

“Is This Not Joseph’s Son?”

Text: Luke 4:16-22

Suggested Hymns:

464, 152, 47, 225, 352

1) The Division That Existed On This Question

2) Why Is The Correct Answer
To This Question So Important?

3) What Is The Correct Answer To This Question?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 4:16–22, ***16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.***

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Some years ago, on a fishing trip, there was a man in the party whose good wife and splendid two sons were members of a Protestant church. He did not attend because, as he stated, he belonged to the “big” church.

When asked whether the religious society whose badge he wore demanded faith in Jesus Christ as an entrance requirement, he stated, *“All that we are asked to admit is that Jesus was a model character and that we intend to pattern our lives after this great Example. My belief is that Jesus was Joseph’s son.”*

A newspaper printed an excerpt from a Christmas sermon of a leading Protestant clergymen in which he denied the Virgin Birth, claiming that Jesus was merely Joseph's son.

Our text raises the same issue: *“Is This Not Joseph's Son?”* Let us consider this important question. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Division That Existed On This Question

After Jesus had been baptised in the Jordan River and tempted in the wilderness, *“Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.”*¹ The voice had come out of heaven from God the Father: *“This is My beloved Son.”*

Soon after God had given the world this assurance, the Tempter in the wilderness summoned all his satanic guile to sow doubt as to the deity of Jesus with the cunning phrase *“If you are the Son of God.”*²

Then, while in Galilee, Jesus paid a visit to Nazareth, the village where He had been brought up *And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.*

After He had read the passage from Isaiah mentioned in our text,³ *He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* Jesus made the majestic claim that He Himself who had spent His boyhood in Nazareth is the Anointed One, the Messiah, Immanuel, the Mighty God, the Saviour of mankind, as prophesied by the inspired writers of the Old Testament.

But before Jesus left the synagogue, there was a division on the question, *“Who is this Jesus?”* At first *“all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.”*

Yet with a strange gleam in their eye they soon shot the poisoned arrow of suspicion at Jesus with the question: *“Is this not Joseph's son?”*

These fiery darts from the pit soon set the hearts in that synagogue ablaze with hatred. We read in Luke 4:28-29, ²⁸ *So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,* ²⁹ *and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.*

This division of opinion followed Jesus throughout His ministry. ***“Therefore some of the Pharisees said, “This Man is not from God ... Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them.”***⁴

When at Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication Jesus asserted His deity ²⁰ ***And many of them said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?”*** ²¹ ***Others said, “These are not the words of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”***⁵

Up in the coasts of Caesarea Philippi Jesus asked His disciples, ***“Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”*** ¹⁴ ***So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*** ¹⁵ ***He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”*** ¹⁶ ***Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***⁶

The burning hatred of those who put Jesus down as Joseph’s son flared up with the fires of hell when Jesus hung on the cross. The chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and that whole satanic crowd mocked Him: ***“He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”***⁷

While, on the other hand, ***“when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”***⁸

Strange to say, this division has followed the preaching of the Gospel through the ages. That, in the last analysis, was the question that divided Christendom in the early part of the fourth century. That was the burning issue of the Council of Nicaea where Athanasius fought victoriously for the deity of Christ over against the Unitarian Arius and his followers.

Today there are legions of so-called modern Christian pulpits who with the blaspheming Nazarenes, Pharisees, Caiaphases, and Arians of all ages scoff at the adorable Son of God with the cynical sneer, ***“Is this not Joseph’s son?”***

2. Why Is The Correct Answer To This Question So Important?

Why should this subject be discussed? Why not forget this old controversy? Is not every one entitled to his own opinion? — Surely the constitution of our Government guarantees all Australians religious liberty.

This, however, is more than a mere academic question. It is not a hypothesis on which old-fashioned, grey-bearded theologians vainly debate. Your attitude on this vital question decides positively where you will spend your eternity.

Would you travel on an aeroplane if you had proof and evidence that the engineer made a fatal mistake in designing the craft? Would you cross a sea if it was proved to you that the engines would blow up before you reached the shore?

