

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church
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**What to do when Jesus asks you *THE* Question
Matthew 21:1-11; 22:41-46**

It's that time of year again. No, I don't mean Palm Sunday and Holy Week and Easter, when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Well, then again, of course it *is* that time of year again. This is Palm Sunday after all, and next week is Easter. But that's not what I mean. I'm talking about the inevitable appearance of special TV programs devoted to the question of Jesus: Did he exist? If so, who precisely was he? Why did he die? Can we trust what the NT documents purport to tell us about him? Is there really solid and substantial evidence that he rose from the dead?

More times than not, these special semi-documentary features appear on the Discovery Channel or the History Channel. If not on TV, you can almost count on Time magazine or National Geographic or some other periodical to ask the same questions.

I generally don't devote much time to watching or reading these reports because the consultants who provide the answers to these many questions are typically the sort of *theologians whose analysis is dictated by a worldview that is decidedly anti-supernatural*. What I mean is that *their worldview dictates how they are permitted to answer the relevant questions*.

For example, "No," they declare with a tone of authority and disdain for those who disagree with them, "No, of course Jesus wasn't God. Of course he didn't rise from the dead. We know that he wasn't God and didn't rise from the dead because dead people don't come back to life. And we know that dead people don't come back to life because there is no supernatural power of a supernatural 'God' who would be present to pull off such a momentous and history making stunt. And even if that sort of 'God' *did* exist, he wouldn't intervene in human affairs to do such a thing." In other words, the deck is stacked from the beginning. The anti-supernaturalist worldview of these individuals dictates to them what can and cannot be said in answer to these many questions about Jesus.

Of course that doesn't mean these aren't important questions. In fact, I am of the mind that no other question has any importance until we have answered the question: *Who is Jesus?* That is to say, when it comes to evaluating the eternal significance of life's most important questions, all others pale in comparison, all others take a backseat, all others must be relegated to a secondary status. And that isn't to say these questions aren't important.

Think about it for a moment. It's important that we ask and answer questions like, "For whom should you vote in this year's Presidential election?" Or again, "What can we do to fix our immigration crisis and reduce our skyrocketing national debt?" Or again, "What, if anything, can be done to improve our public education in America?" Or again, "How can we reduce the number of earthquakes in Oklahoma or the number of abortions country wide?" I could list countless other important questions, but I trust you get my point.

But when viewed from the perspective of eternity, no other question really matters. When it comes down to the issue of life and death and heaven and hell, the only question that counts, the only question that must be answered, is: *"Who is Jesus?"*

I can assure you of one thing. When Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died recently of a heart attack and when former first lady Nancy Reagan died of old age and when Aubrey McClendon died in that horrific car crash only a couple of weeks ago, the only question that mattered to any of them was: "Who is Jesus? What is he to me? Do I believe that he is God in human flesh? Do I believe that he lived a sinless life and died a death in the place of sinners like me, enduring in my place the wrath and judgment of God that I deserved? And did he, in fact, rise again from the dead?"

And that is the only question that ought to matter to you today. You may think otherwise. You may think that other issues are more pressing, more urgent, more relevant and practical to your life. But if Scalia and Reagan and McClendon could speak to us from the dead they would tell you otherwise. Of course, they can't. But I can. So today

I want to give you what I believe is the only credible, meaningful, historically reliable answer to the question. It's the one that Jesus himself supplied when pressed to do so by the people of his own day in the first century.

You see, it's one thing for *me* to ask you the question, "Who is Jesus?" It's another thing entirely when *Jesus himself* asks you that question. And that is precisely what he does here in Matthew 22:41-45.

This strange story is remarkable for a number of reasons, one of which is the way in which Jesus turns the tables on his inquisitors. They've been pummeling him with questions for days, questions like:

"By what authority are you doing these things?" (Matt. 21:23).

"Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17).

If a woman has been married seven times in this age, whose wife will she be in the "resurrection" (Matt. 22:27)?

"Which is the great commandment in the Law?" (Matt. 22:36).

Jesus has had enough, so he decides to ask them (and us) a question. I suspect that in one sense the religious leaders of his day were ok with that. After all, every time they asked him a question he provided an answer to which they had no reply. In fact, we read in Matthew 22:46 that ***"no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions."*** Well, I guess not! You can almost hear them muttering as they slipped away into the shadows: "Man, this isn't getting us anywhere. Every time we open our mouths he makes fools of us."

