

'Who Do You Say I Am?'

Matthew 16:13-16 *"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

It seems that every era of Church history has a question from the lips of our Lord for that time. For example, of the scores of questions asked in the gospels by our Lord, the first generational Church was faced with the question of John 13:38 – ***"Will you lay down your life for my sake?"*** How many of our spiritual forefathers went to their martyr's deaths after facing that question from Christ? The apostolic fathers like James, Peter and Paul dealt personally with this. They were followed by the likes of Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna.

Then came the Nicene fathers and another question emerged. For them it was the question of Matthew 22:42 – ***"What do you think of the Christ, whose son is He?"*** It was this question that brought them to Nicea in 325 A.D. Arius of Alexandria was preaching that the Son was not eternal with the Father but was created by the Father. Out of this Council of Nicea came the Nicene Creed which settled and affirmed for the Church till this very day that the Son was of the same nature as the Father. In those days with this question on his heart Athanasius stood tall as a defender of the Faith.

As the Church entered its dark period held in the clutches of the Roman popes, the Reformers broke through into the dawn of a new day when they were confronted with the Lord's question in John 11:40 – ***"Did I not say if you believe you would see the glory of God?"*** And so, armed with the truth of the book of Romans, Martin Luther nailed his thesis to the door of the church at Wittenburg and the glory of God filled Europe working through the likes of Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and many others.

As the years of Church history continued to unfold and the great missionary movement advanced, they did so with the question of Luke 18:8 on their hearts and minds – ***"When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"*** And so, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone and so many others left the confines and comforts of their homes for places like India, China and Africa with the question of their time – *"When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"* – burning in their hearts.

Then came the 20th century when prosperity filled the western Church. The Church gained influence and buildings and very subtly the emphasis of Godly power changed to worldly influence. And consequently, there came the Lord's question in John 21:5 – ***"Do you love me more than these?"***

Next liberalism with its twin children of pluralism and inclusivism infiltrated the Church and from the lips of our Lord came the question of Luke 6:67 – ***"Will you also go away?"*** And unfortunately, many denominations and Churches that once had evangelism and missions at their forefront and held to a high view of Scripture went away from the doctrinal truth their forefathers had held for generations.

Now we find ourselves ministering in the 21st century. These are days of unbelievable challenge and opportunity. But Christ has a question for His church today and it is perhaps the most important and most controversial question He has ever asked.

I believe it is the issue all true evangelicals must face for the next generation. It is the question of our time. It is the question of Matthew 16:15 – ***“Who do you say that I am?”*** This is the question for us! When so many have gone the way of pluralism and inclusivism, God is asking us – *“Who do you say that I am?”*

It is becoming more apparent that God is raising up a voice for righteousness in a culture that is filled with anti-Christian bigotry. While Prime Ministers and Presidents are presently engaged in a war on terrorism, many pastors and disciples are engaged in a war on truth. There are those among us in our western culture today, just as in the Book of Jude, who seem to be bent on bringing down our twin towers of the truth and trustworthiness of the gospel. Perhaps no other single topic will be under attack during our remaining days of ministry as much as the issue of the exclusivity of the gospel. The next generation of evangelical pastors and Church leaders must be prepared to answer the question of our time – *“Who do you say that I am?”*

There are two distinct styles of leadership prevalent today. There are those who lead by public consensus and there are those who lead by personal conviction. This is particularly true in our western political culture and unfortunately it has spilled into our Church culture as well. We have seen professional politicians who lead by public consensus. It seems a stand is not taken on any issue until a poll is taken to see what the consensus of the people is on a particular subject and then action is taken in accordance with public consensus. And then there are those politicians who lead by personal conviction. These individuals strive to make their decisions on the conviction of what is right and wrong and then stand upon that personal conviction.

Look at some of the major Christian denominations today. They once made decisions on the basis of personal conviction. But now, in our sophisticated 21st century world, many find it more expedient to make decisions on the basis of public consensus. Is it any wonder that such things as political correctness and pluralistic compromise are the result? Those who lead by public consensus lead people where they ‘want’ to go. Those who lead by personal conviction lead people where they ‘need’ to go.

This is exactly the point the Lord Jesus was seeking to make when He took the disciples away from the Galilean crowds and moved them 25 miles to the north, to the headwaters of the Jordan River, near to the city Philip built in honor of the Caesar which became known as Caesarea Philippi. Our Lord knew the tendency we have to abandon personal conviction for public consensus and thus He framed two very important questions for our consideration. First, the question of public consensus. *“Who do men say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:13). Then, the question of personal conviction. *“Who do you say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:15). This is the question of our time: who do you say that He is? The next generation of evangelicals must be prepared to answer the question of our time. Who do you say that I am? The issue of the exclusivity of the gospel will be the single most important issue we will face in the next decade! And if we do not give a certain sound – who will?

