

8.27.23 **Who Do You Say Jesus Is (and why it matters) Matthew 16.13-20**

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Have you ever met or been close to someone who was really famous? It can be interesting to meet people or be close to people you've seen on a movie screen, on television, or playing in a stadium or an arena. When I was a boy my friends and I used to go to Fenway Park to try and get autographs before Red Sox games. We were excited to do that on April 8, 1975, when I was ten years old, because Hank Aaron, who had passed Babe Ruth the previous year to become baseball's all-time leader in home runs was now playing for the Milwaukee Brewers who were opening their season in Boston. Back then there was no interleague play, so I had never seen Hank Aaron play in person. We were outside Fenway Park in our usual place on Jersey Street near the corner of Van Ness Street so we could move quickly to where the visiting players entered, or the Red Sox players drove into their parking lot. The visiting players usually came in taxis from the Sheraton Hotel by the Prudential Building, so we watched like hawks for any cab turning right onto Jersey Street from Boylston Ave. Back then there weren't as many people trying to get autographs so we had a lot of success. I have over 30 baseballs at home covered in autographs I got when I was a boy. Getting Hank Aaron would be the greatest.

Eventually a cab came around the corner and as it drew close my friends and I recognized Hank Aaron was the passenger. We moved closer to the curb so we would be the first people he had to pass to walk into the park. I politely offered him a baseball and pen and asked if I could please have his autograph. He took my ball and began signing it, as my friends excitedly waited their turn. Then a terrible thing happened. A woman who was perhaps 30 feet away from us, screamed, "It's Hank Aaron!" Every head within ear shot turned and looked in our direction. As Aaron handed me my ball back, and my friend offered him his, Mr. Aaron looked at my friend as people were rushing toward us from every direction and said, *"I'm sorry, if I sign any more, I'll have to sign for everyone and I'll never get inside."* And he hurried past my dejected yet understanding friends through the gate.

My friends and I were kind of like Peter and the first disciples of Jesus. We recognized who Hank Aaron was before anyone else and were the first people close to

him and to be able to speak with him. Like Hank Aaron, Jesus also became famous and began to attract large crowds. While there was no question for me and my friends who Hank Aaron was, there was some question about who Jesus was.

Listen to **Matthew 16:13-20**

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

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

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

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

And Jesus answered him, *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah."

Jesus asks his disciples two questions in this scene. **First, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"** They dutifully report the word on the street which reflects a belief that Jesus stands in the historical line of God's prophets, and that's accurate as far as it goes. Jesus belongs in an extensive line of faithful servants of God, willing to stake their lives for the sake of God's people. **Secondly, Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?"** Simon Peter answered, **"You are the Messiah, (or the Christ) the Son of the living God."** While the answers of the people look backward, Peter's answer is present and future oriented.

If Jesus asked you, **"But who do you say that I am?"** how would you answer that question? Each of us would answer in our own way and there'd likely be a little overlap for some of us. I want to share with you how I'd answer that question and I hope it will help you to consider and sharpen your own answer.

The first thing I'd say is, Jesus is my Savior. Jesus is our Savior because he forgives our sin and rescues us from the power of sin and death and frees us to be his people. A Savior is somebody who rescues or delivers somebody from a present or

future harm or danger. We can't save ourselves from the consequences of our sins, but Jesus does. **Titus 2:11-14 describes Jesus' role as our Savior.**

*"For the grace of God has appeared, **bringing salvation to all**, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and **in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly**, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and **Savior, Jesus Christ.***

*He it is who **gave himself for us** that he might **redeem us from all iniquity** and purify for himself **a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.**"*

Jesus is our Savior because he forgives our sins and sets us free to do good in his power and in his name.