In addition to the fact that it is Jesus who now asks the questions, another reason this brief passage strikes me the way it does is because of the ***shocking contrast*** it presents to us regarding who Jesus is. It isn't too far off, in fact it's only days away, when Jesus will be arrested, stripped, savagely beaten, viciously flogged, spit upon, mocked, a crown of thorns pressed in upon his brow, and eventually nailed to a cross.

And yet it is here, in Matthew 22, that we see a far different portrait of the carpenter from Nazareth. Here, coming from his own lips, is a description of Jesus as the Son of the Most High God who will soon be seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. Here, coming from his own lips, is a declaration by Jesus that it is beneath ***his own nail-pierced feet*** that all the enemies of God will be progressively but most assuredly and finally subjected.

How can this be? How can the man who will be treated so savagely in only a few days say with such confidence and authority that he is David's Lord, that he is to be exalted to the place of highest dignity and power, that he is going to utterly subdue and defeat all those who oppose him and the kingdom of God that he came to establish?

So, what I'm asking you to do today is turn your attention away from the image of Jesus as a baby in a manger. After all, it's not Christmas. It's Easter. Furthermore, I don't want you to think of him primarily as a twelve-year-old boy in the Temple, confounding the leading biblical scholars of his day. Try not to envision him as an itinerant teacher traveling the dusty roads of Palestine, healing the sick, driving out demons, and ministering to the needy. Neither do I want you to think of him just yet as a sacrifice for sinners, hanging suspended from a cross. It isn't because these images and portraits of Jesus aren't true. They surely are!

But today Jesus himself is forcing us to think of him in profoundly different terms. ***He is forcing upon us a portrait of himself as the ascended, exalted, and enthroned Son of God, seated at the right hand of the majesty on high, slowly but surely bringing all his enemies into subjection to his sovereign rule.***

What is the Meaning of the Triumphal Entry?

Yet another thing that makes this episode so poignant is that it comes immediately upon the heels of our Lord's so-called ***triumphal entry*** into Jerusalem on what we celebrate as Palm Sunday. But there isn't much in what happened that we would typically describe as being triumphant! Consider what happened.

Although scholars disagree on the precise date of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem, the most likely time was ***March 29, 33 a.d.*** The excitement in Jerusalem was virtually thick enough you could cut it with a knife. Passover was upon them and the city of Jerusalem, usually with about 30,000 people, swelled to as many as 150,000 during the week that would lead to the celebration of Passover.

Word had likely spread that a prophet from Galilee had miraculously raised a man from the dead. Lazarus's death had caused tremendous grief, as he was a prominent citizen. But then this man named Jesus showed up four days after he had died and declared, "Lazarus, come forth!" No one present could deny that a miracle had occurred. Lazarus was alive!

Jewish Expectations

Israel had long looked forward to the return of Yahweh to their land to deliver them from oppressive Roman rule. It was high time, as far as they were concerned, for God to fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David and bring peace and prominence to Israel and to restore her former glory and to rule over her in the land that God had promised to them all.

If you had been present on that day in a.d. 33, and had the opportunity to take a survey among average Jewish men and women regarding their expectations and desires of the long-awaited Messiah, you might well have heard things like this:

"We don't want a Messiah who, when slapped in the face, turns the other cheek and meekly invites the attacker to slap him on the other. We want a Messiah who will wield his sword and slaughter his enemies and ours.

We don't want a Messiah who dies for others. We want a Messiah who kills.

We don't want a Messiah whose message is love and peace and forgiveness. We want a King who will denounce Rome and rout their armies and put us back in power in our own land.

We don't want a Messiah who tells us to love our enemies. We want one who will line them up on their knees and behead them if they refuse to become his followers."

Make no mistake. The day is coming when Jesus will descend to this earth not on a donkey but on a great white warhorse (Revelation 19). He will no longer speak words of peace and love but of judgment and wrath. And yes, all his enemies will be destroyed. The time for salvation is now, but it won't last forever.

We read back in Matthew 21 that Jesus gave instructions to his disciples to search out and find the most impressive war-horse in the land, a regal stallion of strength and power. Well, not exactly. He tells them to go obtain a *donkey* on which he would ride into Jerusalem. A donkey? Yes. But why a donkey?

If Jesus is presenting himself as Israel's King, why does he come in *humility*? Why not with all the regal fanfare and power and glamor of a President or Prime Minister or other visiting dignitary? And why a donkey? Why not in a golden chariot behind six horses?

When Jesus came into Jerusalem in this manner he was setting the stage for the question that he would later ask the people and all the religious leaders, the question that he is asking you and me today.

One OT prophecy that foretold this return of Yahweh to his people is found in Zechariah 9. Matthew refers to it in Matthew 21:5,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

The selection of a donkey and the decision to ride it into the city was a calculated choice by Jesus designed to make it unmistakably clear that he was the King of Israel returning to the holy city and the people who had long awaited his arrival.

