

The Identity of Jesus and His Followers

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[0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word, the Bible, which points us to your living word, your son. And Father, as Peter prayed earlier, we do ask that you would give us minds that understand and hearts that would seek to live in light of the truth you tell us today.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, in life, we meet all sorts of questions, don't we? They range from not so important, like what are we going to do for lunch after church today?

Well, that's pretty important, I suppose. But in the big scheme of things, to more important questions like do I have enough super to retire? Will my current superannuation enable me to stay retired? They're pretty crucial questions, aren't they?

And the crucial questions are those that really change everything, or the answers to them really change everything. I remember asking a pretty crucial question about almost 20 years ago when I asked Michelle, will you marry me?

I was so nervous, she kept asking me if I was okay. I finally plucked up the courage, popped the question, got down on one knee, opened the ring box and she laughed.

[1 : 1 9] Not quite the response I was looking for. And then she did say yes, and my life has never been the same again. For the better.

But today we come to what I think, in fact, better. What God thinks is the most crucial question we will ever meet. And that is the question of, who is Jesus to you?

Who is Jesus to you? In Jesus' words, who do you say I am? Now this question has always been so far, it's always been there in the book of Matthew, the gospel of Matthew, as Peter pointed out at the start of the service.

The question of who Jesus is has always been there, but it's remained just beneath the surface of Matthew's gospel so far. Occasionally coming up for air. So for example, in chapter 8, verse 27, when Jesus calms the storm, you might remember the disciples ask, what kind of man is this?

Who is this? That the wind and the waves obey him. Or in chapter 12, verse 23, when Jesus heals a man of demon possession and allows him to speak and hear again, the people ask, could this be the son of David?

[2 : 3 7] That is God's promised king we heard in our first reading. But for the most of the time in Matthew's gospel, this question of who is Jesus has remained just below the surface, just in the background, until today.

And it starts with the Pharisees and the Sadducees requesting a sign from Jesus to prove who he is. So point 1, verse 1, the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

They say, show us a sign from heaven. In other words, prove to us that you are really from heaven, from God. Prove to us that you are really sent by God as the son of David, the son of God.

Both titles, of course, mean king, Messiah, Christ. Show us a sign. Prove to us who you are. Now, this might seem like a reasonable request, mightn't it?

Except for three things. First, we're told that both Pharisees and Sadducees come together to make this request. And we need to remember that these two groups despised each other.

[3 : 5 6] So to see them working together should ring alarm bells. It's kind of like seeing the Labour Party and the Liberal Party working together. You're going, what's going on? Or the footy rivals of Collingwood and Carlton working together.

Or Collingwood and anyone working together. Sorry if you support Collingwood. Alarm bells should be ringing.

Second, Matthew actually tells us that their request had an ulterior motive. It was to test Jesus. To try and prove, in other words, that he was not the Messiah.

And third, Jesus has already given them plenty of signs which they have refused to accept. And so this request for one more sign is not really a genuine request to believe.

It's actually a sign that they don't want to believe. So look at how Jesus responds in verse 2. He replied, When evening comes, you say, it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.

[4 : 56] And in the morning, today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky. But you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. Jesus then left them and went away. You see, they have minds that can interpret the signs of the sky.

They know if it's going to be a nice day or if it's going to rain. They can draw logical conclusions from what they see. We can do the same thing, not just about the weather, but also about people, can't we?

I mean, if I said, who am I? I wear a blue uniform. I drive a car with sirens. I arrest bad guys. Who do you think I am? You would say, a policeman. Yeah. But when it comes to Jesus, these Pharisees, it seems, cannot interpret the signs of the times.

It's as though Jesus is saying, you can interpret the weather, but you've seen me heal the blind, the mute, the crippled, the paralyzed, the demon-possessed. They've seen it all. You've also heard me healing people with leprosy, feeding 5,000, raising the dead.

[6 : 13] You yourselves have witnessed the teaching, my teaching about the kingdom, all these things that are associated with God's King and Messiah. And so who do you think I am, Pharisees? Oh, actually, Jesus, can you just show us one more sign?

It's almost comical, isn't it? But it's actually sheer stubbornness because this request shows they have refused to listen to the signs so far. And so Jesus calls them wicked and adulterous, just like Israel in the Old Testament, when they refused to listen to God.

And if they've refused to listen to these signs already, then one more won't make a difference.

They've already made up their minds, you see. And in the end, their request is simply an excuse not to believe.

It's kind of like my kids, when they don't want to go to bed, they say, I just need to do one more thing. And then they do it. And then they say, I just need to do one more thing. And they do it and they say it again and again. They don't need to do anything.

