

Introduction

I read an article titled "The 25 Most Important Questions in the Universe." They include the following: (1) Can a pregnant woman drive in the carpool lane; (2) Why does Hawaii have interstate highways; (3) Why can't we tickle ourselves; (4) How many licks does it take to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop; and (5) Why are Grape-Nuts neither grapes nor nuts? Those are obviously tongue-in-cheek questions but the one people asked in verse 10 isn't. It is in fact one of the five most important questions in the universe. Let's examine and answer it today.

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-11 records the event that kicked off the last week of Jesus' life. In verses 1-3, He instructed His disciples to procure a particular donkey for Him, a colt that no one had ever ridden. That explains why He had them procure its mother as well. The mother would be a comfort to her colt and keep it calm as Jesus rode it.

Jesus instructing that, according to verses 4-5, fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, given over 500 years before. Zechariah foretold that Messiah would come as King to Jerusalem in order to achieve salvation, and that He would do so humbly, mounted on a colt.

Normal Jewish people knew that prophecy, which explains why Jesus entered the city the way He did. He had tried to hide His identity as Messiah during His three years of earthly ministry, but now, it was time to reveal it. There was no better way of doing so than acting out Zechariah 9:9. So that's what He did in verses 6-7.

The response of the crowds was a mixed one. Some, according to verses 8-9, spread olive and palm branches on the road before Him. They also cried out "**Hosanna**," which means "**save us**." Their actions and words suggest that they recognized what Jesus was claiming. He was Messiah coming to save them. But most people, according to verses 10-11, either didn't know that or didn't believe it. His dramatic entry into

the city prompted them to ask instead, **“Who is this?”**

The Jesus Question

That is what is called today **“the Jesus question.”** As I said, it’s one of the five most important questions in the universe. Our answers to it determine our destinies now and forever. **“Who is Jesus?”**

That is a credible question because it’s a matter of knowledge that Jesus of Nazareth did actually live. Acclaimed historian and theologian F.F. Bruce wrote about that: **“The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar.”** He was saying that we can know that Jesus of Nazareth lived as certainly as we can know that Julius Caesar lived. Ancient documents of respected writers including Tacitus, Flavius, and Josephus to name a few make establish that He did. Did Jesus of Nazareth live in 1st century Israel? That isn’t the question, because we know He did.

The question is **“Who is He?”** Notice how **“the crowds”** of verse 11 answered that, **“He is the prophet from Nazareth.”** They likely meant He was a local prophet from Nazareth and no more.

Those 1st century crowds have their 20th and 21st century counterparts. Mahatma Gandhi, for instance, wrote about Jesus: **“To me, he was one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever known. Could the fact that I do or do not accept this belief make Jesus have any more or less influence in my life?”** Or Robert Funk, Bible scholar and founder of the Jesus Seminar, wrote about Him: **“We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus’ divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God.”** Funk represents a spate of so-called scholars who interpret Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, charismatic healer, cynic philosopher, Jewish Messiah, or prophet of social change – and no more.

All those interpretations have something in common with the crowd’s in verse 11. They’re woefully inadequate. They fall far short of reality. Who is Jesus? Those answers don’t even begin to do Him justice.

Lack of Respect for Jesus

But what about ours? Do our answers do Him justice? Listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Each of us has asked and answered the question, "**Who is Jesus?**" whether we're aware of it or not. I mean by that that each of us has a vision of Him. Each of us perceives Him to be a particular kind of person in terms of character and competence.

Look at this power point slide. It pictures Jesus enjoying and blessing the children. How many of us think of Him as one who loves children? Almost all of us do. That's because our vision of His character, for the most part, is adequate. We respect Him in that regard. We take Him to be a person of great goodness, one who fully possesses all the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus loving children – that's well within our vision of Him.

Now look at this power point slide. It displays a highly complicated equation of quantum physics that few people on earth understand. How many of us think of Jesus as One who easily grasps quantum physics? Almost none of us do. That's because our vision of His competence is inadequate. Quite frankly, we don't respect Him in that regard. We don't take Him to be a person of great intellect and ability, one who is fully brilliant and capable. Jesus easily understanding the most complicated equations of quantum physics – that's outside our vision of Him.

I'd sum it up this way. Most of us envision Him to be utterly good. We respect His character. But many if not most of us don't envision Him to be utterly great. We don't respect His competence.

