

Do You Recognize This Man? (Part 1)

Misconceptions About Christ

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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We have all probably seen on television, maybe on some internet news site, maybe some newspaper, or even on the wall of the US Post Office, a large headline reading, "Do you recognize this man?" Underneath this caption is a picture of a felon whom the police are trying to locate and arrest. More often than not, there is a short description of the suspected criminal with such information as height, weight, hair and eye color, and any other distinguishing traits they might have. Usually there is a black and white photograph of a suspicious-looking guy with a two-day beard and a scar on his cheek. The description says that his name is Lee Wayne Ray, with brown hair, brown eyes, stands just under six feet tall, and weighs 190 lbs. dripping wet. He has the scar on his cheek and was last seen wearing blue jeans, a black skull and crossbones T-shirt, riding an old Harley motorcycle, and frequents biker and honky-tonk bars.

Could you recognize such a character? Probably. I suppose that someone like that would not be very hard to spot.

There is a more benign form of this in the picture that appears on the side of a milk carton that accompanies school lunches. This one is a bit sadder because it is almost always a child, and there is a caption that reads, "Have you seen this child?" There would be a picture of a cute little boy or girl, with tousled hair, and shining eyes, and a button nose. And this child has been missing for a long time, and his or her parents want them found and back home.

This case is more sad because once a child gets on a milk carton, he is been missing for a while. And you know that once a child has been missing for an extended period of time, the chances of them being found alive are mighty slim.

But, getting this picture before the public must work well enough to make it worthwhile because they are still doing it.

Let us play a little game.

I will describe a real or fictional character from the past, and you see if you could recognize him or her. I will describe, and you will picture them in your mind, and figure out who it is.

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1. The first person is a fairly tall and thin man. He had considerable education, and was renowned for his logical deductive reasoning. Everyone knows that he smoked a pipe, and wore a great overcoat to ward off the damp, and, he donned a strange double-billed cap. He lived in one of the largest cities of the world at the time, when that particular nation was at its height of power. He is reported to have died while chasing his nemesis, and they both went over a waterfall. But, it was only a little while later that he was found alive, and it overjoyed his friend and companion, who was a doctor by profession.

Now everybody knows whom I am talking about. I could not have picked an easier person, right?

It is Sherlock Holmes.

2. This second person is a woman, the last of her ancient nation's monarchs. She is said to have been quite a beauty. She lured two famous generals to fall in love with her. And when the first one was murdered, she took up with the other man. But, he ended up on the losing side of the civil war that followed the first one's murder. Because of this, he committed suicide. And she being distraught decided to take her own life too, but she did it by allowing a snake to bite her. Easy again?

It is Cleopatra.

Just from an oral description, you were able to figure it out, right? So, I am not too hard. It took just a few clues to channel your thinking, and then the answer just comes quickly to you.

3. This third person was a man widely known in his country. He was greatly respected by many, despite the fact that everybody knew that he was illegitimate at a time when illegitimacy was a real black mark against a person's character. He was a rebel, and no law or rule was sacred to him. He did not even wash his hands before supper. He openly consorted with the dregs of society—criminals, prostitutes, outcasts. He routinely blasphemed God, inciting riots, used demonic powers, staged magic tricks, and even gave himself ridiculous titles. One time he even advocated cannibalism. The authorities soon tired of all his non-conformist notions had him executed. Do you recognize this man? You should.

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It is our Savior, Jesus Christ. However, this description was provided not by His followers, but by His enemies. This is what they thought of Him! And you can find these descriptions—every one of them—in this book, the Bible, because God inspired to be written all those things that other people thought He was.

So, from their perspective, He was nothing like the Christ that we know and love. He was bad to the bone to them, even to the point of urging people to eat and drink Him.

Now, despite being converted could we have similar misconceptions about Him?

If Christ were here living amongst us and we did not know who He was, but He came in off the street one day and joined our services, and He stayed with us for several weeks in a row, would we recognize our Savior by the things that He said and did among us? Or, would we reject Him like the Jews did?

