

Who Do You Say Jesus Is?

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Let's open up our Bibles again to Matthew 16. And let's just read verse 13 on down a bit: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.' And he said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'" (Matthew 16:13-16)

Let's pray: *Father we come before you, in the name of your Son. We acknowledge that he is our righteousness, that apart from him we have no part with you. And I pray Father that today you would get glory for yourself and glory for your Son, through the things that are said, the things that are believed, and the works that are done. Lord, help us this day in a way that we will know that you have helped us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Now I want you to look at verse 13: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he was asking His disciples..." (Matthew 16:13) Now this is important, this is not just an aorist activity. This is not just something he did once, heard something of an answer, and then let it go. But the idea here is that he was going back again and again, asking his disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" Now this is extremely important. Why? Because everything – whether you want to believe me or not – I will tell you, that according to the Scriptures, everything in your life and everything in eternity is determined by how you answer this question, "Who do you say that he is?" Now that in itself is the scandal of Christianity. It's set Christianity apart from everything else. You have to answer that question. Who is he? Now there's something you need to understand about Scripture that is extremely important. Something you need to understand about reality. About truth itself. And why do I say it that way? Because today in our culture, reality is anything you think it to be. But that's not true. Reality or truth is defined as that which is, most certainly is. And so the question is not, "Who is Jesus to you?" That's not the question. Or, "Who do you want Jesus to be?" Or, "Who do you make him out to be according to your convenience?" That's not the question. The question: "Who is Jesus?"

Now go back several years, several decades ago, when I was in college and not a Christian, just nothing. Agnostic, nothing. Angry, nothing. Nonchalant, uncaring about religion whatsoever, and I was approached by a young student who wanted to talk to me about the Bible, about Christianity. And my first response to him was this, "I know about Christianity, I know about the church, I have family who are Catholic, family who are Baptist, family who are this and that, and every sort of thing, and I can tell you, I don't want to know anything about the church." And then he said something to me that hit me like a ton of bricks. He said it in a way that no one's ever said it before and I'll never forget it. He looked at me with a sternness in his face, and he said, "I'm not talking about the church. I'm not talking about denomina-

tions. I didn't ask your opinion regarding those things. You cannot slide out of this by casting blame upon people who call themselves the children of God. I have one question for you. Who was the man, Jesus of Nazareth? Who was he?" With that sternness, I kind of bowed my head a bit and I said, well, I mumbled something like, "Well, you know, he's a good man, good person, good... yeah, he's a good guy." It wasn't but a few weeks later that I came across an old English author and scholar by the name of C.S. Lewis, who again said something that hit me like a ton of bricks. And it was this: He called it the trilemma, or that's what others called it. And it's this. When we talk about logic, I'm not talking about the flamboyant relativism and everything of our modern age that says you can't know truth or everybody's right – and to be honest with you folks, not everybody's right. Here are the logical options. The logical option is, somebody's right and everyone else is wrong, or everyone is wrong. But everyone can't be right because everyone is saying completely different and contrary things, making contrary truth statements. So that's something that we need to realize. You can't just say, "Well, Jesus is right for you." No he's not. He's either right or he's wrong. And there's no way you can dance around the issue. And that's what C.S. Lewis was coming up with, and that's what confronted me on that day in those pages when I heard this: here are the options with regard to the man Jesus of Nazareth. One – he is a liar. That's one logical option. He is a liar. Because He said he was the Son of God and he purposefully, intentionally, misled people to think he was the Son of God, or in a more exact way to put it, God the Son, God in the flesh, God who became man. Now if he said that, and he did not believe it, and he was planning some sort of ruse or deception, he was a liar. And there's no way around it. The other option is this: he's a lunatic. Because any person who sincerely believes they are God in the flesh, and they're not, they're a lunatic. If you go to the park today in between this meeting and the wedding and you decide you want to walk around Bisset Park and see the river and you see a man standing on the park bench screaming out, "I'm the way, the truth, and the life," what are you going to think about him? Or, "I am God in the flesh," or, "I am the creator of the universe and the mediator of all things between God and creation." What are you going to think about him? Lunatic. As C.S. Lewis said, on the level with someone who had the brain like a poached egg. He's a lunatic. And there's one other option. And this is most scandalous and startling of all options. He was, and is, and will continue to be exactly who he said he was – the Son of the living God. Do you see that? So what am I telling you to do? Well, I'm not telling you to do, I'm giving you three options. Walk out of this building today and call him a bald-faced liar. Walk out of this building today and call him a lunatic and please have pity on the rest of us lunatics who are following him. Or third, bow your knee to Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the world. Those are your three options. Now I know you could probably sit down in a one-on-one argument with me and tell me, "No, I have all sorts of other options," and I would have to tell you, I wouldn't want to pull a card on you or try to be smart aleck, but I would have to ask you just where you studied logic. Because there is no other logic. I'm not telling you that you have to believe in Jesus. I'm not telling you have to do this or that, but I am telling you that you only have three options. Liar, lunatic, or Lord. Now, let's look at it. Liar. Well, liars, when they're caught in their ruse, they usually give it up, don't they? Because if you're lying, you have some sort of mischievous purpose behind that lying, don't you? Probably money, fame, power. So, when your ruse turns itself on its head and instead of getting all those

