

Text: Matthew 16:13-24

Title: Who is Jesus?

Location: Community Presbyterian Church, Celebration, FL

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Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?"

--What's the word on the street about Jesus? I handed out surveys for my Doctoral thesis asking: if people thought Jesus was divine or not? The overwhelming response was: Jesus was a man, an exceptional man, a good teacher, moral person, but only a man.

--What's the word on Jesus in the realm of Academia? We are so eager to send our children to University where our kids are taught Jesus is the source of many wars and deaths. Incidentally, atheists were responsible for more than 130 million deaths in the last century. & more Christians have been martyred in the past few decades than all Christians killed of all time.

--What are documentaries on T.V. saying? The last one I saw referred to Jesus as a self deluded, misguided Jew who thought He was special.

--What about the realm of Theology? An Ideological symbol but not the only way truth and life. It was weird to be in Christian seminaries and be taught that Jesus is just one way to God among the many others.

--Who is Jesus to the various Christians? Unfortunately there are many ideas here as well. Jesus is the one who can bring you good health and financial prosperity if you have enough faith. Some say He is our savior...a God of grace who would not send anyone to Hell (incidentally Jesus talks about Hell more than anyone else). Jesus has come to enlighten us to find the God within. Others say Jesus is the Lord and you better obey all He says or He will cast you to Hell. Popular opinion from nominal Christians is Jesus doesn't care what I do as long as I live a good life. Actually in James 2:10 it says if you keep most of God's law but fall in just one area, you are guilty of breaking all of it. Still other people say it doesn't matter if you go to church as long as you believe... James 2:19 says even the demons believe and shudder.

When Jesus asked the disciples what's the word on the street was about Me, they came up with various religious figures representing different aspects of the Jewish faith. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, or Elijah coming back signifying the end times. It's amazing that Jesus is performing the miracles prophesized about the Messiah, yet they didn't recognize Him. The religious leaders who actually had the O.T. memorized still missed out on Jesus' identity. How could that happen? Don't underestimate how a selfish disposition can cloud the truth. John 12:43...

While being called a prophet is flattering, it is not enough to accurately describe Jesus. It is ironic that people who do not know Jesus and haven't spent any time with Him are dictating who He is in our culture.

Well there is the word on the street about Jesus but then Jesus gets personal: **Who do you say I am?** Many of us could provide a fairly adequate theological description, but then again it's disappointing how often supposedly Christian folk have convoluted ideas about Jesus their Lord. The #1 reason Islam is

advancing is when Christians are asked what they believe they cannot defend the Trinity—which Islam rejects and uses as their point of attack to refute Christianity.

Recently I engaged in theological discussion with Christians on the tennis court, I asked them why are you going to heaven. The non church going Christian said because I am a good person. This is a misunderstanding of how God's grace is distributed. We are saved not because of our deeds but because of Jesus deed on the cross. Interestingly—the pot smoking, porno watching Christian said I'm getting to heaven because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. On had the right life style and the wrong theology, the other had the wrong life style but right life style. The real question is who am I playing tennis with!

When Jesus asks this question it is more than a curiosity teaser, this is the essential question of life. If Jesus is just a man His words are a good read, nice suggestions...but if He is the son of the Living God than His words carry authority and should determine how we live our lives. Peter answers you are the Christ the son of the living God.

Jesus replies: Blessed are you because you did not figure this out on your own, but My Father made this evident to you.

My brother in law demeans the Christian faith. He points out I read the Bible once, and then uses shallow arguments to dismiss the faith. I wrote a fifty page response to him once. But as I detailed out all the answers with logic and research, it dawned on me, if he is not receptive to the Spirit of God then Jesus Himself could not change his mind. The Pharisees saw the miracles first hand and still rejected & wanted to kill Jesus—did murder Him. Shakespeare said a man convinced against his will is off the same opinion still.

This is where you and I enjoy a unique gift; God has drawn you to Himself. ...John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father draws them. or John 15:16 you did not choose me but I choose you. Don't get puffed up with pride, Romans tells us we were chosen while we were yet sinners, so it isn't because you were especially good. It was merely because you are special to God—you are His child. Someone He died for to remove our problem sin.

I doubt Peter would have produced the correct assessment of who Christ was if he hadn't spent time with Jesus. Two chapters earlier Peter walks on the water and when Peter starts to sink—Jesus saves him. Firsthand experience with Jesus. The highs and lows of life lived with Jesus

The same goes for us; I often ask people tell me about your faith? Inevitably I hear comments like: My mom and dad were church goers. Or I was baptized as a child. Sometimes people will inform me I am a Christian...but there is no evidence of Christ's presence—no excitement. I'm not saying there is a lot of sin, but just the lack of any relationship, definitely not interaction with the living God. Maybe more of a belief system they adhere to. One person when asked who Jesus was responded: He is the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the kerygma in which we find ultimate meaning of our interpersonal relationship. Huh?

