

Just Who Is Jesus?

Matthew 16:13-16

10 January 2010 – Sunday Morning

BI: Understanding the Identity of Christ

Historical Context “**The Big Picture**”: Disciples had spent about 2 ½ years with Jesus by this point. They had seen him perform a large series of miracles (everything from the wedding feast at Cana where he turned water in wine, healing of sick people, raising people from the dead, the feeding of the five thousand, him walking on water and controlling the weather to most recently at the end of chapter 15 in Matthew the feeding of 4000 people.) There had been a growing series of opposition to his ministry by the religious leaders who wanted him put to death for his claims to be God. He had seen large amounts of followers abandon him because he wasn’t the political messiah they were expecting from Rome, a conquering king who would help them throw off the 500+ years of repression and reestablish an independent Jewish state free from outside control (from people like the Babylonians, the Persians & Medes, and even the Romans).

This is a fundamental turning point in Jesus’ ministry – here he is beginning to transition from teaching about the Kingdom and forgiveness of sins to what one of his primary purposes in the incarnation was – to die on the cross for the sins of the world.

Why Did He Ask These Questions? v.13-15

First Question – “Who Do People Say the Son of Man is?”- v.13

Context: This timing was just as Jesus and his Disciples had crossed the Sea of Galilee. They were leaving behind a rather ugly situation in which again the Pharisees and the Sadducees had tried to bait Jesus. They had gotten in a boat and crossed to the other side of the sea to find some time to be alone. Parallel passages in the other synoptic Gospels tell us that Jesus had just

come back from spending a day in prayer to when this exchange had taken place (Luke9:18-21) and that this exchange actually took place before they entered the city of Caesarea Philippi. (Mark8:27-30)

He was very aware of what people were saying about him, he wanted the disciples to sit back and think critically for a minute on who people say he was.

It is interesting to note just exactly what Jesus is asking them. The phrase "Son of Man" was one that dated back the book of Daniel (Daniel 7:13). This phrase was used to describe in a prophecy the promised messiah who would rule the nations of the Earth after the "Ancient of Day" had crushed the nations (different beasts in this passage) that had been keeping the nation of Israel subjected. He is asking "who do people say I am, as Jesus" and "who do people say the Messiah is" – do people (the Jews) truly understand who I, as Jesus am?

The Disciple's Response – v.14

Some say –

John the Baptist – A contemporary of Jesus who's mission was to announce the Messiah to Israel. He was the first prophet in over 400 years. He was executed by Herod (Matt 14:1-2). Some people were saying that he had come back from the grave to continue announcing the Messiah.

Elijah – Elijah was considered by many Jews to be one of if not the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. In Malachi 4:5 this is a prophecy that he will return again to announce the Messiah before the day of the Lord (a reference to the final days of history).

Jeremiah – He was another revered prophet from the Old Testament. Jewish tradition says that he took the Ark of the Covenant and the Alter of Incense out of the Temple and hid them at Mt. Nebo before Babylonians invaded to protect them from desecration by the Babylonian invaders. They believed that he

would reappear and return these items before the Messiah came back. (II Maaccabees 2:4-8)

Another Prophet – other could see through his teaching and his supernatural activities that he was unique, like the prophets in the Old Testament.

These groups came about a close to truth as they could possibly and yet they did not grasp it. They could not make the leap to understand the true identity of Christ being the Messiah and also his divine nature.

These were the ones who kind of got it, who Christ was. Others were not even this close.

One of these groups was the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The Religious Leaders Response Matt 16:1-4

They had asked Jesus for a sign in the Heavens to prove that he was who he said he was. They could accept that the miracles that he had been doing because they were here on the Earth. (this group believed that demons had the ability and the power to perform some of the miracles that Jesus had been doing – the earthly ones). By asking him to prove his divinity with a sign in the skies, they were asking him to prove that his power was coming from God and not from demons. Earlier they had accused him of performing miracles by the power of Satan and not God (Matt 12:49). He choose to not even given them a sign because they wouldn't not believe, they had not believed the ones they had already scene.

Other response – still other believed that if he was the messiah he was to be a conquering king based upon Old Testament prophecies they knew. When they saw that he had no interest in overthrowing the Roman Authorities they packed up their bags and moved on.

Its not like these first century Jews where the only ones who missed the boat on the identity of Jesus. Napoleon (the French Emperor) stated “I know men, and Jesus was no mere man.”

Ernest Renan (19th century French philosopher and theologian/atheists) – “the greatest among the sons of men.”
John Stuart Mill (19th Century British philosopher) – “the guide of humanity.’

