

Who Do You Say I Am?

Series: What God Wants To Know

Brad Bailey – October 19th, 2014

Intro:

Series... not a matter of dismissing our questions...

but of **facing the reality that maybe we are not the center of creation**... maybe we are the ones who should listen to the questions which are asked from outside ourselves. .

The living God who has engaged humanity **has questions** that help **define and direct the real story we are a part of.**

I was watching some football last night...and one player took a huge hit to the head. As I watched the medical team work with him on the field...I saw one begin to ask questions to him...and I knew what they likely were. They were cussion trauma... asking questions to see if he was disoriented he was.

God's questions can help us reorient ourselves

Today...we move into the later part of that story.

God is no longer speaking through prophets but through the direct representation of his very nature in the incarnate Christ.

Christ... begins to ask questions. And today... he asks the most central on of all. [1]

TEXT

Matthew 16:13-21 (NIV)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

The context here is one I which Jesus is beginning to turn toward his ultimate climatic confrontation with death... in which he would bear the weight of all humanity... for it was about 6 months before he was sacrificed and crucified. .

So God called a people out to know Him... Israel... not just the need for sacrifice...but that he would send one who would be sacrificed for them. God began to tell the people through the prophets of One he would send to save them...the Messiah.

But Jesus knew they had given themselves to human powers and popularity... just someone to overthrow Roman oppression.

He knew the people wanted one who would defeat Roman oppression...and save the people from their loss of power.

Humanity has always remained bent on looking at their problem as one out there...one which can be defeated by the power of human force.

Perhaps you can begin to imagine what his heart feels as the reality of his suffering approaches...and the people don't realize what is really at hand...the suffering and sacrifice. Jesus understood the urgency of the hour for this event was **6 months before His crucifixion** and His disciples need to be sure for themselves who He is.

This becomes clearer as we consider that just after Peter gets it right...declares who Christ truly is...**Christ begins to tell them about the suffering and sacrifice** that must now come...and it would be **Peter who rebukes him.**

Peter the confessor becomes the refuser of suffering... the denier when it comes. But finally he would grasp what was at hand and become Peter the Rock.

And it's not just Peter...all who surrounded Christ were perplexed at his being taken captive..and crucified.

QUESTION: "Who do you say I am?"

No mere academic question.

= *Who have you determined I am to you?*

Ever since Jesus came into this world we have been forced to deal with Who He is!

Interesting that Jesus prefaces this all-important question with another: Who do men say that the Son of Man is? "Who do THEY say that I am?"

Not sure exactly why...but it seems clear...that it draws out that many are swirling with speculation and presumptions...just like today.

(And "they" is always interesting... Never clear who it represents or even what is clear.)

That is a question about which nice, polite, respectable people can have a nice, polite, respectable discussion, yet still remain aloof – above the question, still remain disinterested, still rest securely in nice, polite, respectability. It's as if in this silly season of our national life, someone were to ask you, who do you think will win the presidential election? That's a nice, safe question because it allows us to talk abstractly about what hypothetical other folks might or might not do three months from now.

They seem to respond fairly freely... about the various thoughts "out there."

It appears that many have caught aspects of Jesus that suggest someone who uniquely is speaking for God...

Some say that you are:

John the Baptist – You may recall that John the Baptist was the wild prophet God called to prepare the way for Jesus.... urging the people to repent and turn to God and baptizing them in the Jordan River.He had just been beheaded by the local Roman king and some wondered if Jesus may have been John coming back to life.

Some say that you are:

Elijah- You may recall that Elijah was the great prophet of Israel who called down fire from heaven in confrontation with the prophets of Baal.

Some say that you are.... Jeremiah the weeping prophet who suffered great persecution because of his prophecies concerning Israel to turn to God

Some say that you are: One of the other prophets

There are two worthwhile points to note:

First, the **common people loved Jesus** even though they did not fully understand him. They all grasped that he bore the power of God like no one else...and the authority of God like no mere teacher...but as one speaking for God.

Second, it is **quite possible even with a very sincere heart to misunderstand who Jesus is**. It is possible for a person to be very sympathetic to spiritual truth and still not understand what God is revealing of Himself.

It's been said that **these answers** reveal that...
they were **like "a moth hovering around the light."**
They were fascinated by what they could not understand.

Today... we can do the same. Our own assumptions and expectations can be placed upon him.

This can happen by...

Those who desire to honor him.

We can try to fit Jesus into our preferences.

There was a grandmother that was told by her grandson that in Sunday School the teacher said Jesus was Jewish. The Presbyterian grandmother said, "Well, that may be, but I assure you, God is still a Presbyterian.

We have created so many "Jesus's" today [2].....

There's the **Patriotic Jesus** who is wrapped in our flag thereby the assumption is all that we do must be blessed by God.

