



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

“THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST”

John Galbreath
Bible Study Series

Text: Matthew 21:10-11
Date: April 15, 1962

About Westminster's Galbreath Bible Study Series:

This lesson is one taken from a sermon preached by John Galbreath at Westminster Presbyterian Church on April 15, 1962. It was filed with a similarly themed sermon, "The Identity of Jesus," that he preached on January 13, 1974.

To complete the lesson, we suggest that you begin by reading the designated Bible passage (Matthew 21:10-11).

Though the records are incomplete, it seems likely that the hymns were "Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun," "Of for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," and "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna." You might wish to review the text of those hymns. And keep in mind that this was the week that the Church's young people were becoming members that year.

Next, you should review the outline of the sermon. Reflect on the chosen scripture and how you would "fill in" the remainder of the message from the chosen passage.

Then, review the study questions posed about the lesson — whether by yourself or in your small group.

Finally, share your thoughts on the Galbreath Bible Study blog on the Westminster Intranet.

I. Introduction

A. Jesus was not widely known in his time.

1. One man, walking the roads of Galilee and Judea.
2. No mass communication -- no Irving Levine, no Huntley-Brinkley
3. He was no publicity seeker -- told those about him not to speak of his mighty works.

B. Now at the height of Jesus' career, the crowd in Jerusalem, viewing the strange throng about a man on a donkey, asked "Who is This?"

C. This is the perennial question.

1. It is the question Jesus had had to ask of Himself some three years earlier.
 - a) *In a forty-day inner struggle, he had to define just who He was.*
2. As our young people come before the church today to make their profession, this question is the basic one they must face -- "Who is this Jesus?"

II. This is the Prophet Jesus, From Nazareth

A. A prophet -- not a rebel.

1. This is a question the Roman sentries must have asked.
 - a) *In the explosive atmosphere, was this a potential threat to Rome's military power?*
 - b) *The answer, "just a prophet," must have put their minds somewhat at rest.*
 - c) *Unless they had heard of Elijah, or Jeremiah.*
2. Jesus was, indeed, a prophet. Many Jews had despaired for Israel's knowing another prophet -- the prophetic strain seemed to have died centuries before.
3. History will bear out the judgment of the crowd.

- a) *If Jesus and Plato were to speak, and one were to choose -- who would be in Plato's audience?*
- b) *What personality of today's world of philosophy, of science, of religion, would draw a crowd, against Jesus?*
- c) *There are many critics of the Church today, but where are the critics of Christ?*
 - (1) The Communists find themselves inadvertently

B. But "Prophet" was not enough.

1. The danger of half-truths.

a) Calvary was filled with men who had half-truths.

(1) The high priests were correct in saying no man had the right to replace the Law of God.

(2) Pilate was right in saying this was just a squabble among Jews -- let them handle it as they would.

(3) The Roman soldiers were right -- they merely followed orders.

(4) A crowd that saw him only as a prophet was prepared to cry "Crucify him!"

(a) Jerusalem had a habit of killing her prophets -- and Jesus was not to be the exception.

2. The trouble with the prophet is that we accept him only so long as we agree with him.

a) "Get back to the gospel and stop meddling."

III. "Thou Art the Messiah (Christ)"

A. "Whom say men that I Am?"

1. Peter replies, "Some say, a second Elijah, or Elisha."

B. "Thou art the Messiah."

1. Peter knew, not only the words of Jesus, but had seen his mighty deeds.
2. Intimacy usually disenchant -- but the more they knew Jesus, the deeper was their devotion.
3. "Being on the side of an idea that has come of age."
 - a) *The Messiah had come -- and He was at His side.*
 - b) *It is hard to accept greatness when it is so close to you.*

C. Then one night, at the chiding of a waitress, Peter said, "I never knew Him."

1. Jesus had not fulfilled his Messiahship that Peter had envisaged.

IV. My Lord and My God -- two weeks later

A. "I will not believe, unless I put my hand on the print of the nails, I will not believe."

1. The Risen Lord appeared, "Be not faithless but believe."
2. "My Lord and My God."

B. Jesus could not be fully known on the other side of the cross.

1. Jesus was not just "The Prophet" and "The Messiah."
 - a) *These were the titles of men.*
 - b) *Such a title could command the loyalty that great men deserve.*
2. Jesus calls for the loyalty that men give only to God.