It is a sobering question, is it not?

This sermon will be the first of series I am going to do through the Days of Unleavened Bread. This first sermon will essentially be an introduction to the other two. What I want to do is concentrate on the fact that just about everyone with whom Jesus came into contact with during His earthly ministry misunderstood Him—actually during His entire lifetime walking this earth they misunderstood Him. There was hardly a person who accepted Him for what He was, and recognized who He was. And of those who did, none of them did it perfectly either.

We are talking about people who were really close to Him too—His own family; John the Baptist; His own disciples; the crowds that heard Him; as well as the Jewish and Roman authorities. Everybody saw the same person but came up with radically different ideas about Him. Almost to a person, they all condemned Him. As a matter of fact, it is all of our sins that killed Him, so we can truly say that everyone condemned Him.

Now this should give us great pause. And the reason for this is that we are living 2000 years removed from His life walking on this earth. So this is something that happened 80 generations ago, way beyond living memory. We are living in a radically different age, time, and culture. The Jewish Roman society of that time cannot be compared to the way we live today. There are some few points of similarity, but it was very different.

Another thing that is different is that we are reading about Him from a translated Book. We are not even seeing Him act like we would see one another act or hear one another talk. We have to look at it through words on a page that are not even in the original

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language in which they were written.

And so many of the nuances and details we have to search hard to find and understand in context. Sure we have four authentic eyewitness accounts of His life, and that is very good. I am glad God gave us that many! It really helps us to compare and see the different ways that the evangelists looked at His life. Each one of them gives us each something a little bit different. And that is good.

But even so, we do not have the advantage of witnessing His life or hearing His teachings firsthand. We must get the secondhand at least. And, if you count translation, that is third hand, really.

So, we, this far removed and in an entirely different society, reading it all in a book, have to come to recognize Him and follow Him by faith. Because it is a very difficult, almost impossible thing to do without the gift of God's Spirit working in us and with us to come to know this Person. We have to do it through a glass darkly as it were.

Notice Jesus' words to Thomas in John 20. This passage gives us an indication of the disadvantage that we have.

John 20:24-29 Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came [earlier]. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

That gives us a little bit of extra push, momentum, motivation, because there is a special blessing for those of us who having not seen Him in His life or resurrected form and yet believe. So we have a special blessing. At the very least, we have the Holy Spirit of God in us giving us the ability to come to know Him through this very difficult process of growing in faith by hearing.

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It is not an easy thing at all. So what this is here by God through John is an acknowledgment of the difficulty inherent in our truly believing Jesus and what He taught from such a far removed time as this—2000 years, totally different society, totally different way of thinking, and reading it in a book. It is very difficult.

So, if the people who were there seeing the miracles, and hearing the instruction, and witnessing His goodness and perfection, had misunderstandings and misconceptions, and misconstruing of His words, our chances of having them are far greater. It is almost guaranteed that we will not have the complete picture. So, it is up to us to make sure that we do—as well as we can—but is going to be very tough.

You know, we are saddled with even more difficulty in this. I am going to keep piling it on because I want you to understand just how tough it is, and probably the reason why we have such problems at times doing what He tells us to do.

But another one of our difficulties and misfortunes is that we are living at the end of nearly two millennia of false depictions of Christ—things that may or may not be from the Bible—because we have had a great false church out there for all this time, teaching a different gospel and a different Christ. And her daughters who basically picked from where she left off, and gone their own ways, putting out their own different webs for us to get stuck in of falseness—false descriptions.

Now think of this: Think of it just from an artistic point of view. What has the Roman Catholic Church and her protestant daughters taught about Christ through art? What do we know about Him? Well, we have these few generalities that stick in our minds—these images. Images such as a swaddled babe in the manger; we get this every year at Christmas time. Then we get the long haired, soft eyed, delicate-handed young preacher. Okay, so we go from a baby who always needs care, to this effeminate young man who if he picked up a board of wood would break his wrist because he does not have the strength to carry it. He looks like the slightest breeze would blow him down the street.

