

“Whom Say Ye That I Am?” (Who Is Jesus?)

Matthew 16:13-17

Did you know what was the first local church established in America? It wasn't a Catholic church... or Lutheran church... or Presbyterian church. The first local church established in America was the First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island, founded by Roger Williams in 1628. Back in those days, America was truly a “Christian nation.” Most everyone believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Things have changed—America is no longer a “Christian nation.” It has become a “melting pot” of numerous sects and religious beliefs. As Jesus prophesied, *“Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many”* (Mt. 24:11). It's a *“sign of the times.”*

Before 1920 there were no mosques in the United States. Today there are over 2,100 Islamic mosques in the U.S. Cults are abounding. Non-believers make up about one fifth of the population of the U.S.

The future of Christianity in America hinges on whether or not our youth accept what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. Sadly, the majority of youth today have some very unorthodox ideas about Jesus. According research by George Barna: 46% of youth believe Jesus committed sins; 51% do not believe He rose for the dead. Only 24% would strongly and consistently affirm that Jesus is God. Hence, we have a tsunami of young people abandoning the local church as soon as they are on their own.

➡ That is what the question of our text is about—The **ultimate** question.
(Read Matthew 16:13-16)

“Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Jesus did NOT ask this question because He was insecure or having an identity crisis. He was not taking a poll to determine the effectiveness of His ministry. He already knew what people believed about Him.

So, **WHY did Jesus ask this question?** For one thing, Jesus was giving His disciples an opportunity to confirm their own faith. You will never be able to tell others about Jesus if you are not assured of Him yourself!

Also, it is important to know what others believe about Jesus to effectively witness to them. For example, knowing a Jehovah Witness does not believe Jesus is God will help you to communicate the truth about who Jesus really is.

What Jesus did NOT ask—“How many attended our last meeting? How much has been given so far? How many have been healed? How many have trusted Me as their Savior?” No, the question that concerned Christ was, “Who do people say I am?”

Today people show how little they really know of Christ by calling Him a good teacher... my “co-pilot”... “the man upstairs”... “the big guy in the sky,” etc. No one who truly believes Jesus is the Son of the living God would degrade Him as “the man upstairs.”

When Jerry Lewis hosted the Labor Day Muscular Dystrophy Telethons, he sometimes referred to God as “the man upstairs.” I remember one telethon several years ago when Jerry said the donations raised would help “the man upstairs” correct the problem.

I. The POPULAR opinion. Jesus was the most controversial person to ever lived! People have all kinds of ideas about who Jesus was.

- Atheist, Richard Dawkins— “Jesus was a great moral teacher.”
- New Age guru, Deepak Chopra—“I see Christ as a state of consciousness that we can all aspire to.”
- The Dalai Lama (Buddhist) —“...a fully enlightened being...”
- Atheist, Christopher Hitchens— “Jesus of Nazareth is not a figure in history... there is no firm evidence that He existed.”

➡ **Three things set Jesus apart:**

- His compelling TEACHINGS (Mt. 7:28-29; John 7:46). Jesus taught things never taught before. He taught with authority.
- His incredible CLAIMS (Mt. 10:32-33; John 2:19; 14:6). Jesus claims your eternal destiny depends on your faith in Him.
- His undeniable MIRACLES (John 3:2). Jesus did miracles that were never performed before or after (blind, walk on water, feeding 5,000).

- ➡ Jesus asks, “*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*” You would think after all Christ taught, claimed, and did, people would recognize who He really was. But instead the people mistake Jesus for three of the most fervent preachers in the Bible—
- “...***John the Baptist***...”— John the Baptist was a fiery preacher of repentance. He stood against sin and it cost him his life. Even Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead (Mt. 14:1-2). Jesus also preached repentance.
 - “...***Elias***...”— On Mt. Carmel Elijah mocked the worship of 400 false prophets. He preached judgment on the Ahab and Jezebel. God wrought many miracles by Elijah. The Jews thought Jesus was Elijah come back according to Malachi 4:5.
 - “...***Jeremias***...”— Jeremiah was called the “weeping prophet” as he wept for God’s people. Jesus was called “*a man of sorrows*” and He wept over Jerusalem.
 - “...***one of the prophets***”— The prophets were men who proclaimed God’s Word.
 - All of these views believed Jesus was an extraordinary man. But they fall far short of who Jesus really is and are inadequate for salvation. One may believe Christ is a prophet... a miracle-worker... a good man... a great teacher... but that is not enough to save. Christ is God... He is Lord and Savior.
 - Therefore, Jesus asks a “follow-up” question (v. 15)...