“*What do you think of Christ?*” “*Is this not Joseph’s son?*” is a relevant question of tremendous importance to you. There is no escaping the question. You must answer it. Your answer will either save or damn you.

Suppose Jesus was who these Nazarenes made Him to be, then, despite all His glorious qualities and virtuous achievements, He could not be the world’s Redeemer.

To be the Saviour of mankind, Jesus, as man’s Substitute, not only had to satisfy every stipulation of God’s Law, but He had to pay the full penalty of the world’s sin. He had to drain the cup of eternal damnation for every sinner. Such appalling powers as sin, death, Satan, and hell had to be conquered. This is humanly impossible. Scripture says in Psalm 49:7, ***None of them can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him.***

The deceiver from the pit wants to darken your understanding so that you will no longer with the conviction of your heart confess: “*I believe that Jesus Christ is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity.*” If you do not believe those words then you are without God and without hope in the world.

Furthermore, if Caiaphas was right, then Jesus, who testified under oath that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is a perjurer, yes, the greatest impostor of all ages. Then Caiaphas was justified in tearing his clothes and saying, “***He has spoken blasphemy.***”⁹

Then the millions of sincere Christians who put their trust in Jesus for salvation have been duped and deceived. Then why hold Jesus up as our Example? Then why praise His virtues? Could there be a more dishonest cheat

than the one who posed as a divine Saviour and defrauded countless millions out of their eternal salvation?

And since the entire Bible, from cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, has this one purpose to make us wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, then why with faint praise place a Bible in the Christian Pulpit?

This Book, which makes the one claim throughout: *“This is the true God and eternal Life,”*¹⁰ ought rightfully to be placed on the index of forbidden books.

Why, the entire Christian religion, the existence of the Church which bears the name of Christ, the Bible’s being the Word of Truth, heaven or hell, hinges on the question first raised in that Nazarene synagogue: *“Is this not Joseph’s son?”*

3. What Is The Correct Answer To This Question?

You as an individual cannot afford to be confused on this subject. You must know the correct answer to the question our text places so prominently before you.

Go and ask the enemies of Christ what prompted them to deny the claims of His deity. Examine the motives and reasons of the Nazarenes whom Jesus was addressing in their synagogue that impelled them with sinister intent to drag Him to the brow of the hill.

Was it superior intelligence? Was it diligent research in the records of His miraculous birth at Bethlehem? Was it that they had proof and evidence for their claims? Certainly not! Or was it that Jesus, by what He said and did, could not persuade men of the truthfulness of His claims?

A member of the Sanhedrin, a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night in the early days of His ministry and said to Him, *“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*¹¹

At the end of His ministry the representatives of this group gathered together to plot the death of Christ, the Son of God. They admitted among themselves: *“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. 48 If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him.”*¹²

Later, when Peter and John preached the risen Christ at Jerusalem, Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest were gathered together, brought the apostles into their court, and conferred among themselves, saying, ***“What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”***¹³

Were these high dignitaries intent on getting down to the facts in the case of Jesus that they might have and believe the truth? Certainly not! Has any one of the enemies of Christ to this day unearthed proof and testimony that the claims of Jesus and of the Bible are unfounded and false? — Where is the evidence?

On the other hand, Jesus has produced abundant evidence that He is the Lord’s Christ. The miracles He performed, admitted by His fiercest enemies, bore witness that He is the Son of God.

His glorious resurrection, conceded by His contemporaries, both by foe and friend, is unimpeachable evidence, which ought to convince the most stubborn and prejudiced unbeliever, that all the claims of Jesus have the seal of God’s approval. In our text Jesus simply points to His public ministry as convincing proof that He is the Messiah.

Jesus reads a Messianic prophecy from the Book of Isaiah as a text, and this He explains and applies. The one lesson Jesus impresses upon His hearers is: ***“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*** I am the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One, whom Isaiah has prophesied.

