

## What do you think about Jesus?

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Really?

Greg Sheridan is the long-time Foreign Affairs Editor of the Australian Newspaper. He has written a very important book about Christianity in the West, entitled "God is Good For You; A defence of Christianity in Troubled Times." In it he quotes this, from an American observer: *"The religion of modern young American nominal Christians is at best, a kind of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. (Don't worry about the big words!) This holds that there is a God, he exists to solve your problems and make you feel happy, you should be nice to people, and your chief goal in life is to feel happy all the time. Religion thus becomes a kind of therapist's flexible couch, designed solely for your comfort, with God reduced to a quiet parody of the non-directional therapist, who addresses your problems only by repeating your own thoughts back to you and at best sometimes murmuring that, really, you are a very, very special person."*<sup>(1)</sup>

Really?

So what do you think about Jesus?

This is not a new question!

Just under 2000 years ago Jesus himself asked this question strolling along the roads of Northern Israel with his disciples. They had been with him and watching him for almost 3 years now. So he says, as recorded in our gospel reading today:

*"Who do people say I am?"* (Mark 8:27)

## What do you think about Jesus?

He's getting at what the ordinary folks think. Not what are his enemies saying, but, those who don't have an axe to grind – what are they saying?

They replied,

- Some think that somehow John the Baptist, beheaded by King Herod has come back from the dead.
- Others think that the long-awaited re-appearance of Elijah has happened – as they were promised – and he would usher in the coming of the Lord God himself to make everything right.
- And others agreed that Jesus was so outstanding he must be one of the prophets – a straight-shooter getting up the noses of the authorities.

But Jesus' question is for the disciples themselves.

V 29: *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

And Peter answers on behalf of them all:

"You are the Christ!"

Do you notice he calls him THE Christ? That's because Christ is a title, not a name. (If people were to send Jesus a letter they would not address it to Mr J Christ. It's not his surname). No, Peter is correct.

He is saying you are the Messiah (same word, but in the Jewish version). You are the King of the world. Christ, or Messiah means "anointed one". Here it means the one anointed by God as King of all things and people.

## What do you think about Jesus?

It's a title dripping with significance from the Old Testament. For instance, it speaks of the anointed son of God, or king, in Psalm 2.

He is told to sit at God's right hand (the place of all power). He is told to sit there until God makes all his enemies a footstool for the messiah's feet. If they don't want to be crushed by him they must, as the writer says, "*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry*". Here is the King of the world set over the world by God. And he is to rule for the good of his people. He will – to coin a phrase – make Israel great again! We know from elsewhere what that means for the disciples. For them, they think it will mean sharing in the power. Seats at the table. The best seats at the table. They'll be known! If they've hitched their futures to Jesus, surely they will get a great payout!

Sadly, not much has changed. If the quote from Greg Sheridan is anywhere near true then many people who say they are Christians are deluded.

For, instead of comfort, Jesus promises blood, sweat and tears.

Instead of a glorious throne with the whole world laid at his feet, he will hang between earth and heaven. In full view of his disciples and his enemies and the whole nation of Israel he will die as a common criminal, just one of thousands crucified that year.

*Mark 8:34: He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this.*

## What do you think about Jesus?

It's scary, isn't it? For when Peter naturally rejects this, Jesus tells him "Your resistance to the way I will become King, the way I will show I am Messiah, is nothing less than Satanic. You're not thinking God's way, but like a human thinks."

Don't be too harsh on Peter. He was embarrassed.

From time to time we get embarrassed by the cross and the resurrection. It's embarrassing to take our stand with a crucified God. It seems completely out of step with our can-do society to have to say to people actually, you cannot get right with God by trying harder to be good. To have to say to people that the only way they can have a clear conscience is first of all to understand you can't make it clean yourself. To have to say to people that our God is a God who appears profoundly weak. And so are we. To have to tell people they are also helpless to make themselves or this world right with God. To say that the only way we will ever see justice done is to put our lives in the hands of a God who was unjustly strung up on a cross.

And yet – that's the truth.

Christianity is not about having my needs met, but about trusting the One who went to the cross for me. As we are reminded in the Communion, in trusting the One who willingly stood in for us when we should be justly punished for not living in God's world in God's way. That punishment was the reason Jesus determined to go to the cross and to rise again.

## **What do you think about Jesus?**

And that is why he calls us to die to self and to stand firm for him.

**<sup>(1)</sup>Sheridan, Greg. God is Good for You: A defence of Christianity in troubled times (p. 10). Allen & Unwin. Kindle Edition.**