Nowhere else in the gospels do we ever read of Jesus riding an animal. “His decision to ride a donkey for the last mile or two into the city, when he has walked more than a hundred miles from Caesarea Philippi, can hardly have been a matter of physical necessity; his disciples apparently had no such need” (R. T. France, 775-6). Those arriving for Passover were expected to do so on foot. To ride the last mile among an entirely pedestrian crowd was a deliberate gesture by Jesus to make clear his claim to be Messiah.

It isn't simply that the crowds are declaring that *Jesus is King*. In doing so, they are declaring that *Caesar isn't!* As one author put it, by entering Jerusalem and accepting the acclaim of the crowds that he was King Jesus “set in motion a series of events that could result only in either his overthrow of the Romans and the current religious establishment – or his brutal death. He has crossed the point of no return; there would be no turning back. Caesar could allow no rival kings” (Kostenberger and Taylor, *The Final Days of Jesus*).

Our Response

Your first and most fundamental response to Jesus must be to acknowledge him as King. Your King! He has come to this earth to establish himself as your Ruler, your Lord, the one who alone is Sovereign over your life. Yes, he is a Savior. Yes, he is a Teacher. Yes, he is a Friend. But he is also our King and must be recognized and treated as such.

Jesus presents himself to us as King, whose rule is set in place through his sacrificial death and resurrection, not by force of arms. There is no such thing as conversion by coercion. In contrast to what you hear about ISIS and other Islamic groups demanding that people convert or be executed, Jesus appealed to everyone to make their own decision. He did not say, “Believe in me or I will slaughter you, perhaps even cut off your head.” Rather, Jesus said, “I am the one who will die. ***I don't win converts by killing my enemies but by dying for them!*** And in my death you will see my love and the Spirit will graciously draw you to faith.” In other words, many world religions say, “Believe in our leader or we will kill you.” Christianity says, “Our leader was himself killed for such as you. Will you now believe in him?”

Jesus, more than a Man

As you know, because I've repeatedly pointed this out, many people today who make no claim to being Christian ***persist in their praise of Jesus as a man.*** They lift him up on a pedestal as a paradigm of human decency and wisdom and kindness. And of course he is precisely that. But these are the very ones who steadfastly refuse to acknowledge him as risen, living Lord and sovereign ruling King over all that exists. ***They like him as a man, and openly admit that he was the very best of men, but they repudiate him as God.***

I've said before and I'll say it again, this is profoundly silly. Jesus himself will not permit you to think of him in this way. It is nothing less than a mask behind which these people hide their unbelief. Such glowing compliments are in reality implicit denials that Jesus was anything ***more*** than a man.

Of course Jesus was a man. He was the only perfect man. ***But if he was only a man you are hopelessly lost in your sins.***

So listen to Jesus himself as he asks the religious leaders of his day, “Who am I?” Listen to Jesus as he himself asks you and me today, “Who am I?” Is he nothing more than merely human, or is he also God in human flesh, now seated and enthroned in glory at the right hand of the Father?

It's important to remember that Jesus had a purpose in asking this question different from that of the religious leaders. He wasn't trying to win a theological argument. It wasn't his design to embarrass them or reveal their stupidity. He wanted to persuade them by their own logic to recognize who he is. He wanted to take the very OT Scriptures that they affirmed as the Word of God and elicit from them a confession that he is who he claimed to be.

The question itself is simple enough. ***All the scribes and students of the OT acknowledged that the Messiah was the Son of David,*** that is to say, a physical descendant of David. This was in fact one of the most popular titles for the Messiah

In asking the question in v. 43, Jesus *isn't* saying he *isn't* the son of David. He's simply trying to compel them to acknowledge that he is far, far more! Let me explain.

To make his point, Jesus quotes from Psalm 110:1. Many find it difficult to grasp what this verse is saying, so let me lay it out for you in very explicit terms. Part of the problem is that with all these personal pronouns we struggle to know who is in view.

“The Lord [i.e., God the Father] said to my [i.e., David's] Lord [i.e., the Messiah, God the Son], ‘Sit at my [the Father's] right hand, until I [the Father] put your [the Messiah's] enemies under your [the Messiah's] feet.’ If then David calls him [i.e., the Messiah] Lord, how is he [the Messiah] his [David's] son?”

The point is that here in Psalm 110, David, king of Israel, refers to the Messiah as his “Lord”! So, Jesus turns to the people around him and asks this question:

“If the Messiah is no more than a man, if he is no more than the human, physical descendant of David, how is it that David calls him ‘Lord’?”

