

## **Who Am I?**

Scripture Text: Matthew 16:13-20

### **Introduction**

The past two weeks we have been looking at the concept of making disciples. Making disciples is, after all, the great command Jesus gave the Church before He ascended into heaven. Making disciples is what we want this church to be about, where we are sharing the Gospel, loving one another, discerning God's will, and equipping one another to accomplish His will. We have learned that making disciples is much like building a house. God is building the Church, stone by stone, with followers of Jesus Christ. God is building His new Temple with living stones upon one very crucial, foundational piece — Jesus Christ. Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church. Upon Christ, all of the other living stones, the disciples, are assembled in order to build God's Church. If the Church is not built upon the cornerstone of Jesus Christ, then the whole structure falls down. Therefore, we all must be firmly placed upon Christ lest we stumble or become something other than His Church. We want all of His disciples to be firmly placed and cemented to the cornerstone of Jesus Christ.

Part of discipleship is spiritual growth. God wants His children to become mature followers of Jesus Christ. Our spiritual growth continues until we become like our Savior. God intends for every disciple of Christ to grow into a fully mature child of God. God uses us to help each other grow into the likeness of Christ. God uses each of us to love one another, to share His Word with one another, to pray for one another — essentially, to be Jesus to one another. Jesus is the measure by which our spiritual growth is to be compared. Christ is the source as well as the goal of the Church's spiritual growth. Christ is both the cornerstone upon whom the whole Church is built and the means by whom the whole Church is joined together. But, who exactly is this cornerstone? Who exactly is Jesus? Knowing who you are is important, but knowing who Jesus is, is crucial. What we really think about Jesus matters a whole lot. In fact, the most important question anyone can answer is, "Who is Jesus?" This was the question people asked Jesus during His earthly ministry and it was the question He asked others.

### **Who Do People Say Jesus Is?**

People have all sorts of ideas about who Jesus is. Some people do not believe He even existed. To these people, Jesus was no one. Some people think Jesus was just a good man. Others, such as Muslims, believe that Jesus was a prophet of God along with Muhammed and other prophets. Even Jesus' disciples had trouble knowing exactly who He was. In this passage, Jesus was with His disciples in a certain city called Caesarea Philippi. This city was home of many religious beliefs. It had been a center of worship for many false gods, such as the Canaanite god Baal, the Greek god Pan, and even the Roman emperor Caesar. At the time Jesus and His disciples visited, the city was an important city in the Roman empire with a primarily pagan population. While in Caesarea Philippi amongst a population of pagans, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" Look at what they said below.

**Matthew 16:13–14** <sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

The disciples’ responses are consistent with what people expected in Israel. Some people thought Jesus was John the Baptist. Even Herod had thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others thought Jesus was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. One thing is certain, Jesus was popular, but also misunderstood. We read in the Gospel According to John that people had also asked John the Baptist who he was (John 1:19-23). Some people thought John might have been Elijah, from Malachi 4:5 where God was going to send Elijah before the “day of the Lord comes.” Others thought John might have been the prophet who Moses had prophesied in Deuteronomy 18. Others thought John might have been the long awaited Messiah, the one anointed by God to deliver His people from their enemies. John the Baptist denied that he was any of these people, and instead he pointed to another who would come after him “whose sandal I am not worthy to untie”. Apparently, some people had similar views about Jesus, which were all generally positive, but they were also inadequate. There might have been some truth in what people believed about Jesus, for He was a prophet. In fact, He was the prophet; but, Jesus is so much more than these other men.

### Who Did Jesus’ Disciples Say He Is?

Having heard what others said about Him, Jesus then turned His attention to His disciples. He asked the disciples who they thought He was. You might think that Jesus’ disciples would have known exactly who He was. Who would follow someone without knowing exactly who that person is? Sometimes, however, we think we know who someone is, only to find out later that we really did not know that person. Sometimes, who we think a person is may be far different from who there really are. Let us look at the next couple of verses to see what the disciples thought about Jesus.

**Matthew 16:15–16** <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus asked the question, “But, who do you say that I am?”. That might have been a very significant “but”. Jesus heard what others said about Him, but, what He really wanted to know (as if He did not know already!), was what His disciples, the ones who followed Him, believed about Him. That is a significant issue, because those who follow Jesus and say they are His disciples, His Church, ought to really know who He is. Jesus asked this question to all of His disciples who were there, but only one disciple replied. Only one disciple answered Jesus’ question, perhaps as a spokesman for all the disciples. Maybe Peter was the only one bold enough to say what everyone thought. Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He declared that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, the one God had promised to send to His people and the one God had anointed to be their deliverer. This was the person the Jewish people had longed to see. He was the one who was going to ultimately save them.

But, Peter not only declared Jesus to be the long awaited Messiah, but he also declared Jesus to be “the Son of the living God”. Jesus is the Son of the God who is alive. This speaks to both the unique relationship Jesus has with God as well as the uniqueness of God Himself. God is not like the pagan gods of Caesarea Philippi who were not alive and could do nothing for anyone. God is alive and He gives life to His creation. All of those false gods were unworthy of worship, but the living God is the only one worthy of worship. Jesus is the living God’s unique Son, His only begotten Son, unlike any one else. Jesus has a special relationship with God, a fellowship with the Father, that no one else has. To this confession, Jesus responded by telling Peter how blessed he was.

