

# Easter 2016

## Title: **“Your Easter Decision”**

*March 27, 2016 ~ Selected Passages*

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OBJECTIVE: To help everyone understand each person must make a decision if they believe Jesus is their Savior.

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One of the realities of getting older is you become unaware of celebrity culture.

Now this may not be a bad thing – it may be one of the blessings of getting older!

However, we’ll be watching TV – take for instance the show “The Voice”. To help the contestants improve their singing and performance, the cast brings in celebrity singers to help coach the contestants.

I’ve never heard of some of these singers who are brought in to coach – and the humbling thing about it is, these are typically singers / entertainers who have won various awards and they are usually highly respected and popular!

I have to ask my kids: “*Who is that?*”

I guess as you get older you’re too busy to follow pop culture like you did when you were in H.S.

One of the mistakes we Christians can make is assume everyone knows who Jesus is – and assume people know what He has done – assume people know what Jesus offers. We have grown so used to Jesus, that sometimes we don’t realize the person we work with – our neighbor across the

street – the person who cuts our hair – we can assume they know about Jesus and have made a decision about Jesus.

But in many cases we would be wrong.

We live in a culture which is now post-Christian.

Meaning – the overall culture no longer thinks in biblical terms or is familiar with the bible or with Jesus.

The majority in our culture no longer recognize a sovereign God and creator – they recognize the ‘*sovereignty of self*’.

Everything they do and deciding if it’s right or wrong – is based not on some outside ‘judge’ or standard, but on what the individual thinks is right for themselves.

One of the common questions you find throughout the Gospel accounts of the days before Jesus’ crucifixion are the questions:

“Who is Jesus?”

“What shall I do about Jesus?”

These questions are more common in America that we would like to believe – and these questions are much more important than asking, “*Who’s that singer? “What have they done?”*”

So, this morning I want to organize around 3 points which were important to people in Jesus’ day – and they’re just as important in your life today.

#1 – The *identity* of Jesus

#2 – What Jesus *accomplished*

### #3 – Your decision about Jesus

#### Prayer

#### #1 - The identity of Jesus.

Who is Jesus? Not everyone in America knows about Jesus.

In fact, there are many who have attended church throughout their life. Maybe that describes you – growing up and going to church with your family – but it never really made sense to you – it never impacted you and grabbed onto your heart!

Video – “Who is Jesus?” – 3:40

People have all kinds of ideas about who Jesus was / is – but we have a very clear passage in the Bible which tells us who Jesus was.

Let’s look at what’s called, “Peter’s great confession”.

Turn to **Matthew 16:13-16**.

In context, Jesus’ popularity is growing among the people – He’s becoming a celebrity – especially with the people in the northern part of Israel. As you know from our own culture, the public image of a celebrity is not always accurate to reality.

So, in this passage Jesus is talking with His disciples and He asks them a question about popular opinion concerning Himself.

**Matthew 16:13-16**

13 “When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

15 “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Peter got this one right – A+ on the exam!

In his next statement, he nearly gets expelled out of school!

In vs. 14, the disciples tell us there was a great deal of confusion about Jesus in the minds of people. At the bars and in the city square – people knew of Jesus – but they didn’t really know who He was.

The most important question is what Jesus asks His disciples in vs. 15 - and it’s a question not only for them to answer - but for you and me to answer:

15 “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Have you answered the question?

Our educational system has taken a great deal of heat and criticism in recent years – some of it undeserving – but much of it deserving.

*“Don’t use red pens to grade the papers, it will hurt their feelings if they have lots of red marks on their test.”*

*“Don’t mark it wrong if they say  $2+2=5$  – after all, they should be praised for trying – even if the answer is wrong.”*

I realize these may be stereotypical maladies for our schools today – but its undeniable that we have become soft on specifics and soft on the issue of right and wrong in many situations.

There is 1 correct answer to:  $2+2$  – and every other answer is wrong.

There is 1 correct answer to the question: “Who do you say I am?”

Every other answer is wrong.