And then there are two others both basically the same—one is the corpse Jesus, hanging on a cross; or it is the corpse Jesus lying limp in his mother's arms. Again, as with the swaddling baby portrayal, Mary is the one who takes center stage, and not her Son. But, here too, another portrayal of Jesus with no strength. He is not even alive. He cannot do anything. He has bled to death. It is a god with no power. A god with no life. It is the kind of god that Satan would love to see. If you think about it in those terms, it was the god whom Satan finally felt he got his victory over—and that is the image that has been plastered all over this world. It is the one that hangs up in churches and crosses

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everywhere. A dead Jesus.

Now, Jesus did die. Jesus was born. He did go through a period where He was a swaddled baby in a manger. He was a young man at one point, but never long haired, soft eyed, and effeminate looking.

He went through all those stages of life and death, but they are only very small snippets of what He really was, and what He came to truly accomplish. They are snapshots in time. But His life and His character, His teachings are far greater than all that, far more complex, far more nuanced than those images that are portrayed in art.

I have got to ask this question: How many of us, having been in the church of God for 15 to 50 years, still have problems with the popular image of Jesus Christ that we saw every week at church, wherever we had gone, or our parents had on the walls at home when we were growing up? And when we think of Him, we cannot help it but that picture is the first thing that pops into our minds because we have this misconstrued image of what He was. Those things still trouble us from time to time, giving us problems.

Now far worse than the images, I believe, are the false and twisted teachings about Him and His message.

Listen to these, some of these are true, but again they have been taken by the churches of this world and twisted, stretched, or perverted somehow to where what was actually in the Bible is not what they preach at all.

The Kingdom of God is within you. [How many churches run with that?]

Believers go to heaven. Sinners go to hell.

We are no longer under the law, but under grace. [Now that is something from Paul, but where did Paul get it?]

Jesus is the reason for the season.

Crucified on Friday, resurrected on Sunday.

All foods are clean.

Just believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

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Take me as I am, Lord.

All you need is love.

Just name and claim the promise, and the Lord will give you what you ask for.

How many radio and television preachers use that one? Just name it and claim it, and God is forced to give it to you, because you did the procedure like He put it in His Word.

Like I said, some of these things are true, quoted directly out of the Bible, but they have been warped and stretched far beyond their originally intended meanings.

We recognize them but that does not mean that we have not entirely expunged their residues from our thinking. Even after many years in the church of God, they are very pernicious—they cling to us, and we cannot seem to sweep them out of our minds, even though we try hard. We go through this period every year where we are looking for sin, and we are finding sin, and we are sweeping it out of our lives, and trying to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, but still these things fester in us. We do not have the ability, which would be wonderful; to be able to just selectively forget the things we want to forget. We cannot. They are in there. We are still working on our human nature, while it still works on us. There are still things there that Satan can use to get us thinking in a wrong way (again).

Some of us are former Catholics, and continue to struggle with the residue of Catholicism. All it may take is a word, or somebody's actions, and something from their past comes roaring back. Someone was telling me just last week that he remembers everything from the masses, all the words and such, and every time he has to attend a wedding or funeral or whatever, it floods back, and he has to fight it tooth and toenail.

It happens with all of us.

Some Pentecostals have to struggle against that kind of Pentecostal fervor that is not right.

Some Lutherans still struggle with various tenets of Lutheranism.

And it is similar for those who left Judaism too. I know that Jews have a hard time with Christianity because they are so full of the ways that Jews did things. They have trouble divorcing themselves from Judaism in order to be a Christian. We have seen that with a few members in the church over the years. Then we have those who were never Jews,

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leaving the church to go into Judaism thinking that somehow that was a good thing. Go figure.

And then there are people who had no religion before, who were atheists, or secularists, or humanists, or just unchurched, and they come into God's church, and they have to learn everything from scratch, but their prior background gets in the way, it comes back years later, and they have to fight those philosophers and wrong ideas.

