

Great Question of Jesus series

Week 4 – Mt 16:13-17

“Who do you say I am?”

Play the Skit Guy video first.

What a fascinating and intriguing question Jesus asked his disciples and asks each of us this morning: *“Who do you say that I am?”* It’s one of the most important questions you’ll ever have to answer in your lifetime. Let me begin by asking: how would you answer that question if Jesus were standing before you and asked you? What would you say?

If we were to go outside of the walls of this building and out onto the streets Minneapolis, I’m pretty confident we’d get quite a different response than we do inside the walls of this church.

- **A Muslim:** Jesus is a prophet but not God.
- **A Mormon:** Jesus is one god among a multitude of gods
- **A Jehovah’s Witness:** Jesus is Michael the archangel who became a man
- **A Christian Scientist:** Jesus was a man in tune with the Divine Consciousness but not the Christ, and we all have this sense of divine consciousness inside each of us available to discover
- **A Hindu:** Jesus was a guru, an enlightened teacher.
- According to **Daniel Brown in The Davinci Code:** Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a baby together, and the Roman Catholic Church has kept this quiet but it can be detected in the work of Leonardo Da Vinci.
- A fabrication of the early church
- A good moral teacher who lived a model life to follow, but not God
- A really good magician
- A fool who thought he was God and got himself killed
- He never existed
- I have no idea – I’ve never heard of Him

Let me read the context of this question before we move forward. Reading from **Matthew 16:13-20**.

It says that this dialogue took place in a region called **Caesarea Philippi**. This region was located about 25 north of Galilee and an area his disciples wouldn’t have likely frequented. This region had quite an interesting history. In the Old Testament this region was the center of Baal worship. But later the Greeks conquered the area and it became the center of worship of the Greek god, Pan and various other fertility gods. It was located at the foot of Mount Hermon and on the side of the mountain were these caves that you see here. Out of one of the caves would flow a river. It was believed that the Greek fertility gods wintered here deep in the recesses of the earth and that they entered those recesses through these caves. So, at the foot of these caves there would have been all sorts of idols to these fertility gods at what was perceived as the gates to their dwelling places. All sorts of evil pagan worship would take place below these caves. It was like a red-light district for the Greek god worship. Because of this, devout Jews would intentionally avoid this area. But Jesus intentionally took his disciples here to ask them one of the most important questions he ever asked them.

He begins with the question: *“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”*

- **Some say John the Baptist** – Herod believed that after he’d killed John the Baptist (**Mt 14:1-2**)
- **Others say Elijah** (Jews expected Elijah to return in the end based on Malachi 4:5-6)
- **And still others, Jeremiah** (the greatest of the later prophets) *or one of the prophets.*

The disciples certainly could have gone much further with popular beliefs

- **Pharisees and Saducees** believed he was working with the devil to perform miracles
- **Jesus’ own family** thought he was deceived and needed their help to return to reality
- **Others** thought he was just Joseph the carpenter’s son.

After the warm up question, Jesus asks them the question he really wanted to ask them: "*Who do you say I am?*"

As often is the case, Peter speaks up and says, "*You are the Messiah* (or Christ – they both mean anointed one), *the Son of the living God.*" At least on this occasion, Peter got the answer correct. Peter had been following Jesus around the countryside for nearly 3 years now. He'd seen Jesus heal people of various ailments, cast out demons, raise the dead, calm the storm, walk on water in the midst of the storm and teach with tremendous authority. All the signs were there that this was indeed the long awaited Messiah.

Jesus replied, "*Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*" (Matthew 16:17-19 (NIV))

Notice that Jesus points out that the way Peter got the answer correct was not because he was able to figure it out but because God the Father revealed it to him. You see it's one thing for us to get the answer to this question correct, but a whole other thing, and equally important, that we don't just get the answer to the question correct – but that it affects our response to Jesus and how we live our lives.

What a powerful moment of revelation and reflection. Do you see why the setting matters for a proper understanding of Jesus' response? They are standing at the Gates of Hell there in Caesarea Philippi and Jesus declares that the truth of Peter's statement will be the foundation of His church and not even the Gates of Hell, standing right before them, would be able to stand up against His church, founded upon who Jesus is.

As I close this sermon out I want to ask you two very important questions. The first is the same question Jesus asked his disciples:

- 1. Who do you believe Jesus to be?**
- 2. What difference is that belief making in your life?** Because it's one thing to believe correctly about Jesus but it's quite another to let that belief influence the way you live your life. Shortly after this encounter, Jesus began to tell his disciples about his impending death. Peter pulls Jesus aside and tells him to quit talking like that. Peter is as wrong there as he was right in our text today. But at least Peter is allowing what he believes about Jesus to influence the way he lives. He just has a wrong conception of what the Messiah would do. He was hoping for a powerful political Messiah. And Jesus, the Messiah dying on a cross, didn't fit his expectation for the Messiah. You can criticize Peter for being wrong, but at least Peter acted on what he believed, just like when he walked on water, even if it was briefly. At least he acted on his belief.

So, let me ask again – "*What difference does your belief in Jesus make in your life?*"

At half-time of the Vikings football game Friday night they played a video about our new quarterback, Kirk Cousin's football camp. I wasn't surprised to hear he runs one, most of the professional quarterbacks tend to do that. But what I was surprised to hear was his strong testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. He said that his camp is not just about teaching these kids football skills – but even more importantly they intentionally take time out of every day to share Jesus with them. And Kirk's own testimony of faith and the difference it's made in his life was quite extraordinary.

What difference has your belief about Jesus' identity made in your life?

Last Sunday it was my privilege to attend worship services at **Eastside Christian Church** (across the highway from the camp). And during the service they emphasized this program they have currently running called "**ChangeMakers**". They strongly encourage everyone in that church to not just merely attend the church but to be actively seeking how God wants to use them to make a difference in their communities.

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- Muslim:
- Mormon:
- Jehovah’s Witness:
- Christian Scientist:
- Hindu:
- Other beliefs

What was the significance of the location they were in?

What do the “*Gates of Hell*” refer to?

What was Peter’s answer to who Jesus was?

How did he arrive at that answer?

Personal Application:

1. Who do you believe Jesus is?
2. What difference is this belief making in your life?

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