things you're being crucified to a Roman cross, you would probably say, "Stop! I take it all back, I'm not the Son of God." Well, let's talk about lunatic. Some of the greatest scholars that have ever walked this planet say that there is nothing in all of literature like what we have in the simple three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Some say that even the first verses of 5 were written in such a way that we have nothing that compares to them. The statements that He made confounded the scholars of His day and until today cannot be contradicted. Lunatic? I think not. But, Lord. Lord. Lord. And here's something else very important about our text. Look at what he says in verse 13: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is... Some say John the Baptist; some say Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:13) Now these don't in themselves seem like bad guesses. But they're terrifyingly bad guesses. Because there's actually something more dangerous than just out and out saying Jesus Christ is a lunatic or a liar. It's making him common. Making him like anyone else. There, in that, lies the danger. He's like this prophet, or he's like that prophet, that we can accumulate a whole desktop or bookshelf full of prophets. And just put him up there with the rest of them. No, you cannot. He does not give us that option. He is the only one who said, "I'm not just a prophet, I am God become man. I am the eternal Son of God who has robed himself in flesh." And now dwells, or the proper way to say it, now tabernacles among men. Do you see that? Most of you, whether you're agnostic, atheistic, Christian, or just sympathetic, or whatever you are, you would have to acknowledge that media, by and large, is against Christianity. There's not a whole lot of positive stuff being said about Christianity. And if I was invited on a talk show it wouldn't be to promote one of my recent books, it would be to tear me to pieces. Now, here's what I want you to think. I could change all that, I could change it all in a matter of less than a day. And I could make Christianity the toast of the town. And I only have to change one article. That's it. Instead of calling Jesus the Savior, with a definite article, the only thing I have to do is change "the" to "a." He is a savior. If I was to do that, Christianity would become totally and completely accepted by media, scholarship, even the ungodly. Why? Because the scandal of Christianity is not that Jesus is a savior or Jesus is a lord or Jesus is a prophet. The scandal of Christianity is that he is the Lord, the Savior, the Prophet. And anyone who contradicts Him is wrong. That is the scandal of Christianity. And those of you who may be Christian need to understand something. If you deny that scandal, if you try to weasel your way around it to make your faith more compatible and friendly, so that people like you more, you've denied Jesus Christ. He is not a savior. He's the Savior. He did not say, "I am a way, a truth, and a life." He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." And you must understand that. Now we don't want to be mean, we don't want to be mean-spirited, but listen, I see the erosion of Christianity all around us and that we keep compromising in order to be acceptable – to what? To a fallen world. Sometimes when I'm witnessing, especially in a university setting, I say, "Here I am, so help me God," because I have to tell all you students this: "I do believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. And that there is no way to be reconciled to God except through him." I believe that. And I must proclaim that to you. And it's the same thing here today. I must tell you that. Or I would be defiling conscience, I would be lying. And I would be giving you an option that would make you happy but would damn your soul. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. He's not just a prophet, he's not just like others. It's his uniqueness that brings about His ex-

