

Who is Jesus?

Matthew 16:13-20 *Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ*

When Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, “What do people say about the Son of Man?”

The disciples answered, “Some people say you’re John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet.”

Then Jesus asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter spoke up, “You’re the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus told him:

Simon, son of Jonah, you’re blessed! You didn’t discover this on your own. It was shown to you by my Father in heaven. So I’ll call you Peter, which means “a rock.” On this rock I’ll build my church, and death itself won’t have any power over it. I’ll give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and God in heaven will allow whatever you allow on earth. But he won’t allow anything you don’t allow.

Jesus told his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Last week we struggled with who Jesus appeared to be in his conversation with a Canaanite woman. He seemed to be acting out-of-character. We were puzzled.

Now, as if Jesus was reading our minds, he specifically asks about who he is.

He asks it in two ways. First, what the disciples are hearing others say about him. What are they saying about the Son of Man? In response, the disciples give a selection of answers. All declaring Jesus is special, out of the ordinary, and in each case as the returning or re-emerging of a key figure from the past.

Jesus makes no comment about these answers but proceeds to ask another question. “Who do you say I am?” The ‘you’ is plural. So, is he asking for the view of each person in the group of disciples, most probably more than twelve and including women, one by one; or is he wanting a combined answer, a group response? We can’t be sure but we only get one answer and Peter gives it. “You’re the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Was Peter speaking for himself or for the group? Was he speaking for the group without any consultation with the group? We all know confident people who speak their own opinion in a way that declares it to be the group position. Did Peter do that?

Jesus commends Peter as an individual for his answer. Adding this is a gift from God not something he came up with through his own brilliant powers of deduction. Peter got it right. Next week we’ll find out he didn’t fully understand but at least at face value he gave a great answer. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and the Son of the living God. Next week we’ll dig into what that means for Jesus and for us.

For now let’s go back to Jesus’ questions and I’ll add some of mine.

What are people saying about Jesus? What are we hearing people say about Jesus today? You might like to pause and have a think about the answer. How would your neighbours, friends, school-mates, or colleagues answer the question; ‘Who is Jesus’?

What about you? Remember Jesus asked 'you' plural. What about you as a group of people gathered together as a family, or in a small group, or as a congregation? Who do you say Jesus is?

One strong person might be game to give an answer for all of you. But if you all added your two-cents-worth, could you come up with a group answer? Why not try!

Now I have a number of questions. If you're in a group, talk about them and if you're on your own come up with your own answers.

How is your understanding of Jesus the same as the generally accepted, or you could say orthodox, Christian position? Does your understanding of Jesus line up with the great creeds of the church? If so, how and if not, why not?

Another question, how is your understanding of Jesus unique to your group? Or you could ask, how does your group add richness, complexity, and fullness to the work and witness of Christ in your community and world?

You've heard me tell how I was a 'non-picked' child when teams were selected at school and how this has made John 15:16 a favourite verse for me, Jesus said, "*You didn't choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit.*" Jesus picked me! My childhood experience has also heightened my appreciation for welcoming and including others, particularly when we're in a group setting. So think about how your individual or group experience of Jesus enrich the work of Jesus in the world?

Remember, Jesus commended Peter for his answer and confession. Peter was right! Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus is the Saviour of the world. We need to personalise this confession. Jesus is our Messiah, and as the Son of the living God he is our Saviour.

I grew up going to church and confessing the Christian faith with my family, my tribe, and my congregation. Along the way, as I was doing that it became personal. So it wasn't just the faith of my fathers and mothers but my faith. From very early in my life I remember praying, "I am Jesus' little lamb." I believed it but along the way I grew to understand what it meant and it became real for me and now I know I'm Jesus' much bigger lamb. I know Jesus is my Messiah and Son of the living God. That is a gift from God I'm most thankful for!

If you're a parent, your challenge is to help your children transition from a shared or corporate family faith to personal family faith. Jesus is using you to build his church.

Finally, two last questions. First, because we believe with Peter, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, how does that change the way we live? How does what we believe about Jesus show in our everyday lives?

Second, because we believe with Peter, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, how does that determine what we do when we're together as a group of Christians, whatever that means for you? How does it determine how we act toward each other? How does it determine how we act toward those who belong to our group and to those who join us as guests?

God bless your thinking and discussing and fill you with the love of Jesus who is your Saviour. God assure you of Jesus' living, life-giving presence with you and all those you love. Amen.