"If you then, through you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will you Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" *Luke 11:13*

#### 3. Am I seeking to please God alone?

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. *Galatians 1:10*

#### 4. Do I know and appreciate my spiritual heritage?

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. *1 Timothy 5:3-4*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes