

HEAR MINISTRIES

SERMON FOR **August 23rd, 2026**

Text: Matthew 16:13-20
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Prayer: Lord, we want to know You and always lift You up. Help us to hear the words You have for us today and to always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight, our Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

Are you familiar with the game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” Contestants on this show are asked a series of questions, each worth more money than the previous one. If the contestant successfully answers all the questions, he or she wins one million dollars. Before each question is answered, the host of the show asks the contestant, **“Is that your final answer?”** The implication being there is no turning back. Once that answer is given, the fate of that contestant is sealed.

This show was popular with so many people because most of the contestants are just common people like you and me. And, the prospect of winning one million dollars is something that appeals to us all! I mean, who hasn’t ever considered what they would do if they had a million dollars?!

From a human standpoint, a million dollars is a lot of money. But, **in light of eternity, a million dollars means absolutely nothing.** It doesn’t matter how much money we make in this life, or how many possessions we own, when our time on earth is over, we won’t take a single penny with us into eternity.

All that will matter when this life is over is what we did concerning Jesus Christ. That is what our Scripture Reading is about this morning. The disciples are called upon to tell Jesus who they think He is. Their answer determines where they go in eternity.

You see, **knowing Jesus is more important than any other knowledge in the world.** When Jesus asks, *“But who do you say that I am?”* (Matthew 16:15), He is asking the most important question we will ever be asked in our life! **Why? Because what we determine about Jesus will determine where we spend eternity.** And, coming to the wrong

conclusion will cost us far more than missing a question on “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?”! **Missing the truth about Jesus will cost us our soul.** (Mark 8:37-38)

This morning we are going to investigate Who Jesus Is. As we do that, look into your own heart and see who YOU think He is. Then ask yourself, “Is this my final answer?”

First, let's see what other people say about Jesus and who they think He is. John the Baptist was a holy man willing to die for his faith and He knew Jesus was the Son of God. Herod, on the other hand, thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead! (Matthew 14:1-2)

The **apostle John** wrote the book of John in the New Testament to show specifically that Jesus is God. He was not just a prophet that walked this earth, but He was and is true God and man in one person.

Elijah was a great prophet in the Old Testament. Jews were expecting Elijah to return just before the Messiah came. Some believed that Jesus was the forerunner to the Messiah, but not THE Messiah. (Malachi 4:5)

Not **everyone in Jesus' day** thought He was a great man. Some thought He was nothing more than a nobody....others thought He was an evil man. Some believed he was a lowly carpenter, a sinner, an illegitimate child, a mad man and a fool. Others mocked him and treated Him with contempt when He was beaten and nailed to the cross. These people thought this even though they knew of Jesus and had seen His miracles! Many religious leaders of Jesus' day thought He was a devil or a mad man trying to impersonate God.

What do **people today** say about Jesus? Some don't know who He is, some don't care and others have their own opinions. The **Jehovah's Witnesses** say Jesus is the Son of God, a created being who existed in heaven as the Archangel Michael, became human, and sacrificed his life for humanity, but He is not Almighty God.

The **Mormons** believe Jesus is their elder brother and that Jesus and Lucifer are brothers. They say Jesus was married at Cana and had many wives including Mary and Martha.

The **Islam** religion believes Jesus was no more than a mortal whom Allah favored and made an example to the Israelites. They say Jesus is one of five great prophets, including Mohammed, and that He is not divine, not the Son of God and was not crucified.

It must be awfully confusing to the world when they hear all these differing opinions about Jesus.

Well, let's see **what heaven has to say about Jesus**. Matthew 3:17 records what **God the Father says about Jesus**: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* Also, in Matthew 17:5, it is recorded that a cloud overshadowed them and a voice out of the cloud said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him."* Clearly this indicates Jesus is God.

There are many, many verses in **the Bible** that speak of Jesus position: He is called Lord (implying He is in control), Jesus (Jehovah is Salvation), Christ (Anointed), and 'the One chosen by God to be the Messiah.' **The Bible is very clear on Who Jesus Christ is!**

Jesus said about Himself that *"he who has seen Me has seen the Father."* (John 14:9) This implies that Jesus and the Father are One, so Jesus IS God. Jesus said just that in John 10:30. Elsewhere in the book of John, it is recorded that Jesus said, *"I am the Bread of Life....I am the Light of the World.....I am the Door....I am the Good Shepherd.....I am the Son of God...."*

The **third area of investigation is, "Who do YOU say that Jesus is?"** **Do you KNOW and BELIEVE that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God? Do you KNOW and BELIEVE that He died for your sins and that by believing in Him you are reconciled with God the Father and will spend eternity with Him?** **Remember: knowing ABOUT Jesus and KNOWING JESUS are two different things.** Many people can rattle off Bible verses and facts about the Bible or Biblical times but they do not have a heartfelt connection to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They do not know His nature or understand His love.

This is a question that each of us must answer for ourselves, just as the disciples did.

I don't think Jesus is asking us to parrot back the answers we've memorized or heard somewhere. Each of us must look into our own hearts and lives and be honest with ourselves about who Jesus is to us. **How has our life changed because of having Jesus in it? Or has it?** Knowing all the books of the Bible, for example, or memorizing all the Lutheran Doctrine does not mean we know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Going to church every Sunday doesn't guarantee that either. Of course, we **want** to do all these things when Jesus is the center of our lives and our relationship with Him is strong.

Knowing Who Jesus is to us is a very important part of sharing Him with others. Most people are interested in knowing who Jesus is to us and what He has meant in our lives personally as opposed to just walking through "five steps to witnessing" or some other evangelism program.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus gives us two distinct ways to respond to the question of His identity:

- 1) Public opinion or consensus
- 2) Personal conviction

First, the question Jesus asked His disciples, “***Who do people say that I am?***” is in the form of a poll or survey. Many of our leaders today like to take a poll or survey to get peoples' opinions. They then choose to lead based on the results of the poll or survey. Those who choose to lead by public opinion/consensus, lead people where **they want to go** (crowd mentality).

On the other hand, those whose identity is motivated out of **personal conviction** will lead people where **they need to go. They are more interested in the truth, what is right and wrong regardless of the prevailing popular opinion.**

“Who do you say I am?”

Jesus is asking His disciples, “*Do you really believe my claim to be the ‘Great I Am?’ That I am the Way, the Truth and the Life? I Am the Good Shepherd; I Am the Door; I Am the True Vine; I Am the Light of the World; I Am the Bread of Life; I Am the Resurrection and the Life; I am the Alpha and the Omega?*” **Do you TRULY BELIEVE it??**

As author and defender of the Christian faith, C.S. Lewis once wrote, “*Jesus Christ is either who He says He is, or He is a lunatic and a liar. He is Lord of all or not at all!*”

Peter's confession in Matthew 16:26 was not based on public opinion, what others thought or said, but **on personal conviction**. Peter didn't look to a survey or poll to say, “*You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.*” **This conviction in acknowledging Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord came because God, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Gospel, revealed this to him,** creating in him a saving faith.

God is still doing this today in the hearts and minds of those who truly seek Him! **It is Peter's confession** that is the foundation upon which Jesus said He would build His church. Not on a mere mortal man, but **on the solid bedrock faith Peter professed**. Peter's name means “rock.” The phrase “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” is Peter's declaration of faith. Here, “Messiah” signifies the Anointed One, the expected Savior. “Son of the living God” underscores Jesus' divine nature. Jesus' response, “*On this rock I will build my church,*” is important. The “rock” refers to Peter's **faith and**

confession, indicating that **the church will be built on the foundation of true recognition of Jesus' identity**, not on the man Peter. It was when Peter saw himself as a "small pebble" (or stone) that the Holy Spirit reminded him he was a "chip off the old block." A piece of a larger stone.

As Isaiah said, *"If you seek the Lord and look to the rock from which you were hewn and the quarry from which you were dug, you will be blessed....my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended!" (Isaiah 51:1)*

Ruby is a 56-year-old woman who grew up in a rural community and went to church all her life. She knew about the stories in the Bible and she learned that if she was baptized, confirmed and went to church she would be saved from hell and go to heaven. One day a missionary came to her church and shared about how people in this third-world country were hungry to know about Jesus and their lives were being changed from the inside out. Ruby wondered, "Why would a person's life change when they believe in Jesus Christ?" The missionary explained that **a person's life can change when they believe in Jesus because they often experience a transformation in their outlook and values. They desire to know more about Jesus, the Bible and developing a closer relationship with Him. A desire to live according to Jesus' teachings will result in a change of outlook, attitude and behaviors. This change can manifest in various ways, including increased compassion, purpose, and a commitment to serving others.** For example, a person who once lived only to please themselves and worked to gain as many earthly possessions as possible, will begin to notice the plight of others, becoming more giving and less self-serving once they have committed their lives to Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ruby really thought about what the missionary said and she began to read her Bible and pray in a way she had never done before. Now she really **wanted** to know Jesus and give her whole self to Him. Soon, she, too, began to see changes in herself and in her actions. It will be this way for **anyone who truly desires** to live their lives for Jesus.

Why is it important that we have an answer to this question of Who Jesus Is? Well, In I Peter 3:15, we are told "... always be prepared to give a reason for the hope we have" in Christ Jesus.

As we go forth to live out our Christian faith, let us always be ready to give **our own answer with personal conviction to the question people may ask us, "Who do YOU say that Jesus is?" Amen.**

