

Who Is Jesus to You? Matthew 16:13-20

Introduction: Once a teacher was giving her pupils a lesson in logic. *"Here is the situation,"* she said. *"A man is standing up in a boat in the middle of a river, fishing. He loses his balance, falls in, and begins splashing and yelling for help. His wife hears the commotion, knows he can't swim, and runs down to the bank.*

Now why do you think she ran to the bank?"

A girl raised her hand and asked, *"To get all his money?"*

In this part of Matthew's Gospel, we find Jesus' disciples facing a similar situation. It's almost like they are in class when their teacher asks them a very important question. They want to seem as though they are smart, so they blurt out an answer.

It might not be the right answer, but at least it's an answer.

In our test today, one of the disciples, Simon blurts out the right answer, but almost in the next breath, he follows it up by sticking his foot his mouth.

Matthew 16 is a crucial section of Scripture. As we said last week, it records a turning point in the life and ministry of Christ as Jesus withdraws somewhat from a public ministry to the masses to a more private ministry with His closest followers. And in today's passage, we find Jesus, the Master Teacher, turning to His prized pupils to find out how much they have learned.

Our text for today contains the gospel in miniature. The basic fundamentals of the gospel consist of two aspects about Jesus Christ: 1. Jesus wants every follower of His to know who He is, and 2. He wants to know if they are willing to trust Him.

In the last few weeks, we've heard the stories of Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, feeding the multitudes, and walking on the water. We've heard about His encounters with His critics who were out to destroy Him by publicly discrediting Him. And through it all, the disciples have been with Jesus. Now it's time for Jesus to see if His class has been paying attention. First let's notice:

1. A Personal Question (READ 13-15)

Jesus' pop quiz begins with a simple question: *"Who do people say that I am?"* And, the responses were that everyone seemingly regarded Jesus as a prophet or as someone sent by God.

But the real test started with the next question...a personal question. Jesus asks, “*Who do you say that I am?*”

Now we need to understand something here...Jesus asked this question of His closest followers but only one of them had any kind of an answer. The rest just stood there and looked at Him. They didn’t know what to say.

That makes me wonder...if most of Jesus’ closest followers didn’t know what to say, how would we respond if we were asked that same question today? How would the majority of God’s church – folks who have sat in church pews for years respond to such a direct and personal question?

Would you have an answer? Would you have to go to the library and look it up in a book? Would you have to consult a few friends and have a study session to come up with the answer? Would you have to call the preacher? What would you say?

Out there, there is no shortage of answers to that question. To many folks, Jesus is a good teacher, a prophet, a good and moral person, a great leader, or a philosopher. But, I suppose that very few people would say that Jesus is the Son of God.

In preparation for this message, I came across something that made me think that a lot of people would regard Jesus as some sort of politically incorrect, borderline criminal, because He’d have everyone upset at Him.

- The FDA would fine Him for turning water into wine without a license.
- The EPA would publicly shame Him for killing fig trees.
- The AMA would ban Him for practicing medicine without a license.
- The Dept. of Health would reprimand Him for asking people to open graves, for raising the dead and for feeding 5,000 people in unsanitary conditions.
- The NEA would fire Him for teaching without a certificate.
- OSHA would fine Him for walking on water without a lifejacket and for flying without an airplane.
- PITA would be outraged for driving pigs into the sea.
- NOW would criticize Him for not having a female apostle.

- The INTERFAITH MOVEMENT would accuse Him of intolerance for condemning all other religions.
- And the ZONING DEPT. would shut down His ministry for building heavenly mansions without a permit.

So it's no different today. Very few people say that Jesus was actually the Messiah. What happened next was:

2. A Passionate Response (READ 16)

Apparently Simon was the only disciple who really understood who Jesus really was. And He didn't have to attend seminary, or go digging through some text book to come up with the answer. Simon answered from his heart. He said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

You see, when it comes to knowing who Jesus is, it not about knowing **facts** about Jesus – it's about **knowing Jesus period!** There is a difference. Simon could have answered, "*Why, Jesus, You're Joseph's boy, the son of a carpenter. You're a good speaker. You're a healer. You're a magic man*" - There are many ways he could have answered, but he didn't. Simon didn't answer from his head, he answered from his heart.

