Jesus Is...

Matthew 16:13-17

3/26/23

With Good Friday & Easter right around the corner, it seems people need to be reminded who and what this “Holiday” is all about! It’s ALL about JESUS!!! But who is Jesus to us as His Church and who is He to all people?

Who do You Say Jesus Is? This Is a very personal question. The question Is not who you think Jesus is, or what the world tells you who Jesus is, **but rather who He is to you**. Only God can reveal the true Jesus to you. Has He been revealed to you? This morning to set the stage for the next few weeks, we’re going to look at who JESUS IS!

In our scripture today Jesus asks this very deep question. He asked: “Who do you say that I am? That question is more relevant today than it ever was before. For many people, they see Jesus as a “Get out of Hell Free card.” They know all about Jesus, they know the Sunday School answers and version of Jesus. Some even have the head knowledge, but there is no heart knowledge. They desire no change in their lives. They know “about” Him, but there is no desire to really “know” Him. They only want to use Him to escape hell. Jesus had this to say about such people in quoting from Isaiah 29:13:

* Matthew 15:8-9: *8 ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’*

People want to go to heaven, but just leave Jesus and religion out of it. The tragedy in all of this, they have missed out in just who Jesus is.

Scripture: Matthew 16:13–17

*13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” 14 “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.” 15 Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?” 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 17 Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*

There was an online poll taken a number of years ago, the question was asked: “What is the key to getting into heaven?”

-- Living a good life 60.5%

-- Having connections to someone at the top 32.5%

-- Helping old ladies cross the street 2.2%

-- Slipping St. Peter, a large tip 1.7%

-- Having a strong letter of reference 1.6%

-- Making a deal with the devil 1.0%

-- Telling a really good lie 0.6%

-- Total votes: 8,602

Then the question was asked, “Are you going to heaven?”

-- Yes 91.2%

-- No 8.8%

--Total votes: 10,284

The Pew Research Center, Barns Group and Lifeway Research are all about the same in their results as well...

* According to Pew, April 2018 only 56% of Americans believe in the God of the Bible.
* According to Lifeway Research only 40% believe they will be sent to hell if they do not receive Jesus.
* Many other statistics indicate that even among “so-called” Christians, that knowledge of the holy and things pertaining to Jesus and salvation is very limited.

So, Jesus asked the question, “who do you think I am?” Let’s put that question into context.

Matthew 16:13a *“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi,”*

Jesus takes His disciples away from the crowds, perhaps to be able to give them some personal instruction. Maybe He also wanted away from the Jewish crowed that followed them everywhere.

So, Jesus goes to what is perhaps the most pagan place in all of Israel. At the extreme north end of the ancient borders of Israel, was city built to honor Caesar. Caesarea Philippi was about 25 mile north of the sea of Galilee. It was once the center for Baal worship. There were various pagan temples in the city, most notable was the pagan shrine to the Greek god of Pan. Pan was the half man-half goat god of nature. The shrine to Pan was located in front of a large cave like opening revealing a very deep pit known as the gates of hades, or the underworld. This place is so much like the world today, they worship everything but have no clue as to who Jesus is.

* It was here that Jesus talked about His church and the gates of Hades or Hell shall not prevail against it in verse 18).

Matthew 16:13 - *13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”*

* What Jesus is asking was very similar to the polls taken by all these different research groups, determining the religious climate of America. Who does the world say Jesus is? This is important because many people cling to what the opinion polls say. What the culture tells them, they assume to be right, and they go along with the world’s opinion. Truth has very little bearing on what the world sees and does.

Matthew 16:14 *“Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”*

* This the Jewish response. They saw Jesus as a prophet and there had been 400 years of silence, since the last prophet, Malachi wrote the last book of the Old Testament. Then came John the Baptist who was beheaded by Herod Antipas. Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist risen form the dead.

Mark 6:16 - *When Herod heard about Jesus, he said, “John, the man I beheaded, has come back from the dead.”*

* Some thought Jesus was Elijah because Elijah was to come before the Messiah. (Last 2 verses in the OT)
  + Malachi 4:5–6 *5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”*
* Many even believed Jesus to be the forerunner of the Messiah but not the Messiah Himself.

Today there are many answers to this question from the world religions.

* Buddhists believe that Jesus was a wise and enlightened man who taught similar things to Buddha.
* Hindus believe that Jesus was an incarnation of God similar to Krishna, a wise man.
* Jehovah’s Witnesses believe he was God’s first creation, the archangel Michael, who became a man.
* Mormons believe that he was one of the spirit beings that all humans used to be, the spirit brother of Lucifer who became the devil. They believe that Jesus was begotten in the flesh by God the Father.
* Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet and miracle worker, but he was not crucified nor raised from the dead.
* Famous agnostic and author of “Why I Am Not a Christian,” Bertand Russel said, “Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if he did, we know nothing about him.”