Theodore Parker (19th Century American Pastor – Unity church – influencer of abolition movement) – “a youth with a good heart”

The Second Question – “Who do you say that I am?” v.15

Jesus now takes the line of questioning and turns it from what other people are saying and directly asks his disciples and they say he is.

This question is to see if after spending 2 ½ years under his teaching the disciples were able to at least grasp who he really was.

What Is The Answer To The Question? v16

Peter seems to be the one who always opens his mouth first or is the first to do something. He was the one who walked on water, and was later present at the mount of transfiguration. Here again he is the one who answers. His answer is quiet telling – it shows that he as representative of the disciples on some level have grasped who Jesus is.

“The Great Confession” You are the Christ.

Christ – the name/title that is applied here contains a great clue to his identity.

The Greek word being used here Christos (an almost direct transliteration into English). It is the equivalent to the Hebrew word for Messiah. It can also be translated the “Anointed One”. These are references being used to describe the person that God had promised all the way back in Genesis 3:15 to bring salvation to the world.

By stating that Jesus was the Christ, Peter was confessing that Christ was the promised Messiah not just a precursor announcing the Messiah like other Jews had thought he was (v.14).

Very interesting because just before this the disciples had been focused on Earthly things and not on the spiritual lessons Jesus had been focused on (Matt 16:5-12). The disciples were worried about how they were going to feed themselves because they had a lack of bread. Jesus piped in with a warning about the religious rulers (the Pharisees and Sadducees) teachings by using an illustration about bread. They didn't seem to get understand it, as they were still focused on how they would eat. They were standing with the person who had had fed the 5000 and the 4000 from practically nothing (and had leftovers) and they seem to forget that he could take care of them. They didn't seem to get it there, who he is, and here a little bit later they do.

He doesn't stop there.

Peter then confesses that Jesus is the "Son of the Living God." He connects Jesus as being God.

This is the God who created the universe and sustains all things. He was the God who had lead the Jews out of bondage in Egypt using Moses. He was the God that had spoken through all the prophets throughout the centuries.

There is a sense of irony in this passage here. The city of Caesarea Philippi was the traditional birthplace of the Greek god Pan. There was a large shrine to him in that city. The city was also home to a shrine of Caesar – the Roman Emperor – who was worshiped there. It's ironic that in a place full of "religion" that is opposed to the true God, this is where Peter makes his confession.

This confession was a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. From this point he was just a matter of months before his death on the cross. After this he started teaching the disciples about his mission to die on the cross. He started teaching them that he was the atoning sacrifice. His incarnation here on Earth would usher in something completely new. It was after this that the word for Church is first mentioned in the gospels. The disciples while

grasping that Jesus was the Christ and was God, did not still fully understand his mission and his purpose on Earth. This is evidenced by the fact that after Jesus started teaching about his mission, that he would be put to death, Peter rebuked him.

The Deity of Christ

While the disciples may have not fully understood what it truly meant for Jesus to be God, the Apostle Paul when writing the book of Colossians (2.9) 30 years later, seem to have a bit more of an understand of the Deity of Christ. He wrote that all fullness of Deity dwelled in bodily form. All that was God was dwelling in Christ.

The early church fathers struggled to define the doctrine of the Deity of Christ for the next several hundred years. The council of Nicaea (325) affirmed that Christ was equal to God. It was at the council of Chalcedon (451) that Christ was affirmed as being “full humanity and full deity”.

Why Does This Matter To Us?

We need to ask ourselves the same question

“Who Jesus is to us?”

Is he just a man?

Is he as many people thought in his time just a good person, a great teacher who could turn out a crowd to hear him speak? Is he a great moralist? Somebody who gave us a set of rules to live by and how to treat other people?

Or is he the Messiah?

If he is the Son of God to us, are we living our lives in the way? Are we following his commandments, the principles he has called us to live our lives by. One way to know if he is Messiah to us, if we are actively trying to serve others, as Pastor Steve pointed out in last week’s sermon, if we are truly followers of Christ, then we should be seeking out opportunities to serve. To serve at church,

to serve our families, to serve a community. We are called to take Christ's love to all people.

If we don't know Christ as our Messiah or Savior – I challenge you to not walk out of here today without making that commitment.

Lets pray.

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The ____ Picture

____ Did He Ask These _____? vv. 13-15



.? The First Question - " _____?" - v.13

The _____ Response – v.14

The _____ Response – Matt 16:1-4

The Second Question – " _____?" v.15

_____ Is The Answer To The _____? v.16

"The Great _____"



The _____ of Christ – Col. 2:9

_____ Does This Matter To _____?

Is he just a _____?

Or is he the _____?