Regardless, whether Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Methodists, Calvinist, Mennonite, Baptist, or whatever it may happen to have been—what I am trying to say is that every one of these backgrounds sets us up for misconceptions about Jesus Christ. It does not matter what it was, there are misconceptions that we brought along with us out of the world, and even though we may know that they are not right, they still affect us and influence us, unless we really tamp them down tight, or have thrown them out. This has been very hard to do because even though we tend to think that we do not remember them anymore, they are still there.

So, when we come into the church of God, we must determinedly strive to see Jesus Christ as He really was and is—our God, High Priest, and our soon coming King—and to get as complete a picture of Him as possible and to stamp out all those false conceptions of Him that we dragged in with us, maybe unknowingly, ignorantly; but they are there.

Even in people who grew up in the church of God, there are false conceptions about Jesus—we all had to grow up in this world. We were all affected by our friends. Who knows, we might have had ministers in the past who preached a Jesus that was not quite right. We all went through the “church wars,” did we not? All of those things, all of those misunderstandings stem from a wrong understand of God and Jesus Christ.

Had we had a perfect understanding there would not have ever been any controversy. But we did not understand perfectly, or it was not taught perfectly, or we forgot, or we did not hold on to the things that were true, and so we had to go through a very horrible period of trial. We were all tested to see whether we could stand. And we are still going through that same test. It continues on.

What do you know about Jesus Christ and God the Father? What do you believe about them? Are you building on that understanding? Are you continually fleshing out the picture as it were of Jesus Christ?

Turn to II Corinthians 5. This is a very interesting set of scriptures, but I will not go very

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deep into them right now. However, they have some ramifications to us that we need to think about.

II Corinthians 5:16-17 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Now I am going to take this in its most simplistic sense. When we were in the world in other religions, even other Christianities, we knew Christ only according to the flesh. We knew Christ only to the extent that our human minds filled with human nature could understand it. We looked at Him from an entirely human point of view, even though we thought we were spiritual, even though we thought we were religious, even though we thought we were really digging in, without the Spirit of God we were only stretching our intelligence to try to understand a spiritual man, and we could only go so far with it. You could say that we only knew the story, some of the words, but we were able to approach it only from a very shallow point of view because we were hampered by our human nature. Human nature is not of God. Human nature is influenced by Satan and his attitudes. It is easily influenced by the flesh—our own drives and desires.

And so that really put blinders on us in understanding Jesus Christ because He is so far greater than a human mind can understand. We do not understand why He did things that He did, because our flesh would drive us to do something totally different.

So, we looked at Him entirely in the flesh. It is only when God gives us His Spirit that we have the tools and the power to know Jesus Christ from a correct point of view—that is God's view, God's angle on things. But even so, human nature is still there and it is trying to get us to look at Him totally in the flesh again, because that is easy. It is hard to look at Him from a spiritual point of view because it creates another war—a war between God's nature and our own human nature. And so we are fighting this war, but Paul says here that when you become converted, you are a new creation. You need to start looking at Him entirely from the spiritual point of view because that is where the good nuts are, as it were. This is where everything that we need to know for eternal life takes place—on that spiritual side.

Think of it this way—looking at Jesus Christ and knowing Him in the flesh from just a totally human point of view is no better than the people who were there hearing Him speak or watching Him. And what did they do? They rejected Him, and killed Him.

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Paul's advice here is to put away that fleshly viewpoint and look at Him with fresh spiritual eyes, because we are an entirely new creation now. In another place, Paul calls it the regeneration. It is a new life, new eyes, new understanding, totally new approach and goals—everything is new—everything is better.

So, alone without God's Spirit, we can see only the broad facts and storyline—the highlights of His life. We cannot see the spiritual depth, the intricate connections between the teachings, and His actions and teachings together. We cannot see the nuances of attitudes and instruction in Him. And certainly we cannot see the true godliness and perfection of our Savior.

