

## Christ or Criminal

Jesus is a divisive figure.

The polarizing nature of Jesus is clearly evident in the final 24-48 hours of His life. Tension festered and grew within the religious establishment for the duration of His public ministry. What was once just an annoyance of a “country bumpkin” from Galilee had now become a roaring fire of hatred that threatened to engulf the entire city of Jerusalem. Interestingly, the man who was the target of the hostility and at the center of the maelstrom was deemed innocent of any wrongdoing by the civil authorities. Neither the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, nor the Jewish ruler of Galilee, Herod Antipas, found Jesus guilty of sedition or any other crime. It seems quite confusing then that this man would soon die a criminal's death at the hands of Roman soldiers.

What is it about this individual that makes Him such a troublesome figure? Why does He pose such a threat to the religious leaders, the scribes, and the elders? **In Jesus' case, the problem was rarely what He did that caused people to avoid or reject Him.** Who would react with hatred toward a compassionate healer who meets the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those hurting and downtrodden? Likely very few. As a matter of fact, just days before the events of Luke 22:66-23:25, the crowds celebrated Jesus by laying down their cloaks before Him and lifting up their voices in exultation as He entered Jerusalem: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Lk 19:38). Just a few days later the jubilant crowd had turned into a raging mob. The truth is, **people spurned Jesus for who He claimed to be.** The reason for this is quite simple and obvious once we recognize who He is. Let's consider three implications of His true identity based on Luke 22:66-71.

First, **Jesus is the Christ** (Lk 22:67-68). The Greek title *Christ* and its Hebrew counterpart *Messiah* both mean “Anointed One.” They refer to the long-awaited individual who would reign on the throne of David and whose kingdom would never end. The entire Old Testament spoke of this Anointed One. Israel and its religious leaders awaited the glorious arrival of His kingdom and His rule that would free them from Roman oppression. Amazingly, Jesus' birth announcement declared Him to be this king (Lk 1:31-33). Yet Jesus, the Christ, didn't arrive in the fashion the religious leaders and crowds expected. They were livid that Jesus' arrival undermined their authority rather than bolstering it.

Second, **Jesus is the Son of Man** (Lk 22:69). This most commonly used title for Jesus emphasizes His humanity. It stands in stark contrast to the royal title, Christ, and the divine title, Son of God. Paul declares that in Jesus “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col 2:9). In other words, Jesus is the embodiment of God’s original human design - sinless and in perfect harmony with its Creator. He is the second Adam, truly human and fully God. The hatred directed toward Jesus has its epicenter in the gracious and sovereign will of God. For believers, it is reassuring to know that the Father’s redemptive plan is unfolding in the bloody events of the Lord’s suffering. Jesus Himself said that He “came to seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10). The flipside is that those who reject the Savior and the redemption He offers will remain under judgment - a reality that many disbelieve and some vehemently oppose. Hence, the Gospel message and its Messenger are despised and condemned. Jesus Himself says in Luke 12:49-51, “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” The baptism Jesus is referring to is the suffering He would endure on the cross. It is this message of the cross that will ultimately create a division, welcoming some to salvation and condemning others to judgment.

Third, **Jesus is the Son of God** (Lk 22:70-71). The writer of Hebrews indicates that Jesus, the “Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being” (Heb 1:3). Wow! Jesus is in the very nature God. He is the second person of the Trinity, co-equal with the Father. He is “worthy ... to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Rev 5:12). Jesus’ final identity claim caused the high priest to tear his garments in sanctimony, calling Him a blasphemer (Matt 26:65). Those gathered were at an impasse - either they would need to accept Jesus as God and submit to Him or reject and eliminate Him from their life. Jesus’ claim does the same for every man, woman, and child. Either the response is angry self-righteousness or humble submission and worship.

It is quite impossible to fully grasp the amazing disparity that seems to exist between the humble Servant and the glorious Son. To read the accounts of the trials and execution of Jesus and to consider His glorious identity overwhelms the heart to the point of breaking and stretches the mind to the point of splitting. John MacArthur describes Jesus, the God-man, in the following way:

We see Him humiliated and yet majestic. We see Him suffering and yet exalted. We see Him punished and yet innocent. We see Him hated and yet loving. We see Him subjected and yet sovereign.

As followers of Jesus it is difficult to grasp the animosity and disgust that emanated from the events surrounding Jesus' final days. Yet, we too must ask ourselves how we respond to the identity of Jesus - the Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. Is He truly your King who rules your life, every moment of every day? Is He the Son of Man who reminds you of your constant need for friendship, grace, and forgiveness? Is He the Son of God who is glorious, exalted, and worthy of your worship? We must all make our choice.

***Revelation 5:11-14 (ESV)*** - *"Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!' And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' and the elders fell down and worshiped."*