There's the **political conservative Jesus** who is against budget increases and stands for "family values" and owning firearms.

There's the **political liberal Jesus** who is suspicious of Wall Street and Wal-Mart, yet passionate about being tolerate and "green"/reducing our carbon footprint.

There's **Open-minded Jesus** who loves everyone all the time no matter what, except for people who are not as open-minded as you.

There's **Touchdown Jesus** who **helps athletes run faster and jump higher** than non-Christians and seemingly **determines the outcomes of Super Bowls**.

There's the **Prosperity Jesus** who encourages us to be happy at all cost, tells us that "bigger is always better", and a sure sign you have been faithful is obtaining substantial debt.

> Jesus asks us afresh..."Who do you say I am? And we may have to face how we have placed our **preferences...presumptions...and projections onto him**.

And the many answers today include....

Those who may want to dismiss or deflect the question.

Regarding Jesus...

Many who say that there is **no historical figure**.

Jesus was not an actual historical figure...but a fictional one made up by his followers.

We could spend an hour confronting that idea. But just consider that it is not so different than how someone might declare that JFK or MLK...never existed. More than just questioning how and why they were killed...I am talking about questioning their very existence. Even if we took away the evidence of modern media...it would be had to declare they were not real figures because of there are people who knew them who are still alive...as there were when the written Gospel accounts and letters emerged. And there is the impact of their lives and deaths...just as with Jesus.

Stanford university:

"Over the last four decades, historical scholarship on Jesus and his times, whether conducted by Jews, Christians or non-believers, has arrived at a strong consensus about what this undeniably historical figure (born ca. 4 BCE, died ca. 30 CE) said and did, and how he presented himself and his message to his Jewish audience This is a course about history, not about faith or theology."

"He was a great teacher...but never intended to have come from God as a savior."

C.S. Lewis

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 a 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.

Jesus was either totally delusional (crazy) or totally deceptional (lying) - - or he was telling the truth. I believe the evidence supports his truthfulness. Jesus was too good to be a liar and too credible to be crazy.

Jesus had gone to India as a child and become enlightened...and was later misunderstood in speaking of God as a personal god.

Or similarly.... There is simply a denouncing of truth itself. To believe something to be true is labeled narrow... intolerant...exclusive...or arrogant.

Hard to believe something today.... We all do...but there is an idea that if you believe something...it excludes other ideas and therefore it isn't good.

It simply isn't true. I it is not arrogant to believe something is true.

If a diabetic says that insulin is my only way to live instead of die, that is not arrogant. To the contrary, it is stupidity to think that aspirin, Tylenol, or Vitamin C are just as good for treating diabetes as long as you sincerely believe they will work.

Stop and look carefully at the posture of our times when it comes to re-interpreting the past.

In the past few decades there has been a growing posture that believes that anything people say TODAY is smart and smarter than past beliefs.

We live in a time in which we think we know more about the past than those who were there. People presume that they can know who Jesus really is and even what he taught more than those who actually provide direct accounts drawn from eye witnesses.

Many say they were fools who just wanted to believe...which makes little sense because they were killed for such beliefs...whereas it's those today who could be deemed bias for they clearly do NOT want to believe.

It is interesting to consider all the ideas people have about Jesus.

But it is fascinating that what is often discovered beneath these ideas...is usually very little idea as to why.

Often I hear some sort of position...that seems a little hard to grasp or ground...and the basis seems to be, "It's just what I think"...or "I heard someone say this."...or something like that.

"If we take on a position for which we have no interest or initiative to really explore or challenge ...then it's really a reflection not of our reason but our will."

Three things we can say about this question...

1. It is a universal question... which engages those of varying spiritual traditions.

The central question...not just of those who are part of cultures rooted in Christian faith... but of all major religious traditions and cultures.

Countless **Jewish leaders** have sought to respond.

Countless **Hindu leaders** like Mahatma Gandhi have spoken and written about Jesus.

Islam has always placed Jesus in the height of honor and wrestles with his unique difference

Albert Einstein

"As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene....No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life."

Mahatma Gandhi

"A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act."

Napoleon

I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.

H.G. Wells (Historian, Author of *The Outline of History*)

"I am an historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history."

Which leads to something else we should grasp about this question...

2. It is the most significant question we will ever answer.

Our response to the question, 'Who do you say that I am?' shapes our lives more than our answer to any other question."

It is the "foundational" question ...the "rock" or "cornerstone" that our faith is built upon –

1 Corinthians 3:11 (TEV)

God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation, and no other foundation can be laid.

This is the most significant question we can answer. It is the foundation that defines who we were meant to be and how can find that life. It is the most essential question to answer...and the most urgent.