Human nature blinds us to these things because it is limited, finite, and bound to the things of this earth—the physical (II Corinthians 2). We need the Holy Spirit of God to expand our horizons to open our thinking about the Son of God.

Please turn to John 17 and we will see just how important this is. Jesus is praying, and the disciples are listening, and this is what they hear:

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

It is all there! If we want to have eternal life we have got to get to know both the Father and the Son as deeply and intimately as possible. It is not good enough to rely on a quick caricature of the two greatest Beings in the universe like a cartoonist would draw—this is the sky—this is Jesus Christ—and then leave it at that. Most people do not even get so far as to really put a personality with them. They are just blobs somewhere in deep space maybe radiating with light. That is a really bad caricature. But that is how some people picture them. They do not have any personality and any character to go with it.

This is not enough. If we are going to have eternal life, we have to know them inside and out as well as we can. And the reason for this is if all we know is a caricature of God, then we will develop spiritually only as far as the caricature goes. There is a rule of the universe that says, "We can't reach any higher than our knowledge and understanding of the God we worship." If our God is a frog (like the Egyptians had), our spirituality is going to be no higher than that of a frog, which is nothing. If our God that we worship is a man, the highest aspirations that we could ever have is what man produces. That is what this world is going toward now in this drive toward humanism. They can only grow as far as a man can grow.

This is why God became so upset at Israel when they set up the golden calf, because they were changing the image of God, the nature of God into some stupid bull. Not only was it terribly disrespectful and blasphemous of God, it limited *them* too. They could grow no farther spiritually than a bull. What does a dumb bull do? It lives, it works, it procreates, and it dies. What an existence! What kind of religion is that?

God is no bull. He is infinitely more complex than a bull. He is infinitely more complex than all the animals of this earth combined; all the people of this world put together as well. He is God. He is the Creator. He is the One that sustains this very universe. He cannot be put into the image of anything, certainly no animal created for this earth; or man, for that matter. Isaiah 55 says that His nature, His ways, His thoughts are as far above ours as heaven is above the earth. And Israel wanted to compress Him into a statue of a bull? It is ridiculous.

So, if we want to live the eternal life that God lives, then we have to know how God lives! And the only way to know how God lives is to seek and to know, and to recognize and understand God and Christ to the fullest extent that our minds can handle with the help of God's Spirit working in us. That is the only way we are going to even come close to understanding the way that He lives.

Please turn to John 7. This vignette encapsulates mankind's ambivalence regarding Christ. This happened at the Feast.

John 7:10-12 But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret. Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said, "Where is He?" And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people."

So look, even in these few verses we find, the Jews were looking for Him because they wanted to trap Him, and get Him killed. And then you had the crowd divided among themselves, some saying He was good, while others said otherwise.

John 7:40-44 Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet." Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" So there was a division among the people because of Him.

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Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

So here we have this crowd—who knows how large it was. The feasts in Jerusalem usually attracted many thousands of people. And the controversy of the year was, “Who is this Jesus?” And, “is He a good or a bad man?” Which side would we have come down on if we had been there?

So, who is He? Is He good or evil? Is He a Savior or a charlatan? Is He a prophet or a deceiver? Does He keep the law or does He break it willy-nilly? Does He intend to free us or to enslave us? Does He truly love us or is He only seeking His own glory? Does He bring order or chaos? Are His works genuinely of God or does He do it by Beelzebub?

And do you know what? The world in some form or another is still debating these questions today. They are still divided over Him. They do not know which side to come down on. It is a love-hate relationship.

While we may know the answers to these questions, many of us after many years of being in the church of God, have trouble balancing certain aspects of His character and teachings.

Think about this; here is an example:

In John 14:27, and also in John 16:33 Jesus tells us that He leaves us His peace. But do you know that He says in Matthew 10:34 that He came not to bring peace but a sword? Is this a contradiction? How do we reconcile such opposites? If these sayings were placed side by side in the Bible, there would be people saying, “Aha! Look! He openly contradicted Himself! He can’t bring peace and a sword. It doesn’t work that way.”