clusivity which brings about the scandal and the hatred of the world. Now, I was looking this morning in my office, and I just pulled up some things from a gospel book that I've been working on for a while, and I just want to give you some ideas of what I'm talking about. I want to quote a very, very prominent theologian that I greatly respect, Loraine Boettner, and this is what he said, and you've probably never thought of this before. But he refers to Jesus as the only expected person in all of history. And this is true. This is documented. In all the history of the world, Jesus emerges as the only expected person. No one was looking for such a person as Julius Caesar, or Napoleon, or Washington, or Lincoln to appear at the time and place that they did appear. No other person has had his course foretold or his work laid out for him centuries before he was born. But the coming of the Messiah had been predicted for centuries, in fact, the first promise of his coming was given to Adam and Eve soon after their fall into sin. As time went on, various details concerning his person and work were revealed through the prophets. And at the time Jesus was born, there was a general expectation throughout the Jewish world that the Messiah was soon to appear. Even the manner of his birth and the town in which it would occur have been clearly indicated. Now you can go back, and I have, through any religion in the world, any so-called founder, prophet, or whatever you want to get to, and you find that it's simply not the case. No ancient documents, no multiplicity of prophecies indicating who he would be, where he would come from, what would be his lineage, what would he do, what would he teach. But all of these are found in the person of Christ. Let me read something to you from the historian Philip Schaff that I've always held dear. This is an amazing statement, I love this statement. Speaking of Jesus, he says: A character so original, so complete, so uniformly consistent, so perfect, so human, and yet so high above all human greatness, can be neither a fraud nor a fiction. The poet, as has been well said, would be in this case, greater than the hero. It would take more than a Jesus to invent a Jesus. That's how great he is. Now let me share something else with you just before we go on. I want to lay out a few things for you and I don't usually do this but I want to kind of go through a few small prophecies to indicate to you this very important point. And we often do this in a Jewish evangelism, I've done this over in Israel, and that is this: If Jesus of Nazareth is not the Messiah, then every promise in the Bible with regard to the Messiah has failed, because it can no longer be fulfilled. Let me just read a few things that I've gathered over the years. First of all, just listen to this: according to Genesis 49:10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh," a reference, ancient reference to the Messiah, "until [he] comes." Now, what is it saying? "The scepter shall not depart from Judah," – it shall not – Judah shall reign until Messiah comes. But here's the promise. This promise, that a descendant of Judah would reign until the coming of the Messiah, in 70 A.D. the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, the political dominion and authority of the Jews was taken away, and the nation was scattered. For nearly two millennia, there has been no ruler from the tribe of Judah. If Jesus is not the Christ, then God's promise in Genesis 49:10 has failed, for the time is past and it can no longer be fulfilled. It's an absolute impossibility. Now according to Daniel chapter 9 verse 24 through 27, the city of Jerusalem was to be rebuilt 7 weeks of years, that's 49 years, after the end of the captivity. And the Messiah would appear 62 weeks of years, that's 434 years, after the rebuilding of Jerusalem. This prophecy coincides perfectly with the life of Jesus. If Jesus is not the Christ, then God's promise in Daniel has failed because the

