



“Who Are You?”
Luke 22:66-23:16

Idea: One’s acknowledgement of the identity of Jesus Christ has eternal consequences.

Intro: Introductions are interesting. Anytime you are in a social setting with people you have never met, it is highly likely that you will have to introduce yourself. The introverts in the room absolutely love doing this. What do you say in those settings? In my experience, those introductions go something like this, “I am John Doe, and I am a team lead in the marketing department.” The reason we introduce ourselves as such is because most people care more about what a person does than who a person is.

Thursday, I participated in a professional development session that focused on understanding others better. The first exercise asked us to go around our table and individually talk about our name, what it means and why it was given. When it was my turn I said, “My name is James Eugene Taylor III. As a third, I am named after my dad and grandpa. They both were known as ‘Jim,’ but my mom was adamant that I was to be called ‘James.’ My dad was an only son like I am. I only have daughters, so the Taylor name will die with me.” It was a neat experience to hear about others’ names and talk about mine. It was cool because no one ever asks others about their name. Instead, we ask about what people do for living, where they went to school, or what they like to do.

There is power in a name because it reveals a lot about who a person is. In a name, we can learn about an individual’s family, heritage, religious beliefs, and even where they were born. For example, if you meet a Mary Ann or a Betty Sue, then most likely she was born and raised in the South. Names are telling. I am reminded of a conversation in John Bunyan’s classic novel, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, between Porter and the pilgrim. When the pilgrim arrives at Porter’s lodge, Porter asks him, “What is your name?” Pilgrim answers, “My name is *Christian*, but my name at the first was *Graceless*.” This simple, inquisitive question reveals much about the pilgrim that Porter would never have known if he had not asked.

As Jesus is put on trial before both the Jews and the Romans, they wanted to know one thing, “Who are you?”. To learn His true identity, they asked a series of questions: “Are you the Christ? Are you the Son of God? And are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus had spent three years preaching and teaching on the Kingdom of God. He had spoken of His relationship as Son to the Heavenly Father. He had performed countless miracles that were unexplainable unless He is God. On top of that, many people had witnessed heaven break out on earth as angels declared Jesus to be the Christ (2:11) and the Father proclaimed Jesus to be the Son (3:22). If His work and the experiences around Him were not enough, then the religious and Roman leaders could have just asked Jesus about His name. The angel Gabriel told Joseph to take Mary as his wife even though she was pregnant. The child she carried was of the Holy Spirit, and they were to name the boy Jesus because “*he will save his people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21). The name Jesus means, “The Lord saves.” Who is Jesus? He is the Savior.

Read Luke 22:66-23:16.

Inquiry: Jesus is on trial, having been accused of blasphemy and sedition. He will endure six separate trials. Three of them will be before the Jewish leaders, and three will be before Roman authorities. The first two have been completed. The third trial that begins in 22:66 is before the Sanhedrin, the highest court in Israel. Jesus will be found guilty and sent to Pontius Pilate. He will then send the Lord to Herod Antipas who will send Him back to Pilate for the final verdict.

Who was this Pilate? He was a career politician. Emperor Tiberius had appointed him as governor of Judea in 26AD, and he served in this position for about ten years. He was a shrewd but a harsh and insensitive leader. Early on during his administration over Jerusalem, he had caused a riot by his cavalier disregard of Jewish sensibilities regarding idolatry. Unlike former governors, Pilate refused to order his soldiers to remove the images of Caesar from their standards when marching into Jerusalem, which caused an ugly riot. On another occasion, he raided the Jewish treasury, used only for service to God, to pay for an aqueduct. He would be removed from his position after ordering his cavalry to attack Samaritans who were assembled at Mt. Gerazim for worship. The fourth-century Christian historian, Eusebius records that his life was in a downward spiral after that, which eventually led to Pilate taking his own life.

Who was this Herod Antipas? He was tetrarch of Galilee. He was a half-Jew who was nothing more than a puppet ruler. This is the same Herod whom John the Baptist confronted about his wife. Herod was married to Herodias. She was the daughter of Herod's half-brother Aristobulus, which made her his niece. This family connection is not even the most disturbing part of this relationship. Herodias was the wife of Herod Philip, one of Herod's other brothers, when he met her in Rome. Obviously, he liked what he saw, so he seduced and persuaded her to leave Philip and become his wife. This wicked web of family relationships would make the most depraved guest on The Jerry Springer Show blush. John the Baptist, however, did not shy away from it. He called out the sin of both Herod and Herodias, which resulted in his imprisonment. Oddly, Herod did enjoy listening to John speak, but Herodias hated the prophet. Finally, in a drunken stupor, Herod agreed to the request of Herodias' daughter to have John beheaded (Matt 14:1-10).