**Matthew 16:17** <sup>17</sup> *And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*

Jesus acknowledged Peter’s blessedness. You might say this was Peter’s privilege of receiving God’s special revelation about Jesus. Peter’s confession of Christ was a result of God revealing this to him. His awareness of who Jesus truly was amongst so many who thought Jesus was just a prophet was not because Peter was smarter than anyone else. Peter’s ability to confess Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God did not come from any human source, or from his own personal intuition, but rather it came from God Himself. God the Father had revealed Jesus’ true identity to him. Where does spiritual knowledge originate? From where does our knowledge of Jesus come? It comes from God. It is not something learned, but something revealed from God. God reveals Christ to us and He draws us to Himself. Blessed are those who learn from God and confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and their Savior. That is who Jesus is.

### Who Are Those Who Know Jesus?

So, we have the opinion of others about Jesus and we have Peter and the disciples’ confession about Jesus. What did this confession mean for them? Jesus responded to Peter’s confession and said something about the Church. Look at the following verses.

**Matthew 16:18–20** <sup>18</sup> *“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. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.*

Jesus’ response to Peter here has been very controversial, at least Christians have made it so. Many have viewed these verses as proof that Peter was the first pope, that there is papal succession, or the importance of the church in Rome. Reacting to this view, many Christians, especially since the days of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, have interpreted verse eighteen as something other than Peter himself, as if Jesus was not speaking about Peter. None of these interpretations, however, are necessary. So what exactly did Jesus say here? I believe what Jesus was saying here is that Peter would be foundational to the Church that He was building. This passage is

the first of only three times the word for “church” is used in the Gospels. The other two references are both in chapter eighteen regarding church discipline. Thus, Jesus’ response to Peter has something to say about the Church in general.

Jesus’ declaration, “You are Peter,” parallels Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ.” It is as if Jesus said, “Since you can tell me who I am, I will tell you who you are.” Jesus was speaking of Peter in verse eighteen just as clearly as Peter was speaking of Jesus in verse sixteen. Jesus was not referring to Peter’s confession of Him as the “rock”. He was also not talking about Himself as the “rock” of the Church, since He described Himself in this passage as the builder. Verse eighteen says Jesus is building His Church on “this rock”, Peter. Peter was instrumental in spreading the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles. He laid the foundation of the Church among the Jews on the Day of Pentecost with his “heart-cutting” sermon (Acts 2:14-41). He also laid a foundation among the Gentiles after a special revelation and subsequent conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10). Peter was one of many apostles who Jesus used to build His Church. Recall Paul’s words in his letter to the Ephesians, that God was building His Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20). Thus, Peter was not the only rock in the Church, as there were many apostles and prophets, but He was foundational.

Peter and the other apostles were also not the only rocks with which the Church was built. We are all stones with which God uses to put His new Temple together. Jesus is the builder of His Church and He is building His Church with living stones upon the foundation of Peter and the apostles. Jesus also gave a reassuring promise to the Church in this passage. Jesus promised His disciples that He was building His Church on the foundation of Peter and “the gates of hell” would not prevail against her. Satan and his evil powers will attack Jesus’ Church but they will not be able to destroy her. That is good news when the Church faces the attacks of the world. We know God’s Church will stand. Also, Jesus acknowledged that the entrance into the Church, becoming a part of His people, is through a confession like Peter’s. Those who refuse to confess Jesus as their Savior find the door to the Church closed and locked. Have you received the keys to the Church? Do you know Jesus as your Savior? If so, you are a part of God’s Temple that He is building to stand for eternity.

### **Who Did Jesus Say He Is?**

So, we have what people thought about Jesus. We have what Peter said about Jesus. We also have the result of Peter’s confession and what it means for the Church. But, what did Jesus say about Himself? There is one other description of Himself that Jesus mentioned in this passage. Jesus’ specific question in verse thirteen was, “Who do people say that the *Son of Man* is?” Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man more often than anything else. What did Jesus mean by calling Himself the Son of Man? In the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel used “son of man” many times as an indirect reference to himself as a human; however, this is not the only reference to the “son of man”. In fact, the “Son of Man” title in Jesus’ question refers back to a prophecy of Daniel. Daniel prophesied that there would be one “like a son of man” who “comes with the clouds” into the presence of “the Ancient of Days.” Look at the following passage.

**Daniel 7:13–14** <sup>13</sup> *I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.* <sup>14</sup> *And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

This passage from Daniel is probably the clearest example of what Jesus meant by calling Himself the “Son of Man”. God, the Ancient of Days, gives the Son of Man His universal and eternal kingdom. Jesus calling Himself the Son of Man acknowledged both His humanity as well as the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy about Him. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, but He was not merely “a son of man”, meaning a male child born of human parents. Jesus is *the Son of Man*. Jesus is the greatest, most notable son of man of all time. Jesus is the Son of Man who was “lifted up” by being crucified to a cross (John 3:14). Jesus is the Son of Man who provides “the food that endures to eternal life” (John 6:27). Jesus is also the Son of Man who has all authority to judge (John 5:27; 9:39). Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. Another way to say this is that *Jesus is Lord!* That is who Jesus is.

## Conclusion

In closing, the most important question anyone can ask is this: Who do you say Jesus is? Who do you believe Him to be? If He is just a good man, then you can choose to follow Him, but it will not really matter in the long run. If Jesus was just a good man, you do not have to follow Him any more than you need to follow any other good person. If Jesus He was just a prophet, then maybe He spoke the things of God and you ought to obey Him; but, that is not the same as being Lord of all creation. If Jesus is, however, the Son of Man, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world, as He and His disciples claimed He was, then you have a much more important decision to make. If Jesus is indeed Lord, then it matters very much what you believe of Him and more importantly, whether you follow Him. It is a matter of life and death. So, who do you say Jesus is? Do you really believe what you say about Him? Does your life reflect what you say about Jesus, or does it say something else about what you believe? A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has surrendered his or her life to Him as Lord and is following Him wherever He leads. Are you His disciple? Are you following Him? May it be so!