

- ***READ Matthew 16:13-19*** Following a short stay in the region of Magada where Jesus was asked for a sign from heaven by the Pharisees and Sadducees, we find Jesus and His disciples in the area of Caesarea Philippi. This area was the furthest north that we see our Lord traveling to in His ministry, and it was also one of the more religious places in all of the land. This city was situated on the slope of Mount Hermon, and was at one point littered with temples dedicated to the worship of Baal. Greeks believed it to be the birthplace of the Greek god Pan, and there was even a great white marble temple dedicated Caesar worship.
 - It is in this place, backdropped by deep religious significance, that Jesus asks His disciples a very important question, *"Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"* They would've understand that Jesus was referring to Himself when He asks concerning the Son of Man. Jesus had previously spoken of Himself in the third person when He said in **Matthew 8:20**, *"the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."* The Apostles respond with different things they had heard. *"Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."* Jesus appreciated the responses, but then shifts the focus to a much more important question, *"But who do you say that I am?"* The ever outspoken Peter responds to this question with, *"You are the Christ, The Son of the living God,"* to which Jesus affirms as being the truth.
 - I am convinced that Jesus asked this question for a couple of reasons. Firstly, I believe Jesus asked this question because He wanted the Apostles to see the difference between man's understanding and God's reality. *"Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* I don't think this was necessarily a miraculous knowledge of Peter, but this could've been him simply considering the evidence objectively and without prejudice. More on this in just a few moments. But secondly, I believe Jesus asked them this question, because this is one of the most important question that men must answer. Who is Jesus to me? The answer we give to this question will dictate the course of faith we take in this life.
 - After spending much of our time focusing on Jesus, His character, and His mission during the first two or so months of the year as we read through John's Gospel; we are not going to transition to spending a great deal of time talking about discipleship. Our course of discipleship will be determined by our understanding of who Jesus is. Sure, there is an objective answer to who Jesus is, but the rubber really meets the road in our lives when we come to our own understanding of who He is within our own hearts and minds. Jesus asked this question to His disciples for a reason, and we want to ask ourselves this same question this morning as we seek to continue this year's focus of growing mightily and prevailing. Let's start with a bad habit that we often struggle with when it comes to asking ourselves this question.
- I. **Men have a bad habit of making Jesus into who they want Him to be.**
- A. This isn't anything new...men have always struggled with making deity into their own image.
1. In the giving of the ten great commandments in **Exodus 20**, God begins with two all important commandments. *"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God."* (**Exodus 20:3-5**) God's point was clearly and plainly made. *"I am a jealous God who will not tolerate you putting anything before Me or making me into something that I am not."* Nothing complicated here...
 2. Yet, we see the people, just twelve chapters later in **Exodus 32**, creating for themselves the very thing God had expressly forbidden them to create. Led by Aaron, the people fashion for themselves a golden calf. That's bad enough since God had said not to create any sort of idol, yet the greatest transgression was them stating, *"This is your God, O Israel, who brought you*

up from the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 32:4) This did nothing but incite the anger of the Lord, and He immediately told Moses to go back down to the people and let them know they were finished. Moses pleads for the people, and thankfully God changes His mind and relents.

(Exodus 32:11-14) Regardless, we see the extreme anger of God when people try to fashion Him into something of their own choosing.

B. Yet, people have done the exact same thing with Jesus.

1. No one that I know has actually fashioned Jesus into a golden half or anything of that nature, yet there are still many different other forms, shapes, and images that Jesus has been made into in the mind of many.
2. Some people see Jesus as our big brother. He is the Son of God, and we are children of God, so it is concluded that Jesus is simply our big brother. Others have formed within their minds that Jesus is simply a blessing giver and wish granter. *“Whatever you ask in My Name, that will I do.” (John 14:13)* Still others would view Jesus as a loving overlooker of sin. *“If He loved us enough to come to die for us, the why wouldn’t he be willing to overlook my imperfections?”* is something they might say. And still others might see Jesus as our scapegoat. He took the punishment for our sins on the cross so we are now free to live however we would like.
3. These and many other ways not listed are different forms that Jesus has taken in the mind of many men. Just as Jesus recognized that the men of His day misunderstood who He was and the nature of His mission, so people today continue to misunderstand Jesus and shape Him into the image they want for Him to take. Are we one of those individuals or will we allow for Jesus to be exactly who He is supposed to be in our hearts and minds?

II. This is problematic because it doesn’t allow for true discipleship.

A. When men make deity in their own image, they get to dictate how that image is served.

1. When people view Jesus as only our big brother in the faith, then sure they might look up to Him as an example of how they ought to live...but they might not be so willing to submit to Him as Lord. I mean...who here wants to submit to an older sibling? We see the problem created with this type of understanding of who Jesus is.
2. For those who see Jesus as simply a blessing giver and wish granter, what makes Him any different that a genie in a bottle? Does He become someone that we go to only when we are in need of something. Furthermore, what happens when we ask but don’t receive what we have asked for? That seems a bit problematic doesn’t it?
3. What about those who see Jesus as the loving overlooker and/or our scapegoat? Those people have no need to submit to Him as Lord because His love will cause Him to overlook anything we might do and His sacrifice has already paid the price for our sins. These images of Jesus seem mighty appealing, but they leave no room for discipleship.

B. When we make Jesus into what we want Him to be, this doesn’t allow for Him to hold the place of preeminence which He is deserving of.

1. True discipleship is found when we fully submit to the will of another, and this can’t be found when we have made Jesus into who we want for Him to be. We won’t submit to someone who is only our older sibling. We won’t submit to one we only see as a wish granter...we will only see him as a wishing well. We won’t submit as Lord and Master if we don’t think they will actually hold us accountable for our actions. Making Jesus into anything other than exactly who He is will only cause problems within our faiths.