Simon's passionate answer revealed that He understood Jesus to be the presence of God in the world. He perceived Him to be God's salvation to His people, and to the whole world.

It was the right answer, but what made this the right answer? More importantly, why was Simon's answer so important? Well, as I said earlier, this text is the Gospel in miniature. And Jesus' response to Simon reveals just how right Simon was. That leads me to my final point:

3. A Profound Implication (READ 17-20)

Simon confessed Jesus as the Christ, The Messiah, the Son of God. And from this confession, he is given the keys to the kingdom. This is how people will get in. And the implication of that is that God's church will be built upon his confession of faith.

The church today is testimony to Simon Peter's faith. It exists today because Simon Peter and others like him dared to trust and believe in Jesus in spite of their religious upbringing; in spite of the opposition by the religious leaders of the day; and in spite the persecutions they suffered at the hands of the Romans.

That is why this confession of faith is so profoundly important – The disciples staked their lives on it, and began to build God’s church upon it. They proclaimed, “This is how you get in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

You see, this is a more than a right answer. For Simon, it was a life-changing event. His confession is the rock that the church has been built on, and the foundation for the church to grow and flourish against tremendous opposition. And we are gathered here this morning as a result of this man’s expression of faith 2000 years ago. That is a profound implication.

Today here we are in another time and in another place as a part of this great church that Jesus built. It’s grown to a world-wide conglomerate of different denominations and beliefs, but the true church is still based on this confession that Peter made 2000 years ago.

And if you care about the church – if you want the church to continue to grow and flourish, then ask yourself these questions: “*What is it going to take? What do we need to be doing? Does it take a certain style of worship, or a certain new program, or does it take following a set of rules to get people in?*”

Well, I submit to you that the requirements for building God’s church haven’t changed. The foundation is the same. What God asks of us is that we come to know Jesus... That we proclaim Him as the Son of God in our own lives and that we share the Good News with others. That’s it!

It’s like I said earlier - knowing Jesus is the whole point. It’s not about how beautiful the building is, or how big the budget is, or how many people we have on the roll – It’s all about knowing Jesus. If we’ll just focus on knowing Him in the free pardon of sin and telling other folks how they can know Him too, all that other stuff will take care of itself!

Peter was able to say that Jesus was the Son of God because he knew Jesus. That was revealed through the Holy Spirit.

And it’s the same for us. We might not be able to walk with Jesus in the flesh like Peter did, but the Good News is that we still have the Holy Spirit to reveal Him to us. We still have the same opportunity to have a personal relationship with Him as Peter did.

And we have the same responsibility that Peter had – to go out and tell others that Jesus is the Son of God.

Listen, as people who love the church and want to see it continue to grow, we're going to have to be more intentional about sharing Jesus and His love with other people.

I'm not talking about scaring people out of hell or threatening people with legalism, or pushing people down the aisle, or cramming a King James Bible down their throats. I'm talking about sharing Christ with folks. I'm talking about letting people see and hear about your personal relationship with Him. I'm talking about letting your faith show and shine in a dark world.

I read something this week that made me think. This article said that had Jesus been this big threatening guy ready to condemn and send everyone to hell who didn't have the right answer at a moments notice, this story wouldn't be about Simon Peter's confession of faith. It would have been a story about 11 other apostles going to hell.

It's not about being judgmental although we all know that God is just and holy and He will judge us based on our faith. But this morning, it's about who Jesus is. And Jesus is the Son of the Living God. Jesus is a merciful and loving Savior who is looking for followers who are willing to share His message of love and grace. That is who He is.

And that is the message the church's foundation is built upon. If you want to see your church grow and have an impact, this is the foundation we have to be built upon in our witness.

Conclusion: Right now, God is calling us into closer relationship with Him and with each another. We can't be found guilty of keeping our faith all to ourselves. We must be willing to share it if we are to grow God's church.

If you've never been offered this kind of relationship with the Christ – the Son of the living God before, I want to offer it to you now. No scare tactics, No threats, No pushing. I offer you a simple invitation: Who is Jesus to you? Is He your Lord and Savior? Do you know Him personally? Have you professed Him passionately? Has He impacted you profoundly? If not, I invite you to come and let me introduce you to the Jesus I know.