

What Do You Say? Mathew 16:13-20

Life is a journey of learning, and one of the ways we learn is by asking questions. They begin at a young age, soon after we learn how to talk. Where is my mommy? When are we going to eat lunch? Are we there yet? How much longer? As we get older, the questions become more difficult. Why is the sky blue? How come that boy is in a wheelchair? Why did Grandma get sick? We also learn by answering questions. What is 2 x 3? Where is the capital of Ohio? What is the 1st book of the Bible? Who is Jesus?

The simple who, what and where questions are the easiest to answer. Your mommy went to the mall and she'll be back later. We will eat when supper is ready. We are almost there. Jesus is God's Son. Other than those embarrassing questions that arise concerning certain products on television commercials, it is the why questions that are the hardest to answer. The sky is blue because God made it that way. Wheelchairs and hospitals are part of living in a fallen world.

Though we often turn to the Bible for answers to the questions of life, we also should not overlook the powerful questions that God has placed there for our benefit. They are there to help us avoid the mistakes of others, to teach us how to live our life in a way that is pleasing to God, and to help us overcome our fears and doubts. Let's consider a few of them this morning.

One of the earliest questions in human history is found the OT book of Genesis. It's the famous question that Satan asked Eve to cast doubt on the goodness of God. "Did God really say that you shouldn't eat from any tree in the garden?" It was a clever question, one that Eve got wrong, and it led to a series of bad choices and decisions that continue to affect humanity thousands of years later. Many times one question leads to another, and soon God asks a series of pointed questions of Adam as he and his wife are trying to hide from Him after eating the forbidden fruit: *3:9- Adam, where are you? Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?*

A few chapters later, shortly after murdering his brother Cain asked God this question that we too need to consider: Gen 4:9 *Am I my brother's keeper?*

And this one found in 2 Chron 6:18 *But will God really dwell on earth with men?*

Bible teacher Warren Weirsbe claims that there are over 300 questions alone in the book of Job.

Job 2:10 Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?

Job 9:2 How can a mortal be righteous before God?

The author of Malachi asks this favorite question of pastors and church treasurers everywhere *Mal 3:8- Will a man rob God?*

Those are all powerful questions to be sure. But it's Mathew's Gospel that contains some of the best questions in the Scriptures.

2:2 Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?

5:13- You are the salt of the earth but if the salt loses its flavor, what good is it?

6:25 Is not life more than food or clothing?

7:3- Why do you look at the speck in your brothers' eye but don't consider the board in your own?

18:21 "How many times should I forgive my brother"?

22:36 "Which is the greatest commandment"?

8:27 "Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey them"?

Which brings us to the Scripture text that we just heard. Jesus began teaching that day by taking an opinion poll of the disciples where He asked them a simple question. Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am? Perhaps like a judge trying to seat an impartial jury Jesus wanted to know if they had been influenced by the media hype surrounding Him or if they were willing to believe what Jesus told them to be true.

Though there was no television, no radio, no internet and no cell phones in those times the news of His amazing miracles had still quickly spread across Galilee. People everywhere were talking about this person named Jesus. He brought sight to the blind, cast out demons, raised the dead and fed 15000 people with a few fish and 5 loaves of bread, yet He wasn't the least bit interested in running for king or governor. He could have had a thriving medical practice or ran the most profitable grocery in town but instead He chose to keep preaching about the Kingdom of Heaven. And even though the disciples had witnessed those miracles with their own eyes, they still weren't quite sure what to make of Him either.

His preaching was the best they had ever heard, His knowledge of the Scriptures was unsurpassed, yet He had little regard for the religious leaders of the day. Perhaps like we do when we discuss political candidates, they asked each other – what do you think about Jesus? Is He for real? Though they dared not ask, the question in their minds was the same one John the Baptist asked Jesus in Luke 7:20. Are you the coming one, the Messiah or do we look for another?

Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am? After hearing their answers, Jesus asked the question a bit differently. So much for what the world says, what do you say? Who do you say that I am? If you think about it, it is probably the most important question in the Bible. It was not just a question for Peter and the disciples, it is a question for each of us. How we answer is even more important.

Will our answer be like that of the world and be influenced by things happening around us? When things are going as planned it is much easier to say Jesus is Lord. But what happens when our world seems to be crashing in around us? Who do we say He is then? Does it become a question of My God why has thou forsaken me?

Will our answer be like that of the world and be influenced by those around us? It is one thing to say Jesus is Lord when we are in church surrounded by the saints, but what about those times when we are among those who don't believe like we do? Are we still willing to stand up for Jesus, even though we might be accused of being closed minded, a fundamentalist or a Bible thumper?

Will our answer be influenced by the world or will it be guided by the Holy Spirit? The world may say Jesus was a good teacher, but as His followers we say He is the teacher of teachers, the One that created the world and everything in it, including the whole concept of teaching and learning. The world may say He is a fictional character, someone made up by the church to coerce people to do what we don't want to do. We say He is someone who came to show us and help us do what God wants us to do. The world may say He was a prophet like Jeremiah and Isaiah. We say that He is God revealed to us in human form, the one and only Son of God. The world says He is just one of the many ways we can get in touch with God. We say that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him.

So, who do **you** say Jesus is? I pray our answer will be like that of Peter and the church. You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Whether we are on the highest mountaintop or in the deepest valley of life, it is only by His grace that we can bow down on our knees and confess that He is risen from the dead and He is Lord, I pray you will join me in asking God for grace to allow us to remain the "we" of the church and overcome the "me" of the world. Amen