

Who is Jesus?

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Date: 31 March 2019

Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0:00] I believe most of us are familiar with taking exams. And one of the things that we know, those of us who have had some experience taking exams, and so part of the strategy of some people who do well on exams is that they pay special attention to the questions that carry a lot of marks.

Well, friends, this question that we are considering this morning carries a lot of marks. It ranks among the most important questions in life, and so it is impossible to pass the exam of life if we get this question wrong.

If we fail on this question, who is Jesus, we have no chance of passing in the exam of life. So I encourage all of us this morning to pay special attention as we consider this question from this short passage that we just read.

But before we do that, I want to ask you to imagine with me for a moment. Just imagine that a friend of yours were to come to you and say to you, who do people say that I am?

Lyndon laughed, and that's what most of us would do. We would laugh and say, come on, you're not that important. Why do you think people have an opinion about who you are?

[2:01] We'd say something like that. But suppose our friend is not put off, and he says, okay, okay, but who do you say that I am? Who do you think I am?

I know most of us would really begin to wonder about our friend and wonder if all is well with him and be somewhat concerned.

Because that's a strange question. Both of those are strange questions to ask. We don't normally go around asking strange questions like that.

But those questions were not strange for Jesus to ask. And the reason Jesus asked those questions is Jesus was no ordinary person.

Jesus was one who could not be ignored. Jesus is one who still really cannot be ignored. During his earthly ministry, as people encountered him, or as they heard about him, heard about his teachings, heard about his miracles, they came to conclusions about who he was.

[3:18] You read the Gospels, and what you find is that there are many views about Jesus in the Gospels. Jews and non-Jews had views about him. The view of the Pharisees was not positive.

The Pharisees could not deny that Jesus had supernatural power. And so what they did was they said his supernatural power came from the devil.

They said it was not of God. But the reality is, when you read the Gospels, you see that people had far and wide recognized Jesus to be an extraordinary individual, and they formed different opinions about him.

From this passage that we just read this morning, we can see that Jesus asked two questions. And I want us to consider them in our remaining time. And again, if you have any questions, we work our way through the sermon.

Please make a note of them, and we'll offer some time at the end to have them asked and answered. Our primary focus this morning is on the second question that Jesus asked in verse 15.

[4:38] Who do you say that I am? But to get to that question, we need to get to the first question, which Jesus asked in verse 13. Because he uses the question in verse 13 to set up and get to the one that he asked in verse 16.

So let's consider the first question Jesus asks. Who do people say Jesus is? Who do people say that Jesus is?

Or to ask of the way Jesus asked it in verse 13, who do people say the Son of Man is? It's important to recognize from the outset that Jesus knew better than his disciples what people thought about him.

Jesus not only knew what they said, he knew what they actually thought about him. So his questioning was not kind of, some kind of a personal survey where he was trying to get information to see how well he was doing in terms of popularity.

Jesus asked this question to teach. He asked this question to teach his disciples, and we pray by God's grace that the question also teaches us.

[5:55] And so he asked his disciples, who do people say that the Son of Man is? And we see in verse 14 that the disciples begin to answer him, and they say some positive things.

People say, you'll join the Baptist. Some say you're Elijah. Others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And with each of these responses, we're able to see that people thought that Jesus was not an ordinary person.

They identified him with the great prophets of the Bible, like John the Baptist and Elijah and Jeremiah. Now, although the first point that I am covering is worded slightly differently from the way Jesus asked it, I want to make sure that we see how Jesus did ask it.

Jesus didn't ask, who do people say that I am? He didn't ask that question. The question he asked is, who do people say that the Son of Man is?

Jesus uses this title, Son of Man, for himself. It's the title that he preferred. It's the title that he used regularly as he referred to himself.

[7:20] And the disciples understood that he was referring to himself. The title, Son of Man, has what we may consider double meaning. It points to the humanity of Jesus.

He was a part of the human race, like everyone. One, he was Son of Man. But that's not all the title meant.

Those who knew scripture in Jesus' day would have been aware that the title, Son of Man, had divine implications as well. It pointed to the divinity of Christ.

It pointed to the fact that Jesus was God the Son. The title, Son of Man, is used in the book of Daniel. In Daniel chapter 7.

And Jesus used it regularly to refer to himself throughout his ministry. And those who understood scripture would understand that Jesus was pointing to his exalted role in redemption history.