The second thing I'd say about Jesus is that he's my Lord. The term, "**Lord,**" is a title of dignity and honor acknowledging the power and authority of the one addressed. During his earthly life, Jesus was addressed as 'Lord' (Matt. 7:21, Mark 7:28). The Apostle Paul uses the title 'Lord' when he appeals to the teaching of the Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 11:21). Two of the most common terms used to describe Jesus in the New Testament are "**Savior,**" and "**Lord.**" When we baptize people, part of what we ask is, "*Do you believe in Jesus as your Savior and Lord?*" Savior refers to Jesus saving us from our sins and forgiving us. Savior reminds us of Jesus role in our salvation, deliverance, or rescue. **Lord means that Jesus is the leader of my life – my first and ultimate allegiance is to him, and what he says, I'm going to do.** When you say, Jesus is Lord, you're saying, I'll imitate and follow his way of life. He's in charge of and directs my habits, choices, and decisions. Saying Jesus is Lord means he lives at the center of your life. His mindset and attitude will be yours.

Jesus asks these questions about his identity in Caesarea Philippi—which lay at the foot of Mount Lebanon, near the sources of the Jordan River, in the territory of Dan, in the far the northeast of Palestine. Philip, the tetrarch, the only good son of Herod the Great, in whose dominion the city Paneas lay, beautified, and enlarged the city and **changed its name to Caesarea, in honor of the Roman emperor, and added Philippi after his own name**, to distinguish it from the other Caesarea (Ac 10:1) on the northeast coast of the Mediterranean Sea. So, it's in a place named for two

political rulers that Jesus is revealing he's the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed one, the one who deserves ultimate devotion and loyalty, not any political ruler.

Those who call Lord Jesus are committed to obeying him (Matthew 28:16f, Rom. 14:8; Rom. 6:3-11; 7:4-6), but Jesus doesn't ask us to follow him without helping us to do so. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

"Jesus asks nothing of us without giving us the strength to perform it.

*His commands never seek to destroy life, but to foster, strengthen and heal it."*¹

If our habits remain the same after we call Jesus Lord, we won't experience or demonstrate much of the life and power of Jesus. That life and power will remain dormant until through our habits and attitude we truly begin trusting Jesus to lead our life. To say Jesus is our Lord means trying to live our life in every aspect in a way that pleases Jesus.

Even people who don't believe in Jesus as their **Savior and Lord**, will usually acknowledge that he was a **Teacher**. That's **the third thing** I say about Jesus, he's my **Teacher**. However, Jesus isn't a teacher who's seeking to convey information about a subject like Geometry or French. **Jesus teaches to change lives, to bring about a transformation in character and habits and thinking.** Jesus teaches to help people become like him. Jesus teaches by painting a picture for people of God's preferred future for their life that's so compelling and powerful that people want to move toward it.

All four of the gospels portray Jesus teaching all over the place. Jesus teaches in cities (Matt 11:1) and beside the sea (Mark 4:1); in synagogues (Mt 13:54, Mark 6:2, Luke 4:15) and in the temple (John 7:14); on a mountain top (Matt 5:1-2) and in a boat (Mark 4:2); the list goes on and on.

Jesus also practiced what he taught. He embodied and demonstrated what he wanted his followers to do. Jesus never asked his students to do anything that he didn't first do himself. He modeled what he wanted us to do, and he criticized those who don't live what they taught and told others to do. In **Matthew 23:3** (NIV) Jesus warns against hypocrisy saying of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees, *"So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach."*

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 40.

Secondly, even his opponents say that **Jesus teaches in accordance with the truth** (Matt. 22:16, Mark 12:14, Luke 20:21). His most common way of teaching is in **parables** (Mark 4:2, 34) *“He began to teach them many things in parables,” “he did not speak to them in except in parables.”* The other primary way Jesus taught **was by answering and asking questions**. People are always coming up to him asking, *“Teacher...which commandment in the law is the greatest (MT 22:36), “what must I do to inherit eternal life (MK 10:17), “Teacher, Moses said... (MT 22:24).* Jesus would also ask people, *“What do you want me to do for you?” (Mark 10:51).*

Jesus teaches to make disciples who are like him. It's that simple. In **Luke 6:40**, he says, ***“A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.”*** When we apply ourselves diligently to being Jesus' students in the school of life, we will become like our Teacher.

