

Matthew 16

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[0 : 0 0] In the next verse, in verse 16, we have one of the great confessions made with regard to Jesus Christ. And that, of course, comes from Peter, who said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And the question that Jesus asked came really against the backdrop of Jesus' confrontation earlier with the Sadducees, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the religious leaders who were so blind with regard to Jesus.

They weren't blind with regard. We mentioned that this morning. In fact, sometimes there will be overlap in what I'm saying tonight with what was said in the morning. But they were so blind, not with regard to biblical knowledge, because we've got to remember that these religious leaders were saturated in the Word of God.

They were tremendous students of the Word, but they were prejudiced against Jesus. And we've always, always got to guard against being prejudiced.

It's very, very important that when we come to God's Word, that we come with an open mind. In other words, when I say an open mind, it's a mind that is ready to be taught, not to come with our own preconceived ideas.

[1 : 1 8] Because, you know, many of the great heresies of today and many of the false teachings of today can find their origins even in the Bible, where people will take something from the Bible and they will twist it to mean what they want it to mean.

Because really, if you take, it's very easy to take something in the Bible out of context and even to just separate a wee bit of a verse and to home in and to build great, what they would term great ideals and great truths and begin almost to build a whole way on things.

The Bible is its own interpretation. The Bible interprets itself. And that's why it's so important that we are students of the Word with teachable spirits, always asking that the Holy Spirit will open our mind to the truth so that we will see and that we will understand and that we will learn.

And that is certainly not what these religious leaders were doing. They had made up their mind that Jesus Christ was an imposter, that he wasn't who he said he was.

So Jesus, in private conversation with his disciples, is asking them, who do people say that I am? Now, when Jesus asked this question, he was asking the disciples in the way that he would be saying to them, right, I know that your ear is close to the ground.

[2 : 4 9] I know that you move around and that you're hearing what people say. Who do people say that I really am? That's not the way Jesus is asking this question.

Jesus is asking this question for a specific reason. He is bringing the conversation round and he's probing into their hearts so that they will be persuaded of who he is.

So this was just a lead-up question that he was then going to home in on them so that to see that they understood who Jesus was himself and who Jesus is.

And so Jesus is asking them this question. And, of course, great crowds always followed the Lord Jesus Christ. And the one thing that everybody had to admit was that he was an exceptional person, that he was quite extraordinary.

And even his greatest critics, and he had many, we find different declarations made. They said, never a man spoke like this man. That was said by his critics.

[3 : 59] They actually said, people who had no time for him, that he spoke with authority, not like the scribes and the Pharisees. Because they were used to that kind of, it was obviously a very dull kind of teaching and very legalistic type of teaching, and it would be going right into the most minute detail of things.

But when Jesus taught, there was an authority, there was a power, there was a reality. And even his critics had to admit that, that here is somebody who was different and somebody who's spoken away.

So he was, without a shadow of doubt, he was the most influential person in his day. And the huge crowds from all sections of society followed him, of course, for differing reasons.

So Jesus asked the question, then, who do people say that I am? And the disciples said to him, well, they said, some say you're John the Baptist. Now, again, this opinion, this came about, I think, from the idea that King Herod had, that John the Baptist had risen from the dead.

Remember how Herod had John the Baptist put to death. Remember, you all remember the story of how when John the Baptist, who had been put in prison, when Herod had that sort of feast, and the head of John the Baptist was requested and was brought in on a platter.

[5 : 37] It was one of these awful moments. But what we've got to remember about Herod is that although Herod had John beheaded, that wasn't what Herod wanted for John.

because Herod was in awe of John. He had huge respect for John, even although he had put him in prison, and he had put him in prison because of Herodias' sake.

But he still had huge respect for John because we're told this in Mark's Gospel. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a just man and a holy man, and he observed him.

And when he heard him, he did many things, and he heard him gladly. That's what it says about King Herod. It's very obvious that he had often private conversations with John.

He was so moved by John's conversation and teaching and authority that King Herod did many things. He obviously was trying to do things in his life, to readjust things.

[6 : 51] Of course, he didn't do the great thing, which was repent and seek the Lord, but he did many things. So John's influence on Herod was huge. And yet we know that on that particular day, because of Herod's lust and Herod's pride and Herod's huge ego, which turned in a kind of a disaster for Herod, he ordered the execution of John.

But it's very obvious that Herod, I believe, had many restless nights where he realized that he had silenced a voice that had spoken to him, a voice that no doubt pricked his conscience and affected him in many ways.

So Herod couldn't get rid of John. And so when Jesus began teaching and the fame of Jesus began to spread all around, Herod thought, you see, he was disturbed.