Today, there are many who know of Jesus, but really know nothing about Him. So many will say that he was a wise man who taught many good things. If they had really read and understood the things that Jesus said and did, they would either say that Jesus was a certifiable lunatic, or a counterfeit, fraud, and great deceiver, or He was exactly who He said He was. Obviously, most people have never really given the Bible much thought and study. So, Jesus changed the question and asked His disciples directly:

Matthew 16:15 Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

* This question is much deeper than it appears. Jesus did not ask **who they thought He was or what they believe Him to be.** Jesus asked **who He is to them**. It was a very personal question. It was not theological exam. It was not a pop quiz. It was personal question that required a commitment on their part.

Peter, who was the unofficial leader of the 12 spoke up first in Matthew 16:16 - *“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God*.”

This was not the first confession made, but it was the first **made without undo emotion**. After Jesus calm the storm, the terrified fishermen proclaimed:

* Matthew 14:33 *Then the disciples worshiped him. “You really are the Son of God!” they exclaimed.*
* And after the feeding of the 5,000 Peter also said: John 6:68–69 ***68****Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.****69****We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God.”*

In his response to Jesus, Peter was stating a fact. He saw the loaves and fish multiplied. But the question Jesus asked in Caesarea Philippi was different. Jesus asked who was He to them personally.

* “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
  + “Christ” is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word “Messiah,” meaning the Anointed One, the One from God, the One who is God. Not only that, Peter did not only say God, but He said the Son of the LIVING God, considering that they were surrounded by so many dead gods there in Caesarea Philippi.
  + Jesus was for everyone, not just the Jews. Calling Jesus, the Son of the Living God, also equated Jesus with God. In the Jewish culture and mindset, to say Jesus was the Son of God is to say Jesus was God. To Peter, Jesus was the Anointed One who came from God, the One who is God. And He was Peter’s God. Quite the confession and commitment.

Even with this confession, Peter’s understanding still needed updating and completion. In just a few verses later after Jesus talks about His Church being built on the rock of Peter’s confession, Peter is corrected by Jesus because Peter clearly did not understand Jesus’ mission.

* Matthew 16:21–23 21 *From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. 22 But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him for saying such things. “Heaven forbid, Lord,” he said. “This will never happen to you!” 23 Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”*

And even with this confession, Peter still had his shortcomings. Peter still needed to grow. Remember what Peter did after Jesus was arrested in the garden before His crucifixion? Matthew 26:75 *“Suddenly, Jesus’ words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And he went away, weeping bitterly*.”

Like Peter, our confession of Jesus is only the beginning. We must grow in our confession and understanding of just who Jesus is. Look quickly at what Jesus tells Peter: (Matthew 16:17) *Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*

Peter was given this confession by God who revealed Jesus to him. We can attend all the Sunday School classes, faithful in all the Bible studies, but in the end, it is God who reveals the very person of who Jesus is to us.

In closing I want to share just a few things that Jesus is, whether He is to you or not!

Jesus is...

* Redeemer
* Savior
* True Love
* Faithful
* Perfect
* Amazing
* Merciful
* Glorious
* Holy
* Deliverer
* The Word
* Our Peace
* Our forgiveness
* Our Healer
* Our Strong Tower
* Forever Steadfast
* The Promise Fulfilled
* Our Shepherd
* The Way, The Truth & The Life
* ALIVE
* SOON COMING
* MY SALVATION
* MY ANSWER
* MY EVERYTHING!!!

John 6:44 - *For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up.*

Jesus makes it clear; He draws all peoples to Himself.

* John 12:32 *“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.”*

No one can truly call Jesus Lord except that the Holy Spirit enables them.

* 1 Corinthians 12:3 *So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.*

Has Jesus been revealed to you? If He has, then today is the day of salvation.

* 2 Corinthians 6:2b*... Indeed, the “right time” is now. Today is the day of salvation*.

So, the question still stands today. It is a personal question that should touch the very depths of your heart & soul. This morning, who is Jesus to you? Not “what you think about Him, not what the world tells you about Him, but what has God revealed to you about Jesus. Who Jesus is to you.... Can you truly call Him the Christ, the Son of the Living God? Can you call Him Lord?

For those of us who can answer these questions in the affirmative, this Easter, you’ll truly have a reason to celebrate and be thankful for who Jesus is in you!