II. The PERSONAL conviction (v. 15). Your salvation doesn’t depend on what others believe about Jesus, but what do YOU believe.

➡ The question is similar to what Jesus asked the Pharisees in Matthew 22:42—“*What think ye of Christ?*” The most serious question you could be asked. Your eternity hinges on your answer.

➡ What others said...

- God the Father— “*Thou art my beloved Son*” (Mk. 1:11)
- John the Baptist— “*This is the Son of God*” (John 1:34)
- Nathanael— “*Thou art the Son of God*” (John 1:49)
- Martha— “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of God*” (John 11:27)

- The Roman centurion—*“Truly this was the Son of God”* (Mt. 27:54).
- Devils — *“Jesus, thou Son of God”* (Mt. 8:28-29).
- Peter—*“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

A. **Peter’s PROFESSION.** It was calm, calculated, and certain.

1. *“The CHRIST.”* The promised MESSIAH—The deliverer of Israel. The word *“christ”* means anointed. There were three “anointed” offices in the Old Testament: Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus was all three.
2. *“The Son of the living God”*— Any profession that says otherwise is antichrist (1 John 2:22; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (2 Tim. 3:15)
3. Peter’s profession matched what Jesus claimed about Himself (John 10:36—*“I am the Son of God”*).

On July 6, 2000, Hugh Downs was the guest host on Larry King Live. He lead a round table discussion on this question: “Who is Jesus?” Among his guests was Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, Dean of the Oxford L'chaim Society. Boteach said, “Jesus was a great teacher, a very ethical, moral, human being—perhaps in our opinion, not a prophet, but certainly a phenomenal teacher...”¹

If Rabbi Boteach really thought Jesus was a great ethical, and moral, and phenomenal teacher, why wouldn't he follow His teaching? If Jesus is not who He said He is, He was neither ethical, nor moral, but one of biggest liars to walk on the face of the earth.

B. **Present-day PERVERSIONS.**

1. The Jehovah's Witnesses - “Michael the Archangel is no other than the only begotten Son of God, now Jesus Christ.” (*New Heavens and New Earth*, pp, 30-31).
2. The Mormons - “...Jesus, our elder brother... begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden,

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0007/06/kl.00.html>

and who is our father in Heaven." (*Journal of Discourses*; Vol. 1, pp. 50-51.) "...Lucifer the son of the morning is our elder brother, and the brother of Jesus." (Apostle B. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 163-164.)

3. The Unification Church (Moonies) - "He (Jesus) can by no means be God Himself." (*Divine Principles*, pp. 210-211.)
4. Islam - "Jesus was no more than a mortal whom Allah favored and made an example to the Israelites. They are unbelievers who say God is Messiah, Mary's son." (Koran, Sura 43:59)

III. The PLEASING response (v. 17).

- A. A pronounced BLESSING! The first answer (v. 14) received no word of "blessing." That is because the popular opinion of Christ, although honorable, fell way short of who Jesus is.
 - Jesus affirmed Peter's answer. He did not rebuke Peter, as he did a few verses later (vs. 21-23).
 - Peter was blessed in his profession, but rebuked for denying the necessity of the cross. His profession needed to be broadened. To most Jews, the Messiah wouldn't come to suffer and die—He would come to take over.
- B. A personal REVELATION. The greatest revelation anyone could have is to be convinced in their heart by God's Spirit that Jesus is "*the Son of the living God.*"
 1. This is the SECOND time Peter affirmed Christ's deity. The first time was after Jesus fed the 5000 with the five barley loaves and two fishes (John 6:69). But when Peter made his first profession, Jesus did not respond with a word of "blessing" as He did in our text. Why? Because Peter's first profession of Christ's deity came as a result of seeing the miracle of the loaves and fishes. But Peter's answer to Christ's question, "*Whom say YE that I am?*" was the result of how God dealt with him individually in his heart.
 2. Jesus was not saying the Father appeared to Peter with some special revelation. Peter's confession was one of heart felt

conviction. It did not come from "*flesh and blood*," because the natural man knows nothing of Christ's deity. No one can