For David to refer to the Messiah as “my Lord” is evidence that the one described is in a position of superiority to the speaker, namely David. And when David said it, according to v. 43, it was under the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration (“in the Spirit”).

The Messiah, therefore, whoever he may be, has to be both man and God!

Two other statements here must be noted.

(1) God the Father says to the Messiah, “***Sit at my right hand***” (v. 44a).

To be seated at someone's “right hand” was symbolic of the highest honor possible and the greatest authority imaginable. In the OT, God's “right hand” symbolized many things: victory (Ps. 20:6; 44:3; Isa. 41:10), the position of favor (1 Kings 2:19; Ps. 80:18; Jer. 22:24), and power (Exod. 15:6; Ps. 89:13; Isa. 48:13). To sit at the right hand of God is to rule and exercise dominion and justice. There is no higher privilege or power.

Later, in Matthew 26:63-66, Jesus applies this to himself. The high priest demands that Jesus answer the question: “Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see ***the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power*** and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” What does this mean for you and me?

It means Jesus is in that place of power and authority from which he pours out upon us the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-35)!

It means that our salvation is guaranteed and rock solid and that Jesus is ever ready to intercede on our behalf when we come under accusation by the Devil (Romans 8:31-34).

It means that you also, if you believe and trust in Jesus the Messiah, are seated with him in the heavenlies and thus are secure in his love (Ephesians 2:4a, 6; Col. 3:1-4).

(2) God the Father says to the Messiah, “***Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet***” (v. 44b).

The “enemies” in view here are not only human but primarily ***demonic***. All the spiritual forces of darkness have been conquered and are being progressively brought into subjection to the Lordship of Jesus (see Ephesians 1:20-22; 1 Cor. 15:24-27a).

This, then, is a ***present reality*** and not merely a future hope. “The brow once crowned with thorns now wears the diadem of universal sovereignty; and that hand, once nailed to the cross, now holds in it the sceptre of unlimited dominion. He who lay in the tomb has ascended the throne of (an) unbounded empire” (John Eadie, 104).

Jesus is saying in no uncertain terms: “This is all about me! I am the Messiah who was prophesied centuries earlier in the OT Scriptures. I am the Messiah David had in mind when he wrote Psalm 110. I am the Messiah the people only days ago hailed and praised as I made my entry into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. And as the Messiah, ***I am more than David’s son. I am GOD’S Son and therefore David’s Lord!***”

Jesus is inviting the scribes to reconsider whether or not “son of David” is adequate to explain the Messiah. Is it enough merely to refer to him in this way? Jesus isn’t repudiating the title. He is indeed the son of David. As a man he stands in direct descent from David. And son of David was a clear and widely acknowledged Messianic title in the first century.

But it is as if Jesus is saying to the people of his day the same thing I repeatedly say to the people of ours. ***Is it ok merely to acknowledge Jesus as a good man, a wise man, a great leader, etc.? No. If he is nothing more than a man he is not good.***

Likewise Jesus is challenging the people of his day by asking the question: Are you willing to go beyond affirming my descent as a man from the line of David and to acknowledge that I am the Son of God as well?

So here, then, is what this short but incredibly powerful passage is all about. Yes, says Jesus, I am the son of David. I am a man. But as true as that may be, it isn’t enough! It is perfectly appropriate to refer to me as son of David. But it is not sufficient. The Messiah, the Christ, is also David’s Lord. He is not merely David’s son. He is God’s Son! David would never have addressed a mere human descendant of his as Lord. A father or grandfather never addresses his son or grandson as Lord!

This is not a denial of the Messiah’s Davidic sonship, but rather a demand that they acknowledge that more is required. ***Yes, the Messiah is David’s son, but he is also God’s Son.*** Are you willing to embrace this truth? Well, are you?

Jesus is no mere successor to David or a replica of him. He is David’s Lord, with an authority far higher than any earthly throne and with a dignity far greater and more majestic than any human could bestow.

Jesus is both David’s son and David’s Savior!
Jesus is both David’s son and God’s Son!
Jesus is both human and divine!
Jesus is both man and God!

Today and every day we sing of his death and shed blood, and his alone. Why? Because all others who died were but mere men. And as mere men they did not rise from the dead. Jesus, on the other hand, was both human and divine, both son of David and Son of God, who not only died but then rose again to life eternal.

So the question that Jesus puts to you today is simply this: Who is Jesus of Nazareth? That, dear friend, is **THE** question. On your answer to that questions hangs suspended the difference between heaven and hell.