

"Who do you say I am?"

Next week Sunday marks the beginning of what is often called Passion Week: beginning with the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday, leading to Jesus' death on the cross and concluding in victory as He rose from the grave. That's all to come, before that week there was a point in Jesus ministry that He set His face toward Jerusalem, knowing what was set before Him, aware of His purpose, the reason why He had come, Jesus made His way to Jerusalem for the final time.

Prior to this, He began speaking about His death – the fate that awaited Him in Jerusalem – to his disciples. Even though they didn't quite understand or at least accept what He was saying. Before Jesus spoke about His death – hinting at the reason why He had come – He had a particular conversation with His disciples – one that we find reported in the three Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

One day, while travelling around the Caesarea Philippi, Jesus was praying in private and His disciples were with Him, away from the crowds. Jesus asks His disciples a question – as He often did when teaching them:

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13)

Who do people say I am?

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Matthew 16:14)

Quick aside – how could people say John the Baptist when John baptised Jesus? Surely they couldn't think He was the same person? But not everyone saw that moment of Jesus' baptism. They'd heard about a great prophet ministering by the Jordan River, and now when they encountered Jesus they saw a great prophet who taught with authority, possibly leading them to think it was the same person.

We see in the other options given all are highly regarded prophets. The people recognised in Jesus that He was an important teacher of God's word. They recognised that He was a significant person – on par with the great faith leaders of their nation. They recognised that Jesus had both authority and power. People were drawn to Him, crowds gathered around Him.

Now Jesus wasn't asking His disciples about what people thought of Him just to boost His ego. No, rather He was leading up to His next question. The crux of the matter.

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

What about you, my disciples who have walked and talked with me, who have seen me at work preaching and teaching, healing the sick, restoring the broken, delivering the oppressed. You who have gotten to know me better than anyone else, ***Who do you say I am?***

I want to pause right there before we hear Peter's answer for the disciples because this question is probably the most important one that you will ever answer in this life.

But what about you? Who do you say that Jesus is?

Your answer to that question has an enormous impact on your life. And we each may have many answers to that question. Like the people we may say Jesus is a wise teacher, a good man, a servant of God. Or more personally we may say, Jesus is my friend, my comforter, my refuge.

All that is true. But there is one answer, a truth, that stands above all others.

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

The Messiah, "the anointed One". The one in whom all God's promises are fulfilled. The one who is God – the Son of the living God. The Saviour, the one who has come to deliver us.

Jesus responds to Peter in saying: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

This correct conclusion about the person of Christ was not something Simon Peter could have worked out on his own. It was a revelation from God in his heart and it would bring great blessing into His life. It would be a foundational rock on which he could build his life. In fact, Jesus says to him that he is Peter (Cephas) which means “rock”, so transformed he would be from acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah.

The fact that Jesus is the Messiah, He is our Saviour, is the foundational truth of our faith. The Easter story demonstrates just what kind of Messiah Jesus is. Many of the Jews were expecting a great military leader who would deliver them from Roman oppression, bringing about a golden age for their nation like it was under King David and King Solomon. But Jesus’ purpose was much greater than that. He had come to save all people, to open up the kingdom of heaven to all who would place their trust in His saving grace. To do this Jesus would have to die, paying the price for all our sin.

As He set His face towards Jerusalem for this purpose, He would share with His disciples that this is what had to come to pass. Many of them couldn’t understand this. Peter even rebuked Jesus! But God’s plan would not be thwarted and would not end in sorrow for Jesus predicted that He would rise again on the third day.

This is still to come in the story, the story that we will be telling and remembering once again this Easter period. For today and going ahead into Easter, I want to ask you to prepare your hearts as you consider that question:

Who do you say that Jesus is? Who is Jesus in your life?

I pray that the Lord would reveal, by His Holy Spirit in your heart, the truth about Jesus. That you would know Him as Lord and Saviour. That you would know Him as your deliverer – the giver of life eternal. That you would trust in Him. That you would place your hope in Him. For this will be a rock, a firm foundation in your life. It will affect every aspect of your life in the now and the future to come.

To close I would like to share a portion from Psalm 33 as relates to us – God’s chosen people – called by His name.

Psalm 33:12-22

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people He chose for His inheritance.

From heaven the LORD looks down
and sees all mankind;

from His dwelling place He watches
all who live on earth—

He who forms the hearts of all,
who considers everything they do.

No king is saved by the size of his army;
no warrior escapes by his great strength.

A horse is a vain hope for deliverance;
despite all its great strength it cannot save.

But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear Him,
on those whose hope is in His unfailing love,
to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the LORD;
He is our help and our shield.

In Him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in His holy name.
May your unfailing love be with us, LORD,
even as we put our hope in You.