

**LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION**  
**Matthew 16:13-17**

**Messiah Confirmation Sunday**  
**May 4, 2014**  
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We live in a time when almost everyday there is another poll taken. Findings are released on everything from people's feelings about our cold and windy winter; our feelings about the new Viking's stadium; our feelings about road construction. If a person doesn't know how they should feel about something they can always let the surveys help them decide.

In the time of Jesus of course there were no national polls conducted; there were no cable news shows to put differing opinions on the firing line. Rather, all opinions were spread by word of mouth and they no doubt varied greatly from person to person. In the case of what people thought of Jesus, of course, his ratings would have varied considerably.

If you took a poll of the Pharisees their opinion of Jesus would have been pretty low. In fact, they would have called Jesus an enemy of the Law of Moses as well as a friend of outcasts and sinners. If the Chief Priests would have been polled they would have claimed he was a blasphemer because he claimed to be God's son.

If you polled the people whom Jesus healed they no doubt would have been singing his praises; they would have shared how caring and loving he was to the troubled and hurting. Yet if you polled the majority of the people they probably would have listed themselves in the category of "not sure;" they just didn't know what to think of Jesus.

In our focus today on Mathew 16, verse 1 says that some Pharisees and Sadducees "*came to Jesus*" and they asked him "*to show them a sign from heaven.*" They wanted to see his credentials. Yet Jesus tells them that they "*cannot interpret the signs of the times;*" that even though they know how to read the signs of the weather they are oblivious to his miracles and message. They totally miss the obvious signs that people need to repent and have faith.

Even the disciples aren't real sure about Jesus and become concerned about not bringing any bread along to eat. So Jesus has to remind them of how he had not too long ago fed the five-thousand with just five loaves of bread. How easily they forgot their faith in Jesus and rather focused on their day to day worries.

Then Jesus finally asks his disciples in verse 13, "*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*" He wanted to know what the latest polls were saying about his ministry; he wanted to know what people were thinking.

In response to his question they said, "*Some say John the Baptist (raised from the dead), but others Elijah (Elijah being the prophet many believed would prepare the way for the Messiah), and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets (there was a strong belief that only risen*

*prophets of old could do such miraculous things like Jesus was doing).*” It was obvious from their response that his ministry was not being understood and that he was not going to win any popularity polls.

Then Jesus asked his disciples, his closest friends, *“But who do you say that I am?”* Now the question was very personal. It couldn’t be answered by simply pointing to what others were saying. Only one would answer and that answer must not have come quickly. Peter’s face must have been radiant and his voice must have been alive with the excitement of discovery as he answered, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

Jesus then expounds on Peter’s words by saying, *“Blessed are you (Peter), for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”* Jesus then continues, *“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, (this confession), I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

Peter’s confession revealed to him by God through the Holy Spirit is the foundation of our faith as Christians. This confession is the rock upon which the church is built. The center of our existence is that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The truth that Jesus is the Christ is seen in how Jesus then tells his disciples, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* It is seen in the account in Chapter 17 of Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain when God’s voice from heaven said, *“This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”*

The truth that Jesus is the Christ is seen in how Jesus then heals the boy possessed by a demon. Jesus is truly God’s son. He is the Savior of the world. He is the sure foundation upon which we can build our faith and lives. He is the rock of our mission as a church.

Now if we were to poll people today about Jesus; if we were to ask the question, “Who do people say that he is?” we would certainly get a wide variety of answers. Some today would say that Jesus was just a good person, a good prophet who lived long ago; one who simply left us some good moral teachings to live by.

Others would say that Jesus was simply the inspiration for the Christian religion, yet he is really no different than the founders of the other major religions of the world. Others would say, as a poll I once saw stated, that Jesus was one of the most important historical characters to ever live—right behind Lincoln and Kennedy.

Yet some others would say that Jesus is simply for kids; he is important to help teach their kids values; he is important so they get their kids to Sunday School and Confirmation. Yet when their kids are grown and gone some parents believe they have done their duty; some feel they personally don’t need Jesus or the church very much anymore. Regular worship, continuing to grow in a personal faith, is not important to them.

Oh, but then the question comes personally to each one of us, “Who do you and I say that Jesus is? Who is Jesus for you and me?” It is here that we can no longer simply talk about what other people think or simply about the latest polls. It is here that we can no longer rely on what our spouse or good friend believes. We need to ask ourselves life’s most important question.

This, of course, is what we are doing on this Confirmation Sunday; we are asking these young people who Jesus is for them; if they believe in him and if he is their Lord and Savior; if they intend to continue to live their faith through active worship, continued growth, and service in Christ’s church and to others?

Yet today we are also asking each parent, family member, worshipper and person who Jesus is for you? The Confirmation service is not simply for these young people, it is also a time for you to reaffirm your faith in Jesus; it is a time to recommit your life to being a disciple and follower of Jesus; it is a time to grow in your service to Christ’s church and to others.

Now the reason, my friends, our answer to this question is so important is because our answer actually determines how we are going to live each day. It also determines how we will spend eternity. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”* This means that it is through knowing Jesus as our Savior and friend that we also know God his Father. Therefore it is only through Jesus that we can enter into God’s kingdom.

Secondly, our answer to this question gives us the assurance that Jesus is with us always in the good times as well as the bad. We have the assurance that he is there to give us strength in the times of weakness and despair; to fill us with joy and peace. If Jesus was only a historical character, if he is not the Christ then we are all dreadfully alone.

Thirdly, our answer to this question also determines our capacity to love others. It is only in Jesus that we know what true love is—love that is patient and kind; not jealous or conceited or proud. Therefore, it is only as we live in fellowship with Jesus, only as we allow his love to fill us, that we are able to love others as he has loved us.

Fourthly, our answer to this question also determines how we will face death. The truth is that it is only in Jesus that we know that death has been swallowed up in victory; only Jesus is the resurrection and the life; only in Jesus has death lost its sting.

Finally, our answer to this question determines where we will spend eternity. John 3:36 says, *“Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, but whoever rejects Jesus will not see life.”* To know Jesus as the Christ, as our Savior and Lord, means we have the blessed assurance of eternal life in heaven when we die.

Who is Jesus for you, my friend? Is he someone you simply talk about in analytical terms or is he someone you know as a friend; someone you know in a personal way? May we all along with Peter be able to confess with boldness, “You, Jesus, are the Messiah!” You are my Savior and Lord. May that be your answer to life’s most important question.