[8:23] We see this double meaning of the title, Son of Man, up close in Matthew 26. When Jesus stood before Caiaphas, the high priest, as he was on trial, as he was hours away from being crucified.

And he was being accused of many things. And so we read in Matthew 26, starting in verse 62, And the high priest stood up and said, Have you no answer to make?

What is it that these men testify against you? But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God. Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus said to him, You've said so. But I tell you, from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy.

[9:44] And notice how Jesus responded to the high priest's demand that he should tell him whether he is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said, You said so.

But I tell you, from now on, you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven. The high priest used the title Son of God in his demand to Jesus. But in his response, Jesus uses the title Son of Man. So why did Caiaphas get upset? Well, Caiaphas got upset because as a good high priest, he would have known this verse in Daniel 7, 13, where it talks about the Son of Man coming on the clouds and possessing dominion and possessing a kingdom and ruling over all. And Caiaphas recognized that Jesus was saying he is that Son of Man and he recognized immediately that Jesus was equating himself with God.

And he reacted violently, tearing his robes and charging Jesus with blasphemy. But there's another clue in the passage that Jesus is trying to get his disciples to understand his divine identity and trying to get us to understand it as well.

[11:17] That clue is in the location where Jesus chooses to ask the question. It doesn't seem to be happenstance that Jesus would ask the question at this place called Caesarea Philippi.

It almost seems intentional in verse 13 where Matthew records it. Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi.

Sometimes when we go into particular locations they trigger thoughts. They trigger memories. And so it was about Caesarea Philippi.

Caesarea Philippi was located on the southern slope of Mount Hermon. And it was a location that had a long history of the worship of false gods.

It was first used for Baal worship and then for the worship of the Greek god Pan like frying pan. and in Jesus' day it was used to worship Caesar as its name Caesarea implies.

[12:30] Caesar Augustus was worshipped as god and he assumed for himself divine titles like savior. And so it was at this location of misplaced worship and confused deity that Jesus asked the question who do people say that the son of man is?

And Jesus recognized that those that there were those who were ascribing deity to a mere human Caesar while missing his own deity and hence the question he asks.

And friends today it is no different. Jesus can be ignored so most people who have heard of him hold some kind of view of him.

And for many people today Jesus is merely a prophet a good man a great teacher a moral example but for many they don't see him as God as one who deserves to be worshipped with their hearts and served with their lives.

many of the same people who have these views about Jesus as a good teacher and as a prophet and as a good moral example many of these same individuals worship false gods and false religions like Buddhism and Islam and Hinduism.

[14:02] But when you talk with many people about their views about Jesus and particularly those who have false views about Jesus what you quickly find is that the views they hold are not their own views.

And by that I mean they're not their views that they have taken the time to consider and to evaluate in light of scripture for themselves.

They're inherited views. They're the views of the people. They're views of what people say, what others say. But friends, this question who is Jesus must move from what people say to what do you say.

Put aside what the people say, what do you really say? Who is Jesus? And so after listening to the survey results from his disciples about who people say that he was, Jesus gets personal with his disciples and he asks them in a pointed way but who do you say that I am?

You who have been with me, you who have seen me up close in every way and to every degree that's possible, traveling with him, seeing him privately and publicly, seeing his miracles, hearing his teachings, who do you say that I am?

[15:31] And this brings me to my second and final point. who do you say Jesus is? Although the second question was directed to all the disciples, Peter is the one who answered.

And it wasn't because Peter was smarter or more spiritual than the rest. Jesus tells Peter in verse 17 that the answer he gave was not what he or some human came up with, flesh and blood, but that the Father revealed it to him.

I think if we think a little bit about that statement from Jesus, we could say Jesus was in essence saying to Peter, Peter, being with me for the period of time that you have been with me, seeing the miracles that I have performed, hearing the teachings that I have taught, seeing me up close in all my person, none of that could reveal to you what you just said.

Flesh and blood could not reveal that to you. Jesus tells Peter, it was revealed to you by my Father who is in heaven.

And let's look closely to what Peter said. Peter said, you're the Christ, the Son of the living God. That's what the Father revealed to Peter. Now you'll be thinking, well, really, what is the big deal about that?

[17:22] why is that such a big deal that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Such a big deal that the Father, only the Father could reveal it, that they could not come to this conclusion on their own.

