

The Apostles' Creed

Part 3

And in Jesus Christ

Matthew 16:13-17

With Study Questions

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When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

¹⁴ So they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16:13-17).

Introduction

Having dinner with a friend I had been praying for and to whom I had been making an effort to present the gospel, he asked me a question – which was really more of an objection: "I understand your desire to see me believe in God (which I do), but I just can't get behind all this talk about Jesus; why so much emphasis on Jesus?"

In part I understood his objection. Contemporary Christians will often speak of Jesus in such familiar and casual terms that He may appear to be their imaginary friend or a capricious Greek or Roman god who is inconvenienced or offended by the lesser gods by which He is surrounded.

This mentality gained momentum in the 19th century, creating a stage for the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche's infamous penultimate statement – the statement he made before his most well-known "God is dead" announcement. Nietzsche first explained how all the other gods died. He explained that "when God stood up and said I am the one true God – the God you are to all worship, the other gods died laughing."

There is a tension between the *nearness* of Jesus and the *holiness* of Jesus that must be ever before us – we might call it His *immanence* and His *transcendence* – the Jesus who is here and the Jesus out there. This tension can be found when we compare certain passages in Scripture where Jesus calls His disciples "**friends**" (John 15:15) and yet we read that "**every knee should bow**" before His name (Philippians 2:9, 10).

What bothered my friend was something theologians call the *kerygma* (the proclamation). The kerygma are affirmations about Christ – summaries of the person and work of Jesus; who He is, what He has accomplished. This is central to the Christian faith – central to Scripture. Often, while speaking with children seeking communicant membership, we ask them who the Bible is about. They may answer God or Jesus – both answers equally correct.

What we notice in the Apostles' Creed is a very short affirmation regarding the Father (Almighty – Maker of Heaven and Earth). We also read a very short affirmation of the Third Person of the Trinity (I believe in the Holy Ghost). The vast majority of the Apostles' Creed pertains to the person and work of Jesus Christ – the Father's Only Son, Our Lord.

In the passage we read, we see a dialogue between Jesus and His disciples (Peter as the spokesman). Jesus is asking who people say that He is. He hears a variety of answers then asks them who they say that He is. They (Peter) gives an answer that is so amazingly correct that Jesus is quick to reveal that their ability to answer correctly came straight from heaven. What is the answer? It seems simple, an answer our Sunday school children can give--**"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

I Believe in Jesus Christ

I Believe in Jesus Christ – Something unique to the Christian faith is the significance of belief in a person over simple ideas. Not that ideas or propositions aren't important and necessary but they revolve around and clarify our understanding of the person and work of Christ (who He is, what He did, does and will do), not in opposition to, but over and above whatever call their might be in the lives of people.

The focus of attention for Christianity is Jesus over and above the church. One will hear never-ending indictments against the behavior of church (both locally and historically), but one is hard-pressed to even hear accusations against Jesus. It is quite easy to find blemishes in church history and one needn't look beyond Scripture.

When I'm reminded by my non-Christian friends of the Crusades or Inquisition (popular dark points in church history), I don't bother trying to defend the church, I rather site the dark points in the history of God's people in the Old and New Testaments. The darkest people Jesus dealt with were priests. The Apostle Paul had very harsh things to say to those within the

boundaries of God's covenant people. But we're not to believe in the church the way we're to believe in Jesus.

When the Christian says "I believe in Jesus Christ" he is not saying it the same way a person might say "I believe in Confucius, Mohammed, Gandhi, Buddha, Freud, Marx or even Moses." When the Christian says he believes in Jesus he is not saying it the same way a person says he believes in America, or Presbyterianism or Communism or Socialism or even Judeo-Christian ethics. Certainly the Christian trusts in what Jesus taught and should make every effort toward obedience, but more importantly the Christian is trusting in what Jesus did – something we learn by His very name.

Jesus

I wasn't raised in the church, so it took quite some time before I realize that Jesus Christ wasn't Jesus' actual name. Jesus is His name, Christ is His title and both have significance. It might be more accurate to say Jesus, the Christ. We learn a host of things by this name and title.

Jesus is Greek for Joshua, meaning "**God is Savior**" or "**Jehovah is salvation.**" It was for this reason that the angel instructed Joseph, saying "**And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). In the same way that through one man the entire world was lost in sin, "**through the One, Jesus Christ**" we "**receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness**" (Romans 5:17).

Belief in Jesus is not like the Home Depot slogan, *you can do it, we can help*. Belief in Jesus comes through the God-given realization that we can't do it, we can't contribute, we can't take one step toward heaven – heaven has come to us in Christ. And that second name, Christ, helps us understand more fully.

Christ

Occasionally someone will jokingly (I think) suggest that I, as a minister, have a direct line to God. They think I can help change the weather, or remove the demons from their new house or turn the tide of fortune in their direction or some such thing. I generally just laugh that off, letting them know that my access to God is the same as anyone else's, through Christ. As

an older person who has studied Scripture and experienced a bit of life, I might be able to offer you some understanding, guidance and support. But when it comes to you and God, I need to become invisible.

John the Baptist, sensing an undue trust in people had in him, made it clear **“I am not the Christ...He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:28, 30)**. When it comes to access to God, interaction with God (prayer), guidance from God, etc. there is only one Christ.

Christ is a word corresponding with the word Messiah (in the Septuagint) meaning anointed. It holds the idea of being anointed to a particular office in the Old Testament – specifically priests, prophets and kings. These offices in the Old Testament had an instructional element to them – that we might begin to grasp the person and work of the Messiah – the Deliverer.

As our Prophet, Jesus, by His Spirit and word reveals the will of God (John 15:15) in all things concerning edification and salvation (Acts 20:32; Ephesians 4:11-13; John 20:31).

As our Priest, Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice without spot or blemish to God (Hebrews 9:14, 28) to reconcile sinful man to God and He ever makes intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

As our King, we recognize the hand of Jesus behind all human affairs. He is our lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22), He rewards obedience (James 1:25; Revelation 2:10), correcting sins (Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19), preserves, supports His children while restraining and overcoming all their enemies (1 Corinthians 15:25; Psalm 110:1, 2) powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, (Romans 14:10–11) and our good; (Romans 8:28) and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel. (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9, Psalm 2:8–9).

When a person says “I believe in Jesus Christ” he is saying that he believes in no one else and nothing else to be approved before his Maker – that in Christ the demands of God’s law have been fully satisfied. When we come to the Lord’s Table, the elements represent His body and His blood and no one else’s. And the only introspection we are to entertain is if we believe in Him in sincerity of heart (Ephesians 6:24).

Questions for Study

1. What are some reasons people might struggle with belief in Jesus rather than the more general belief in God (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the difficulties that might arise between the immanence and transcendence of Jesus (pages 3, 4).
3. What is the kerygma (page 3)?
4. What does it mean/not mean, to believe in Jesus (pages 3, 4)?
5. What do we learn from the name *Jesus* (page 4)?
6. Explain the word Christ and some of its implications (pages 4, 5).
7. What are the offices of Christ and what do they entail (page 5)?