Jesus is the Christ – the Messiah – the anointed one of God.

Jesus is the Savior of the world.

Jesus is God (John 1 – God incarnate)

Do you know who Jesus is – or do you have some version of Jesus that someone made more palatable to current sensitivities?

Is your identity of Jesus a politically correct one – or a biblically and historically correct one?

## **#2 – What Jesus accomplished**

Not only is it important to know who Jesus was / is – but it’s crucial to know what He accomplished.

In fact, you can’t separate His identity from His accomplishments.

You can’t take Jesus’ identity – and leave out His work.

Who Jesus was had a direct effect on the work He did.

Of course, Jesus did many things.

**Jesus was a great teacher.** His teaching attracted large crowds wherever He went and people were amazed at not only the content of His teaching, but the authority by which He taught.

**Jesus was a great moralist.** His most popular sermon – the Sermon on the Mount – has the greatest moral teaching the world has ever known.

**Jesus was a healer.** The Gospel accounts of Jesus record His healing ministry where thousands of people were healed of disease, sickness and even birth defects.

**Jesus was a revolutionary.** He stood against the ruling class – the religious leaders of His day. He renounced their hypocrisy and their heavy hand upon the people.

**Jesus was a prophet.** He spoke the Word of God – He brought the message of God to the world.

**Jesus was a King.** He was born in the royal bloodline of David – He told Pilate He was a King – on His cross read the sign, “The King of the Jews”.

**Jesus was a priest.** The book of Hebrews details His priesthood as He interceded on behalf of sinners before a holy God. Jesus presented the greatest sacrifice to atone for the sins of humanity.

This is His greatest and primary accomplishment – His atoning sacrifice for sins.

The Apostle Peter writes:

**1 Peter 3:18a**

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”

The Apostle Paul writes:

**Romans 5:8**

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

The great accomplishment of Jesus was dying as a sacrifice for your sins - for my sins - for the sins of the world - and rising from the dead - defeating sin and death - making it possible for us to be reconciled with God! Jesus did a lot of things - but becoming the world's one and only Savior is His greatest accomplishment.

### **#3 – Your decision about Jesus**

Unless you live under a rock somewhere ‘off the grid’ - you know all too well that we're in the political season. Political campaigns are important for us as citizens because we have a decision to make.

A responsible citizen listens to what the candidates say - and looks at the candidate's history to see if what they are saying now agrees with their past actions.

Eventually, the primary process will result in the political parties nominating a candidate.

The American voting public must make a decision about their preferred candidate.

A winner will be decided upon on November 8<sup>th</sup>.

Many people attend church and try to do more good than bad in their life, and they think if they do those things their spiritual life has been tended to.

Religion is viewed as something you do - a place you go - an ideal you try and live up to.

But this is not what Jesus taught.

Jesus made it very clear - you...me...everyone must make a decision about Him. We must have faith in Jesus. The last week of Jesus' life, we see people making decisions about Him.

The first person I want us to consider is Judas Iscariot.

Judas is the disciple who betrayed Jesus with a kiss. He is one of the most despised people in human history.

Even Jesus said it would have been better for him if he had not been born (Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21).

But I see Judas in a lot of people.

Everyone saw Judas and counted him as a disciple of Jesus. By all appearances, he seemed to be a devoted follower, but in the end, it was obvious he was more concerned for himself.

In the end, it's clear to see he was following Jesus for his own agenda.

He thought Jesus would lead a revolt against the Romans and once again establish an independent nation of Israel.



When it became clear this would not happen - Judas betrayed Jesus for the price of redeeming a slave (Ex. 21:32). Let me be clear - when I say: "*I see Judas in a lot of people*", I'm not saying I think people would betray Jesus as Judas did.

But...how many people do you know who simply walk away from Jesus?

How many people follow Jesus for a time - maybe years - attending church - serving in ministry - and they simply walk away from the One they claimed to follow...the One they claimed to believe in?

Have you walked away from Jesus?

