

⁴⁰After hearing his words, some of the people said, “This is truly the Prophet.” ⁴¹Others said, “This is the Christ.” But some said, “Surely the Christ does not come from Galilee, does he? ⁴²Doesn’t the Scripture say that the Christ comes from David’s descendants and from the little town of Bethlehem where David lived?” ⁴³So the people were divided because of him. (EHV)

Theme: Who is Jesus?

1. Many are ignorant of the answer
2. We know only by the Holy Spirit

Have you ever seen a man-on-the-street interview? You probably seen it before on a talk show, a youtube channel, or on some website. It’s when an interviewer goes to a particular location, like a street, and asks random people a set of questions. More often than not when you watch such interviews the ignorance of the people being interviewed is amazing—if not a little frustrating. The questions asked in such interviews are usually fairly easy, sometimes they are opinion questions, but time and time again people give the wrong answers or are completely ignorant of the subject, even if they always pretend to be experts!

If you were to walk around town giving a man-on-the-street interview and ask everyone a single question: “who is Jesus” you would get a variety of answers. Some answers you would be pleased with, most you wouldn’t. Everyone would most likely have an opinion in one way or another, but the ignorance of the truth, or maybe the blatant hostility toward the truth, by most of the people would probably shock and appall you.

The same was the case even during the time of Jesus—everyone had an opinion about Jesus, some were right, most were wrong. But this wasn’t a man-on-the-street interview. This was what they thought of him after listening to him preach.

We’ve been talking about the answer to this question: who is Jesus lately, haven’t we? We discussed a number of times that Jesus is true God from eternity, and yet, also true man. We have seen that Jesus is the Savior—the one promised so long ago. And today we see that Jesus is the Christ.

Our text takes place during the Festival of shelters, or Tabernacles, a week-long festival remembering how the people lived in tents or other temporary shelters for 40 years as they wandered the wilderness. They were also reminded how God brought them out of the wilderness and gave them the Promised Land. This was a week-long feast in which the Jews celebrated God’s goodness and mercy; and Jesus decided to attend.

Half-way through the feast Jesus began to preach. On the last day of the feast Jesus said **If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink! As the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from deep within the person who believes in me.** John explains that Jesus meant that those who believe in him will have the Holy Spirit, which had not yet been given to them. When the people heard these words they were divided as to who Jesus was and they continued arguing with each other as to who Jesus was—as they had been doing earlier in the chapter.

Some said, **This is truly the Prophet.** These people were referring to a prophecy God gave through Moses in Deuteronomy 18. **The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brother Israelites. Listen to him.** We know that this was a prophecy about Christ. Both the Apostle Peter and Stephen in the book of Acts say that Jesus is the fulfillment of this passage.

But some Jews did not think this prophecy was about the Messiah. We can tell in these verses that some Jews made a distinction between the Christ and the prophet. They thought that the prophet was another forerunner of Jesus like John the Baptist was. These people were impressed by Jesus' words enough to call him a prophet, but they still were not believers that Jesus was the Christ.

Some did believe that Jesus was the Christ, but others denied it. These unbelievers knew that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, as the well-known prophecy from Micah, our first lesson for today, tells us. But they also knew that Jesus was from Nazareth—so how could he be the Messiah?

But this isn't the only prophecy about where the Messiah would come from. We read in Isaiah chapter nine, **In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan.**

Why is Galilee honored? Because that is where the Savior of the world would come from. The Jews who believed didn't have a problem that Christ came from Nazareth—because they knew Isaiah's prophecy. But the unbelieving Jews either didn't know about Isaiah's prophecy or they simply chose to ignore it.

The unbelieving Jews also had the excuse that Christ didn't come from David's line. Or so they thought. We have the genealogies of Christ written down for us in the gospels of Matthew and Luke—we know for a fact that Jesus came from the line of David. But the Jews didn't have this advantage. However, the Jewish society is one that loves genealogies. It would have not been hard for the Jews to trace Jesus' genealogy back to David's time. So, the two excuses that the unbelieving Jews give are just that, excuses; and they hold absolutely no merit.