What is the proof? Look at the fulfilment of *Isaiah* in our text.

He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor. Jesus invited the bankrupt sinners to come to Him. These unclean beggars came to Him with their filthy rags. He washed them from their sins in His own blood, took them to His bosom and made them the children and priests of God. His Gospel is: ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***¹⁴

He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted. There sat Simon Peter in the court. The coal fire had proved an attraction that caused his ruin. He had denied

his Saviour. He was utterly crushed. He wept bitterly. The heavy hand of God lay upon his tortured conscience.

The prodigal, hungry and forsaken, sits down among the swine utterly undone. Jesus invites these Peters and prodigals in Matthew 11:28–9, *28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

To proclaim liberty to the captives. There are “the captives.” They are the slaves of sin and vice. They are caught in the snares of the devil, taken captive by him at his will.¹⁵ They are sold under sin.

The drunk, the drug addict, the adulterer, the greedy lover of money, are held in the cords of sin. Zacchaeus, the tax collector greedy for money, Magdalene in the coils of her vice, Saul of Tarsus thirsting for the blood of Christians, were held in the bonds of iniquity. When Jesus comes to these slaves, He gives them the power to break the chains. Their changed lives are evidence that the Gospel of Christ brings deliverance to the captives.

And recovery of sight to the blind. The smart and blatant unbeliever can see only with his physical eyes. But he is spiritually as blind as a bat. These people have their understanding darkened through the spiritual ignorance that is in them. The god of this world blinds the minds of those who do not believe. This type of blindness is fatal. It is a symptom of the outer darkness that will be their eternal lot.

Saul, the former blind Pharisee, and the millions of converted Christians who had the veil removed from their eyes to see the glory of God in Christ Jesus are living testimonials of the truth that Jesus brings sight to the blind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed. God sent His Son into the world to free such people. The galling yoke of sin bruises the heart of the transgressor. The poisoned sting of sin causes wounds and bruises and putrefying sores.

These chafed Cains under their crushing burden cry out, *“My punishment is greater than I can bear!”*¹⁶ The sin-bruised jailer at Philippi, with sword in hand to destroy himself, when Paul had appealed to him not to take his life, came trembling with the question, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*¹⁷

There is only one religion in the world, the one that assures man that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that has the power to set at liberty those who are bruised.

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD. The hearers in the synagogue who listened to the discourse of Jesus knew that the fiftieth year, the jubilee year, was a type of the deliverance that the Messiah would bring. The trumpets of the jubilee that men sounded throughout the land gave the signal that all Israelites in bondage were free again. Every man returned to his possession and to his family.

The Gospel proclaims to sinners throughout the world that the debt of all sin is paid in full by Jesus Christ and that the slaves of Satan can be converted and return to the inheritance of their heavenly Father. We enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. Jesus sends forth His heralds with the Gospel-trumpet ***“to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”*** to all people.

Thus by His doctrine and by His deeds, by His miracles, by His death and His resurrection, Jesus has given conclusive evidence that He was not Joseph’s son, but the only-begotten Son of God the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

There has been, and there always will be, a flagrant disagreement on the question *“Is this not Joseph’s son?”* But ***“but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁸***

You now understand why the answer to this crucial question has such decisive consequences. Your eternity hinges on it.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant you according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with might by His Holy Spirit in the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is what He claims to be in our text, the Christ and the Son of the living God, the only true God and eternal Life. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 4:14

-
- ² Matthew 4:4
³ Verses 17-19
⁴ John 9:16
⁵ John 10:20-21
⁶ Matthew 16:13-16
⁷ Matthew 27:43
⁸ Matthew 27:54
⁹ Matthew 26:65
¹⁰ 1 John 5:20
¹¹ John 3:2
¹² John 11:47-48
¹³ Acts 4:16-17
¹⁴ Matthew 5:3
¹⁵ 2 Timothy 2:26
¹⁶ Genesis 4:13
¹⁷ Acts 16:30
¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:23-24