It just shows the lack of depth of people. They do not see how He could do both, and still be God. What these are, the peace on one hand, and the sword on the other, are facets of an intricately complex character—One who can rightly determine when it is best to bring peace, or One who can rightly determine when it is right to bring the sword with chaos, destruction, and death. People get all upset about that scripture that says that God says, “I create calamity and evil.” Yes He does! He has His purposes. And only the righteous God can do that properly with the right purposes to bring out the right ending.

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But people do not think of God that way. They think of Him as some loving grandpa or something, who could not possibly lift a hand against anyone. "How could He do that? That wouldn't be loving." Oh yeah? Sometimes it is loving to smack when it is really needed. And God knows when it is needed. It is called the chastening of the Lord. It is the same Lord who gives comfort, and also chastens.

So, do you recognize both the Peacemaker and the Conqueror as the same Jesus Christ?

Here is another one. This is the one that most of the Protestant world has as real problem with, and that is the difference between the Jesus who says, "I Am the Good Shepherd who gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11)," and the Jesus who says, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30)."

Can the Good Shepherd and The Judge be the same Person? Is this caring Man who lifts a lamb out of a hole in the ground the same One who comes with a rod of iron smashing His enemies? Do not they know that a shepherd has both a crook, a staff, and/or a rod?

Do we see both sides? Can we reconcile them? Do we (to put it more broadly) see Him in His fullness? I am sure the answer to that is "no." None of us see Him in His fullness. But, it is our goal to see Him in His fullness.

Turn to I John 3. These things will not happen until the resurrection, but this is the goal.

I John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him [why?], for we shall see Him as He is.

The only way that we are going to be like Him is if we are getting a proper understanding of what He is like, and with His help changing our character to match His. And so, the very next verse tells us, "Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself." This means that we get rid of the sin, the humanity, and anything that is not holy; putting on Jesus Christ, putting on that new man in Christ.

So, if you do not know who Jesus Christ really is, you cannot put Him on. And if you do not know what He is really like, you may pick up some trait and put it on that does not reflect the character of Christ. So we have to know Christ so that we can choose to grow

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in His direction.

Now, I promised this at the beginning, let us see the biblical record of misconceptions about Jesus Christ. We are going to start in Matthew 2. The misconceptions began immediately after He was born.

Matthew 2:1-4 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

I will not go any further. You know the story. They found out that He would be born in Bethlehem, and he sent the magi down to that area, and they found Christ, and they gave Him the gold, frankincense, and myrrh; then in a dream they were warned to leave by another way, and so they did.

Matthew 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

We see two different reactions to the Christ here. One believing He was a King, believing He was an heir to an earthly throne, bowed down to Him and worshipped Him, giving Him gifts worthy of a king. They misconstrued His purpose here on earth. They thought that He was an earthly king coming to rule. He was an heir to the throne of Judah and to the throne of Parthia too, because that is where these magi came from. Parthia was an empire of the time ruled by a line of David's descendants caused by the dispersion of Israel and Judah previously. And they were there to acknowledge the fact that this child was a possible heir to their throne in Parthia. That is why they gave Him the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, because He was somebody special. And He was! But in their eyes, as far as we know, He was only an earthly king.

Well, how about Herod? Herod saw Him as a rival to his throne, a rival to be gotten rid of. He took immediate action and tried to assassinate Him because he did not want this

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kid causing trouble for him when He grew up.

So, right away, there are two main groups of characters in the story who misconstrue Jesus Christ and His purpose. They misunderstand.

Now it is fine that the magi gave Him the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, because He was indeed a king. But He was not here to rule the earth right now as it were. They misunderstood.

But, since God sent them, there was a good reason for it. But in their own mind, they had things wrong.

Luke 2:41-50 His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the Boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it; but supposing Him to have been in the company, they went a day's journey, and sought Him among their relatives and acquaintances. So when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them.