time has passed, the days have run out, and there's no longer any opportunity for it to ever happen again. Both Malachi chapter 3 and Haggai chapter 2 teach that the Messiah was to come while the second temple was still standing. The second temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. So if Jesus is not the Christ, the Messiah is never coming. The Messiah was to be a son or descendant of David. And he was to come at a time when the house of David was in low estate and held in contempt like a tree that had been cut off to its very roots. In Isaiah 11:1 the Scriptures declare: "Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit." Jesus appeared as the Messiah at such a time. If he is not the Messiah, then the Scriptures cannot be fulfilled for even the root of Jesse now has been pulled up with the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. At that time when the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., all genealogical evidences were destroyed and it would now be impossible to prove the Messiah's lineage. According to Daniel 9:27, the Messiah would confirm the new covenant and put an end to the sacrificial system under the old covenant. The sacrificial system ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. If Jesus is not the Christ, then the sacrificial system has ended without the coming of the Messiah. And finally, according to the prophet Isaiah, the Messiah's coming would be marked by an ingathering of the nations, or the Gentiles. For nearly two thousand years, a countless multitude of Gentiles from every nation on earth has identified themselves with the God of Israel through the so-called Messiah, just as the Scriptures predicted. Jesus is the Messiah. And the Messiah was not just a man. Even the ancient Jewish scribes held him to be more than a man, that when he came, the Son of David would be greater than David and that he would be Lord of David. That he would be divine. That he would be God that became man, and that's exactly what happened. Now, what do the people say about Jesus? That doesn't really matter. What do you say about Jesus? You personally. What do you say about Jesus? And if you're not a Christian, I hope that these words will haunt you, and haunt you, and haunt you until you answer. But I will warn you, Jesus in his own teachings does say that when you hear something like this, there is a character in the Bible that happens to be real and personal – he's called Satan – and that when someone hears something like this and doesn't pay attention to it, but seeks to dismiss it, then Satan himself comes by and snatches it out of their heart, so that they do not think of it again. That's why Jesus said be very careful of the things that you are listening to. Because "...to whom much is given, much is required." Who do you say that this Jesus is? Now, here's something else that I want you to see that is very important. Look in verse 16: "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'" (Matthew 16:16) Now, I've sat here, well, stood here, for the last twenty minutes and spoke about the Messiah, spoke about Jesus, given you certain evidences, and although that is all helpful, what you need to understand is that to truly believe in Jesus Christ, as Lord and Savior in a saving way, it is a work of God the Father. That's what he tells Peter here, this apostle: "Peter, you didn't think this up, you just weren't convinced; this is something supernatural. God opened up your heart and he revealed this to you, Peter." Now, here's what I want to ask you. How can you know? If you're in agreement with me right now in everything I've said, how can you know? How can you know that that affects you in any way? If I walked out on the streets and gave an interview, I'd find all kinds of people say, "Yeah, yeah, I believe he's the Son of God. I believe he's the Son

of God. Yeah.” But then if I looked at their life, would I see any evidence whatsoever that they actually believe this stuff? I want you to think about it. There are people here today in our world who would acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Messiah, and yet when they die they will stand before God, will be judged, and will not enter into heaven but be condemned to separation from God throughout eternity, even though with their mouth they have said, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world.” Because they really didn’t. It was just something they were taught. They learned it from their mom or their dad, or their grandmother, or they became intellectually convinced but they never truly did believe. They never came to a point where they meditated upon this, they thought upon it, they held onto it, they fought with it until they come to the realization that this is true, and because of that, their life was never impacted and their religion was always external. It was always just something that, “Well, I go to mass,” or, “I go to the Lord’s supper,” like we’re going to have next week, or, “I do this,” or “I go to church,” or “I sing in the choir,” or “I do this,” but when you look at the inside of their life, there is no genuine love for Christ, and their lives are not transformed by him. He is not the center of their lives. He is not in their thoughts. He is part of a religion they have adopted or inherited. But there’s no transformation. There’s no living according to the greatest truth that’s ever been given. I was at a school one time and after the classes I was sitting down in the café minding my own business, and these two people came over and started a discussion with me, something of an aggressive discussion with regard to the things about Christ, and as I talked to this one fellow, finally this girl, I think she was trying to gain some points in the argument, she says, “Well, I do believe in God, I’m not like my brother.” And I said, “What’s your brother like?” She said, “Well, he’s an atheist.” “Really, and how does he live?” “Horribly!” I said, “Well, to be honest with you, I have a lot more respect for your brother than I do for you.” And she said, “How can you say that?” I said, “Rationally, I have to say it. Your brother claims there is no God, and he lives like a man who believes there is no God. You tell me there is a God, but you do not seek to know His will, you do not seek to know His commands, you do not seek to order your life according to Him.” Do you see the inconsistency? They’re both wrong but at least one is more logical. He’s being consistent to the false thing he believes. The question is this: are you and I consistent? Do we truly believe? And then I want to end with this. We have to be very, very careful here. Because if I were to stop this sermon right now, you might think that Christianity is simply a moralistic, ethical religion. That, “Well, I acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah, and therefore, I’m going to get a Bible and I’m going to read His commands and I’m going to seek to follow Him.” Now remember what I told you earlier, that Jesus is a prophet, but not just a prophet, but the Prophet, and he’s not only the Prophet, he’s more than a prophet. And what am I trying to say? Christianity is not about you buying the rule book and then trying to follow the rules. That is not Christianity. That is a legalism and it is deadly; it is self-righteous, and it’s wrong. And it shows that you’re blind to everything about God and yourself. You see, let’s look. Jesus says this: If you turn over with me in chapter 16, after Peter makes this declaration that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah – what he was saying was true, but Peter himself didn’t understand it. He said, “Yes, you’re the Messiah, you’re the Son of God.” You believe that, you do well, but what does it mean? Is it your kind of Jesus? Jesus defined by you. Or is it the Jesus defined by himself? And look what he says. (Matthew 16,)

