

WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?**Matthew 16:13-20****(Read Matthew 16:13-20)**

Intro: This is Irvin Tyson at 19 or 20 years old. This is Irvin Tyson on his wedding day. This is Irvin Tyson on his wedding anniversary 50 years later. This is Irvin Tyson using just one of his many talents. This is Irvin Tyson soaking up the beauty of creation. This is Irvin Tyson being goofy. This is Grandpa, Irvin Tyson. This is Irvin Tyson, my father. This is Irvin Tyson, my Daddy.

These are just the ways my family knew Irvin Tyson. He was also a minister of the Gospel, a Church Leader, a hard worker, a faithful employee, business owner and all around good citizen. But as I already pointed out, most important to me and my family he was Daddy. That's who he was to us.

Now, let me ask, who is Jesus to you? Jesus asked his disciples, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* Matthew 16:13b; and they accurately recounted what people were saying about this extraordinary man from Nazareth. And then he asked them, *"But who do you say that I am?"* Matthew 16:15. This is a key issue: the world has lots of descriptions of who Jesus Christ was and is, to some he is a myth, to others he is an important prophet, to almost everyone he was an all around good guy. But who do we say he is? This will determine how we deal with life and how we face the future. So, let's talk about it, who is Jesus to you?

First . . .

A sinful place is good place to proclaim the Son of the living God

- It was no accident that Jesus and his disciples were in Caesarea Philippi for this eternal life lesson. It was north of the Sea of Galilee, miles and miles north of the region principally inhabited by the Jews. Some commentators suggest that Jesus went there to get away from the press of the crowds and have some concentrated teaching time with his disciples. Maybe, but no matter what this was an area associated with idols and pagan deities and false belief. In Old Testament times it was a place of high places where Baal was worshipped. Later, as the Greeks conquered the region, the Greek god of nature, Pan, was worshipped in a cave there which was alleged to be his birth place. By the time Jesus and his followers were walking through it, it was a Roman bastion reflecting the worship of Caesar in a temple built by Herod the Great who even named the town Caesarea Philippi. It was in this setting, with his Jewish followers, in the midst of Gentile paganism, that Jesus asked, referring to himself, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* Matthew 16:13b.
- And that's a good question to ask, then and now.

What DO people say about Jesus?

- The people of Jesus's day, knew Jesus was not just a regular guy and the disciples' shows it, *"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* Matthew 16:14. They thought maybe John the Baptist had somehow resurrected or maybe had not been executed by Herod after all. Or maybe he was Elijah, who had been prophesied to return or Jeremiah or another prophet. Anything but what he was and is – the Messiah, the Son of the living God.
- As I already said – for us today, Jesus makes a favorable impression. Gandhi said if it wasn't for Christians, he would have been a follower of Christ. Muhammad considered Jesus the most important prophet, but not the son of Allah. To non-believers, Jesus is universally seen as a very good person, but just that, a person, and not God. In a lot of cases, people DO NOT want Jesus to be anything more than a historical or mythical figure because they don't want to relinquish control to anyone else.
- But Jesus didn't leave it at that, he asked . . .

What do YOU say?

- Essentially he is asking, "Why are you following me?"
- Now, Jesus didn't ask this because he didn't know who he was or was feeling vulnerable and needy and looking for words to bolster his ego by knowing what the trending opinion was. Not at all. Instead he's checking to see how far his disciples have come. He has an important follow-up question to the crowd question – *"Who do YOU say I am?"*
- G. Campbell Morgan writes, *"When Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" you it is both emphatic and plural. He addresses this question to the disciples at large rather than to Peter only. The people are*

free to believe whatever they want about Jesus, but Jesus has been carefully preparing these disciples to carry on his work. They have heard his teachings and witnessed his miracles. What they think of him is critical.”

- Yes! What we as his disciples (that is literally what we Christ Followers are, disciples) think of Jesus is critical indeed! Is he Lord? Is he the Risen Lord? Is he worthy to be followed and to be shared with a wandering world? We need to know.
- Peter answered for everyone, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* Matthew 16:16. He knew, even though the religious leaders wanted him gone, that the opinion of the world was generally complimentary towards Jesus and even thought highly of him. The problem was, the world’s opinion wasn’t and still isn’t accurate. Jesus was much more than John the Baptist or Elijah or a prophet. He was more than a national reformer who performed lots of miracles and certainly more than a prophet. Nope, he’s much more than that: Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah.
- For once, Peter wasn’t just flinging words, his confession was divinely inspired and Jesus points that out, *Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.* Matthew 16:17. Several weeks ago we looked at Peter’s sermon on Pentecost which was also divinely inspired. That was the beginning of the Church – here is where Jesus points out is the foundation of that Church. A foundation built on solid rock. Jesus responds, *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.* Matthew 16:18. That rock is Christ, the Son of the living God. So who is Jesus to you? G. Campbell Morgan writes *“How we answer this question is also critical. Uncertainty equates to unbelief at this point. To be Christian means believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Anything else is less than Christian.”*
- You cannot be saved by Muhammed, or Buddha, or any of the gajillions of gods in Hinduism. You cannot be delivered by the Book of Mormon or by handing out literature for the Jehovah’s Witnesses or any other of a myriad cults. You cannot get to heaven by deep meditation or by just being “as good as the next person”. And the end of your days here is not just a hole in the ground or your ashes sprinkled in your “happy place”. Here’s the truth, *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* Acts 4:12.
- Jesus told Peter and the disciples that their confession was a rock against which the gates of hell would not prevail. And then a short while later he proved it when he rose from the grave. So, not matter what people say about Jesus, or God the Father – the truth is the Church is built on the confession that Jesus is Lord and he is the only way to peace and to salvation. Paul put it this way, *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* 1 Corinthians 3:11. I referred to false religions and cults a bit ago – a very good way to determine if a belief system is false is to ask the very question Jesus did – what do they say about Jesus? If he is not the Christ, and the Son of God, it is a false religion or cult.

Conclusion: I’ve often taught the root meaning of the English word, Church. It’s not a building – it’s a people – literally, God’s Called Out Ones. That’s us! And we are built on the Rock.

So, even though the people Jesus had been teaching recognized him as someone extraordinary, even supernatural, the disciples recognized him as something far more than that. This shows that if you spend significant time with Jesus you will see him for who he is. Let’s be disciples and spend time with Jesus in prayer and in scripture. Let’s get to know him so well that when we are asked, “Who is Jesus to you?” we can reply *“He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.”* And we’ll be standing on the Rock that is the Church that will not fail. Amen.