That's what I mean when I say, "*I see Judas in a lot of people*". I see a lot of people over the years who follow Jesus for an extended time - only to abandon Him - to walk away from the one and only Savior.

Usually it's due to some disappointment or tragedy in life. We could make a very long list of life's disappointments and tragedies couldn't we - but in some sense, it's just like Judas - Jesus didn't live up to the expectation.

Judas wanted a revolution - Jesus offered redemption.

Never mind the expectation was wrong.

Never mind the expectation was based in their own agenda.

Have you walked away?

Have you decided Jesus isn't worth your devotion?

The next person is Pilate.

To be fair - Pilate was put into a very difficult situation.

He was forced to make a decision about Jesus - and it was not an easy decision. But that's what leaders must do - make the tough decisions - and make the right decisions.

When you boil it down - Pilate was unjust and his backbone was found lacking.

Peer pressure is not limited to adolescent struggles.

Peer pressure played a role in the condemnation of Jesus Christ.

Pilate found Jesus innocent:

**Luke 23:4, 14-15, 22**

"Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

"You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined Him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him."

vs. 22 - For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in Him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have Him punished and then release Him."

**John 18:38**

"What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against Him."

**John 19:4, 6, 12**

“Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him.””

**Vs. 6:** “As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw Him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!” But Pilate answered, “You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him.””

**Vs 12:** “From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.””

Peer pressure. Sometimes our decision about Jesus is influenced by those in our life - those close to us - or the group we hang out with and try to impress.

Pilate ‘wants to satisfy the crowd’ more than satisfy justice or make a decision based on the truth...

**Mark 15:15**

“Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them...””

Pilate knew what he should do with Jesus. A judge knows you release the prisoner if the prisoner is innocent. But Pilate was afraid to make the right decision, so he asked the crowd what to do with Jesus.

**Mark 15:12**

“...Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?””

**Matthew 27:22**

“Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?””

The crowd influenced Pilate's decision about Jesus and what to do with Him.

**Luke 23:24**

"So Pilate decided to grant their demand."

**Matthew 27:24-26**

"When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

All the people answered, "His blood is on us and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed Him over to be crucified."

Pilate...it was your responsibility.

You were the Roman authority who was responsible to determine guilt or innocence. You determined Jesus was innocent, but you gave Him the gravest penalty of the guilty!

When it comes to Jesus, you can't be passive or neutral. You can't wash your hands of the whole Jesus thing and say, *"I'm sitting this one out!"*

Passivity or neutrality is a rejection of Christ!

In your own life, does the 'crowd' stifle your belief?

Does the crowd deter your willingness to stand for Christ?

Following the crowd is not the best practice.

Jesus said,

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.”

**Matthew 7:13**

You must make a decision about Jesus...which brings us to the ‘People of Israel’.

There are others we could look at and see the decision they made about Jesus.

- We could look at the Roman Centurion who watched Jesus die on the cross and realized Jesus “was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).
- We could look at the women who stood by Jesus throughout the entire crucifixion (John 19:25).
- We could look at the thief crucified next to Jesus and His declared faith in Jesus as he pleads with Jesus to remember him when He comes into His kingdom (Luke 23:42).

However, I want us to consider the decision made by the people of Israel.

Fifty days after the resurrection, on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost - the day the church was ‘born’ - the Apostle Peter preached a sermon to the people in Jerusalem.

(“Fellow Jews” – Acts 2:14)

Peter’s sermon is helpful because he not only preached about the identity of Jesus and the great work of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection - but he also told the people to make a decision about Jesus.

He told them to repent of their sins in the name of Jesus and be baptized!

**Acts 2:32-33**

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

**Acts 2:36-38**

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “**Brothers, what shall we do?**”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**Apply it...**

Decide to put your faith in Jesus...

Become one of His followers...

Become a Christian - a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

**A**dmit your sins

**B**elieve in Jesus as your Savior

**C**ommit each day to Christ

Get baptized - a public commitment to Christ

Next Sunday - Commit each day - begin with baptism!

Close in prayer