Verse 21: “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” So we’re talking about something more here than a prophet. We’re talking about a Redeemer. Because let me share with you something. If this day you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God, this very day, and you go out and buy yourself a Bible and if you could, from this very day, you obeyed every command internally and externally, every disposition of yours was perfect, every word, every attitude, every thought was sinless, from this very day until judgment, you would still stand condemned before God. Why? Well, if I’m driving down the road and a policeman pulls me over and he says, “You were going 70 in a 55 MPH zone.” I say, “Well, don’t write me a ticket.” “Why?” “Because from now on I’ll never do it again.” You see, you’re already guilty. You’re already guilty. There were two men broke down on the side of the road, that’s why I got here late today. I pulled over to see if I could help them, and we were able to share Christ with them. They were two pretty rough looking characters, and I looked at them and I said, “You want to know something? I’m a criminal. And if I died right now – even being a pastor, being a preacher, helping orphans, and everything else we do – If I died right now, based on that, I’d go to hell. Do you understand me?” I said, “My only hope is the only hope you two men have, and that is that Jesus Christ died for sinners. My hope is not my ability to follow him, my hope is not my church attendance, my hope is none of that. My hope is that Jesus Christ died for sinners.” And that’s what Peter and they had to understand. They thought, well, he’s the Messiah, the King, he’s going to reign now, and we’re all going to follow Him. The problem is Peter, you’re an enemy of God. The problem is, John and Paul and every other apostle and every other person including everyone in this room, you have broken every law God has ever written and you are an enemy of God. You say, well, I’m not that bad, really. If I could take out your heart right now and put it on a DVD, and I could show up here on a screen everything you’ve ever thought, even some of the things you’re thinking now about me, you would run out of this place, you would run out of this place and you’d never show your face here again because you’ve thought things so dark and so twisted you could not share them with your closest friend and yet the God who is holy, holy, holy, sees them all. What do we have to be to go to heaven? I had someone ask me that one time on an airplane. I was reading my Bible, and he said, “What you got there?” I said, “I got a Bible.” We started talking, and he said, “Well, what do I gotta do to go to heaven?” I looked at him, I said, “Well, that’s easy. You just have to be absolutely, morally prefect from the time of your birth to the time of your death.” And I went back to reading my Bible. And I could see his face twisting up sort of, and then, finally he looked at me and he goes, “Hey – what?” And I said, “Oh, I’m sorry, you have to absolutely ethically, morally pristine, without any flaw, without any shadow, without any error in thought, word, or deed, before a holy God who is thrice holy, you have to be like that from the moment of your birth to the moment of your death. OK?” And he looked at me and he goes, “Nobody could do that!” I said, “You got a big problem, don’t you?” You see I wasn’t trying to frustrate the man, I was trying to prove a point, the same one I’m trying to prove to you. There are a lot of people who think that they and Jesus working together are going to get themselves to heaven. You’re mistaken. If I took your best thought, your best word, and your best deed, and sent you before God with only those to be judged by, you would be condemned. Let me just give you an example. You say,

