

ZION SERMON, AUGUST 23, 2020

Jesus asked a very deep question in today's reading. **"Who do you say that I am?"** That is the ultimate question. The eternal question. The question whose answer will determine where you spend eternity. It is a question that is as relevant today as it ever has been. Many people see Jesus as a "Get out of Hell Free card." They know all about Jesus. They know all the Sunday School answers. They have the head knowledge, but there is no heart knowledge. They desire no change in their lives. There is no desire to really know Jesus. They only want use Him to escape hell. Jesus had this to say about such people.

(Matthew 15:8–9) **"This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."**

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. A recent poll by the Pew Research Center found that **Only a little over half of Americans (56%) believe in the God of the Bible.** Only 56% said they believed in the God of the Bible.

According to Lifeway Research only 40% believe they will be sent to hell if they do not personally Trust Jesus.

WHO DO YOU SAY THAT JESUS IS? Jesus had taken His disciples away from the crowds, perhaps to be able to give them some personal instruction. Maybe Jesus also wanted away from the Jewish crowd that followed them everywhere. So, Jesus went to what is perhaps the most pagan place in all of Israel.

At the extreme north end of the ancient borders of Israel in the area of the tribe of Dan, was a city built to honor Caesar. Philip, who was the tetrarch of those northern districts at that time, had his own name added so as to not confuse this city with the other city of Caesarea located on the coast.

Caesarea Philippi was about 25 mile north of the sea of Galilee, right at the headwater and springs that marked the beginning of the Jordan River. It was once the center for Baal worship. It was here that Jesus talked about His church and that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

(Matthew 16:13) **Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"**

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 tell 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.

"And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

This was 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 Herold Antipas the tetrarch. Herold thought Jesus was John the Baptist risen form the dead.

(Mark 6:16) **But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"**

Some thought Jesus was Elijah because Elijah was to come before the Messiah. That's how the Old Testament ends.

(Malachi 4:5-6) **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 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."**

Some thought Jeremiah because some of the inter-Testament writings had Jeremiah hiding the Ark of the Covenant and he was to return and reveal the ark before the coming of the Messiah. Many believe 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.

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 charlatan, 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) **He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"**

This question is much deeper than it appears. Jesus did not ask who they thought He was. He did not ask what they believed 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 a personal question that required a commitment on their part. Peter spoke up first.

(Matthew 16:16) **Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

This was not the first confession ever made, but it was the first made without undo emotion. Remember last week how after Jesus calmed the storm, the terrified fishermen proclaimed:

(Matthew 14:33) **Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."**

And after the feeding of the 5,000 Peter also said: (John 6:68–69) Peter answered Him, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

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 He was to them personally. **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

"Christ" is the Greek equivalent the Hebrew word "Messiah," meaning the Anointed One Not only that, Peter did not only say God, but He said the Son of the LIVING God. 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.

But 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) **From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He**

turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

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) **And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." So, he went out and wept bitterly."**

Like Peter, our confession of Jesus is only the beginning. We must grow in our confession and understanding of just who Jesus is. And Jesus tells Peter:

(Matthew 16:17) **Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."**

Peter was given this confession by God who revealed Jesus to him. We can attend all the Sunday School classes. We can be faithful in all the Bible studies. But in the end, it is God who reveals the very person of Jesus to us. Do not miss-understand me, Sunday School and Bible Study are important, for that is how we grow, and it often through these things that God make his revelation of Jesus to us. But we cannot go to Jesus unless God draws us.

(John 6:44) **"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."**

And Jesus makes it clear, He draws all peoples to Himself:

(John 12:32) **"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."**

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

(1 Corinthians 12:3) **"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that 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 Cor. 6:2) **Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now's the day of salvation.**

So the question still stands today. It is a personal question that touches the very depths of your soul. 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. Can you truly call Him The Christ, the Son of the Living God? Can you call Him Lord?