It's just an excuse not to go to bed. Well, so too here is this request for a sign. It's just an excuse not to believe. And so Jesus tells them they won't receive a sign except the sign of Jonah.

[7 : 25] What is that? Well, Jesus actually already told us. He told us back in chapter 12. So just turn back in your Bibles two pages to chapter 12, verse 38.

Just turn back two pages on the left-hand side under the heading, the sign of Jonah. So chapter 12, verse 38. We read, Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

He answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but none will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. And here's the explanation. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Do you see what the sign of Jonah is? It's a sign of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. The sign that Jesus will be crucified, buried in the heart of the earth for three days and raised to life, just as Jonah was metaphorically kind of swallowed up in death by the fish, in the fish for three days and then metaphorically brought back to life or literally vomited back to dry land.

That's the sign of Jonah. In fact, it's next weekend, isn't it? That's the sign of Jonah. It's Easter. And this sign is not just for them, but it's a sign for us too, that we might know who Jesus is.

[8 : 52] See, I don't know about you, but people still have asked me from time to time or have said, if God only showed me a sign, then I would believe. I've had people say that to me.

And sometimes we can even wish for a sign ourselves, can't we? Or wish that God would give our family and friends who are not Christians a sign so that they might believe.

But the thing is, God has already given the greatest of signs, the sign of Jonah, the sign we celebrate next weekend. The sign of Jesus' death and resurrection for which we have evidence.

I mean, take the resurrection, perhaps the greatest sign of who Jesus is. We have such evidence that a renowned Jewish historian said this on the next slide. He said, in purely logical terms, the

resurrection of Jesus is the lesser of two evils for all who seek a rational explanation. In other words, the resurrection is the logical conclusion from the signs, from all the evidence. Now, this professor, Lapid, he doesn't want to believe it, which is why he calls it evil, an evil, but it's the lesser evil.

[10:04] It's less evil than being irrational, like the Pharisees were being. Now, God may graciously choose to give people a sign or a vision or a dream, but we actually already have enough to draw a logical conclusion about who Jesus is and believe in him.

It's just that people don't want to like the Pharisees. And so they ignore the evidence and the signs we already have and demand just one more sign as an excuse not to believe.

And so Jesus warns his disciples against this teaching that ignores the signs and refuses to believe in him as the king. And so Jesus said, point to verse 5, chapter 16, verse 5.

When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. Be careful, said Jesus to them. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

And they discussed this among themselves and said, oh, is it because we didn't bring any bread? Aware of their discussion, Jesus said, you of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?

[11:12] Do you still not understand? Don't you remember who I am? Don't you remember the five loaves for the 5,000 and how many basketfuls you gathered?

Or the seven loaves for the 4,000 and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I'm not talking about bread, but rather be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?

Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Notice that we are told to be on guard three times in these short verses. Three times. And so this teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees, that seems to be pretty dangerous, doesn't it?

And so what is this teaching? Well, again, the Pharisees and Sadducees not only despised each other, but they had hardly any teaching in common with each other. What's more, in Mark chapter 8, he records Jesus adding Herod.

[12:18] Watch out for the yeast of Herod. So on the next slide, he says, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. But what did Herod teach? And so what is this teaching that all three groups have in common that they're to guard against?

Well, the only thing it can be is the teaching that Jesus is not the King, not the Messiah. Remember, Herod thought that Jesus was possessed by John's spirit.

It was John come back from the dead, chapter 14. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees have just come to Jesus to test him, to try and prove that he is not the King, the Messiah. And so I take it, this is the common teaching that the disciples are guard against.

The teaching that says Jesus is not the King. And why are they to guard against it? Well, because it's easy to forget it. It's easy to doubt that Jesus is the King.

I mean, the world says he's not. Sometimes we feel like he's not. And other times we act like he's not. I mean, take the disciples. See verse 7?

[13:21] They think the issue is they forgot the bread. But then in verse 9 and 10, what have they really forgotten? Jesus says, don't you remember? Who am I? I'm the one who fed more than 5,000 with five loaves.

I'm the one who fed more than 4,000 with seven loaves, with basketfuls left over. Don't you remember who I am? I'm the King who provides abundantly for his people.

I can certainly provide for you lot. I'm not worried about whether you brought bread or not. You see, the disciples in that moment forgot who Jesus is, didn't they?

And in so doing, they acted as though he was not the King who provides. And to act like Jesus is not the King is the same as not having faith.

In him as the King. Do you notice what Jesus says in verse 8? When they acted like this, Jesus says, you of little faith. Or better, no faith at that moment.

