

Who Do You Think You Are?

Maurice W. Lusk, III

The question we have been asking throughout this study is the same as Jesus' question of to his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" As important as this question may be, a question of equal significance is, "Who did he believe himself to be?" From what we read of him throughout the New Testament Gospels, he clearly believed himself to be the very Son of God, the promised one, the Messiah, one who was not only "one of us" but "God with us;" one who could say, "In that you have seen me you have seen the Father." How did he come by these beliefs concerning himself? These questions concern Jesus' messianic consciousness. What did Jesus know about who he was, and when and how did he come by this knowledge?

These are questions of great significance in that what Jesus believed about himself is what empowered his whole existence and even awakened the power of divinity within his existence. Belief is that powerful and Jesus not only taught this about the power of faith, he exemplified it in all he said and did.

Jesus Was a Believer

The Righteous One Shall Live by Faith

In Gal 3:11 we have a very curious argument developed by Paul. He quotes a passage from Hab 2:4, which reads literally from the Greek text, "the righteous one, out of faith he shall live." A PhD dissertation was written several years ago arguing that Paul is using this expression, "the righteous one" to refer to Christ, whose life of faith was a model for all believers. Jesus is called "the righteous one" in six different references in the New Testament (cf. Acts 3:14; 7:52; 1

Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:1, 2; 3:7). A strong case can be made that this is Paul's argument here; i.e., that "the righteous one" (Christ) lived by faith, and he is the model for all those who would be saved by their faith. That Jesus' life was characterized by a deep and powerful faith is beyond serious question. He was a believer par excellence; and is, in this sense, the exemplar of all believers or those who would live by their faith.

The Faith of Christ

This view is reinforced by the fact that in four different places in the Greek text of this letter (Galatians) Paul refers to "the faith of Christ" (i.e., his own faith) as having an essential role in our salvation. In each occurrence the Greek word for faith is used with the genitive form of Jesus Christ, Christ, or Son of God. The genitive is the possessive form of a Greek word and should usually be translated by the equivalent English possessive form, "of." In Gal 2:16 we have, when translated literally from the Greek:

*. . . a man is not justified by works of the law but by means of **the faith of Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by **the faith of Christ**, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

This same Greek construction is found in Gal 2:20 and 3:22, where the expressions "faith in the Son of God," and "faith in Jesus Christ," literally reads, "the faith of the Son of God," and "the faith of Jesus Christ." The significance of this is that in Paul's belief, Jesus of Nazareth was himself a believer, whose belief in who he was empowered his whole existence.

Jesus' Messianic Beliefs and His Messianic Consciousness

Now, the question which most immediately confronts us concerns how Jesus came by his beliefs? How did he know who he was, what he was here to do and how he was to do it? Many are convinced that Jesus, being divine, came by all of his knowledge by means of the divinity within him. If this is the case, then Jesus'

experience of human existence was not genuine, his faith was not acquired in the same way as ours, and to speak of him as the exemplar of our faith is inappropriate. If he was "one of us," then he came by his faith as we come by ours. From what the Gospels tells us he did, at a given point in his life, become intuitively aware of his divine identity. This was done, perhaps, by an awakening of the dormant powers within him as he began his messianic mission. Prior to this awakening, however, it appears that his human experience was as human as ours, and his faith and faithfulness was as real and as human as ours.

Ways of Knowing and Believing

In order to answer the question of how Jesus came by his knowledge of who he was (i.e., his messianic identity), we must first discuss how anyone comes to know anything. This is called the study of epistemology. There are at least five different means of knowing or coming to knowledge.

One May Know by Means of Physical Experience

We all experience our world through the five physical senses of sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. What we sense/experience through our five physical senses is transferred to our brains and stored there in learning segments. As we grow as intellectual beings, we learn to interpret that which we experience. Here is introduced a second means of knowing or coming to knowledge, the reflective thought processes called "reason."

One May Know by Means of Reason

The data we acquire and store in learning segments may be interpreted in such a way as to lead to new knowledge. This new knowledge is essentially the conclusions we come to through the interpretation we give to the empirical data we acquire through our physical senses. This interpretative process is called discursive reasoning or reflection. We reason deductively and inductively from explicit and implicit information. We think logically or illogically by

which we come to insights or understanding which may be either true or false. This knowledge is different and more sophisticated than the simple data we acquire through physical experience.

One May Know by Means of Testimony

Testimony is simply information or data given us by someone else. What someone knows through his physical experiences, reasoning, testimony may be passed on to others orally or in written form. If one is persuaded that this testimony is true, he believes it; if, however, he is persuaded that it is untrue, he disbelieves it. All of what we know historically is based on testimony. This is the case from every piece of data written in our history books to every word of Scriptures. If we accept any of it as true, we do so on the basis of faith; i.e., persuasion that a given testimony is true.