Are any of you master carpenter's? What if I told you I wanted to be an expert carpenter and you invited me to your home for an hour a week and for 30 minutes we sang about carpentry, and the wood and how solid, and beautiful the wood was and then we sang about nails and how shiny and hard they are. What if after that you took out a manual about carpentry and read it to me for 30 minutes? How long would it take for me to become an expert carpenter? Exactly, I'd never become one. Yet, there's a danger that we may think we can become a disciple of Jesus by following a similar approach. In order for us to master anything we have **to do it, practice it, reflect on it, learn from our experiences. It takes focus, time, and effort. We need to learn from Jesus our Teacher by doing what we see him say and do.**

Jesus is my Savior, Lord, Teacher, and finally, my Friend. In the New Testament Jesus' effort to mirror God's love and mercy even to outcasts causes his opponents to insult him by calling him ***‘a friend of tax collectors and sinners’*** (Matt. 9:11; Luke 7:34). They said it derisively as an insult, Jesus saw it as a compliment. We all need friends like Jesus. **What a blessing it would be if we could all be friends like Jesus.** And Jesus invites us to be his friends by doing what he commands.

In **John 15:12-15**, Jesus says: *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call*

*you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”*

Friendship is a relationship of mutual trust. Someone defined Christianity this way: **“Christianity is the acceptance of the gift of the friendship of Jesus.”**² **Jesus is our friend** - he stands by us, supports, and comforts us, but like all true friendships, it needs to go both ways. Jesus also wants us to love him and others the way he loves us. Jesus wants us to experience the friendship, love, and joy that make life a blessing and he wants us to share that transforming friendship with other people who also need to experience, perhaps for the first time, friendship, love, and joy.

In all friendships we not only care about the other person, but we also take seriously what our friend takes seriously, which means the commandments of Jesus. If we desire to be known as or called a friend of Jesus, then we need to take seriously the commands Jesus gave us. We will do what he says. Otherwise, we may be deceiving ourselves about the depth or nature of our friendship. Friendship is vital to life. All of us - even people who have committed serious crimes, or been in prison, or made mistakes or done things that we regret or are ashamed of - need friends.

When we're friends of Jesus, spending time with him and seeking to obey his commandments, then the joy that's in Jesus (John 15:11) will be evident in our lives. We won't be Christians for whom our relationship with Jesus makes no apparent difference in our lives. **The friendship of Jesus our Savior, Lord, and Teacher and the friendship of other people nurtures and sustains our life.**

In Acts 4 Peter and John are hauled before the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law in Jerusalem after they created a stir by healing a disabled man in the name of Jesus. Verse 13 says (*New Living Translation*), *“The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that **they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them as men who had been with Jesus.**”*

One of the goals of a Christian is for people **to recognize you have been with Jesus.** What a wonderful way to be known as someone who has been with Jesus.

² Leslie Weatherhead, *The Transforming Friendship*, (Abingdon, Nashville, 1990), 18.

In the end, a life of faithful, loving service may be the best answer to that awe-inspiring question: **Who do you say that I am?**

John 3:16-17, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”*

Blessing: “Grow in the grace and knowledge and goodness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. Have you ever met someone who was famous or well known? Who was it, where were you, what made the encounter memorable?
2. Why is it important for Peter and for you to have a clear grasp of who Jesus is? Why does it matter? What difference does it make?
3. The setting for Matthew 16:13-20 is Caesarea Philippi a district named for a Roman Emperor and the son of King Herod the Great. What do you think might be the significance of stating Jesus is the Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One, in a place that is named for two political rulers? What are the implications for Christ followers of making such a statement?
4. If someone asked you who Jesus is, what would you say? What are some words, terms, or images you might use?
5. What are the four terms used for Jesus in the sermon? Why is each of those four terms important and significant?
6. Why might a life of faithful, loving service be the best answer to Jesus' question: Who do you say that I am?