[14:26] For at that moment, they doubted who Jesus was. And so they were faithless. You see, it's easy to forget who Jesus is. It's easy to act as though he is not the King.

And so it's easy to be faithless in that moment. And the irony is that at the very moment Jesus is warning them about not forgetting who he is, they forget who he is.

Do you see how much they need this warning? But so too do we. Because we can easily forget who Jesus is. And we can easily act like he's not the King.

And in those moments, we can easily be faithless. And this is dangerous because moments of faithlessness can turn into a lifetime of faithlessness.

And as we saw last week, faith in Jesus is the difference between being accepted by God or rejected by God. And so be on your guard, he says.

[15:25] So that this false teaching of the Pharisees will not spread like yeast throughout their lives. For Jesus really is God's King. Point three, verse 13.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, Who do people say that the Son of Man is? That is Jesus.

And they replied, Well, some say that you're John the Baptist, like Herod. Others say Elijah. And still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But what about you?

He asked. Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, You are the Messiah. The Son of the Living God.

And with those words, we come to the climax of Matthew's book so far. You see, in verse 21, Matthew uses this phrase, From that time on. And it signals a shift in the movement of the story.

[16:28] A shift from who Jesus is to what Jesus will do. Namely, suffer. And three days later, be raised from the dead. But it's this question of who Jesus is that has been in the background all this time.

And now for the first time, it's been brought to the foreground. For Jesus, for the first time, asks his disciples directly, Who do you say I am? And Peter, acting as a spokesperson for the other disciples, Declares with more clarity and confidence than ever before, You are the King.

The Messiah. The Son of the Living God. And the Son of God there is another title for the King. And we saw that in our first reading from 2 Samuel 7.

And Messiah, Christ, Son of David, Son of God, They all refer to God's promised King, Who would rule on David's throne forever.

And so Peter is saying, Jesus is this promised forever King. And if this is true, then it changes everything. For now, Jesus is the one who has all authority over all people all the time, Whether they realize it or not.

[17:40] Us here, those going about their business at Shopping Town, Those in our suburbs, He is their King, whether they realize it or not. And so He is the one to whom all people will answer to on that last day.

He is the one we are to live for and serve. He is the one who sets our agenda for life. And His kingdom is the one that is worth being part of, Because it's this kingdom that will last forever.

See how crucial a question this is? How it changes everything? I remember after we were married, Michelle was asking me about children, Which is a pretty crucial question, Because kids really do change everything in life.

For the better. I'm not even sure I said yes, but anyway. The answer to this question, though, Changes everything, not just for this life, But for the next.

First, the question of who is Jesus to you? And yet it's not an answer that we can come to by ourselves. Do you see verse 17? Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, For this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, By humanity, But by my Father in heaven.

[19:00] Do you see, While Peter himself has interpreted the signs And come to this conclusion, It is only because God has enabled him to do so. It means, by the way, That no matter how many signs people see, God is ultimately the one who enables people to believe.

Which is why we need to keep praying for people. But because God has revealed this to Peter and the disciples, They are incredibly blessed, Says Jesus.

For they recognize who Jesus is, They believe in who he is. So now they are part of God's kingdom. And not just part of God's kingdom, But also the ones through whom Jesus will build his kingdom, His church.

Do you see verse 18? He says, And I tell you that you are Peter, Which means rock. 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. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. And then he ordered his disciples Not to tell anyone he was the Christ at the moment.

[20 : 07] It's interesting, by the way, That in 2 Samuel 7, The son of God Is the one who will build a house for my name. Do you remember? A house for my name is the temple.

And here is Jesus, The true son of God. And he will build God's spiritual temple, The church. And he says he will build it on this rock.

What rock is this? Well, as you know, Some churches say It is just the person of Peter. And therefore, If you can trace your descent From the person of Peter, Then you have the authority. You have the keys of the kingdom. The church is built on you. And you can say what you like. And your word is even more authority Than God's word. But do you notice? Jesus only says that about Peter After he makes the declaration Of who Jesus is.

In other words, Peter is the rock Only in so far As he has been given the truth About Jesus. So I take it, Jesus will build his church Upon his disciples Who are enabled To declare him As the king The Messiah.

[21 : 15] And the keys of the kingdom They refer to the gospel message That the disciples will receive. At the moment They know Jesus is the king But in verse 21 They will also be told What it means for Jesus To be the king That he must suffer And die And on the third day Be raised to life.

In other words Jesus will give them The full gospel To proclaim That he is both king And saviour. And it's this gospel message That is the keys To the kingdom.

