

Have you ever been asked a really difficult question and just wasn't sure how to answer it?

Sometimes we ask questions of ourselves.

A teen might ask should I go to college? What will I major in if I go to college?

Others might ask who will I marry? Will I even get married?

There are a lot of questions to ponder here a few more:

- Are eyebrows considered facial hair?
- Do vegetarians eat animal crackers?
- When does it stop being partly cloudy and start being partly sunny?
- If a kid refuses to sleep during nap time, are they guilty of resisting a rest?
- Is there a time limit on fortune cookie predictions?
- Why is it that everyone driving faster than you is considered an idiot and everyone driving slower than you is a moron?
- Why do people think that swaying their arm back and forth would change the direction of a bowling ball?
- What was Captain Hook's name before he got the hook?
- Why do people say they "slept like a baby" when babies wake up every few hours?
- Why is it called a funny bone, when if you hit it, it's not funny at all?
- If you see a turtle without a shell is he naked or homeless?

Over the next few weeks I want to talk about a question that was asked by Jesus. It's found in Matthew chapter 16 verse 13. We are going to look at a few character accounts up to the week after Easter. Today we are looking at the disciple, next week Bartimaeus, for Good Friday we will look at Pilate's wife Claudia, for Easter Mary Magdalene, and finally finish off the week after Easter with Matthias.

Matthew 16:13–20 (NIV) - ¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

Let's continue reading verses 14-20 - ¹⁴They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I 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." ²⁰Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

I think it is important that we look for a moment of where this conversation takes place.

Verse 13 tells us, "When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi. . ."

Caesarea Philippi is located in the far northern part of Israel and would have taken Jesus and the disciples around 2 days to walk this somewhere around 25 mile stretch from Galilee to the area located at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Galilee was a hot and humid region, Caesarea Philippi most likely a little cooler because of its altitude. Jesus may have been trying to get away from Galilee because of the heat and maybe trying to get to a quieter place because as his popularity increased the crowds began to push closer to him.

The region of Caesarea Philippi was where many of the Gentiles lived which interestingly enough had a Greek and pagan influence. So they left the Jewish crowd who were talking about all miracles and teaching and going to a place surrounded by pagan influence represented in the forms of temples and idol worship.

I need you to understand the back story because I believe it may help us understand more fully how a question like this would have impacted them.

Caesarea Philippi was originally known as Panias after the Greek god Pan. The conquest of Alexander the Great in this area imported Greek language and culture everywhere he went. Because of the vegetation and streams that flowed through the surrounding region it was identified as an ideal place to worship this Greek god Pan. See Pan was known as the god of shepherds, flocks, and nature.

According to pagan mythology. Pan took the form of being half-human and half-goat that played the flute. This flute became known as the Pan-flute. Legend has it that Pan was born in a cave.

IN the side of the rock walls next to the cave are hollowed spaces that were carved and crafted idols of Pan where displayed for worship. In front of the mouth of Pan's cave a temple was built to honor and worship Caesar Augustus. The waters flowed through the temple as a symbol of life.

It was full of paganism and idolatry in the days of Jesus.

The history is important as we look at the passage in Matthew 16 for a couple reasons. First the reason why Panias was known as Caesarea Philippi in this era is political in nature. After the death of Herod the Great, his son Phillip established this area as the capital of his rule and named it Caesarea to honor the emperor of Rome. But to distinguish his city from others with similar names it named it after himself Caesarea Philippi or Phillips Caesarea.

So, imagine Jesus walking with his disciples into this city with Roman political and military trappings that was still filled with reminders of pagan worship scattered throughout. See the Jews were looking for someone to conquer and cleanse the land from the pagan influences.

So, here's the thing Jesus just didn't match their expectations.

Jesus at this place of pagan influence and stronghold away for the masses trying to get to him looks at his disciples and asks this question in the latter part of verse 13

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

He then awaits their response which is found in verse 14, ¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

So here Jesus is asking in a broad sense who do the people say I am? I believe he knew of how he was perceived by many.

