

Jesus Is the Answer (Matt 16.13-23)

I. INTRODUCTION: A SERIES ON JESUS

- A. The whole of the Scripture tells one story — the story of the Uncreated God who has created all things in order that he would demonstrate himself to be eternally glorious and prepare a people to dwell with him in eternal communion. At the center of that one story is one man — Jesus of Nazareth.
- B. Knowing and following Jesus is at the heart of Christianity. Because of this, it is essential for us to understand what the *scripture reveals* about him.
- C. In this passage of Matthew, we see the centrality and importance of answering the question “Who is Jesus?”

II. THE MOST IMPORTANT ANSWER (MATT 16.13-15)

- A. It is clear in a reading of Matthew’s Gospel that the scene in 16.13-20 marks a profound turning point in the ministry of Jesus.
- B. Up to this point, Jesus has been gathering people to himself, and has been ministering among the people of Galilee. He has operated with dynamic demonstrations of power, taught the crowds as one having authority, and has called disciples to himself as a Rabbi.
- C. This had led to various interpretations attempting to understand the meaning and importance of Jesus’ ministry. The religious leaders, the crowds, and even the Roman authorities had all attempted to understand and situate the importance of Jesus within their own expectations, understandings, and interpretations.
- D. It is into this situation that Jesus, removing himself from the crowds (and even the Galilean region), gathers his disciples to ask this question: “*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*”
- E. **Son of man:** This title is one that Jesus uses most to describe himself. Although his disciples, and the later church, would come to see him as the Messiah, it is likely that Jesus limited his use of the title “Messiah” to describe himself because of all of the latent expectations tied to that term in his day. The term “son of man” allowed Jesus to define aspects of his ministry (cf. Dan 7.13-14) *while* using a term that was ambiguous enough for him to define.
- F. **One of the prophets:** the answer that his disciples give is that the people believed Jesus to be “one of the prophets”. They describe him as John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. It is not necessary to press the nature of what the people believed as it pertained to if they *literally* believed that Jesus was these men resurrected. Rather, it is evident that the people of Jesus’ day believed that he was in line with the Old Testament expression of the prophetic ministry. In other words, the expectation of Jesus’ importance was believed and understood, even if the people did not know exactly how to fully make sense of his ministry.
- G. The importance of this section turns on the question that Jesus poses in v. 15. No longer is he concerned with what the people (whether the religious leadership, the crowds, or the Roman authorities) believe about him. He is concerned to personalize and focus the question upon his followers.
- H. Our answer to the question “*Who do you say that I am?*” is the most important answer to the most important question that can be asked. It is not enough for us to be content with the answer of others around us. We must each answer this question for ourselves.
- I. One of the powerful realities of this passage brings us to the nature of interpretation. It demonstrates that there will always be ways of understanding Jesus that seek to “make sense” of his life, his ministry, his claims, and his importance — but fall short of the reality of who he truly is.

- J. In our own day and age, there are many answers to the question “who is Jesus” from the lips of different streams and different cultural conceptualizations of him.
1. Jesus is a *moral teacher* — there are those who would seek to understand Jesus’ words as nothing more than a great teacher of morality and virtue. These people would state that Jesus has much to offer us by way of wisdom and morality, but is not the Savior of the World, not a King who should be submitted to, and not the only way to experience true life.
 2. Jesus is a *revolutionary* — another claim in our own day is that Jesus was a type of revolutionary, giving a template or blueprint for effective social change through a message of non-violence.
 3. Jesus is an *example* — a popular sentiment in our time is that Jesus came to give us an example of what it looks like to walk with radical compassion, love, and forgiveness. This type of message does not necessarily want to talk about the demands that Jesus made about following him, but rather attempts to demonstrate that if we all followed his example the world would be a better place.
- K. Ultimately, our answer to this question is one of eternal significance. “Getting Jesus right” matters for us in our lives — both in this age and in the age to come.