C. "The Prophet" and "The Messiah" becomes "My Lord" and "My God."

1. It is not until Jesus is known in the personal relationship that His identity becomes real.

V. Conclusion

Suetonius was the rather gossipy private secretary of Emperor Hadrian. In a journal, written nearly a hundred years after these events we find:

"He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus."

Suetonius wrote as though Christ were a contemporary. But this is the only way we can truly know Jesus -- for it is a Risen, Living Lord to whom we give our life.

Study Questions -- Part I

Bible Reading:

Matthew 21:10 says: "When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?'"

- Imagine that you were present on that Palm Sunday. If you have never heard about Jesus, what would you have thought when you saw the crowds treating Him as they did?
- Now imagine that you were already a Christian. How would you have answered the question "Who is this?" for those who didn't yet know Him?

Matthew 21:11 says: "The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

- What would you have expected to see once someone had been identified as a prophet?

Study Questions -- Part II

Sermon :

The title of the is "The Identity of Christ." If you had the opportunity to meet someone *today* who had never heard of Jesus, how would you begin to describe Him?

I.A.2 -- Dr. Galbreath mentions important reporters of the day. In today's world of non-stop communication, think about the "voices" of various news sources -- newspaper, magazines, television news -- and think about how those reporters might describe the events of Palm Sunday.

I.A.2 -- If you were reporting from the scene, how would you go about telling the story? To whom would you speak?

I.A.3. -- Jesus was not a publicity seeker. In our world, do you think Jesus would have been able to share His message without using the media?

I.A.3 -- A lyric in *Jesus Christ Superstar* says, "Israel in 4 B.C. had no mass communication." If mass communication had been available how do you think Jesus might have used it to spread God's word?

I.C. 1. -- Dr. Galbreath notes that Jesus was more than thirty when he began His ministry. What do you suppose those first years were like in His life? Do you imagine that he was simply a carpenter or do you suppose he was already serving but on a smaller scale?

I.C.2. -- This mentions the young people joining the church back in 1962. How do you think the young people who join Westminster today are like those young people? How are they different? How do you think their lives as Christians will be different because of the ways in which the world has changed?

II.A. -- Dr. Galbreath notes that Jesus was a prophet not a rebel. How do you think He would be viewed if he traveled to the Afghanistan or Pakistan of today?

II.A. 1.b. -- How could Jesus put people's minds to rest if he traveled to atheist, Buddhist, Muslim or other areas?

II.A.3. b. -- If Jesus did appear today, who of the "pundits" in the media do you think would speak against Him? How do you think Jesus would react in such a debate? What would He say to them?

II.A.3.c. -- The sermon was preached in 1962. Who do you think would be mentioned as critics of the church today? What about critics of Christ?

II.B.1. 2. -- If you had been able to defend Jesus before Pilate and the crowds, how would you have argued on His behalf?

II.B. 2. -- Is there anything that Jesus said that you find yourself disagreeing with, even in part? How does that impact your relationship with Him? What do you think He would tell you if you asked Him about it?

III.B. -- The sermon notes that Peter had seen Jesus' deeds. How do you think faith differed for those who saw the deeds than for those of us who believe entirely on faith?

III.B.2. -- Dr. Galbreath notes that intimacy usually disenchants but that the more people knew Jesus the deeper their devotion was. Do you think that still holds true today? How do you deepen your devotion by learning more about Him?

III.C. -- Even as Peter knew the words and deeds of Jesus, he still denied Him. Have you ever faced a situation where you may not have denied Him but simply found it easier not to start an argument? Thinking back on it, how would you face that situation today?

IV.A. -- Have you ever faced a situation that made you want to see "the print of the nails?" How do you move beyond that and hold to your faith?

IV.C. -- The sermon says: "It is not until Jesus is known in the personal relationship that His identity becomes real." How are you building a personal relationship that makes Him real to you?

V. -- Does it change your faith in any way to know that Suetonius, writing so long ago, alludes to Christ? How would you use those writings to tell others of Him?

V. -- How do you make Jesus feel like a contemporary in your own life?