

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM? – Matthew 16:13 – 18

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

Matthew 16:13 - 18

I grew up in the Anglican Church in a medium sized congregation in Toronto. I attended church faithfully and grew to know and love Jesus there. The area of Toronto in which I grew up was largely Caucasian in culture, but at my high school there were a number of students from different cultures and faith backgrounds. My lab partner in biology class was from a Hindu background, a good friend in my theatre class was Jewish more by birth than practice, her parents however observed all of the holy days and kept a kosher kitchen. One of my teachers was a Buddhist and one of my Biology teachers was an atheist/humanist/secularist (whatever the politically correct term is now) who thought my argument for special creation was amusing and naïve. I was fascinated by their cultures and particularly by their various faiths. In my fascination, it never really occurred to me though that some of these people had no connection whatsoever to Jesus or Christianity or that some of them might have had negative thoughts or perspectives on Christ.

WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT THE SON OF MAN IS?

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” In asking this question, Jesus is asking his disciples to share what they have heard, to share what other people are saying about Him. It was and still is an important question. It is a question that we must ask in our time, in our country and our city. We must understand what people say about Jesus if we are to help them to know Him.

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” In Jesus day, there was a diversity of opinion as to who he was. In our day the same holds true. I want to share a couple of very general perspectives, to help us understand the diversity of opinion that surrounds us now. Let’s look first at some of the religious perspectives that exist.

Jesus was born into a Jewish family in a Jewish culture under the influence of Rome. So, what do Jews believe about Jesus? It might be easier to say what they don’t believe; they don’t believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. In the early days of The Way – Christianity – many Jews saw the message of the Christian Church as pagan. When Christ followers would enter into synagogues

they were often thrown out because what they preached and believed was so diametrically opposed to Judaism. Jesus simply did not meet the criteria of what the Jews believed the Messiah to be. In the Jewish faith, it is believed that when the real Messiah comes, the changes he brings about will be perceptible, measurable and provable.

There are some Jewish people in our day who recognize Christ as the Messiah. They seek to reach other Jewish people with the truth that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. They face much opposition and persecution much as the earlier followers of Christ. According to many Jews this is an abomination as one cannot be Jewish and Christian at the same time.

Down the street from us, we have the Ontario Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Many people, including many Christians regard Mormonism as simply another Christian denomination. I won't get into the complexities of why I believe this is untrue, but "who do they say that Jesus is?"

In Mormon theology, Jesus is a created being, the product of relations between god and one of his goddess wives. He is believed to be the literal spirit brother of the devil (*The Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Moses 4:1-4) and of you and I. In the *Journal of Discourses*, the Mormon Apostle Owen Hyde states, Jesus was married to both "the Marys and Martha, whereby he could see his seed before he was crucified." This is hardly the Jesus of Orthodox Christianity.

We live in a city with many from the Muslim faith. What does Islam say about Jesus? Muslims respect and have reverence for Jesus. They believe that he was born miraculously by a command of God and that he was a great teacher and one of God's greatest messengers. They do not believe he is Messiah nor do they recognize that he was crucified.

There are many other faiths that surround us in our city as well. We have many people from Sikh and Hindu backgrounds, people who are involved in various aspects of the New Age movement, Jehovah's Witnesses. While it is important to understand what others who hold to a particular faith say about Jesus, it is also important that we recognize that there is a large segment of our society who would claim that they are not religious at all. Some have a loose concept of God; still others would claim not to believe in God at all. If you ask people specifically what they believe about Jesus you will get a variety of reactions from nervous laughter to outright anger, reactions not unlike what you saw in the opening video.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

As important as this question is, Jesus' second question is of even greater importance, "**Who do you say that I am?**" There is no wiggle room here. In

asking this question, Jesus forces us to take a position; not simply to share what we have heard or have observed, but to state our own beliefs – beliefs not simply about God, not about religion, but about Jesus himself.

One would expect that those who did not know Jesus well would have differing opinions and points of view as to who he be. The same holds true in our society. We can't expect that those who have had little or no exposure to Jesus would really have an understanding as to His true identity. However, when faced with this question his followers should be able to answer clearly.

When His disciples were asked the question, Peter responded, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”**

“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Note Peter's answer here; there are no “ifs or buts”, it is not a long theological dissertation. Sometimes today you can ask a Christian who Jesus is and you get everything but a simple answer. ***Jesus said unto them: "Who do you say that I am?" And they replied: "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we find the ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationships." And Jesus said: "What?"***

Peter's answer is a simple clear statement of truth, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”** This was the dawning of the Gospel, the beginnings of a new Kingdom that would turn the world upside down. To be able to state what Peter did was incredible. His response was absolutely radical.

As Christ followers, we look through the lens of two thousand years of Christianity and we often see this truth as being very matter of fact and frankly can sometimes be a bit blasé about it. “Yeah the sky is blue, water is wet, Jesus is Messiah, the Saviour.” But we should be anything but blasé. Jesus is still the Christ, he is Messiah, the Saviour of the world. This should get us excited! If it doesn't move you and stir your passion, then have you really grasped the enormity of the truth of who Jesus is?