One May Know by Means of Revelation or Inspiration

This means of knowing is essentially the same as testimony. There is a difference here, however, in that here the source of the testimony is supernatural or otherworldly. Revelation is that which is made known or revealed to us by God. Inspiration is a supernatural heightening of the human intellect, a special gift of insight or understanding given a person as a divine endowment or an empowering of God.

One May Know by Means of Intuition

Intuition is knowing the self-evident or knowing intrinsically. Intuition is having knowledge of something without the conscious use of physical experience, discursive reasoning, testimony, etc.. One knows intuitively that he exists without having to reason to a logical conclusion that such is the case. One knows intuitively that something cannot be and not be at one and the same time. One who has an experience knows intuitively that they have had the experience and may not be convinced otherwise. Intuitive knowledge is knowledge intrinsic to the knower.

Jesus' Messianic Consciousness

With all of this said, we come again to those questions concerning Jesus' messianic consciousness: what did Jesus know about who he was, and when and how did he come by this knowledge? What sources informed his thinking as to who he was and what he was here to do? The writer of Hebrews says that, "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through the things which he suffered; and being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him," (Heb 5:8-9). If Jesus' faith was informed by the divinity within him, then he did not learn as we learn, nor come by his faith as we come by ours. The Scriptures say, however, that he did learn through his obedience, therefore, Jesus must have gone through a learning process in the development of his beliefs as we all do in our faith development.

How then may Jesus of Nazareth have come by his messianic beliefs, understandings, and later messianic consciousness? The data of the New Testament Gospels provides us with an abundance of possibilities as to the sources informing the thinking of Jesus concerning who he was and why he was here.

His Mother and Joseph

Here we are asking what Jesus could have come to know *by means of testimony*, specifically the testimony of Mary and Joseph. What did his mother and Joseph impart to him of the events surrounding his birth? What did Mary believe about this child begotten or conceived in her miraculously and what of all this would she have told this child about who she believed him to be?

What of the revelation from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38) did she tell Jesus? What of what happened when she visited Elizabeth the mother of John (Luke 1:39-56) did she impart to him? What of the revelation of the angel to Joseph (Matt 1:18-25) did Mary or Joseph tell him? What of the visit of the shepherds and the angelic revelation to them (Luke 2:8-20) would they have told him? What of the appearance of the star at his birth and the visit of the Magi from the

East (Matt 2:1-11) did they communicate to Jesus? What of what the prophet Simeon told them about who Jesus was did they relate to Jesus (Luke 2:21-35), and what of the prophecy of the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36-38) did they tell him?

In Luke 2:19 and 2:51 we are told that, "Mary kept all these things in her heart." Is it not reasonable to assume that Mary, at some point, would have told Jesus of all these things? Is it not a curiosity that at twelve years of age Jesus seems to have had an unusual interest in things pertaining to God (cf. Luke 2:42-52). His faith was surely informed to a great extent by his mother, which was the case with all Jewish children (cf. 2 Tim 1:5). How much more would she have told this child of hers whom she knew by revelation to be the promised Messiah.

Is it not curious what Jesus said to his mother when she told him that the guest at the wedding were out of wine? The English translations usually translate Jesus' comment to mother as, "Woman what concern is that to me and you?" The Greek reads, literally, "Woman what to me also to you, not yet has come the hour of me?" If this is a question, which is possible, Jesus is saying to his mother, "What I do will affect you also, has my time come?" Perhaps he is saying to her, "Are you ready for what is about happen when I begin doing the work of the Messiah?" Her reaction seems to indicate her answer. She says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Is there a resignation in her words that she must now prepare herself for the for the fulfillment of the words of Simeon at the Temple, "a sword shall pierce your soul?" (Luke 2:25-35)

The Hebrew Scriptures

Here we are asking what Jesus could have come to know *by means of the testimony of Scripture*. In Rom 10:17 the apostle Paul tells us that faith comes by hearing the word of God. To what extent would the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures have informed Jesus as to who he was? Jesus would have been introduced to the Sacred Writings of the Jews very early. During the early years of childhood the mother was responsible for the religious teachings

of her children. The father would step in a six and continue the male's education. In communities where they existed, the synagogue school (*beth sepher* - house of scrolls/scripture) provided instruction for special Jewish children.

The uncanny knowledge of the Scriptures Jesus displays in the midst of the scribes in the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:42ff) at the age of twelve would seem to indicate that he had been exposed to the Hebrew Scriptures at an early age. Further, from what we see of Jesus' role in the synagogue service in Luke 4:16ff, especially his ability to read from the Hebrew Scriptures, it would appear that he had significant exposure to the synagogue's *beth sepher*, which was a room attached to the synagogue where the ark of the scrolls was kept for reading and tutoring.

