

To God Alone Be The Glory

Whenever you want to conduct any business on the internet, the website on the screen in front of you asks a number of questions. “What’s your name? What’s your email address? What’s your phone number? Where do you live? What’s your credit card number?” Do you see what they are doing? They are asking you to answer the question, “Who do you say you are?”

In today’s Gospel Jesus ¹³asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ‘Son of Man’ was Jesus’ usual way of referring to himself. Son of Man. See how the term emphasizes his humanness? Son of Man. He was born of a woman just like we were. But then, in the book of Daniel (7:13-14), there’s the prophecy about the coming Messiah who would rule as king over all peoples forever and ever. Guess what the coming Messiah is called in that prophecy. Yep, “son of man.” How will a human be able to rule forever? There’s only one way this can happen: he must also be true God. No wonder Jesus referred to himself as the ‘Son of Man’! He was revealing to everyone who knew the prophecies that he is the long-promised God/man, the Savior of all sinners!

So then why does Jesus ask this question: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Is he saying: “Check my social media, disciples. I want to know what people are posting about me. It will bolster my

confidence if lots of people are liking me.” You know, you could twist Jesus’ question into all kinds of weird things that it’s not. And unfortunately several have tried.

But Jesus’ question doesn’t have to be complicated. If you read the words of this account carefully, you can see that Jesus was teaching his disciples, leading them to a fuller understanding of his identity, and not just for their own spiritual welfare, but for the benefit of everyone they would soon reach out to with the good news. That’s why he asked, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

What a great question! We could benefit by answering Jesus’ question on a regular basis, “WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?”

But back to Jesus’ disciples. They had just recently returned from one of their evangelism trips. They had talked with lots of people, so they were familiar with popular opinion. Jesus was asking his disciples for some expert testimony: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” What a great teacher! Jesus wants his disciples to repeat popular opinion because he is about to have them compare and contrast all that with what they’ve learned about him so far.

¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” First, wow!—the people have actually heard of Jesus. And he didn’t even have to hire a campaign manager or set up an Instagram

account or do video shorts. While today's influencers and politicians work hard to achieve name recognition so they can get votes, Jesus' work as a teacher who could also do miracles made his name widely recognizable.

Success, right? Everyone was speaking highly of Jesus as a special man of God. Why, he was counted among the prophets of God! John the Baptist had called people to repentance and had assured them of forgiveness, just like Jesus was now doing. Elijah was a man of prayer and a miracle worker, just like Jesus. Jeremiah and other prophets had official enemies in the church and in the state, just like Jesus. Wow! What complimentary associations! Who wouldn't be elated to be so well thought of?

The only problem is that these identities fell short of the mark. How would you feel if you were introduced as having one child when in reality you have two or even four? What if I described you as having a high school diploma when in reality you also achieved a bachelor's degree or even your master's degree? Saying that Jesus is a prophet is the truth. But it doesn't go far enough. In our day people refer to Jesus as a great man, a visionary, a charismatic leader, a supreme example of kindness and love, even "the man upstairs." But these characterizations don't go far enough. If we're going to describe Jesus, let's include the most important details.

So ¹⁵ "what about you?" Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?" Brilliant teaching, Jesus! If you had started with this question, the disciples could have dodged the issue by telling you what everyone else was thinking. But since they already reported what everyone else was saying about you, they are caught on the spot. They have to answer with what's in their head. Do they agree with the world's minimalistic view of your identity?

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Yes! That's it, Peter! Way to go! Jesus is not just a prophet but **the Prophet** (Deuteronomy 18:15. He is the Priest who was to come, but not from Levi's line (Psalm 110:4). He is the Messiah, the Christ, the King who would rule forever and ever (1 Chronicles 17:10b-14). And, Peter, we appreciate how you call Jesus "the Son of God" because this phrase reveals that Jesus is equal to God (John 5:18).

Peter, how did you get so smart about Jesus? ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. Simon Peter couldn't possibly have dreamed up this understanding on his own. If you want proof, do a survey of all the world religions. All the religions that humans dreamed up make Jesus out to be less than he is. That's as far as humans can get. So whenever anyone identifies Jesus

correctly, they have had outside influence from God himself. Simon Peter knew who Jesus was because the heavenly Father had revealed this truth to him. The Father reveals the same truth to us through the gospel. God gets the glory for us knowing who Jesus is.