Well, let me try to explain why they couldn't come to this conclusion on their own. And let me try to explain why we cannot come to this conclusion on our own.

You realize that even though we have the account of the Gospels, we have the full word of God. If all we have is ourselves and this word, then that's it.

We're no different from Peter. The same way he could not come to the conclusion by the experiences that he had, alone, we cannot come to the conclusion about who Jesus is on our own with whatever information may be available to us.

So let me try to explain. Throughout the Old Testament, from as early as Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15, God promised that he was going to send a Savior for his people.

[18:48] people. In Genesis 3 15, this Savior is referred to as the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent. And throughout the Old Testament, the promise of an anointed Savior, a Savior King, was developed that he would come and he would save the people of God.

And then we come to the New Testament and in the New Testament we come to the Gospels and we see that Jesus was born King of the Jews and Savior of the world. But the Jews had distorted ideas about who this promised Savior King, this promised Messiah who God would send to save his people, they had distorted ideas about who he would be.

They had a mixture of what Scripture said but also political aspirations. And they came up with one who looked very different from the one that God had promised that he was going to send.

They formed a view of what this Messiah would look like and in their mind their expectation was of a political leader, a deliverer, one who would come to them on a horse, not on a donkey as we will commemorate shortly on Palm Sunday.

And since Jesus didn't fit their picture of what Messiah should look like, the Jews rejected him and this is still the case for most Jews today. They still reject Jesus.

[20:24] But Peter, a Jew, says, you're the Christ. In other words, he was saying, you are the Messiah, you are the anointed king, you're the promised one who God said he would send.

And when Jesus would say to Peter, Peter, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, he's saying to Peter, Peter, you're really no different from the rest of Jews.

You're no different from the rest of Jews who have this expectation of this primarily political Messiah who is going to come and free you from the oppression of Rome.

But notice that Peter not only identified Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah, but he added another title, he said, the Son of the Living God.

Peter could have simply said the Son of God, but it seems like in the reality of where they stood in this place of false worship, of false gods, that Peter would say you're the Son of the Living God, making a distinction between the true God and the false dead pagan gods that Caesarea reminded them of.

[21:53] And notice the title, the vivid contrast between Son of the Living God that Peter uses in verse 16 and Son of Man that Jesus used in verse 13.

In these two titles we can see the uniqueness of Jesus, we can see the humanity of Jesus in the title, Son of Man, and we can see right on the side of that the divinity of Jesus in the title, Son of the Living God.

Here's what Gabriel said to Joseph speaking about Mary and the child that she would bear in Matthew 1 verse 21.

Gabriel said to Joseph, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus came to save his people from their sins, hence his name Jesus means God saves. And this salvation was the, it was the single mission that Jesus had as he came into the world.

[23:15] Everything else is secondary to it. His moral example, his great teaching, the miracles that he performed, all those things are secondary to what Jesus came to do to save his people from their sins and what was required to be able to do that.

Look at what Matthew records for us further on beyond where we read this morning in verse 21 of chapter 16. Matthew writes, from that time, from this time that Peter had this revelation of who Jesus really was.

From that time, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, far be it from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you. But he turned and said to Peter, get behind me, Satan.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind on the things of God. You're setting, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

[24:38] The singular purpose for which Jesus came into the world was to die a substitutionary death on the cross for sinners and for sin. And then to rise again on the third day so that those who put their trust in him will be saved.

Now this is a very interesting development that Mark records for us in verses 21 through 23. Jesus announces that he is going to be killed.

And the same disciple who said, you are the Son, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Now rebuke Jesus. Far be it from you, Lord. And if there's ever evidence that would help us to see beyond what Jesus said that flesh and blood did not reveal that to Peter, this is evidence that Peter really, he in and of himself did not get that revelation.

Because what is very clear is the revelation that he had moments before when he said, you are the Christ, Son of the living God, he missed it on this particular part when Jesus shared what he had to do consistent with that revelation that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the one who came to save God's people from their sins and by necessity had to go to the cross and to die and be killed in the manner that he prophesies.

Peter says, far be it from you. And in that moment Jesus identifies Peter on the side of Satan. Because Peter in that moment was not desiring what God required to fulfill the purpose for which Jesus came into the world as the Christ, as the Messiah, the Savior of the people of God.