III. JESUS IS THE CHRIST (MATT 16.16A)

- A. The first answer that Peter gives to Jesus’ question is that he is the *Christ*. The word Christ (Greek *christos*) was the translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah”, which meant “anointed”.
- B. Over the period between the testaments (after Malachi and before the coming of John the Baptist), the people of Israel never experienced true freedom after returning from the Babylonian exile. They had experienced different “overlords” (first the Persians, then the Greeks, and then the Romans at the time of Jesus) who oppressed them.
- C. During this time, there was a growing expectation that God promised to send an *anointed deliverer* from the line of David who would liberate them from their oppressors and reestablish the kingdom of Israel in glory.
- D. Jesus himself rarely used the term *Christ* as a self-identifying title. This is because his concept of *how* the Messiah would provide salvation was drastically different than the expectations of the people in his day.
- E. Yet, Jesus does not correct Peter with regards to the claim that he is the Christ — and, this would become one of the primary ways that the early church understood the identity of Jesus: that he was the anointed deliverer promised to come and bring salvation to God’s people.
- F. What does it mean that Jesus is the Messiah / Christ?
1. Jesus is the *son of David* who will rule as king for all eternity (Gen 49.8-10; Num 24.17; 2 Sam 7.12-16; Pss 89.3-4, 19-37; 110.1-3; Isa 9.6-7; 11.1-5; Jer 23.5-6; Hos 3.5; Amos 9.11-12; Mic 5.2-5; Matt 1.1; Luke 3.23-38; Rom 1.3-4; Rev 5.5; 22.16).
 2. Jesus is the *anointed deliverer* who will bring restoration by establishing God’s kingdom (Isa 35.1-7; 61.1-4; Jer 3.15-18; Ezek 37; Matt 11.2-6; Luke 4.16-21; John 1.51; Acts 3.19-20; 1 Cor 2.1-5; 4.20).
 3. Jesus is the *suffering servant* who will offer himself for the sins of his people (Is 42.1-4; 49.3-4; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12; Matt 1.21; 12.15-21; 16.21; John 3.14-15; 12.27-50; Acts 8.26-40; Rom 3.21-26; 5.6-11; 2 Cor 5.21; Gal 2.20-21; Eph 1.7; 2.1-9; Heb 9.11-28; 1 Pet 3.18-22; 1 John 2.1-2; Rev 5.6-10).
- G. One specifically difficult element of understanding the nature of Jesus’ Messiahship among his disciples was the relationship between his necessary suffering and his identity as Messiah.

H. However, Jesus did not separate the two realities in his discussion of being the Anointed One of God.

²¹From 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 (Matt 16.21)

²⁵And [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24.25-26)

I. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ highlights here the *humanity* of Jesus. As a man he is the Anointed One that God had promised to send to bring salvation and deliverance for his people.

J. To say that Jesus is the Christ is to believe that he is the *only one* who can bring salvation. He has come to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice, to be raised again to glory, and to offer all who will believe upon him by faith forgiveness, eternal life, and access to God the Father.

IV. JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD (MATT 16.16B)

A. The second answer that Peter gives to Jesus' question is that he is the *Son of the Living God*.

B. The title "Son of God" throughout the New Testament becomes an important, and profoundly rich title for Jesus because it helps give shape and definition to his relationship to God the Father.

C. To understand that Jesus is the Son of God is more than just saying that he has a special or unique place in God's purposes. Throughout the Scripture, it is understood that for Jesus to be the Son of God demonstrates that he is both *eternally* God's Son and that he is *equal* with God.

1. Jesus is *eternally God's Son*

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God... ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; the only God [Son], who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1.1-2, 18)

⁵⁸Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8.58)

¹When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you... ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (John 17.1, 5)

2. As the Son, Jesus is *equal with the Father*

¹⁸This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5.18)

³⁰I and the Father are one. (John 10.30)

D. In the Gospels, God declares that Jesus is his Son in a unique manner at his baptism.

¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him... ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3.16-17)

E. Paul recognized that the resurrection *openly demonstrated* that Jesus was the eternal Son of God.

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart from the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, ³concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 1.1-4)

- F. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Son of the Living God highlights the *divinity* of Jesus. He has existed eternally with God and is himself God. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is eternally the Second Person of the Triune God.

V. THE NECESSITY OF REVELATION (MATT 16.17)

- A. Peter's declaration is one of the most succinct and powerful declarations of Jesus' true identity found in the Scripture. Each of the phrases is full of meaning — and each is necessary for a full portrait of the person of Christ.
- B. On hearing Peter's profession of faith, Jesus pronounces a particular *blessedness* upon him. The blessedness lies in reality that this truth was not something that had been derived through Peter's own intelligence, skill, or wisdom — but rather that God the Father had chosen to reveal this truth to him. In other words, Peter was blessed because God had given him eyes to see and know the true identity of Jesus.

¹⁷And 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." (Matt 16.17)

- C. This demonstrates to us that the reality of Jesus' identity cannot be understood apart from the truth of God's revelation to us.
- D. Because of this, we must submit ourselves to what he has revealed to be true about Jesus *by faith*. At times, there will be paradoxes and difficulties that consist in the portrait of Christ that has been revealed in Scripture (i.e., fully God and fully man!). However, we must submit ourselves to humbly accepting the glorious mystery of Christ Jesus as God has revealed it.
- E. Paul declared that the mystery of Christ Jesus was eternally vast.

⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things (Eph 3.8-9)

- F. Paul understood that the knowledge of Christ Jesus required a spirit of revelation in order that we would see and understand rightly.