2. This means that we must take a step by and instead of coming up with our own subject answer of who Jesus is, we simply survey the evidence and allow for Him to be exactly who He is. Yet again, this isn't something that people are often willing to do, and this was evident within Jesus's time on earth. In **John 6:15**, following Jesus's healing of many and feeding of the 5,000, we find the people trying to make Jesus their king. *"So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone."* Think about that...they were going to force Jesus to be king! This was ridiculous because Jesus was already going to be king! Yet...He wasn't going to be the type of king they wanted. Again, instead of allowing Jesus to be who who He was...they wanted to shape Him into who they wanted Him to be and that wasn't going to work at all. The same is true for us...we will never find success in our faiths and we will never follow Jesus as He deserves to be followed if we won't allow for Him to be exactly who He is supposed to be in our hearts and minds. So who is Jesus to us? Who is Jesus to me?

III. We must be like Peter and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and our Lord.

- A. While men had all of their ideas concerning who Jesus was, Peter relied upon the Lord for his understanding of the true identity of Jesus.
 1. Going back to our opening, Jesus commends Peter for his accurate acknowledgement of Jesus when He says, *"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* (**Matthew 16:17**) I'm not convinced this was a miraculous revelation from God, but I lean more towards this being Peter taking what God had given Him in the evidence and allowing Jesus to be exactly who He was.
 2. There was plenty of evidence to support Jesus's conclusion. There were numerous prophecies that had been fulfilled through Jesus's birth. In Matthew's Gospel we can count at least five within the first two chapters. In total there are at least 400 prophecies throughout the Old Testament that can be seen as being fulfilled in Jesus's life on earth.
 3. Furthermore, Jesus made plenty of claims that only deity could make. He claimed that people would call Him Lord at the judgment day. (**Matthew 7:22**) He claimed to be the living bread which had come down out of heaven. (**John 6:51**) He really ruffled some feathers when He claimed to have existed before Abraham lived. (**John 8:58**) There might have been a time when Jesus wasn't exactly forth coming with His deity, but that certainly couldn't be true of His entire ministry.
 4. We could look to the claims of John the Baptist (a man who some claimed that Jesus was Himself) to find evidence for Jesus's deity and lordship. "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, *"This was He whom I said, "He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."*...I AM A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD," (**John 1:15,23**) John claimed that Jesus wasn't just another prophet or man, but that He was something so much more...He was the Christ, the Messiah.
 5. Finally, Peter could look to the power that Jesus displayed and be fully convinced that Jesus was so much more than just a regular man or even just a great prophet. In all, the Gospel records about 35 miracles performed by Jesus, and John tells us He preformed so many more that are not recorded for us. (**John 20:30**) Yet, by the time we find Jesus her in Caesarea Philippi asking His Apostles who He is, Peter has already seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law (**Luke 4:38-41**), cause the draught of fish (**Luke 5:1-8**), and calm the sea with just His words. (**Matthew 8:23-27**) Peter put the pieces together in the moment concerning who Jesus was... will be be willing to look at the big picture contained with the Bible and do the same?

B. Only through our own personal acknowledgment of Jesus as such can we begin to submit and follow Him where it is that He desires.

1. If we are willing to step back and acknowledge Jesus for who He truly is...the Christ, the Son of God, and our Lord then we can begin to do that which is demanded of us as disciples. It is at this point that we will truly be willing to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him wherever it is that He might demand. **(Matthew 16:24-27)**
2. If we truly acknowledge Jesus for who He is then we will at this point be willing and even motivated to make big time changes where need be in our lives. Remember, Jesus preached a message of repentance **(Matthew 3:2)** and so did His Apostles **(Acts 2:38 & Romans 6)**. Therefore, we must be willing to change our lives upon committing to live for Jesus. Yet, if we only see Jesus as being anything less than Christ, God, and Lord then we are not going to be willing to sacrifice our own desires to make those necessary changes.
3. Finally, it isn't until we truly acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, our God, and our Lord that we will be willing to do all things that He commands us to do. Remember from last week, all authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth. He is the rightful authority in our lives and unless we submit to Him as such, we will not do what He says and truly be His disciples. **(Matthew 7:21-23)** We might trick ourselves into thinking we are true disciples without submitting to Him as Lord, but we will truly only be fools who are unwilling to elevate Jesus to where He ought to be. He deserves to be our Lord, and unless we submit to Him as Lord He will not and cannot be our Christ and Savior.

If Jesus were to stand here this morning and ask, "Who do men say that I am?" I believe we would have many different answers that we could give Him. Yet, the only question that would truly matter would be Him asking, "But who do you say that I am?" This is a question that we must answer. This is a question on which the fate of our souls hang. If He is anything less than Christ, God, and Lord then we are only setting ourselves up for failure. May we truly believe from our very souls that He is who He truly is so that we can become what He truly desires for us to become...disciples dedicated to Him in all things.

PRAYER *Our great and glorious Father in heaven...we humble ourselves before Your throne of might and power ever grateful for the glory of Your Son and everything He has done for us. We are a people so unworthy of Your grace and mercy, but Your Son is more than worthy of our love and devotion. Help each of us to become convinced within our own minds of who Your Son truly is. Help this acknowledgment to become a firm foundation for our faiths, and may we ever press on towards greater faith, discipleship, and obedience. Help us to grow and prevail and may it all be done to Your glory alone. Thank you for the gift of Your Son and His great sacrifice for us. It is in His name, Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God we pray...amen.*