Jesus was and is the most influential person who has ever walked or will ever walk the face of this earth. He divides time. We refer to years before his birth as B.C., “before Christ”. Years following his birth are referred to as A.D., from the Latin *“anno domini”*, meaning “in the year of our Lord”. In his lifetime he probably spoke to no more people than would fill one stadium at a Billy Graham Crusade today. Yet his message has spanned the globe.

What about you; who do you say that Jesus is? You either believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah or you don't. You can't “sort of” believe it. You can't sit on the fence about this one. There is a wonderful quote from C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* that captures this better than I ever could.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

This is the most important question that you will ever answer. If it’s a question you’ve never answered I would encourage you to seriously consider it. But know this, it is not a question that can be answered through reasoning or human logic, it is not a question that someone else can answer for you. Who you believe Jesus to be is something you must come to terms with, personally.

I believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He is my Saviour and my Lord. How did I come to believe this? There were many things that came together to contribute to my coming to know this to be true: conversations with others both believers and those who didn’t believe, prayer – conversations and wrestlings with God about this truth, searching Scripture to see what it had to say about Jesus, looking at the prophecies about Jesus in the Prophetic books of the Old Testament and reading the Gospel accounts of his birth, life, death and resurrection. But these things were merely contributing factors in embracing this truth. The most important factor can be found in Jesus’ response to Peter.

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” Peter could not have known this on his own; it was not something that was derived through human wisdom or logic, but was revealed to him by God the Father. Those of us who profess that Jesus is Messiah do so because God has opened our eyes to this truth.

Matthew Henry says this in relation to this passage, ***“The Christian religion is a revealed religion, has its rise in heaven; it is a religion from above, given by inspiration of God, not the learning of philosophers, nor the politics of statesmen.”***

When it comes to truly understanding God, we’re all pretty much like kindergarten kids learning to tie their shoes. If I believe, if we believe that we can know the truth about Christ without God having opened our eyes to this truth, then we deceive ourselves.

WHAT DO YOU DO WITH JESUS?

We are in a season where more people will think about Christianity and Jesus specifically than perhaps any other time of the year. All around us, many people are getting ready for Christmas. Christmas has been adopted by many as a time of celebration with family, a season of goodwill. I get that the Christmas many people celebrate has little to do with the birth of Christ. But, I don't get bent out of shape because people say "Happy Holidays" or "Seasons Greetings" or send cards with the same message. It doesn't change what I believe and know to be true. In fact, it gives me greater opportunity to share what I believe and the reason I celebrate Christmas.

As we celebrate this season, let us think and examine what it is that we truly celebrate. Some of the cards we get or send have pictures of nativity scenes. We see a sweet little baby laying in pristine hay, often adorned with sparkles that annoyingly cling to everything but the Christmas card. We observe as Philip Yancey puts it in his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, "***a mellow, domesticated holiday purged of any hint of scandal. Above all, we purge from it any reminder of how the story that began at Bethlehem turned out at Calvary.***" It's as though we've almost forgotten or want to ignore that the birth of Jesus is inextricably linked to his death and ultimately his resurrection. After all, he is the Christ, Messiah, our Saviour.

In the accounts of Christ's birth in Luke, there is one person who seems to truly grasp the enormity of what God had set in motion with the birth of Jesus, Simeon. This is Luke's account of Simeon's encounter with Jesus and his parents.

"Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Saviour you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!" Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. Then Simeon blessed them and he said to Mary, **"This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and it will be their undoing. But he will be the greatest joy to many others. Thus, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your hearts."** *Luke 2:29 - 35*

Philip Yancey says this about this passage, ***"Somehow Simeon sensed that though on the surface little had changed – the autocrat Herod still ruled, Roman troops were still stringing up patriots, Jerusalem still overflowed with beggars – underneath, everything had changed. A new force had arrived to undermine the world's powers."***

A new force had indeed arrived, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. The God-Man had come. The one who would turn his world and our world upside down – forever. The one who had no tolerance for the empty, pompous behavior of the

religious leaders – white-washed tombs he called them – nor for religious hypocrisy had entered the scene. The one whose presence demanded a decision as to who he was had left his home and arrived here on earth. The one who was born to ultimately die on a cross, the Saviour had come. The one who would be raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father had been born.

We've looked at two questions this morning: ***“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*** and ***“Who do you say that I am?”*** These are two very important questions. The first question is important as we share the Gospel with those around us. But we must remember, all people have been created in God's image. Whatever faith people hold to, whatever their beliefs, we must always treat them with respect and dignity and this includes when we share Christ with them. The second question is vital. Christ is Messiah and who we say that he is impacts every single facet of our lives.

I want to leave you with third question to think about, ***“What do you do with Jesus?”*** Those that were afraid of him, that despised him, had him crucified. We're going to celebrate Communion together because we believe that Jesus is Messiah, that he is our Saviour. So, ***“What do you do with Jesus?”*** In two weeks time, Pastor Stephen will share a message, *The Day After Christmas*, and he'll have some answers to that question.