When someone asks you who is Jesus? I hope you'll say "let me tell you what God has done in my life and is doing right now. Let me share my testimony and experience answered prayers/miraculous intervention/how God's growing us. . 1 Peter 3:15 says always be ready to give an account for the hope that you have within you.

If we haven't been reading the Bible and actively engaging God in our daily life then we won't have anything substantial to draw upon when the Question about Jesus is put before us we will be a little fuzzy on the Christ question.

Furthermore, who Jesus is to you will be reflected in how you live whether Jesus is a priority or a theory, someone to see in the next life or the presence of God now today.

It gets more complicated because even when we might have the accurate verbal account of Christ's identity, that doesn't necessarily translate into a surrendered life...Jesus said rightly did Isaiah prophesize about you that your lips give praise but your hearts are far from me.

2 Timothy 3:5-7 comments about Christians that hold on to a form of godliness although they have denied its power...men always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Why is there no power? Because there is no submission to Christ's lordship. They never let Jesus have His way in their lives. We seldom hear what was said of John Vianney: An extraordinary thing happened to me today—I saw Christ in a man. What If people saw Christ in us!

Let's explore what the right confession of faith can accomplish. From Peter's confession two important ramifications emerge: First is the establishment of the church. This is the first time Jesus mentions the Church. When Jesus states upon this rock I will build my church, is the rock--Peter the man? Or his confession of faith—the truth that Jesus is Lord? The Catholic Church weaves its succession of popes from Peter the man...Protestants from Peter's rock of confession. It is worth magnifying when Jesus disciples assert His identity the church is built!

Notice the second outgrowth of Peter's confession of faith: The gates of Hell cannot prevail. When our Hellish situations arise it is our understanding of who Jesus is that directs our prayers and imbues confidence in our souls to know that the Lord hears our prayers Eph 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us.

We have an intriguing passage in vs. 19 Whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven and vice versa...is this excommunication? Is God granting to sinful people the unique authority to dispense His grace as we see fit? What are the keys of the kingdom? It is our confession of faith that gets us into heaven. Wherever the grace of God is preached and received, God's eternal covenant is established--bound and sealed.

However when the grace of God is rejected or spurned then the consequences are we are cut loose. Everything here on earth has its analog up above...if we bind ourselves to the love of God it is sealed in heaven. If we cut ourselves loose from Christ's salvation He will honor our choice and not impose His abundant life upon us.

Sounds like an easy decision—right? Maybe not. Who Jesus is has serious implications. Vs. 24 deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. The cross is the example of the servant hood we are called to—total self denial.

Peter is unable to comprehend that the cross is God's plan for Christ's ministry. Or that servant hood is the essence of discipleship that we forgive our enemies, turn the other cheek, take care of the poor... give our lives for others.

The Messiah suffering many things and being killed is unacceptable to Peter. So Peter takes Jesus aside God forbid and Jesus says get behind Me Satan. Poor Peter first the holder of the keys to heaven, now he's Satan. Why? Telling Jesus how to be Lord according to our agenda is akin to Satan's agenda--- avoiding a cross. This is our challenge to follow Him into the rough areas of life.

In the book Tragedies of American history (light bed time reading) several tragedies are covered, including the Johnstown flood of 1889. It told of Western Union's Station manager Harriet Ogle a heavy set woman with the courage of ten, who watched the wave come toward her, but even as she stared at the massive wall of destruction, Ogle continued to pound in her telegraph key, never giving thought to leaving her post. Even as the wave spit out bodies of people she knew the woman tapped out the warning on her key to cities below. Her final words this is my last message became a legacy. Preparing those down river for what was crashing through Johnstown that very moment. Because of Harriet's sense of duty Caimbria City, Copersville, Moralville, San Hollow & Sheridan Station would not suffer the great loss of life that struck Johnstown. The flood waters rushing toward her a traumatic death seconds away—yet she did not think of herself, she thought of other people who were in danger. She saw through the eyes of Christ and gave her last breath to helping others.

That was 1889 let me tell you about 2010 Nancy received an email from our UK family who is starting an orphanage n Kenya. She writes that as we look for the opening I must expect to be shot at...so she is asking for prayers. Someone laying it on the line for Jesus.

The British Mystery writer Dorothy Sayers said this about Jesus: To do them justice, those who crucified the Christ did not do so because He was a bore. Quite the contrary, He was too dynamic to be safe. It has been for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. Who is Jesus to you? A sweet baby hugger or the Lord who confronts evil on humanities behalf?

Who is Jesus to you? A Genie that exists to serve you? Just a man with great words, but no authority over your life? Or is He the Lord you follow and enjoy?

I'll remind you who He is: The One who died to forgive your sins. The One who rose from the Dead and now sits at the right hand of God praying for you and interceding on your behalf.

He lives to empower us.

The One who has gone on to prepare a place for us so that we will live in the house of the Lord forever.