Our historic Christian faith is characterized by the exclusivity of the gospel. Jesus said, *“I am The Way, the Truth, and The Life and no one comes to the Father but by me!”* (John 14:6). These are not our words, but His. If they were ours, it would be nothing less than arrogant bigotry. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He doesn’t simply say that He shows us the way, He says He is the way. He does not say it’s hard to come by another way, He says no one comes to the Father but through Him. The definite article is emphatic and repeated – *“I am The Way, I am the Truth, I am the Life.”* It is no wonder that Jesus asks us the question of our time, the question of personal conviction – *“Who do you say that I am?”* To say in our pluralistic culture that Christ is the only way to Heaven is like waving a red cape in front of a raging bull but it is without doubt the most important question of our time and it is Jesus Who asks us, *“Who do you say that I am?”*

Christianity was birthed in a religiously pluralistic world. There are today the remains of a building in Rome called the Pantheon. It was the temple to all the gods. This was where people of the Roman Empire could go and worship the god they served whether he be Jupiter or Juno or whoever. However, throughout history the church has insisted that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and there is salvation in no one else. Sadly, our western culture is becoming more and more like the culture of the first century world where political correctness is the order of the day and where religious beliefs amount to little more than our personal taste as if we were journeying down a cafeteria line choosing our personal food preferences.

So like those first generation followers of Christ, we are now faced with the question for our time – *“Who do you say that I am?”* In a world where public consensus, with its pluralism, inclusivism and political correctness is the call of the day, we must make a bold stand and declare that we are unashamedly disciples of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the Way, the Truth and the Life. We must be prepared to join Simon Peter in telling our world, *“You and You alone are the Christ.”* The same Peter who stood with John before the most powerful political and religious leaders of their day, the Sanhedrin, and declared, *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12). We must stand also with the Apostle Paul and hear him say, *“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”* (Galatians 6:8). And with the Apostle John and hear him say, *“He who has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”* (1 John 5:12).

Brothers and sisters, we live in perilous times. We claim that Jesus is the answer to every question, the hope of the world and the road to salvation – but we stand silent against the flood of false teaching which would reduce the Lord to what others say about Him. But Jesus is looking you and me in the eye today and asking us for our personal conviction – not just what we believe in private, but what are we convicted to declare in public. *“Who do you say that I am?”* Let me close by answering the Lord from my heart and if any of this resonates in your spirit today, I pray it will give you the courage to speak up and make sure everyone around you knows your answer, when Jesus asks you. So who do I say that Jesus is? Let me tell you.

He is the Lord Almighty, Omnipotent King, Lion of Judah, Rock of Ages, Prince of Peace, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. The Provider, Protector, Righteous Ruler and Reigning King of all creation. He is my Father, my Helper and my Guardian. He is God.

He is the First and Last, the Beginning and the End, the keeper of Creation and the Creator of all He keeps. He is the Architect of the universe and the Manager of everything. He is risen and brings power. He reigns and brings Peace. He is the wisdom of the wise; the power of the powerful; the ancient of days; the ruler of rulers; the leader of leaders; the overseer of the overcomers; the sovereign Lord of all that was and is and is to come. He is light, love, longevity, and the Lord. He is goodness, kindness and gentleness. He is God.

He is Holy, righteous, mighty, powerful, pure, faithful, forgiving and forever. He is my Redeemer, my Saviour, my guide and my peace. He is my Joy, my comfort and my Lord. He always was, He always is, He always will be unmoved, unchanged, undefeated and never undone. He was bruised and bought healing. He was pierced and eased pain. He was persecuted and bought freedom. He was dead and brought life.

The world can't understand Him. Armies can't defeat Him. Schools can't explain Him. Leaders can't ignore Him. The Pharisees couldn't stop Him. The people couldn't hold Him. The New Age can't replace Him. Herod couldn't kill Him. Nero couldn't crush Him. Hitler couldn't silence Him. Experts can't explain Him away!

His ways are right, His word is eternal, His will is unchanging, His burden is light and His goal for me is abundant life. He rules my life. I serve Him because His bond is love, I follow Him because He is trustworthy. He will never leave me, never forsake me, never mislead me, never forget me, never overlook me and never cancel my appointment!

When I speak, He listens. When I fall, He lifts me up. When I fail, He forgives. When I am weak, He is strong. When I am lost, He is the way. When I am afraid, He is my courage. When I am faithless, He is faithful. When I stumble, He steadies me. When I am hurt, He heals me. When I am broken, He mends me. When I am blind, He leads me. When I am hungry, He feeds me. When I face trials, He is with me. When I face persecution, He strengthens me. When I face problems, He comforts me. When I face loss, He provides for me. When I face death, He will carry me home! He is everything for everybody, everywhere, every time, in every imaginable way.

His love is unfathomable. His grace is amazing. His mercy is new every morning. His healing is total. His promises are true. His peace is overwhelming. His joy is unspeakable. His righteousness is my reality. His holiness is my birth right. His mission is my mission.

He is God. I am His, and He is mine! He is in control. He will take me home when it's time ... and because of Who He is - all is well with my soul! Amen.