In his mind, he kept thinking about John and he was saying, it's John. This is John risen from the dead. Now, obviously, it wasn't. But that seed, that what Herod was saying, no doubt sort of caught into some people's minds and it began, some people began thinking, this is John the Baptist, this is John risen from the dead.

Others were saying, he was Elijah. And again, they were going back to the prophecy of Malachi because in the prophecy of Malachi, it tells that, or it says that, before the coming of the day, before the day of the Lord, that Elijah was going to return.

[8 : 34] And so there was this awareness, this maybe, this is Elijah. But what they hadn't grasped was in fact that John the Baptist was the Elijah type character that was to come.

And again, that's one of the kind of little warnings that we have with regard to the Bible, of trying to interpret prophecy. You see, it tells us in Malachi, and people, so often, people think, well, this is definitely how it's going to be.

Verse 5, Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord. Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. Now, of course, this was prophesying the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, behold, I will send you Elijah. John the Baptist was the Elijah type character. There were many similarities between John the Baptist and Elijah, even in their dress, even in their way, in their teaching, in everything.

There was a huge similarity between the two characters. And in fact, Jesus himself says, John is the prophetic announcement of Elijah.

[9 : 51] He says in Matthew 11, For all the law and the prophets prophesied until John. And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come.

And that's why I'm saying we've got to watch with regard to trying to interpret prophecy. Because so often, we come to prophecy and we think, ah, this is what it says. But we cannot be too definite.

Because that was part of the problem. They were convinced that Elijah was going to come again. But Jesus is saying it's an Elijah type character. And this was him. This was John.

And then others were saying it was Jeremiah or one of the great prophets. The one thing was that everybody knew that Jesus was special. But I suppose when we ask the question, who do men say that I am?

That if you go through the Bible or through New Testament times, you will find that different people are responding in different ways. Because sadly, if you went round the nation at that particular time and asked some of the Jews, who is this Jesus?

[11 : 02] You would get the most extraordinary reaction. because some people, some of the people, and particularly amongst the religious leaders, this is what they said, he's a sinner.

Some people labeled Jesus a sinner. Now that's quite extraordinary that the one person in this world, the one person who was never a sinner, is the one person at that time they labeled a sinner.

Now a sinner wasn't just, like we know, we're all sinners. A sinner at that time was somebody who was notorious in the way that they lived. They lived in a defiant way before God.

They lived with no sense of shame and they kind of plowed the depths. And their sin was so obvious to everybody. They were notorious in their way and people said, oh, he, that, he's a sinner.

That's why they were appalled at Jesus that he went to have a meal with one who was a sinner. He was notorious. He was noted as being a sinner. And that's what they said to Jesus.

[12 : 11] He's a sinner. Isn't that extraordinary? The one person that never, ever, ever sinned in thought, in word, and in deed.

And you ask them, who's Jesus? He's a sinner. Does that not show how twisted the human heart can be? And as we said already this morning, that's the spirit that still exists to this very day where people will distort the Christian faith, where they will put down it, where they cannot, they're incapable of seeing anything good in it or about it.

And you'll say to people, open your eyes, can you not see? But they can't because they're blinkered, they're prejudiced, there is this hatred in their heart to the Christian faith.

There were others, of course, that said of Jesus that he was illegitimate. There were others that said of Jesus that he was a madman. There were others that said of Jesus that he had a demon.

In John's Gospel, chapter 10, when Jesus gives that beautiful teaching on the Good Shepherd and some of the most beautiful words that Jesus ever spoke and have down through the generations given so much security and peace and hope to the people of God, some of those who listen to Jesus, this is what they said in John chapter, John 10, he has a demon and is insane, why listen to him?

[13 : 42] Isn't that extraordinary? People who are listening to Jesus preaching and teaching and saying, I am the door, I am the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep, all these beautiful verses that we have and people are listening to him and saying, you know this, he's as a demon, he's insane, why do you listen to him?

As I said, that spirit, unfortunately, is still alive and kicking today and that's why people will not open their Bibles, that's why people will not come to church, that's why people deliberately choose and refuse not to listen and I think we've got it something sometimes we don't understand that there are people who are so bitterly opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they have made up their mind, they are adamant and they're even angry, there are a lot of angry people against Christ because they hate him and they hate Christianity as well and they're saying, why listen to him?

And their whole aim in life is get rid of the Bible, get rid of the church, remove Christianity, its influence and its impact in society and they will do everything that they can to put down on Christianity and destroy it.

It's a spirit that was there in the day of Christ. As I said, there are times you stop and you think and you say, how can you be so blinkered? Please, open your Bible, just come and try, listen to Jesus, listen to the words of Jesus.

But then I say to myself, even if they listen to the words of Jesus, they will still, many of them, have that spirit because these are people who were listening to Jesus, who were present in front of Jesus and they're saying, he's mad, he has a demon, why listen to him?