It says it right there! They misunderstood. They knew He was a prodigy. Here was this kid that they never had to spank. He was the perfect child. He never did anything wrong. And I am sure that this astonished them, that when they said, "Okay, Jesus, let's go on back to Nazareth," He did not come. Maybe it was the first time that He "disobeyed" them, or "evaded" them, or whatever they thought. They were astonished, and they were anxious. Jesus could not have done this! He would not have done this, would He? He would not have left us. They even knew that He was the promised Savior of Israel—the Immanuel—God with us! It was very clearly told to them that this is who He was. Yet, they totally failed to understand His drive and zeal to do the work of God.

As soon as He got an opportunity, He took the time to go to the temple, and listen, and

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talk to the ones who were supposed to know something—the priests and the teachers in the temple. His parents thought He was irresponsible, and maybe disobedient. But He was pursuing His higher duties. He already knew what it was. And He took the opportunity when it presented itself to educate Himself at the temple, if only for a few days.

Something simple like that—here He was, improving Himself, and doing what God wanted Him to do, and He got called down for it by His mom. She misunderstood.

Matthew 4:1-4, 10-11 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" . . . Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Even Satan "misunderestimated" (as George Bush is reputed to have said); he miscalculated his ability to tempt Jesus to sin. I am sure that he did not go into this temptation thinking that he would lose. Satan knew he was a man, weak like other men, and surly He could not be as strong as Adam. Adam was newly created about 4000 years before. He was strong; the prototype man. He was just made out of the dust of the ground; full of mental and physical strength.

But Jesus had been in the wilderness for 40 days and physically weak. I am sure that He was somewhat emaciated by this time. He wanted food. So, that was the first thing Satan tempted Him with. He thought, "I'll get Him through His stomach," (The lust of the flesh) because His flesh is crying out, craving sustenance of some sort. "Jesus, You've got power. Those stones over there not doing any good as stones, why don't you turn them into something fluffy, nice and light, and just eat that wonder bread. You'll love it!"

But what did Jesus do? He rebuked Satan, and said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." He came back at Satan with Scripture.

They did this two more times. And each time He came back quoting scripture when the question was lust of the eyes, and also when the question was the pride of life. Each time Jesus said, "No, I'm not going to give in. I'm not going to worship any other God but

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the Father. I'm not going to listen to you. You may have been able to fool Adam and Eve, and all the rest ever since, but that streak stops with Me, because I've come here to do a greater work."

And He did. Satan "misunderestimated" Him.

Turn to Luke 4. This passage is when Christ started His ministry in His hometown of Nazareth.

Luke 4:16-17, 20-24 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. 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, (and He reads the scripture) 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. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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?" He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country.

And then He said things along the lines that, "Gentiles are more receptive to what I have to say than you are. You are all hardheaded, and hardhearted."

They had just said, they marveled at His gracious words. And you know what?

Luke 4:28-30 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 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. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

They did not see the soft guy with the effeminate hair. No, He looked a lot like them, and He could pass through the crowd without being seen.

So even the people of His hometown misunderstood Him. They had watched Him grow

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up, and they knew His family. They knew His reputation for piety, honesty, and hard work because He was there in the synagogue every week. I am sure that He had taken His turn to read before. As a boy growing up, they knew He was the carpenter's son. They knew He did hard work, and He could build a nice house. "But preach the gospel? Are you kidding me?" They saw Him not as a prophet or Savior, but only as Jesus the local boy. They could not see beyond that.

They could not take His mild rebuke about the hardness of their hearts either. For that, they wanted to kill Him! And by their actions, He was proved correct! They misunderstood Him.

Turn to Matthew 11. Even His cousin, John the Baptist, misunderstood Him, had misconceptions about Him.