Jesus continues. Simon, ¹⁸*I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.* What a promise! But how we should understand Jesus' words? You see, the name 'Peter,' pronounced *petros* in Greek, means 'rock.' If you have a friend named Peter, you can call him "rock boy" or "rock dude." So is Jesus saying to Peter, "You are called 'rock' and on this rock I will build my Church"? Will Jesus build his Church on Peter? Here is one of those Bible passages where looking at the words in the original language helps. Jesus says: "You are *petros* and on this *petra* I will build my church." *Petros* is a rock, the size you can pick up; but *petra* is a huge boulder, or even a rocky crag like what you see at Maiden Rock. Peter wasn't a bolder, and only sometimes was he a rock. During his years with Jesus his emotions often overwhelmed him, and he sometimes got in the way of the gospel. Later on the Holy Spirit would turn Peter into a strong leader for the Church, yes, but even then the Apostle Paul had to correct Peter publicly for going along with some false ideas (Galatians 2:11-21). So you see, Peter was not much of a rock on which to build Christ's Church.

Well, if Jesus wasn't talking about building his Church on Peter, what is the solid rock on which the Church is built? Could it be Peter's confession that 'Jesus is the Christ?' Yes! This truth, that Jesus is the Christ, is the very foundation of the Church. God's religion, Christianity, has been built on 'faith in Jesus as God's Son, the Savior from sin.'

Now do you see why Jesus' question, "WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?", is so important for us to answer today? But we don't have to answer this question on our own. The Holy Spirit loves to help us answer with more than just that Jesus was a good man. That's why the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus as God's Son and our Savior and then leads us to make this same confession, "Jesus is the Christ." The Holy Spirit turns us into rocks just like Peter, which God places one on top of another to build up the walls of Christ's holy, invisible Church.

...and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. What's Hades? 'Hades' can mean 'the grave' or 'hell': two concepts in one word. And 'gates' is a good way to picture all the power and durability of a kingdom. So 'the gates of Hades' is a great way to picture the power of death and the power of Satan. *The gates of Hades will not overcome it.* Satan will not win the final victory over the Church. Oh, the Church may be persecuted. It won't surprise me if someday I am executed for teaching about Jesus. If so, Satan will seem to have

won, because I'll be dead on account of the gospel, and maybe you will stand up for Jesus and be ended. But even then, the grave will not be able to hold any of us in. We will rise to eternal life on the Last Day. The gates of Hades will not overcome the Church. The final victory will be ours. Besides this, everyone who is brought to faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God—that's another way that the gates of Hades don't overcome the Church. God keeps winning souls to his side through the gospel, which is where we go next.

Jesus says, ¹⁹*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*” Keys can lock and unlock. In Bible terms keys can bind and loose. When someone repents of their sins, you are to use the unlocking key on them—tell them they are forgiven, loosed from their sins, because of Jesus. The good news about Jesus opens the gates of heaven for them. But on those occasions when someone is not sorry for a sin (it doesn't matter which sin), they bar themselves from heaven. If you tell them they are forgiven when they're not sorry, you teach them they can hold on to a sin (it doesn't matter which sin). So you are to withhold the good news from them, to bind their sins to them, to tell them they are in danger of God's judgment as long as they hold to their sin instead of to Jesus. This helps them see what God in his love wants them to see: that heaven is locked to

everyone who is not sorry. Of course, as soon as they turn away from their sin, we immediately use the unlocking key on them. This is how Jesus wants us to use the Keys. And when we do, we are saying, “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He is the Savior all of us sinners need.

But ²⁰*Then [Jesus] warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.* Why clam up? Well there was a problem with this term ‘the Christ.’ Satan had successfully warped the understanding of this term in people's minds. If people associated Jesus with all their wrong ideas about the Christ, this wording would lead them further away from the truth instead of closer. So out of love for souls, Jesus prohibited the use of this title for a time. Later, after Jesus' suffering and death had exploded any false hopes for the Christ to set up an earthly kingdom, then the disciples could say “Jesus is the Christ” till the saints came marching in. They did. And that's why God's religion is called “Christianity.”

WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS? Do you agree that he is the Son of the living God, the Christ, the long-promised Messiah, the world's only Savior, your Savior? Do you understand that he has given you the authority to unlock heaven to people by telling them about Jesus, and that you also have the authority to inform those who refuse to turn from evil that heaven is locked to them? You do? Then blessed are you! This was not

revealed to you by man but by your Father
in heaven.