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor 2.1-5)

³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4.3-6)

¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles (Gal 1.15-16)

¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe... (Eph 1.16-19)

VI. THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

- A. Jesus then turns to Peter and declares that he will build his church upon *this rock*. Throughout the history of the church there have been several ways of understanding this statement:
1. ***Peter and his successors***: through much of the Roman Catholic tradition, this saying has been interpreted to mean that Jesus will build his church upon a succession of leaders starting with Peter, and that they will be given a particular authority over God's church.
 2. ***Peter as a unique leader in the founding of the church***: this teaching would seek to understand that the play on Peter's name (meaning "Rock") demonstrates that Jesus is saying that he is going to use Peter in a unique way to build the early church — but that this statement does not speak of a line of succession.
 3. ***The revelation of Jesus' true identity***: many Protestants have sought to teach that Jesus is not teaching that Peter himself will be the rock on which the church is built, but rather his profession. This is derived from the fact that although Jesus uses a word play, they are in different forms of a word and therefore denote different things.
 4. It is likely that the correct interpretation is some mixture of the second and third option. Peter did possess a unique leadership role in the establishment of the early church — and Paul understood that Jesus used the apostles and prophets to lay the foundation stones of the church (see Eph 2.19-22). However, even if there is an element of Jesus stating that he would build the church on the ministry of Peter, it is likely that this happens specifically in relation to ***Peter's confession*** of Jesus' identity.
- B. The "foundation" of the church is Jesus himself — both in reality (united to him by the Spirit) and in belief (the rightly held doctrine of Jesus Christ). This is the foundation that will not be shaken and will not ultimately be prevailed against by the schemes of the devil.
- C. It is clear from both this passage and throughout the New Testament that Satan seeks to separate the church from her one true foundation. Many have seen two common means that he uses to assail the people of God (cf. Rev 13).
1. ***Persecution***: Satan seeks to come against the people of God through the means of physical persecution and opposition. Through this means, Satan seeks to incite fear in the people of God that will lead them to fall away from walking with him in faith and obedience.

⁹Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my sake.

¹⁰And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. (Matt 24.9-10)

2. ***Deception***: the other means that is commonly used is to bring deception to the church — specifically in relationship to the person of Jesus Christ. Toward this end, he utilizes false teachers who seek to distort and pervert the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ in order to lead God's people astray.

¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold... ²³Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect (Matt 24.11, 23-24)

¹³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Cor 11.3-5)

¹⁸it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come... ²²Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

²³No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also (1 John 2.18, 22-23)

VII. SEVEN REASONS FOR PREACHING THIS SERIES

- A. ***Jesus is the perfect summation of God's revelation and purposes:*** The Scripture teaches that Jesus is the full, true, perfect, and ultimate revelation of God. To see Jesus is to see the Father. Because of this, to look at Jesus is to know what God is like. As we grow in understanding and knowledge of Jesus, we grow in understanding and knowledge of God.

⁹Whoever has seen me has seen the Father (John 14.9)

¹⁵[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God... ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. (Col 1.15, 19)

- B. ***To hold to the purity of faith handed down to us:*** The apostles regularly declared that they were seeking to steward the truth of God's revelation in faithful accordance with what had been handed down. They believed that the church would (by God's grace) remain faithful to the teachings that had been revealed to the apostles through the faithful dissemination of truth from generation to generation. Because of this, we seek to honor and affirm the aspects of Biblical truth that have been held throughout the ages by the followers of Jesus. In relation to the doctrine of Jesus these are most adequately expressed in the Nicæan Creed (325 AD) and the canons of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD).

³Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3)

- C. ***To stir our affections for Jesus Christ:*** Growing in the knowledge of Christ is closely tied in growing in our affections for him. As we come to see him more clearly (as revealed through the Scripture) our hearts are enflamed with greater zeal and affection for him.

³²They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24.32)

- D. ***To orient and situate our obedience:*** Jesus is worthy of our obedience *precisely* because of who he is.

⁶⁸Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6.68-69)

- E. ***To secure ourselves against the schemes of Satan:*** As mentioned above, one of the primary ways that Satan seeks to separate the church from her true foundation is through raising up lofty opinions against the pure doctrine of Christ Jesus. We long to be a people who are rooted in the truth of Christ in reality (joined to him by faith) and in purity of doctrine.

⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10.4)

- F. ***To embolden our gospel witness:*** Peter declares that one of the primary outcomes of our salvation is that we might proclaim the excellencies of Jesus as his witnesses in the world. In seeking to know and delight in the excellencies of Jesus Christ, we seek to both grow in our understanding of the gospel and embolden our allegiance to him as Lord of all the earth.

⁹But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet 3.9)

- G. ***To embrace Jesus and not be offended by him:*** There is ultimately no neutrality when faced with the truth of Jesus' person and his claims. Although he has the words of life, there are those who will be offended by the truth of his revelation and turn from him. We desire to know him more, that we might not be offended by how he leads and what he calls us to in response to him.

⁶Blessed is the one who is not offended at me (Matt 11.6)