With this contextual background, let's tackle the great question being asked of Jesus in these trials. Everyone interrogating Jesus is asking, "Who are you?". They questioned Jesus not to believe on Him for salvation as the Christ. They did so only to condemn Him. There are three dynamics at play in this questioning, and they are the same dynamics we wrestle with today when considering who Jesus is.

1. The Court of Public Opinion

Think about Jesus. Has there ever been a more divisive person in history than the Lord Jesus Christ? Anyone who has ever heard His name and learned what He did, has developed an opinion about Him. This was doubly true of those who stood in judgment over Jesus in these trials. The Jewish leaders and members of the Sanhedrin identified Jesus as a false teacher and accused Him of being an insurrectionist (22:71; 23:2, 10). Spiritless Herod treated Jesus as a fool, mocking Him with his questions and dressing Him up as a king (23:11). Pilate recognized Jesus as a guiltless man who had not broken any laws, but by punishing Him, He nonetheless showed that he did not see Jesus for who claimed to be (23:4, 14-16). The court of public opinion believed Jesus to be a liar or a lunatic, but He definitely was not the Lord.

What is your opinion of Jesus? Who do believe He is? There are many people today who believe Jesus was a good man who did many great things. They see Him as a good and moral teacher, who loved people and advocated for equality. Perhaps, like them, you have enjoyed and appreciated His teachings and contributions to life. Others, obviously, are not as friendly toward His life and ministry. They vehemently reject Jesus and anything associated with Him. You might fall into this camp.

The court of public opinion rarely agrees with what Jesus believed and said about Himself.

2. The Reality of Perceived Identity

While there may be debate among people about the identity of Jesus Christ, He was certain about who He was. Jesus identified Himself as the Savior of the world, the Son of God, and the Sovereign King (22:67, 70; 23:3). He was never confused about his life and mission. He told Zacchaeus, “*the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost*” (19:10). When debating with the Pharisees, Jesus described Himself as “*the light of the world*” and “*the light of life*” who knew where He had come from and where He was going (John 8:12-14). As Jesus stands before and is questioned by the Sanhedrin and Pilate, He does not shrink back from who He is.

As we consider the identity of Jesus, we too ought not back away from His claims to be the Savior, the Son, and the Sovereign. No one has articulated this reality better than C. S. Lewis. In his book *Mere Christianity*, he says:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him [that is, Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. 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 a 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.... 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.”

The reality of Jesus’ perceived identity was that He is Savior, Son, and Sovereign.

3. The Magnitude of Personal Faith

In each of the trials and with each person that Jesus interacted with throughout His life and ministry, there was an opportunity to believe on Him for salvation. Even as the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin questioned and ridiculed Jesus, His claims were an opportunity for faith and repentance. Joseph of Arimathea was there during that trial, and He chose to believe on Jesus (23:50). Similarly, Pilate was given a chance to faith into Jesus. They discussed the charge of claiming to be the Christ and the King of the Jews, and they talked about truth and what it is (23:3; John 18:37-38). Pilate’s wife was even tormented by dreams about Jesus, so she warned Pilate to not touch the “*righteous man*” (Matt 27:19). He refused to heed God’s gracious offering. Herod’s chance came earlier when he used to enjoy listening to the hard preaching of John the Baptist. Sadly, he closed his heart off to the gospel when he beheaded John. Therefore, as Herod questioned and mocked Jesus, the Lord never spoke a word to him.

Pilate, Herod Antipas, and most of the Sanhedrin rejected Jesus’ identity as Savior, Son, and Sovereign. As such, they earned the payment for their sinful rebellion against the Lord (Rom 6:23). This passage reminds us that one’s acknowledgement of the identity of Jesus Christ has eternal consequences. What we do with Jesus determines whether or not we will spend eternity with God or away from God...in heaven or in hell.

Do you see the magnitude of personal faith? Those who faith into Jesus as their Savior, believing He is the Son of God and Sovereign King over all experience three glorious realities:

- Redemption
As Savior, Jesus forgives and removes all sin from their lives. All throughout His ministry, Jesus forgives sin (5:20; 7:48).
- Family
As the Son, Jesus adopts sinners into His family (Gal 4:5).

- Kingdom
As the Sovereign, Jesus brings His people into the Kingdom so that they serve Him as priests (Rev 1:6; 5:10).

Conclusion: Jesus was repeatedly asked, “Who are you?”. His response in word and action was, “I am the Savior of the world, the Son of God, and the Sovereign King. When you are asked a similar question, what is your response? When Porter asked this question of the pilgrim, he responded by saying, “My name is *Christian*, but my name at the first was *Graceless*.” The same could be said for all of us today who claim the glorious name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our name is now Christian, but it has not always been so. That title was given to us the moment we believed, the day we took God at His Word and accepted the gift of eternal life He offered us. Prior to the name change, we were better known as Graceless.

Many people refused to believe what Jesus’ words and actions said about Him. Those, however, who chose to believe on Jesus were transformed and made new. They who were once graceless became full of grace in Jesus.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14