[27:01] So what's the point about Peter's answer? What's the big deal about Peter saying, you're the Christ, the Son of the living God?

That's the big deal. The big deal is in a world that is filled with different options for worship. Only God the Father can reveal to us that Jesus Christ is the true anointed King, the Son of the living God, the only one who is worthy of worship and obedience.

Finally, in verse 18, Jesus further says to Peter, Peter, and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

There's a whole lot of ink that has been spilled on those words of Jesus, what they mean and the implications of them. But simply Jesus is saying to Peter that the rock is the revelation that he just proclaimed, that Jesus is the Christ.

He says on that, on that stable revelation, on that fixed body of truth, I'm going to build my church. going to build my church. in the original language, the Greek word that we find in verse 18 for church is the word ecclesia.

[29:07] And the word comes from really not a religious word, but it was a generic word that simply referred to a gathering or an assembly of people.

It could be a political gathering, it could be a civic gathering, it could be a religious gathering, an assembly of people.

And so the ecclesia really was those called out to a particular gathering, whether it was political or whether it was religious, whether it was civic.

they were called to a particular gathering. It was a kind of invitation to come to it. So essentially what Jesus was saying was that the assembly of the called out ones, the assembly of his called out ones, will be built on the revelation that he is the Christ, that he is the anointed savior king.

and he says the very gates of hell shall not be able to prevail against the called out ones, against his ecclesia. There are people who debate, again, a lot about the implications for Peter and what was built on him and not built upon him.

[30:33] But here is the point of the whole account. The point of the whole account is to help us to see that the identity of Jesus as Messiah points to our need for him as our savior.

The identity of Jesus as the Messiah points to our need for him as our savior. And so the question that Jesus asks, the personal question, who do you say that I am, needs to be answered sincerely by every one of us.

We need to answer it for ourselves. It's worth the time to take, to consider who Jesus really is.

I imagine this morning that if I were to now pass out a test, and I were to ask each person present this morning, based on this sermon, to answer the question, who is Jesus?

I'm pretty sure you'd all answer it in accordance with what you just heard, and you'd put the right answer on the paper. But being able to answer the question, who is Jesus, based on what you've heard this morning, doesn't prove that you have come to a revelation, a personal revelation, of who Jesus is, as revealed by God the Father himself.

[32:20] And that's because knowledge of who Jesus is, is more than just factual knowledge, or head knowledge. Knowledge of who Jesus is, refers to a deep, soul conviction that Jesus is the Christ, that he is the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, that he is the Savior of the world, he is the one whom God sent into the world, to be a sacrifice for sin, and for sinners, and out of that conviction, we yield our lives to him, and we live for him.

My friend, our lives will bear the evidence as to whether we have come to a soul conviction that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, that he is the Son of God, that he is the Savior of the world.

Because it is a contradiction to say that he is, and then not live our lives in worship and obedience to him.

And I think when we consider the situation in our country, this is the startling concern that I have, and I think that we should all have, that there are many people who believe that because they can get that answer right.

That you say to them, who is Jesus, and why did he come? And they can give you all the right answers, perhaps based on having studied it in school, studied it in a Sunday school, but they would be willing to acknowledge that they don't live for that one who they have said is the Christ, is the Messiah.

[34:12] And brothers and sisters, I'm convinced that the bridge between those two, the bridge between being able to give the right answer about who Jesus is from a head knowledge understanding and to live for him, laying our lives down in service to him and worshipping him is this revelation in the middle that only God can give us as to who he is, that he is worthy to be worshipped, that he is worthy to be served, that he is worthy to be obeyed.

Only God can give that middle link between that head knowledge and that life reality that shows that we really believe that.

I think we all know that the things we truly believe react upon. The things we truly believe react upon. When someone, for example, were to say to you, I've done this for you.

Generally, we think about, okay, the person has the capacity to do it, we believe them, they're truthful, we get all excited. We immediately seek to act upon it. But when somebody says something to us that's outlandish and we don't trust them and it's crazy, we won't even bother to chat.

And so, it comes down to what we truly believe. And what we see from Peter's experience, what we see from the other disciples' experiences, is that the revelation of who Jesus is can only come from God the Father.

[35:58] And if you're here this morning and you would acknowledge and you would say, yeah, I can get the answers right about Jesus, this. But I have to acknowledge that my life does not reflect that I truly believe that.

