

Confession and Prediction – Matthew 16:13-28

Who is Jesus?

Who is Jesus? Who is he? If you're listening to this, this might seem like a silly question because you probably already know who Jesus is. But this is a serious question because your answer to who Jesus matters and has deep implications for you as it will shape what you believe, how you live and even your eternal salvation as we will see in today's passage.

And if you were to ask someone on the street, or a work colleague or your non-Christian friend, who is Jesus, What kind of answers would you get? They might say he was a man from ancient times, a prophet, a wise teacher, a religious person, they might say that he didn't exist, that he was just made up. They might give the answer that Jesus is someone that some people remember during Easter and Christmas (which as an aside is in 103 days).

We've slowly been making our way through Matthew and we're reaching the half-way point now. In Matthew 1-16, we meet Jesus, we hear his teachings, the sermon on the mount, we read of the miracles he performed, miracles that pointed to his power, demonstrating that he had power from God, and that he was the promised Messiah, and we've read of how people responded to Jesus along the way. And now Jesus and his disciples are alone, they are approaching the region of Caesarea Philippi, and Jesus wants to know what the people are saying about him, v13 "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

Matthew 16:14 (His disciples) replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

And these would have been very good answers for a 1st century person of that region to give, Some thought as King Herod did, that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead, others thought that Jesus might be Elijah or one of the other prophets from the Old Testament, after all, Jesus had been preaching the kingdom of God and performing miracles. Elijah will actually come up in next week's passage.

But who is Jesus to YOU?

But the real confronting question is the one that Jesus asks next:

Matthew 16:15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Notice the change in questioning. Jesus is not asking for objective information, it's now a subjective, a personal question. In this question, Jesus is now asking "what about you, who do you say I am?", It's not about what others have said anymore, it's now about them, what his disciples think. Jesus' question goes to the heart. The disciples have been following Jesus for some time now and so their answer is important. We've seen people totally getting it wrong so far as to who they thought Jesus was, the Sadducees and Pharisees got it wrong, when they should have been the ones to recognise Jesus. Peter speaks up:

Matthew 16:16 *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

In this answer, Peter acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah, the King, the son of God. Peter hits the nail on the head and this may be surprising given that the disciples didn't really understand what Jesus was saying in last week's passage. Why did Peter get it right?

Matthew 16:17 *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."*

Peter didn't come up with the answer on his own, he also didn't just make up the answer, but in fact it was God that revealed it to him and made it clear to Peter that Jesus is the King, the Son of God. This is important to understand because we also need to respond to the question of who Jesus is and when we see Jesus as our King, our Lord and Saviour, then we remember that it is God working in our lives.

The tricky/confusing part of the passage

V18 and 19 are a bit tricky because these verses have had huge implications for the life of the Christian Church.

Matthew 16:18-19 *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

The interpretation of these verses by the Roman Catholic Church in particular has caused great division in the Church, it's been a point of difference for those who have left the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Reformation, the interpretation has been in dispute between Protestants and Roman Catholics. How does the Roman Catholic Church interpret these verses? Their interpretation is that the church is built on Peter being the rock of the church. Peter being the rock of the Church as declared by Jesus is also where Peter gets papal authority, and so it is here that Peter becomes the first Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in a line of popes which start from him.

There is the popular image of Peter standing at the Gates of Heaven letting people in or not into Heaven since Peter has been given the keys to kingdom. But it is only God who judges and only God who has the power to let people into heaven.

The best interpretation is that the message of Jesus being the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, that message is the rock on which the church is built. When Peter declares Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God", this is the cornerstone of the Christian faith and it is the message which saves people from hell, it is the key to heaven. Trusting and believing in this message, this truth, is the key to the gates of heaven.

Jesus must die

And so for Jesus to be the Messiah, what did that mean for Peter? What did that mean for his followers?

Let's read from verse 20 to see:

Matthew 16:20-23 *Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. ²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

The expectation of the coming Messiah was that he would be the one to deliver his people from Roman occupation, that Israel would be a nation again. And so Peter calling Jesus the Messiah mean he was declaring that Jesus was the King. The Jews were under Roman occupation and so to declare someone other than Caesar to be King was essentially calling for Revolution, to overthrow the Romans and to kick them out of Israel. But Jesus is saying the exact opposite of their expectations, that he will suffer, be betrayed by the elders, priests, teachers of the Law and die, but raised on the third day. The time had no yet come for this to happen to Jesus which is why he instructs his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah, but in Jesus' prediction that he will die and rise again, Peter doesn't hear resurrection, he instead hears death, that Jesus will . That is why he says, "Never!". Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me Satan", because what Peter is saying is different to God's plan and God's way, it is sin and sin is of Satan. Peter, much like others who were awaiting the Messiah, had an expectation of Jesus to lead a revolution, similar to how we might have expectations to what we want God to do for us, but we are subject to Jesus, not Jesus subject to us. We are not in charge, that is what Satan wants, to be in charge.

Following Jesus

Jesus lays out what it means to be subject to Him, what it means to live with Jesus as their King.

Matthew 16:24-26 *Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"*

If the answer to the question "Who is Jesus?" is that he is the Christ, then we must deny ourselves and follow Jesus. This will have serious implications for your life and how you are to live. It will mean a complete change in your life because who Jesus is to you will show in all facets of your life, your priorities. Jesus the King means that we aren't the King. It's very easy to be tempted into chasing the things of the world, indeed to try gain the whole world. Similar to the character of Gollum in Lord of the Rings, whose one goal is to have the precious one ring, when Gollum finally has his precious ring towards to end of the Book, as it is reaching its climatic end, but he is falling into the lava of Mount Doom to his death. For what will we benefit if we gain the whole world yet lose our soul? We need to give up self-rule and submit to Jesus, make his priorities, our priorities and obey him. As Jesus' followers what do we have to look forward to?

Matthew 16:27-28 *For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*²⁸ *"Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."*

We have heaven to look forward to! To gain life under Jesus is to be with him forever. And so set your sights on Jesus, don't be distracted by the world and remember what he has done for all of us. Keep asking yourself, "who is Jesus to me?" If he is your King, live like he is your king, If he is not your king, keep asking "who Jesus is", my prayer that is that God will reveal himself to you and be your King.