“Well, I’m not a murderer, I’m not a prostitute.” What is the greatest sin? Well, what’s the greatest command? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Do you realize you’ve never done that, not one second, in any day of your life? You and I have never loved the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We are so full of self. That’s why we have more mirrors than Bibles in our house. And that’s why mirrors are always hung up and Bibles are closed. We’re all about self. And God is holy. God is holy. Now that’s good news and that’s bad news. Why is it good? Because you wouldn’t want an omnipotent Creator and Lord of the universe having the character of a Hitler, would you? You’d want a holy and righteous God, you would, that’s comforting to know that God is holy and righteous. But it’s also, to the thinking man and woman, it’s very discomfoting. Why is it discomfoting? Why is it discomfoting that he’s holy and righteous? Because you’re not. So now what does a holy and righteous God do with someone like you? And me? What does he do? Now, I’m going to give you the heart of Christianity. Now when I say that I realize I’m kind of old, I’m fifty-three, but I haven’t been alive for a millennium. And all the wisdom of the world wasn’t born in me nor shall it die in me, so how do I come about telling you I’m going to give you the very heart of what Christianity is? Well, for two reasons. One, it’s in the Bible, but I can misinterpret the Bible, even though the Bible is infallible, so how do I know I’m giving you the heart of Christianity? Well, when you look down through 2,000 years of Christian history this is what you see by those men and women who loved the Bible and studied it and believed it. I’m going to give you the hardest, greatest problem in all of Scripture. This is it. If you’ve been here in this church you’ve heard it a million times but some of you haven’t, so the people in this church are going to hear it a million and one now. This is the greatest problem in the Bible: if God is good, he can’t forgive you. If God is righteous and holy, he cannot forgive you. And you say, “What?” That’s it, really. The greatest problem in all of Scripture. We see it in Exodus, we see it in Psalms, and we even see it in the book of Proverbs. We see Paul dealing with it in Romans chapter three. And it’s this problem: if God is just, how can he just simply, as he says, just turn his back to your sin, how can he cover your sin, how can he cast your sin away from you as far as the east is from the west? Literally, in the book of Psalms and again, in Romans 4, it’s he covers it. What do we think about a judge who sweeps crimes under the rug? Do we call him righteous? No, we don’t, do we? We call him corrupt. Is he maintaining righteousness? Absolutely not. He’s defaming righteousness. You see therein lies the great problem in the Bible. God is righteous. And because he is righteous and because he is holy, and guess what? Because he is love, he hates. He hates evil. Some people say, “Well, God is love and therefore he doesn’t hate.” No, God is love and therefore he must hate. He hates evil. He can’t just turn his back on evil and he can’t just turn his back on your evil, or my evil, or anyone else’s evil. God is a righteous judge. And shall not the God of all the earth do right? So the great question in the Bible is: how can God be just and yet simply forgive wicked men? How can he do it? The answer is in the person of Jesus Christ. And this is what so many people do not understand about the cross. God in his righteousness condemns man; every man, everyone here, everyone who’s ever walked the planet since Adam, condemned in our sin. And all the religion, all the church going, everything else you mind want to add to it, it’s not going to help you one bit. You’re condemned. To be in heaven you must be perfect; have perfect righteousness, and none of us have that. And God cannot do it any other way. Because he is righteous he