With the knowledge of Scripture Jesus demonstrates in the Gospels, it would appear that he spent a great deal of time in those old Hebrew Scrolls, and especially the messianic texts. In the revelation given Mary and Joseph, certain Scriptures were cited as being fulfilled by his birth (cf. Matt 1:23; Luke 1:32ff). Surely this would have been communicated to him, pointing him to the Scriptures for his own understanding of the messianic promises and their relationship to him. From what we see in Luke 24:27, 32, 44-46, it is apparent that Jesus' proof of his messianic identity was rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. Perhaps, through his own immersion in these Scriptures a process was set in motion which eventually led to an awakening within him (or an intuitive realization) of who he was and the meaning and significance of these Messianic text for him.

Revelation from or Inspiration of God

What of Jesus' messianic consciousness was informed directly by inspiration of God? It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus was a recipient of revelation from God and that he was inspired of God, as were the Old Testament prophets. To what extent was this means of coming to knowledge utilized by God in the development of Jesus' understanding of who he was?

At Jesus' baptism God audibly pronounced him as his son (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22); so also at the transfiguration (Matt 17:1ff; Luke 9:35). The Gospels clearly portray Jesus as a recipient of direct revelation from God:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Matt 11:27).

*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing**; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son, and **shows him all that he himself is doing**; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel (John 5:19-20).*

*They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Even what I have told you from the beginning. I have much to say about you and much to judge; but he who sent me is true, and **I declare to the world what I have heard from him**," (John 8:25-26).*

*So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but **speak thus as the Father taught me**. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him," (John 8:28-29).*

*. . . but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you **the truth which I heard from God**; this is not what Abraham did (John 8:40).*

*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; **this charge I have received from my Father**," (John 10:18).*

*For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me **has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak**. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say,*

therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me," (John 12:49-50).

Jesus knew that he was sent from God, as is evident from his own claims:

*For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of **him who sent me**, (John 6:38).*

*About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but **his who sent me**; (17) if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority (John 7:14-17).*

*Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I **proceeded and came forth from God**; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me (John 8:42).*

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that **he had come from God** and was going to God (John 13:3).*

Intuitive Awakening of His Divinity

As stated above, intuition is knowing the self-evident or knowing intrinsically. In the incarnation experience of Jesus, to what extent would his intuitive sense of who he was have to be rendered dormant in order for his development as a human being to be real or genuine. And further, at what point would the awakening of his divine nature become necessary in order for him to fully manifest himself as the Messiah who was in reality "God with us?"

There are in the Gospels indications that he was clearly aware of his divine identity, or, to put it in the terms of this discussion, he was *intuitively aware* of who he was, especially his oneness with God:

*Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for **I know whence I have come and whither I am going**, but*

you do not know whence I come or whither I am going (John 8:14).

*Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **before Abraham was, I am,**" (John 8:58).*

*"**I and the Father are one,**" (John 10:30).*

*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? **He who has seen me has seen the Father;** how can you say, Show us the Father? (John 14:6-9)*

*I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished **the work which you gave me to do;** and now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with **the glory which I had with you before the world was made.** "I have manifested your name to the men you gave to me from out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you; for **I have given them the words which you gave me,** and they have received them and know in truth that **I came from you;** and they have believed that **you sent me** (John 17:4-8).*

How and when this intuitive awakening occurred is not revealed to us; only that from the time of his messianic anointing at his baptism (Luke 3:21-23a) he entered into his messianic mission in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and began identifying himself with the messianic expectation (Luke 4:14-21) and the arrival of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 17:20-21). In the Gospel of John it appears that his messianic consciousness had fully developed so much so that we see him revealing to his disciples that although he was "one of them" he was also "God with them."

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Questions For Discussion

1. Why is it important for us to see Jesus as a believer and one who came to faith the same way we do?
2. How did Jesus' beliefs empower his existence?
3. Discuss the section on "Ways of Knowing and Believing." Have the class discuss their understanding of each of these ways of knowing.
4. In what ways could Jesus' mother and Joseph have informed his faith as to who he was?
5. In what ways would the Old Testament Scriptures have led Jesus to an understanding of his messianic identity and mission?
6. What evidence is there that Jesus' messianic consciousness was informed by revelation or inspiration of God?
7. To what extent do you think Jesus knew intuitively that he was divine?
8. How do you think Jesus perceived of himself as one with God?
9. When do you think Jesus' messianic consciousness became fully developed?
10. To what extent was the divinity within him awakened by his messianic consciousness?

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