This wasn't the only time people were divided as to who Christ was. Earlier during the Feast of Tabernacles some of the Jews said about Christ: **He is a good man;** while others said **No, he deceives the people.** And we see many other examples throughout the New Testament of people hearing the gospel and some believed while others made excuses and rejected the teaching that they heard.

The same still happens today—the world is divided as to who Jesus is. Some will say that Jesus was a good man, a spiritual leader, but nothing more. Others will say that Jesus was a prophet of God, but not our Savior. Or a son of God, but not God himself. Others will claim that Jesus and his followers have deceived many into thinking he is the Promised Savior. Then another group of people think that Jesus has brainwashed countless into believing the ridiculous and impossible for their own personal gain.

Why so many opinions about Jesus? Some of it is ignorance—they honestly don't know for whatever reason, maybe no one ever told them who Jesus is, they were taught wrong when they were younger and never bothered to open up a Bible to find out for themselves. And then there are others who should know, or did know at one time in their lives, but for one reason or another they chose to reject Jesus, and make excuses as to why they can't believe it.

It can get frustrating at times, can't it! This is such a fundamental truth. And it's a basic truth; it's not as if this is something that Christians have been keeping secret for thousands of years; this is part and parcel of the gospel message that Christians have been spreading around the world. How can people not know this, how can be so ignorant of the truth or the stubborn to believe the gospel?

And it becomes so frustrating for us we are tempted just to give up sharing the Word with others. We figure it's not worth the hassle. So many people hear the gospel and so many people reject its truth, that it's simply not worth it; it's a lost cause. There is little use of sharing the gospel with someone, and we certainly aren't going to waste our time defending the truth or arguing with people concerning that truth.

However, we were once in the same place. We were born in the darkness of sin and ignorance concerning the truth of salvation. We didn't know God, were his enemies and we didn't care to know anything about him. But the light of the gospel shines in our hearts. How? By the work of the Holy Spirit, he created faith in our hearts through the waters of baptism. He kept us in the true faith through the Word and the sacrament of Holy Communion. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, we see the light of salvation in the glory of Christ. He has enlightened our hearts so that we know the truth about who Jesus is and everything he has done for us. Without the Holy Spirit we'd still be in the darkness of ignorance failing the test about Jesus.

Because of the Holy Spirit we confess along with the believing Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But what exactly does Christ mean? We hear this word so often that whenever we do, we don't give it a second thought. It may seem that Christ is just one of many names for Jesus; but it's much more. Christ is the Greek word for the Hebrew word Messiah. Messiah is the name the Jews used to refer to the Savior who was to come—the Promised Savior. Both Christ and Messiah mean the Anointed One; so, when we call Jesus “Christ,” we are calling him the Anointed One—the long-promised Savior.

When Christ was baptized he was anointed by the Holy Spirit, who came down upon him in the form of a dove. We learn in the book of Acts that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with Power. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus to equip him for his work as the Messiah.

The work of the Messiah was to save the whole world from everlasting damnation. Again and again we read that Christ came to save us from our sins. Jesus did this by living his life perfectly, suffering and dying in our place, and rising from the dead. By the work of the Christ, we are saved from all our sins and everlasting torment in hell.

Because Jesus is the Christ we want to go out and tell others about him. We know that not everyone believes that Jesus is the Anointed One so we confess our faith. Those who do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah will not be given the gift of eternal life. Like God, we want all to come the knowledge of the truth—the knowledge that Christ is the Messiah, and so we share the Word with them. And we pray that the Word would not return to the Lord empty, but that the Holy Spirit will work through the Word, shared by us and bring many to faith.

This is, after all, why the Word was written. I think of what we sang as the response to our Verse of the Day—from John 20, **these (words) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

The purpose of John's gospel—and the entire purpose of the Bible is so that we would believe that Jesus is Christ, the Messiah—the Promised Savior, so that we would be saved. Therefore we remain in the Word ourselves and spread the gospel. And when someone asks us, “who is Jesus” we'd testify to the truth and others will believe it as well. Amen.