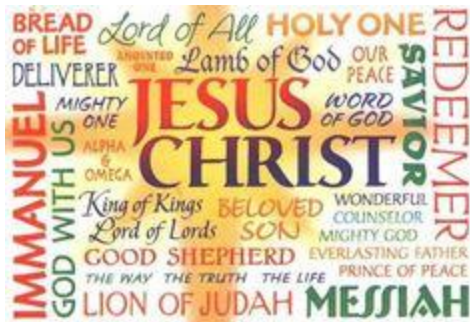


June 14, 2015

What I Believe

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."



As we noted last week, those who believe in God have all degrees of belief from those who deny the very existence of God to those who have an intimate relationship with the God of the Bible and believe in him completely. The challenge of this series is not for us to discuss what others believe, but to consider what we, personally, believe.

The next question in our series is what do you believe about Jesus of Nazareth? Again the spectrum of belief extends from those who deny he ever existed through those who accept him as a great teacher and prophet up to those who have a close, intimate relationship with the one they believe is the resurrected Son of God.

Again, the purpose of this series is not to tell you what to believe so much as it is to challenge you and I to think about our own personal beliefs about Jesus. It is hard to discuss what we personally and individually believe about Jesus without considering some basic information.

From a historical perspective the evidence for a teacher named Jesus who lived early in the first century in Palestine is pretty strong. Two non-Biblical authors of the period wrote, albeit briefly, about Jesus. Josephus, a Jewish survivor of the first Jewish War, became a prophet to the Emperor Vespasian. In his writings he mentions Jesus, who was called the Messiah, and who was crucified by Pilate.

The second source of non-Biblical material about Jesus comes from Tacitus. Tacitus was a Roman historian and a Senator who wrote early in the second century about those who followed "Cristus". He recorded that Jesus was a Palestinian teacher who was crucified by Pontus Pilate and whose followers were still being persecuted in Rome.

Of course Scripture gives us a great deal of information about Jesus especially in the four Gospels, at least two of which were written by eye-witnesses to his ministry. There are few who still deny that Jesus existed, but many who question whether he was more than just a good teacher. The authors of the gospels, particularly Matthew, who was an eye witness and Apostle, and John, who was Jesus' closest friend and confidant among the twelve, wrote extensively about Jesus, and his claims as to who he was and where he came from.

Matthew recorded the conversation between Jesus and the twelve that is our context for today and John writes an extensive gospel detailing the testimonies to the reality of our Lord. He

begins, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him was nothing made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (John 1:1-2 and 14)

So, what do you believe about Jesus? Was he simply a good teacher who died a horrible death? Or, was he the Son of God who became flesh; the Messiah of God who died for your sins and mine? Do you believe the accounts of his resurrection and ascension are true or myths created by his followers? Is Jesus your Lord and Master, your friend and brother, or all of these? What would you do with Jesus?