

Answering The Question?

Matthew 16:13-20

FBC Cisco

August 23, 2020

Why am I a Christian? Even now?

Forgiveness for my sin. Grace for my guilt. Mercy when I'm wrong. And I believe in living like Jesus makes the world better. Compassion for those who suffer. Empathy to those who are different. And maybe most of all for me I follow Jesus because I believe it is through him that God is making all things new.

Other than my words, What evidence would there be that I do believe Jesus is Lord?

Do my actions point to this reality?

What would the person who decided to follow Jesus all those years ago think of the Christian I am now. Do my actions match up with my confession in the baptismal waters that Jesus is Lord?

There is a question from Jesus that seems straightforward and There is an answer we will hear today from Peter that is profound in its understanding yet must be continually affirmed by Peter, and by us as well.

Reading of Matthew 16:13-20

Whether we realize it or not, we are continually answering the question, "who do you say I am?". And what is our answer?

Though this question is posed to Jesus' disciples, it is a powerful question for us today. Who do we say Jesus is? And the question is even more important if we embrace the fullness of what it means to "speak" or "say" in this context. It just may be that the lives we lead in light of our hopes in the Messiah are just as critical as that which we confess with words, no matter how true or elegant. That is, as we answer this life-altering question, the shape of our lives may be as important as the words our lips voice.

Questions of identity are at the center of the Gospels. In both narrative accounts and explicit identifications, the Gospels weave a number of portraits of Jesus. In doing so, however, the Gospel writers are not just interested in correctly defining who Jesus is but also in shaping a community molded in light of his actions and teachings. And so these questions of identity are not just a matter of definition but of formation, not just doctrine but discipleship.

In this week's story, these questions of Jesus' identity are stated as sharply as any other account of Jesus' ministry. Gathered in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus wonders aloud what the crowds are saying about him but more importantly what the disciples think. It's another way of saying, "Why are you following me?"

We remember that this story of discovery is particularly crucial in Mark's account (8:27-38). In Mark, this scene is the critical point upon which the whole story turns. With Peter's confession, the story makes a dramatic shift towards the cross. In Matthew's account, the story is important though perhaps not as central as Mark's version. It remains critical because the question of Jesus' identity drives so much of the story. For instance, questions of identity are precisely why Matthew begins with a complex, fascinating, structured genealogy.

Genealogies are not just simple accounts of past ancestors. They are ways that we construct identity, ways in which we relate to our past. Jesus'

identity is linked by Matthew's genealogy with Abraham and David, with exile and deliverance, with kings and extraordinarily faithful women. So also the birth narrative places Jesus in important company. The threats over his young life, his family's exile into Egypt, and their eventual return resonates with Moses' own story. The identity of Jesus's is being shaped all along through Matthew's gospel.

The way this passage begins also tells us a lot. The location of this event in Caesarea Philippi is no accident. Caesar's name and the city Philip the Tetrarch are at the heart of the story too Jesus' identity is composed in the context of God's interaction with Israel as well as the political power of Jesus' own time. When Peter declares Jesus to be the Messiah or the anointed one of God, images of political independence are certainly in the air.

After all, anointing is precisely how Israel's kings were inaugurated into service. Behind Peter's hopes is a political expectation that Rome would no longer wield its swords, that Rome would give authority to the one true power of the universe. And when Jesus starts preaching about a kingdom of heaven which keys he has given to the faithful, you can only imagine the excitement these disciples would have felt, an excitement Jesus will reshape and redirect as the gospel continues.

The power of Peter's confession is only enhanced as the passage comes to a close. Here, Jesus famously grants Peter a new name, which is also a symbolic anchor for the "church." There are, of course, debates revolving around the identification of "the rock" upon which Jesus will build the church.

The question for us is "how we might see that power working in our midst?"

Where do we see God at work now? Where is the kingdom breaking into the world? Could we catch a glimpse of the power Jesus gave to Peter and the disciples?

In the end, a life of faithful service may be the best answer to that awe-inspiring question: Who do you say that I am?

“Church” is not simply an institution that arises after the resurrection of Jesus to promote his teachings; rather, the church is founded on blueprints drawn by the earthly Jesus to be a continuation of the work he has begun. (And what work is that?) Would we join in that work?

Hades will not prevail - like the Hebrew sheol it was the place of the dead. Serves as a promise and encouragement that not even human’s greatest enemy will be able to overcome the work of the church.

The authority Peter had was given to all the disciples and implicitly to the whole church.

We have been given the keys. What will we do with them?

Stretch is a minister in Pennsylvania who tells about how getting a set of keys changed his life.

He got a car. He asked himself, “where should I go?” He went where he always went, church. When he got there he was asked to work at the after school program and now he was where he wanted to be making some money. Perfect. Then he got another key. To the church. He was asked to fill the soda machine. He got a key to that too. It came with the perk of Mountain Dew when he refilled the machine. He had keys that gave him authority. He would get another key. As he was alone in the church one night doing his work God called him to ministry. Another key, another responsibility to participate in the work of God’s kingdom. Keys give people

authority. Jesus gives his followers keys to the kingdom. What an awesome thing for Jesus to give.

And the church is as resilient or fragile as each of us in our own faith. The church exists daily in the tension of power and powerlessness. Jesus' question to each of us is, "who do *you* say that I am?" What is *your* testimony of me? What is *your* experience of the living God through my witness and presence?"

This is the rock on which the church is founded and the source of authority for Christians. Our testimony about who Jesus is, the messiah, the one who saves, the one who has conquered sin and death and overcome the world; to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess as Lord, our lives will testify about *that* Messiah, son of the living God. What will your life say?

We are not only individual testifiers within a community of believers, but a community that testifies to the life giving gospel of Jesus Christ. By liberating all believers in this way, the church - the body of Christ - realizes its own authority as a living witness that overcomes the power of death and despair.

When we make the claim that Jesus is Lord, Messiah, Son of the Living God, we have been given the gift of revelation about the truth of Jesus identity, and we have been given the keys to a kingdom that comes with love and peace and hope and joy to change the world. May we answer Jesus' question with lives that usher in this kingdom of God.