



## WHO IS JESUS TO ME?

---

Tombstone epitaphs can be very interesting. These today are a play on the deceased's name. On John Penny's of Wimborne, England, "Reader—if cash thou art in want of any, dig four feet deep and find a Penny."

From a cemetery in Ruidoso, NM, "Here lies John Yeast; pardon me for not rising." From Boot Hill Cemetery in Tombstone, AZ, "Here lies Lester Moore, Four slugs from a forty-four. No Les, No Moore."

From a gravestone near Uniontown, PA, "Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake, Stepped on the gas instead of the brake." From a cemetery near Wetumpka, Ala, "Solomon Peas. Peas is not here, Only the pod. Peas shelled out, Went home to God."

What do all these individuals have in common? They're all dead! But I'm here to tell you this Easter morning that the epitaph on a tomb in Jerusalem, Israel, the tomb of Jesus is: "He is not here; he has risen, just as he said" (Matt. 28:6).

Two of the most important events in human history are the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote:

1 Cor. 15:14, 17 (NIV), "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith...If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

The central theme of early Christian preaching was: Jesus Christ was crucified dead on a cross, his dead body was buried in a tomb, and three days later he was raised from the dead.

The cross and the resurrection, linked for all eternity. Without the resurrection the cross is meaningless. Without the resurrection the cross is a tragedy and a defeat.

If the body and bones of Jesus decayed in a grave, then the world is still in darkness; life has no meaning; the Bible is full of myths; we have been taken in by a gigantic hoax; and a good man was needlessly crucified for a lie.

However, millions of people, living and dead have experienced the living Christ. As the New Testament adamantly declares, Christ has indeed risen from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest and the most thrilling fact of human history is. And because of that fact, each of us must ask, “Who is Jesus to me?”

Two people who were there represent one or the other of us.

## 1. Disdainful Denier

(Read Matt. 27:22-24). To Pilate, Jesus was a nobody. When Pilate went to bed that Thursday night he probably didn't have any more on his mind than the running of his kingdom.

Meeting with a group of tax collectors the next morning; touring a section of the city with the public works manager to check on drainage problems; lunch with the commander of the Roman legion stationed in the city.

It was an ordinary night. He couldn't have foreseen being awakened by his chief of staff with the news of some impatient Jews demanding an immediate trial for someone named Jesus.

When he went to bed that night he didn't know that the next day would be the crisis of his life. He dresses and prepares to meet with these impatient, pesky Jews. He has nothing but disdain for them, but he is charged with keeping the peace.

I'm sure he wondered, “What now? What do these Jews want?” When Jesus was brought before him he was just another insignificant Jew, another bother on Pilate's valuable time.

There are many like Pilate. Jesus means nothing to them. “Jesus Christ” is just a cuss word for many.

A husband lets his wife handle the religious chores for their family, so what! Children are dropped off for Sunday School. So what? It's no big deal! The Bible, if there is one, is never read. So what! Jesus means absolutely nothing to them.

The Easter story, the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, is meaningless. Only 42% of Americans know that Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus.

The chance of life he wants to give, the promise of eternal life he offers—all meaningless, just as he was to Pilate.

Pilate didn't want to be face to face with Jesus, but he was. He didn't want to have to commit himself about making a decision about Jesus, but he had to.

He asks, "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" At least he asked. Who was Jesus to Pilate? Nothing more than a bother, a drain on his time. Pilate distained Jesus.

## 2. Tearful Joy

(Read John 20:1-16). To Mary of Maglada, Jesus was everything. The scene now changes from Pilate's chamber to a garden tomb. It is three days later in the stillness of the dawn.

Mary Magdalene stood trembling before the empty tomb. "How can it be?" she wonders. She was there when the soldiers rolled the heavy stone across the entrance of the cold tomb.

She watched as they carefully placed the seal. But now, the tomb was empty. How could it be?

What a difference between Mary and Pilate. Jesus was nothing more than a temporary bother to Pilate; at the most a slight threat to peace because of the agitation of the Jews.

Jesus was everything to Mary. During the years she knew Jesus she experienced peace for the first time. She experienced God's forgiveness and love. In Jesus she knew hope. But now he was dead—his body was missing, perhaps stolen.

Try to feel what Mary was feeling. She believed him to be dead. She came at this early hour because so great was her love for Jesus that she wanted hurry preparation for his permanent burial.

Now, surrounded by the darkness of that early morning, loneliness engulfed her. The weight of her past sins pressed down upon her; the reality of Jesus' death crashes in on her. Since Jesus was dead, then she was dead. Her sins were not forgiven.

There would be no peace for her—ever. Feel her pain. Grief stricken, tears running down her face, feeling alone and helpless, she ran to find someone to share her pain, someone who would understand.

When she came to Peter and John, in her anguish she didn't even greet them. She just screamed, "They've have take the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him."

Peter and John ran to the tomb. Mary followed. After looking around inside the empty tomb they left, but not Mary; she lingered. She began crying again.

"Oh God, I'm so helpless. What's going to become of me? I don't want what I was. Forgive me. Change me." Jesus was as important to her as he was unimportant to Pilate.

With tears streaming down her face, still unbelieving, she looked one more time into the empty

tomb. To her astonishment it was no longer empty. Two men in white were seated where Jesus' dead body had been tenderly laid.

There was compassion in their voices when they asked, "Why are you crying?" As their words penetrated her grief-stricken heart, without even thinking, she responded, "They've taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they have put him."

Do you hear her words, "My Lord"? She still believed him dead, but he was her Lord!. The words were scarcely out of her mouth when she sensed a presence behind her. Turning she saw a man she supposed was the gardener.

He, too, compassionately asked why she was crying and who she looking for. Why didn't she recognize him? Because she didn't expect him to be alive. She was looking for a dead body. And because she was crying.

Her thoughts were limited to the one idea of giving that dead body a proper burial. He gently said, "Mary," and immediately she knew it was Jesus. (v. 16)

Jesus was alive! His body hadn't been stolen—he was resurrected just as he said he would. He was alive. He really was alive. Jesus Christ had arisen from the dead!

Wednesday night in our Tenebrae service we focused on the betrayal, abandonment, and agony experienced by Jesus leading to his crucifixion and death.

Listen as the choir leads us in the rest of the story—the resurrection of our Lord, because, truly, Jesus our Savior is risen: The Rose. (Ends with "My Redeemer Lives")

## Application:

Who Is Jesus to Me?

Jesus lives. You have to ask yourself, "Who is Jesus to me?" He was nothing to Pilate—just another Jewish bother.

Pilate thought he could wash his hands of the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion. He wasn't the first and certainly not the last to disclaim responsibility when it comes to Jesus.

Pilate even tried to shift responsibility from himself to the Jews. They were not the guilty ones. All of us are guilty—sinners for whom Jesus willingly went to the cross. We are the reason Jesus died on the cross.

Many today try to get out of that responsibility. But the truth is all of us are responsible for the cross of Jesus. Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because he is alive, each of us is responsible for what we do with him today.