Jesus seemed to have something in Him that reminded them of one of the prophets of old and that is how many perceived Him. Not the Messiah, not the King, not the Ruler, just a prophet.

He had demonstrated his miraculous powers, but they just didn't accept Him as the Savior. The crowds spoke highly of Jesus, enjoyed talking about Jesus, admired Him, but were never really convinced of His deity.

Do you realize that there are many today that feel the same way? So many today just want Him to be good teacher, but God, really?

In the days of Jesus, the crowds expected more than what had been demonstrated up to this point. They had been taught to expect a conquering King who would cleanse the country of the pagan influences and deliver them from the oppression of the Romans.

A true Messiah well he would deliver Israel from her enemies and establish His Kingdom on earth. Since Jesus refused to use His powers for His benefit although many had seen His miracles the people and even His disciples at times caused them to wonder who He really was. So, they just thought he was some prophet.

Jesus after asking about what the people thought now comes to a specific question its found in verse 15.

Matthew 16:15 (NIV) - ¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

For two and a half years Jesus has been trying to teach them who He was and now the time has come in the midst of this pagan town that they were passing through he asks the question, "who do you say I am."

This is a question for you and I as well.

So maybe after a bit of silence and the looking at each other wondering who will speak up and answer this important question Peter as a representative for the whole clan speaks up and says,

Matthew 16:16 (NIV) - ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

This declaration was huge. Peter was saying you are the True King, you are the one Israel has been waiting for, the one the prophets had predicted and spoken about.

This declaration was saying, Jesus your Lord, Caesar is not. This was a costly declaration.

And Jesus responds. . .

Matthew 16:17 (NIV) - ¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

The light bulb had gone off, he was not just a good man, a great teacher, nor just a prophet. He was the Messiah the Christ.

Think about this, this is what the disciples had hoped for since they first started following Jesus two and a half years earlier. Look at John 1:41-42

John 1:41–42 (NIV) - ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Andrew had brought his brother to Jesus on that day Jesus speaks Peters destiny but Peter doesn't realize for a while. But here at this moment on the shores of Galilee they find themselves in front of a massive rock quarry with little rocks littering the ground all around them and then imagine Simon Peters thoughts when in this backdrop Jesus looks, maybe points at Peter and says,

Matthew 16:18–19 (NIV) - ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 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."

The original language is translated, "You are Peter (petras . . . little rock), and on this rock (petra . . . quarry of stones) I will build my church."

Oh and by the way from some of the caves flowed water and in pagan mythology some believed it to be a gateway to the place of the dead, some called it the gates of hell or hades.

So, in this place Jesus tells Peter you are a rock and the gates of hades will not overcome my church.

One more point gates are a defensive tactic to try and keep out those coming in to invade what is behind them. Jesus is saying nothing the enemy has inside its gates will be able to come against my church. Jesus is on the attack; His Kingdom will rule.

2 Corinthians 2:11 – in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

When Jesus tells Peter, He is giving him the keys to the Kingdom he is talking about the authority that comes from being an apostle and a child of God.

We too have been given authority because of what Jesus did.

Let's look at a couple more verses.

Matthew 16:20 (NIV) - ²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

His time had not yet come to be revealed and so in the quite of this place away from the crowds don't tell them who I am. I time is coming soon that you will be free to say so.

Let me just share a couple more things concerning this as I mentioned this is the first of several weeks of messages on Who do you say that I am." I know we have been talking about Peter coming to this truth, but let me share another for a moment.

Matthew 11:1–3 (NIV) - After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. ²When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Are you the one or should we look for another? What a surprising question from John the same John that when Jesus came to be baptized pointed at him and said, "Behold, the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world."

Yep same one, but now he's wondering, why?

What if he had been wrong about Jesus, what if He wasn't the Messiah?

Because he heard about the prophets saying he would set the captives free and John is found in prison captive.

Matthew 11:4-5 (NIV) - ⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Who do you say that I am?

To Peter the Messiah, to John the Messiah, to Lazarus the raiser of the dead.

So, church who do you say He is?