Urgent is not the same as instant. Not all that bears urgency can be solved instantly.

To answer a question in some shallow way does not reflect significance.

It's interesting that Jesus asks **such a central question... at such a later time.** These had been his disciples for over two years. He's been teaching and demonstrating God's work daily. I believe that **Jesus understood that he must reveal what defied the minds and hearts of men.** The entire religious perspective was going to be confronted.

To say "I'm the one you were expecting" was not an option. The religious posture of the day... may have had some good in it...but it had become what religion often becomes... just a nicer clothing upon human pride.

The people were not looking at their own hearts and crying out for mercy to be saved from the deep pride and self-centered nature that ruled the...they were just wanting to feel better about their lot in life.

They wanted a **political savior** more than a **personal savior.**

So just like those who first engaged him....we need to look at what he did...and listen to what he said. Jesus takes time to engage people with who he really is.

Two equally important truths:

Jesus understands that there is a process involved with one's ability to understand him and what is at hand. He will help anyone know him whose heart is open...and sincerely willing to accept him for who he is.

But equally...

Jesus knows that **ultimately this is the central question which each must answer.** The disciples will not be able to go forward without grasping this answer. Every life who knows of Jesus becomes engaged in a question for which the answer defines life.

So while it is a question that deserves a time to engage...it is **not a question that can be escaped** simply by **setting it aside....or wrapping up a response** in some academic response.

We all have answered already... like when the game show host says, **“Is that your final answer?”** Is that where you settle your eternal destiny?

This leads to the third thing we can say...

3. It is ultimately a personal question...and we are responsible for our own answer.

You can feel the shift from the preliminary question... about what OTHERS say... to then bringing it to the question that really matters, Who do you say that I am?

At some point we are going to set our destiny by that answer.

It is a question that our parents cannot answer...nor our professors...nor our pastors...nor popular culture.

Matthew 16:16

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

The Messiah, the Son of the living God. [3]

For Peter and the disciples they had by the Spirit of God come to life changing conclusion that Jesus was

Not just another prophet (John the Baptist, Jeremiah, Elijah, etc).

Not just another Rabbi or teacher.

Not just another wonder-worker.

He was God incarnate Savior.

Jesus was the one they had been waiting for: the Son of David and Abraham’s chosen seed, the one to deliver them from captivity, the goal of the Mosaic law, Yahweh in the flesh, the one to establish God’s reign and rule.

This is Jesus the Christ the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world!

Ultimately this this profession is **not** one of **agreement of the intellect** but a **submission of the will**.

Do you think God cares about whether you just know who he is...or whether the more ultimate issue is who he is to you?

Jesus called for a personal conclusion and commitment, not an academic answer.

Who do you say that I am? It is an intensely personal question – our response, one way or the other, involves us; it commits us.

It is a **self-involving confession**, and beyond that it is a **self-committing confession**. We cannot say Thou art the Christ and have nothing change. To acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ is to place oneself in his service, in his debt, at his feet. It is to commit.

Closing:

This new name “Peter” is simply the masculine form for the Greek word “Rock” – Petros, and the same is true for the underlying Aramaic, Kepha. Did you know that this is the very

**first instance of “Peter” – “rock” – being used as a personal name in any language or culture?
No one had ever been called Peter before.**

Jesus would lead him to a new understanding...one which would prevail...one in which he would be a rock.

> Jesus wants you to become to know the same foundations out of which you can be a rock.

If this question is the most significant and personal...

I want to encourage each of us to renew your answer...or renew your process.

Resources: Oxford Circle Mennonite Church, “Who Do You Say That I Am?” (September 18, 2011); Fr. Patrick Allen Sermon: Who Do You Say That I Am? (September 2008)...he further notes that N.T. Wright makes use of the concepts of “self-involving” and “self-committing” statements with regard to the Resurrection of Jesus in his book *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (pp. 714-720).

Notes:

1. This account is in all three synoptic Gospel accounts (Mark 8:27-29; Luke 9:20; Matthew 16:13-26)

and elements of a similar profession can be found in John.

2. Some of these were adapted from a list by Kevin Deyoung.

3. The Bible Knowledge Commentary explains that ...

“As “the Christ,” He is the Messiah. Ho christos is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament māšāḥ, which means “the anointed One.” In Him are fulfilled all the promises of God to the nation. And as the Old Testament made clear, the Messiah is more than a human being; He is God ([Isa. 9:6](#); [Jer. 23:5-6](#); [Micah 5:2](#)). Peter thus acknowledged Jesus’ deity as the Son of the living God. The disciples had come to this conclusion as they observed the Lord Jesus over a period of time, witnessed His miracles, and heard His words.”

Lewis quote - *Mere Christianity*, Book II, chapter 3, paragraphs 11 & 13, pages 55-56