For it is the gospel message That unlocks Entry Into the kingdom That enables people To enter it. And this is exactly What we see Jesus doing At the end of Matthew Don't we?

Saying to his disciples Sending them out To go and make disciples Of all nations To build his church. How? By teaching the gospel. And the great news Of verse 18 Is that not even The gates of Hades Not even death itself Will stop the growth Of Jesus' church.

Not ISIS Not this so-called Safe schools program Not the government Not anything Will stop the growth Of Jesus' church. For if Jesus Is the forever king Of God's forever kingdom Then this kingdom Will prevail This kingdom Will win.

[22 : 36] Well I started with Talking about Questions we meet In life And the answers To some of these questions Will change How we live.

Though some of these Questions might Seem important to us But are not. For our children At the moment They are asking At every meal time Is there dessert. And if the answer Is no Then apparently Life is no longer Worth living.

You see some questions Might feel like They're important But they're not. Yet on the flip side There are some questions That sometimes We forget Are important But are actually Critical Crucial And the most crucial Of them all Is this question Who do you say Jesus is?

For your answer Will determine Where you spend Eternity. So who do you Say Jesus is? Do you believe him To be the forever king Who died and rose again?

The one who At the cross Paid for your sins And mine So that we could be Forgiven And welcomed Into God's Forever kingdom? Or like the Pharisees Do you refuse To accept The signs?

[23 : 53] As I said This is the most Critical Of questions Because your answer Will shape Not only this life But the life To come It is the difference Between heaven And hell So who do you Say Jesus is?

For those of us Who do say That Jesus Is our king Who do believe In him As our king And saviour Then three quick Things Firstly Do you realise How incredibly Blessed You are?

That's what Jesus Says Blessed are you Simon Peter For this is not Something we have Worked out All on our own But something That God Has enabled us To believe Not because We deserve it Or did anything To earn it But because God has kindly Revealed it To us And now we Get to have Forgiveness Whenever we ask We get to be Part of God's Family who cares For us And we get to Have the certain Hope of glory Before us That is we will Beat death We will rise Again People spend Millions of dollars Every year to Try and beat death God gives it to us For free All because God Chose to reveal to us The true identity Of Jesus All because God Enabled us to Believe him So do you Realise how Incredibly blessed We are Secondly Do you realise That we have The keys To the kingdom For now that God has revealed

To us who Jesus is Now that we Know the gospel Message We have Those keys That knowledge To unlock The kingdom For others So the question Is will we Use those keys To help Unlock it For others Will we do What we can To share The gospel Easter is Coming up Why not Pray for an Opportunity To say Something Michelle's Godmother Is a lady Called Elizabeth And she Gives her

Grandchildren Easter eggs Each Easter With a sticker That simply Says Jesus Is risen Now she Cannot say Much more Than that Because if You have Any relatives Who are not Christians You know You can't Say much More than That They won't Listen But she Does what She can She uses Her keys In what Way she Can So that She might Help unlock The kingdom For others And thirdly And finally We are to Continue To live With Jesus As our

King You see Sometimes In life It's easy To doubt Who he Is It's easy To forget That he Is our King Like the Disciples Forgot In the Boat And so We are to Be on Guard How By continuing To read Our Bibles To keep Reflecting On the Evidence To keep Interpreting The signs To keep Reminding Ourselves Of who Jesus Is And what He has Done For us So that The false Teaching of The Pharisees Will not Spread like Yeast Throughout Our lives But instead Will joyfully Keep Serving Him I was Speaking With someone Just this Past week Who is Doing it Tough At the Moment Their Health Is not Great And they Are struggling And the Conversation Started off Reasonably Negative Actually And then As we Spoke And as I Tried to Point them To Jesus And just Mentioned Verses You know That I knew Off the top Of my head To try and Remind them Of who Jesus is And what He's done They turned

[27 : 24] Around And by the End of the Conversation They said It's just been So good to Talk to you Not because Of me But because They were Reminded of Who Jesus Is And doing That Help them To guard Against Doubting Him And forgetting Who he Is So we To keep Doing that Keep reading The word Keep coming To church As I Know you Do That we Might not Let that False teaching Spread But that We'll Continue to Serve Jesus As our King So let's Pray that We might Let's Pray Our Gracious Heavenly Father We do Thank you For this Crucial Question Of all Questions That is Asked in Today's Passage And answered So clearly The question Of who Is Jesus And the Answer that He is the King The Messiah The son Of the Living God Father we pray That you would Help us To keep Remembering Who he Is And what He has Done for Us That we Might

Continue to No longer Live for Ourselves But for Him Who died For us And was Raised Again And we Ask this In his Name Amen