cannot sweep your sin in a basket or under a rug. So God in his righteousness condemns you, and me, and all of humanity. And then God in his love becomes a man and he lives the life you could not live, that I could not live. Not only is he avoiding sin, but at the same time, he is living a life of perfect righteousness. Not only avoiding the negative, but always doing the positive. A perfect righteous life. And then that Son of God, he goes to Calvary. And on Calvary, he dies. But now here's the problem. When you hear all those Easter sermons, mainly what do you hear? You hear about the Romans, you know, nailing him to a tree, and beating him and stabbing him with a lance, and you hear about all the things the Romans did to Jesus, and it killed him. And when you hear that kind of preaching, that kind of preaching is totally missing the point. We are not saved from our sins because the Romans beat up Jesus and killed him. We are saved from our sins because when he was on the tree, all of your sin was imputed to him, and then God in heaven turned away from his only Son, not because he lacked the moral fortitude to see him suffer, no, he turned away from his only Son because his only Son became sin. And the separation from God that you should experience and I should experience throughout all of eternity, the Son of God experienced on that tree. And then there was not just the negative withdrawal of God's presence from Christ so that he cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) But then, all the full force of God's wrath, of his holy hatred against you, and your crimes, and me, and my crimes, that as a holy God, he must pour out, he poured out on his own Son. As the prophet in Isaiah 53:10 says, "And it pleased the Lord..." – the four consonant YHWH – "it pleased YHWH to crush the Messiah." To crush him! Under the full force of his wrath. You know, many of you have read the Bible, he's in the garden, and he cries out, "Let this cup pass from me... let this cup pass from me...let this cup pass from me." (Matt 26:39-44) Three times. Do you honestly think that our Savior was afraid of a Roman lance? How is it that so many people think that when Jesus is looking at this cup, he is thinking, you know, about the cross, and the beatings, and everything else, and it causes him to sweat drops of blood. Really? How is it then, count the apostles, all but John, and countless martyrs, went to the cross, and church history tells us they were singing hymns? They were full of joy at being crucified like their Lord. So how is it that they had more boldness than their Savior? Jesus was not sweating drops of blood in the garden simply because of a Roman cross. It was because he had always dwelt in the bosom of the Father, perfect delight between one another. He had always been the beloved Son in whom the Father was well pleased. And on that tree, the Father withdrew his presence from his Son as he should from us, and then his Father crushed his Son. That's what was in the cup. The wrath of Almighty God against every sin we've committed. And he drank it down, and when he cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) he turned the cup over and not one drop came out. He drank it all. Paid in full. And he died. And on the third day, he was raised. By his own power, by the Spirit's power, and by the power of the Father he was raised. And Romans tells us that that is God's sign, that is God's vindication of his Son and proof that that death he died on Calvary was sufficient to pay for all your sins. So what does it mean to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God? It's not just, "I love his teachings and I follow him." It is this: I have nothing. I have no righteousness. I have no hope except what God did for me on Calvary and in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. That is my hope. If I stood in the midst of the most horribly, wicked people in a massive den of iniquity, and I stood

there, I was transposed there right now, translated to that place, the only thing that separates me in the eyes of God from them is the cross of Calvary. Where Jesus Christ died for my sins. That's it. And I want to tell you something. If you add any of your supposed virtue to that, you do not believe in the Son of God. I hear so many people tell me, "Yeah, I'm a Christian." "Are you believing in Jesus?" "Yes, I am." "Well, if you died right now, where would you go?" "Well, ah, I think I'd go to heaven." "Why?" "Well, I've been good. I've been a good person." Do you see the disconnect? What?! What?! You've been a good person? Really? Really? Good enough to take any one of those thoughts and stand before God and risk all of eternity on it? Well, some people will say (and they said this in Romans 5 and Romans 6, that was what Paul was answering to), "Well, if you're saying that it's just faith in Jesus and not our works, then people will just believe in Jesus and then live like the devil and they're going to heaven?" Absolutely not. You see there's two doctrines in the Bible you need to understand. The first one is justification. What is justification? It is a legal declaration. The person who believes in Jesus Christ is legally justified before God. God looks at that person as right with him, not on the basis of their virtue, but on the basis of what Christ did for them. God declares them righteous. That's the believer's standing. But then there's another doctrine called the doctrine of regeneration. If you've read the Bible, you've heard it in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things pass away, behold all things are new." What does that mean? It means those who truly believe in Jesus Christ have also been born again, or, what we call regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They've been made alive. So that it's not them believing in Jesus and then doing a bunch of righteous things that they hate. But it's their believing in Jesus and they're saved. And because of that salvation, and because of the power of God to transform a life, they now begin to walk in newness of life. But never is their standing before God based upon what they do. It's based upon the cross of Calvary. Christ, Christ alone. Now, I'm going to finish with an illustration, and hopefully it doesn't apply to you, but it may give you some insight into what I'm talking about. First heard this from a dear friend of mine, Charles Leiter, and it's a wonderful illustration. Let's say that we own a bunch of sheep, and we've got a problem. There's a bunch of coyotes. Now how do we solve the problem? Well, there's a few ways we can solve the problem. One is, we can get a gun, and we can shoot the coyotes. Now that solves the sheep's problem, it solves our problem, but it doesn't solve the coyote's problem. What else can we do? Well, we can get a cage, and we can trap the coyote. We could trap him. So we've solved the sheep's problem, we've solved our problem, but we really haven't solved the coyote's problem. You say, "Well, he's reformed." No, he isn't. He's just caged. He's not reformed. He walks back and forth in that cage, back and forth like this, and just wanting to get out. You let that door open, he's coming out of there. So we haven't solved his problem. You know what I just described? Religion. And a lot of Christian religion. "I go to church, I hate it, but I'm going because it's the right thing to do." "I do this because it's the right thing to do, because I gotta do it." There's really no love for God, there's no genuine desire to serve him. "Just gotta do these things." That's legalism, that religion, that's church. "Why do we have to go?" It's the same way as the coyote saying, "Why can't I just eat sheep?" And every time someone's not looking and every time that door is open, you're going to eat sheep. You're going to sin, because that's what you love. Now what is Christianity? God changes the coyote into a sheep. That's Christianity. From the inside. He changes their heart. He takes out