[15 : 40] And then, again, we find even the Pharisees in Matthew 12, when it was being highlighted to them that Jesus was casting out demons and they said, aye, no wonder, he's casting out demons because he has a demon.

It's by the power of Beelzebub that he is doing that. And all throughout life, they made out that Jesus was an imposter. And even onto the cross, they mocked and they jeered.

And remember the cry from below the cross, mocking cry, if you are the Christ, if you are the Son of God, come down and we'll believe in you. he saved others, he cannot save himself.

We've said this before, they didn't realize the truth of what they said. Jesus couldn't save himself and save others at the same time. The reason Jesus stayed, if Jesus had said, alright, I'll come down, I'm going to come down from the cross just now, and he could have, it wasn't the nails that held him there, although physically they did, but if he had exercise, the authority and dominion and power that he could have, he could have come down from the cross.

If he had come down from the cross, they wouldn't have believed. They couldn't have believed because there would be no salvation. He was on that cross to procure salvation, and he stayed on that cross out of his love to us, and so he couldn't save himself and save us at the same time.

[17 : 25] The only way he could save us was by giving up himself. That's what he was doing, and as he was doing that, they were saying to him, you're a fake, you're an imposter, you're not real, come down and we'll believe in you.

And so we see that that's the spirit, that's the attitude that was prevailing with so many people. Who do people say that I am? And again, if we go back to the New Testament, let's hear it from another side, old Simeon.

Here's Simeon, and he'd been waiting to see, he had been given an assurance that he would see the Messiah before he died, and that's a beautiful picture of old Simeon holding the little baby Jesus in the temple, and he says, mine eyes have seen your salvation, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

And you listen to Nathanael, remember how Nathanael had met with Jesus, and he was very skeptical to begin with, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?

Then he meets with Jesus, and in a moment of meeting with Jesus, he says, Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel. You remember the woman at the well of Samaria?

[18 : 52] This woman who, her life was kind of going in a downward spiral, she met with Jesus, Jesus gently began to lead her in the right way through conversation, until this dawning realization came over her in her conversation, I know who you are.

And she went running back into the village, and her testimony was, come, see a man who has told me all the things that I ever did, is not this the Christ? And you listen to Martha at the grave, in the face of death, heartbroken, remember how Lazarus had died, and Jesus is speaking to Martha, and as Jesus made that great declaration of how he was the resurrection and the life, remember what she said, Lord, I believe, she said, that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world.

Then we hear the voice of the centurion, we mentioned that this morning, the man in charge of the execution, and as he had stood there facing the cross and witnessed all that took place from beginning to end, and he had seen all the phenomenon that occurred, and he had seen the attitude of Christ and listened to the words of Christ, and at the end when Jesus yielded up his spirit, he said, this man, truly this man, was the Son of God.

And so as you go through the New Testament, more and more you're beginning to discover one person after another, like Thomas is saying, my Lord and my God, people are discovering, discovering, discovering, Jesus is the Christ, he is the Son of God.

I hope tonight you've made that discovery, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Is he your God? Have you made that discovery personally for yourself?

[20 : 51] Because if you haven't, you know, tonight that opportunity is there and there's nothing great, there's no greater discovery that you can ever make than to discover that Jesus is there for you and that he is all he says he is, that he is the King, that he is the Lord of glory, and that he is able to save you and to bring you into a royal inheritance and to make you an heir of everlasting glory, and he'll do that tonight for you, and he will give you a life of stability, a life of purpose, a life of identity, a life of hope.

This is Jesus, and all these people in the Bible, they had met with Jesus, and this is what they were able to say. Again, supposing we turn into the Bible again, and we say, right, that's what people are saying.

What does heaven say as to who Jesus is? Well, we hear the words of the Father, and he speaks from heaven, and this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Then again, if we go up in the scriptures, and we'll hear the voice of the angel that was sent to speak to Joseph, remember, when he discovered about Mary, Mary shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.

Even if you go to hell, the scriptures will testify as to who Jesus is, because you find it's very interesting that in the time of Jesus, when there was a lot of demon possession, one of the things the demons couldn't bear was coming into the presence of Jesus.

[22 : 45] And you will find that so often there was a reaction, for instance, with the likes of Legion, and remember how Legion meets with Jesus, and he had all these demons, and the cry is coming out, what have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

You know, it's only in this world there is such a thing as an atheist. Do you know there is no atheist in hell? The demons, there's not one atheist amongst the demons, and the devil most certainly is not an atheist.

Because you know what it tells us in the Bible? That the demons, with regard to God, they believe in him, and they do more than that, they tremble. They don't believe, obviously, savingly, but they believe and know the reality of God, and what they know often makes them tremble.

