

“Christianity: Who Is Jesus?”

Matthew 16:13-17

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I want to share a hilarious joke with you: There are some fun comparisons to think about Jesus' character. There were 3 equally good arguments that Jesus was Italian: 1. He talked with His hands. 2. He had wine with His meals. 3. He used olive oil. But then there were 3 equally good arguments that Jesus was a Californian: 1. He never cut His hair. 2. He walked around barefoot all the time. 3. He started a new religion. But then there were 3 equally good arguments that Jesus was an American Indian: 1. He was at peace with nature. 2. He ate a lot of fish. 3. He talked about the Great Spirit. But then there were 3 good arguments that Jesus was Black: 1. He called everyone brother. 2. He liked Gospel. 3. He didn't get a fair trial. But the most compelling evidence of all: 3 proofs that Jesus was a woman: 1. He fed a crowd at a moment's notice when there was virtually no food. 2. He kept trying to get a message across to a bunch of men who just didn't get it. 3. And even when He was dead, He had to get up because there was still work to do.

Jesus asked his disciples a similar question, “What are people saying about who the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Jesus said to them, “And what about you? Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter said. “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!” Jesus said to him, “God bless you, Peter!” What do you think is the point of Jesus in these conversations? I want to pass the same question to you all: “Who do you say that Jesus is?” What is your honest response to His question? Actually, Jesus didn't ask his disciples a theological question about the Messiah, but an invitation to follow him as the Messiah. How about each of you here at Fair Oaks church? Will you be able to comfortably say that Jesus is your Messiah, Savior and the Son of the Living God and follow Him in your whole life? What does it mean to confess that Jesus is my Messiah and follow him in my Christian faith? This morning, I invite us all to learn more about Jesus as our Messiah. I hope that we all confidently acknowledge Jesus as our Messiah like Simon Peter and follow Him.

In the Scripture reading, Jesus and his disciples headed out for the villages around Caesarea Philippi. Archeology study shows us that Caesarea Philippi was built on the site of an earlier city named Paneas, after the Greek god Pan. Herod the Great had built a temple there in honor of Caesar Augustus. (63BC-14AD) Perhaps, Jesus naturally tried to associate the image of the Emperor of Rome with his understanding of the Messiah when he was going through this

town. Can we easily associate Jesus with an image of an Israel King or Roman Emperor? In fact, Jesus wasn't anointed with holy anointing oil by the religious and political leaders at all. Rather Jesus was accused as a dangerous and unholy man by the religious leaders. He suffered and died on the cross as a criminal. Jesus seemed to be a helpless and powerless man. How dare Jesus call himself a Messiah? What does He mean that He is our Messiah?

Let's begin with a traditional understanding of a messiah. In the Jewish tradition, a messiah literally means "the anointed" and it naturally refers to a kingship or liberator of a group of people. In the Old Testament Bible, a messiah meant a king who was anointed with holy anointing oil. So to speak, a Messiah is a king and a great liberator. The Hebrew word, the Messiah is translated in Greek as Christ and literally means liberator. To Jesus, the liberation experience didn't mainly mean social, political, military and economic salvation. Rather Jesus' salvation was liberation from bondage for everyone going beyond the narrow scope of one ethnic Jewish religion. His new understanding of Messiah and Kingship included Gentiles. Jesus' salvation was revolutionary and provocative to the Jewish leaders. What Jesus meant about the Messiah was the love of God and helping them to start a new relationship with God in Jesus. This new Messiah came with power to reconnect people back to God.

Let's look at Jesus' question for his disciples and Simon Peter's personal response. Jesus' question was "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered "You are the Messiah and the Son of the living God." There is a huge difference between one of the prophets and the Messiah. Peter experienced the presence of God in Jesus but other people did not. What about your experience of Jesus? Is Jesus merely a good teacher like a professor of Christian ethics? Or is Jesus a great activist for justice and peace like one of the prophets? NO! He is the Messiah connecting us to God! I hope that you can find the living God. Unlike other disciples, Simon Peter found the living God in his master Jesus. Pastor T.D Jakes reminds us of his faith statement and spiritual principle. He said "I believe God is real; I believe that He wants to be involved in my life. I believe that He can be trusted even when He cannot be understood. I believe that He is my biggest fan, my wisest counselor, my most dependable friend. And I believe that He is constantly working for my good."

Jesus' kingship brought a new and provocative challenge to those who were used to seeking political importance but it was different. Jesus' power didn't only mean kindness, compassion and 'doing good', but it also brought us a new life and started a new relationship for your salvation. This spiritual restoration and salvation is one of the essential parts of Jesus' kingship and messiah. We come to church every Sunday for at least one hour to be connected to Jesus and experience the living God. Jesus is inviting his disciples, Simon Peter and all of

us here to say that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah came not for others, but for you. Consider finding a new relationship with God through Jesus and follow him as your Messiah. Amen.