their heart of stone and he gives them a heart of flesh. And that's how you know you've become a Christian. Not just because you give some empty profession, that, "Yeah, I believe Jesus is the Son of God," but because something, as it happened to Peter, something more than flesh and blood happened to you. God showed you, this is his Son, and he put an overwhelming new desire in you to follow him and to please him. Do you see that? I'll give you a lecture right now in ontology. And it's this: I have a nature, I have a will, and I have activity – things I do. If my heart loves evil, my desire is for evil. Things of this world, the immoralities, the sensualities, the money, everything that's in this world, if that's what my heart loves, then those desires influence my will, and my will pushes my activities. I'm driven by my will that's driven by my evil desires, and I do evil. But, if someone can change this heart of mine, so that the things I once loved I now hate and the things I once hated, like righteousness, I now love, then there's not much to worry about after that. Because my new desires push my life in a completely different direction, and when I do sin, it breaks my heart because my heart's been made new. If I was a pastor of some of the churches that exist. Say I'm the new pastor and as soon as I come my first Sunday, someone walks up to me and says, "Brother Paul, there's a guy over there named Bill, he's over there up the hill there, and he hasn't been to church in five years, and everything, and we can't get him to come back to church. He's a member here, would you please go and get him? That's your job, you're the shepherd." So I go, I knock on the door, and there's Bill. Bill says, "Come on in." I come in. I say, "Bill, you haven't been in church in five years." "You're right, preacher, you're right, you know I just follow other things, just have a love for the world, but you're right, I need to do the right thing and I need to get back in church." "And Bill, I hear you've been walking around town drunk quite a bit." "You're right, preacher, I've been drinking and stuff, just love that old liquor, but I need to put it away, I need to do the right thing, and I need to get back to church. It's what I need to do." "Okay, and Bill, I hear you haven't been very faithful to your wife. That you're kind of a man about town." "Preacher, you got me there. You're right, I just need to let that go, as much as it pulls on me, love that kind of life, I just need to let it go, I need to do the right thing." So next Sunday, I come to church and everybody says, "Pastor, this is incredible! A sheep has come home!" No, he hasn't. They're all looking at Bill and they're going, "A sheep has come home." No, he has not. A wolf has just come back into the cage. Do you realize what Bill is saying? "You're right, preacher, I need to stop doing all the wicked things I love and start doing all the righteous things I hate in order to gain some entrance into the kingdom of heaven." That's religion, and that's not what we're talking about. We're talking about a life transformed. And if your life has not been transformed from the inside out and all you have is a religion, or a ritual, or there's certain things you think you've done and you're doing and because of that you're going to be okay on the final day, you're not. I'm telling you, you're not going to be okay at all. The question is, not some religious exercise as Paul says in the book of Galatians, the question is, are you a new creature, with new desires and a new heart? "What should I do?" Acknowledge your sin, acknowledge that all your righteousness is like filthy rags before God. And throw yourself on Christ. On Christ the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand... I dare not trust the sweetest frame, But wholly lean on Jesus' name. Nothing in my hands I bring (to barter with God, to pay off God), But simply to the cross of Christ I cling. Let's pray: Father, I thank you for your Word, thank you for the cross of Christ, thank you for the Holy Spirit who opens up

hearts and minds to know thee. Lord, help us, in Jesus' name. Amen.