Matthew 11:1-6 Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding His twelve disciples, that He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Even John the Baptist, the one who proclaimed, "This is the Lamb of God," "I saw the Spirit of God come down on Him like a dove," "I heard the voice out of heaven saying, 'This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" doubted. I wonder why. Why did John think he needed to ask this question after he had had that great witness to Himself about who He was? I am sure that his imprisonment had something to do with it. One could get depressed thinking that life is over. Things just were not working out the way that you expected, because you were sitting there rotting in jail someplace. I am sure that John the Baptist, being a man, had those thoughts running through his head. Maybe he thought that Jesus would come to where he was in prison, and set him free—miraculously somehow. That it would work out; that John and Jesus would meet again. I do not know. Perhaps he felt, or he was thinking that maybe Jesus had come to set up the Kingdom of God on earth right then, and that if he would just wait long enough, Jesus would set up His government and all those who were on Jesus side would be set free. I do not know.

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But the answer that Jesus gave him was clear. His work of healing, and preaching the gospel was the work of the Savior. And that is all that he should have expected to see. So, he should not be offended by what God had sent him to do.

So, even John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, had trouble understanding what Jesus was all about.

There is another one in Mark 10.

Mark 10:35-40 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

Hmmm. Could maybe James and John have misconstrued Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of God? It sounds like they did. James and John were among the disciples that were closest to Him; certainly John was known as the beloved disciple. Yet even they did not understand what He meant about them sitting on thrones with Him in the Kingdom of God. I think that like many others, they thought it was going to be an earthly kingdom. Or, maybe constructed on the lines of an earthly kingdom, where Jesus as its king could simply hand out offices to His friends in some sort of patronage system—like all the other nations do. They thought that they had an "in" because they knew the "big guy." He would pave the way for them to have all these nice things. "You be duke." You, be this other duke." And they would be right there—have it made.

But Jesus pulls some them up short on this idea. "Look, you have to qualify to sit on my throne with Me. And, the way that you qualify (listen to this) is through suffering!"

"Hey hey! (clap, clap!)" "And through overcoming!" "Whoo Hoo!"

"And if you want to be a ruler in My Kingdom, guess what! You must be a servant of all! Isn't that great, James and John? Do you want to sign up here?"

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They already had. He really turned them about, did He not? Here they were looking for all the good things—blessings, gifts, high positions of power—and He said, “Okay! Do you want these things? Well then, you gotta pay for them! Do you really want them?”

Of course, they did. But, they had to learn that.

You might want to jot down Mark 3:1-3 because it is still another incidence that illustrates the Jews, certainly the Pharisees, misunderstood Him. This is the one where He went into the synagogue, and healed the man with the withered hand. And they were telling Him, “You shouldn’t do that on the Sabbath.” And it says that He looked upon them with anger. And He said, “Which is better—to keep the Sabbath, or save a life?” And then they got all huffy about it because He meant to heal the man.

They did not understand, like other places also mention that God desires mercy before sacrifice. So, they misconstrued Him too.

There are lots of these in the Bible where they misunderstood what He said, and what He meant, taking it the wrong way, and eventually wanting to kill Him—and they did.

I will not go to John 18:33-38 because that is well known also. This is the example of Pilate. Pilate said, “Are you a king then? That’s what the Jews tell me, that you’re some kind of king, and could rebel against Caesar.” And Jesus said, “Certainly I’m a king, but my kingdom is not of this world. I came here to witness for the truth.” Pilate then says, “What is truth?” But then he concludes, “This man is innocent.”

He thought that Jesus was a would-be prophet, and a Jewish rabble rouser that the Jews brought to him to get rid of. He did not see Him as the King of all, or The Prophet, or as the Word of God, or the Creator—his Creator! He just thought He was some Jew that had been caught in the Jew’s net.

These types of misconceptions continue to this day. People the world over, and to some small extent even we in the church, do not understand Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior and King. Yet, despite our varying misconceptions, while we were yet in unbelief, He paid the price for our sins by giving His own precious life for us, knowing that in time, through His Spirit, He would help us understand who He really is, and it is our lifelong project to get to know Him even better.

In closing, turn to Isaiah 53. It is for these misconceptions about who God is that He gave Himself for us so that He could straighten us out in due time.

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Isaiah 53:1-6 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Have a wonderful Sabbath, and inspiring Passover season!