So people who are atheists, they will discover if they die in that way, as atheists, that they will arrive in a place where they have no fellow atheists, and they themselves won't be, because they will discover nothing but the frightening reality of the presence of God, in his wrath and in his judgment, because that is what hell is.

So the Bible is telling us, heaven tells us, the angels tell us, God the Father tells us, even the demons are pointing as to who Jesus Christ is.

[24 : 22] And all these people who met with Jesus, and Jesus touched their lives, they're telling us who he is. And what does Jesus himself say? Jesus himself says, I and the Father are one.

Jesus says that he is God, of very God. Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He says he is the door. He says he is the light of the world.

He says he is a good shepherd. He says he is the resurrection and the life. He says he is the bright and morning star. Jesus is revealing more and more right through the Bible who he is.

and we have to ask the question, who do you say he is? Because that's a question Jesus is asking. Who do people say that I am?

That's a question you have to ask yourself. Do you agree with the testimony that the Bible makes of who Jesus is? and if you do, the question then is what do I do with Jesus?

[25 : 30] Because it's a question that one day is going to be turned on its head. Because it's a question that Jesus himself is going to be faced with in reverse. What am I going to do with you?

Because that will be the question that Jesus has to answer himself on the day of judgment with every single person. as the judge of all the earth, what am I going to do with you?

What am I going to do with me? Jesus has to ask. And that question is answered by what we have done with him. Have we accepted him or rejected him?

Because what we have done with him is what he will do with us. It's very simple, it's very straightforward, but it's very solemn, and it's very, very challenging.

Well, Jesus wants us to come. He doesn't want us to remain in darkness. Jesus doesn't want the gospel to be something that's kind of hidden in mist so that we don't understand.

[26 : 36] He wants us to see. That is one of the things that comes out in the Bible. He's saying, won't you hear? We are living in gospel times. We're living in the New Testament times where the gospel has to go out and be preached and witnessed.

I hope and pray tonight that you will see Jesus as who he is. That faith says you are the son of God. Faith sees Jesus as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

You know, the Bible highlights Jesus in his threefold office as prophet, priest, and king. As prophet in that he reveals the word.

He reveals God to us. He is in the office of priest as the one who has made sacrifice for our sins.

He is in his office as king, the one who rules his church and rules our heart. And if tonight you can see Jesus in that way, as the one who is the word, as the one who has revealed, who is the great messenger of God.

[27 : 53] If you can see Jesus as the one who has made sacrifice for your sin, and you're seeing Jesus tonight as king, lord of your life, then you're in the right place.

You're seeing Jesus for who he is. and I pray that you will go on from that to be able to lay hold not only upon the fact that you know Jesus, but that the knowledge that you have of Jesus will change your life and give you that courage to come out and to declare that Jesus is your Lord.

Because I feel that far too many people have come to that place, and yet they're looking for something more, something extra. And they say, ah, there's got to be more to it than this.

The Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord, this is what it means. It's to believe, to accept, to lay hold upon Jesus as our Lord and Savior and be able to confess it.

Because, you know, refusal to confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord, it robs you of assurance. Be quite persuaded of it. The day that you take that step of confessing that Christ is yours, you know, it does something wonderful for you.

[29 : 19] It lifts you on. It gives you an assurance. There are a lot of Christians who have never actually taken that step of making that public confession.

And they're saying, oh, it's because I'm lacking assurance. And, that, you know, refusing to come out, as it were, and declare this cripples assurance.

So, you take that step and come out confessing that Jesus Christ is your Lord. Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we pray that we might know this Jesus as our own, and that we'll be able to make that confession that Peter made.

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. May we be able to make that confession knowingly, that we have come even to experience personally the power of Jesus within our own lives.

We pray to bless each and every one of us and grant us grace in all that we have to do in this week. Grant us health and strength and your safety as we go on.

[30 : 26] Be with us in all the duties that lie ahead of us and take away from us all our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Let us conclude singing from Psalm 73 from the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 73 from the Scottish Psalter. And we're going to sing from verse 25 to the end. And the tune is Tiverton.

Psalm 73 from the Scottish Psalter. And you will find that on page 316. Verse 25, whom have I?

in the heavens high, but thee, O Lord, alone, and in the earth whom I desire, besides thee there is none. My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never, for of my heart God is the strength and portion forever.

For lo, they that are far from thee forever perish all. Them that are whoring from thee go, thou hast destroyed all, but surely it is good for me that I draw near to God, and God I trust that all thy works I may declare abroad.

[31 : 34] Psalm 73 from verse 25 in the Tunis Tiverton. Amen. Please així in the support.

Bye-bye. Bye-bye. Lord, lo, may the dark far from thee forever perish shall, then let a holy from thee go, thou hast destroyed all.

But surely it is good for me that I go near to God.

In God I trust that all my works I may declare abroad.

Amen. Amen. Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.