That's problematic though whether we know it or not. If we don't respect His competence, we can't believe that it's safe and best to do all that He says. And if we don't believe it's safe and best to do all that He says, we won't routinely do it. We'll do it only when it suits our own judgments of what is safe and best. Lacking respect for the intellect and ability of Jesus, in other words, is a major hindrance to discipleship to Him. It makes discipleship to Him a daunting and tension-producing prospect indeed.

Respect for Jesus

So, let's respect His competence as we do His character. We talk about "**gaining**" respect for people and that's what we do with Jesus. We gain respect for Him. We do that by seriously studying His words and actions in the Gospels in terms of His competence. We examine the nature of what He said and did for an express purpose – to learn what they reveal about His intellect and ability. We also seriously study what the rest of the New Testament reveals about His intellect and ability. We learn two things about Him when we do.

First, He *has* absolute cognitive mastery over all of reality. He also *had* that. Consider two facts about Him when He was "**in the flesh.**"

One is that no one in history has ever known even remotely as much as He knew. The academic journal *Science*, for instance, identified what it called the top 25 unanswered science questions. One is, "**What is the biological basis of consciousness?**" What is the link, if any, between consciousness and the neurons in our brains? Jesus knew the answer to that and the other 24. He had in His possession the best information about everything, including the things that matter most in human life.

Consider a second fact about Him. No one in history has ever thought even remotely as well as He thought. His sayings in texts like Matthew 5:27-30; Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 13:15-16; Luke 20:27-40; and Luke 20:41-44, for instance, reveal that He was an unparalleled logician. His powers of logic, reasoning, analysis, memory, good sense, imagination, and creative thought have never been equaled.

So that's the first thing we learn when we study Jesus in the New Testament. He has and had absolute cognitive mastery over all of reality. The second thing we learn is that He has and had absolute *practical* mastery over all of reality. During His earthly ministry, for instance, He had the ability to direct weather patterns, suspend gravity, change molecular structures, create something from nothing, transform human tissue, restore life to dead human tissue, and more. Contemplate what He did when He healed the blind. The optic nerve in a human eye

contains approximately one million nerve fibers. Jesus not only knew that but was able to transform them by simply willing it. Our greatest achievements today in medicine, physics, chemistry, engineering, astronomy, and so on would have been child's play to Him.

That then is what we learn from the New Testament. Jesus has and had absolute cognitive and practical mastery over all of reality. He is and was, in other words, the Master of reality. Do you and I understand and believe that? It's vital that we do because it gives us the foundation we must have in order to respect Him.

Let Jesus "Master" Us

Now, there isn't anything vague about what it means to respect Him. Since He is the Master of reality, we let Him "**master**" us. That's the action of respecting Him. We let Him "**master**" us. That means two things.

First, based on what I've said today, we acknowledge that He "**fits**" in literally every aspect of human life generally and our personal lives particularly.

Many Christians segregate Him out of relevance to life. They take Him into account in some aspects of life but not in others. They accept that He "**fits**" here, here, and here, in these activities, experiences, and events. But they reject that He "**fits**" there, there, and there, in those. So, a Christian executive chef prayed about His relationship with His wife because Jesus "**fits**" there. He's the Master of marriage. But he didn't pray about a new recipe with which he struggled greatly because Jesus doesn't "**fit**" there. He isn't the Master of cuisine.

But He is the Master of cuisine, and everything else. He is the Master of mathematics, microbiology, interior design, art, plumbing, carpet cleaning, architecture, psychology, and so on. So, we acknowledge that He is. We accept that He "**fits**" in literally every aspect of life whether it's forgiving wrongdoers or creating works of art.

Letting Jesus master us means a second thing. We follow His lead in

every aspect of life. We don't experience and do things on our own – alone. We experience and do them in conjunction with Him, relying on His intellect and ability to help us. First, having confidence in His intellect, we actively seek His guidance through His written word the Bible, the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, and the other methods of divine guidance. And second, having confidence in His ability, we actively pray to Him and ask Him to do or give what we need. We follow His lead in every aspect of life.

Catherine Marshall, author and wife of Peter Marshall, told about trying to create a certain design with some drapes for her windows. Unable to get the proportions right to form the design she wanted, she became frustrated and quit trying. But then she began conversing with Jesus about it and praying. Soon, ideas about the design she wanted were coming to her until, finally, she figured out how to achieve it.

Conclusion

Notice what Marshall did. First, she acknowledged that Jesus “**fits**” in interior design. And second, she followed His lead. She respected His intellect and ability in other words. She let Him master her and so must we. We must and we will – if we answer the Jesus question rightly. Who is He? He's the Master of reality.