



January 10, 2021
“Who Is Jesus?”
Matthew 16
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There are many views about the identity of Jesus. Was he just a good teacher, an enlightened man, or a popular prophet? Modern religions think so. But Jesus is more than those things. In Matthew 16, Jesus takes his disciples to a place called Caesarea Philippi to discuss his true identity as the Christ, the Son of God. In today’s message, Pastor Gary exposes the historical and modern myths about who Jesus is, as most importantly, he shares Scripture that proves Jesus’ true identity.

Historical Background

1. The reason Jesus didn’t want the multitudes to know his true identity was because he was on a divine timetable.
 - a. Jesus’ mission and ministry was directed by God the Father.
 - b. Jesus didn’t want to be “popularized” because his ministry and mission needed to be his first priority.
 - c. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem before the Passover, he became widely known, and the religious rulers sought to have him killed.

2. The true identity of Jesus is laid out in Matthew 16.
 - a. There has always been a misunderstanding about who Jesus really is.
 - b. Jesus was intentional about going on a long-distance journey (about thirty miles from Capernaum, Jesus’ ministry base) to bring the disciples to Caesarea Philippi.
 - i. A trip to Caesarea Philippi would be unusual in that it wasn’t really on the way to any place.
 1. For Cornerstone Chapel attenders it would be like walking up Route 15 thirty miles to a destination in Frederick, Maryland for a Bible study, and then making the return trip.
 - ii. Caesarea Philippi is in the northern-most part of Israel, just beyond the

Golan Heights, at the base of Mount Hermon.

- iii. The headwaters of the Jordan River flow from a cavern underneath the base of Mount Hermon.
- iv. In Jesus' day this area was a bustling metropolis and would have been called "Sin City" in modern terms, a Las Vegas if you will.
- v. There was nothing godly about the people or the culture, and there was certainly nothing Jewish about the people or the culture.
- vi. The fact is that it was **very** secular and **very** pagan and **very** worldly. (Emphasis added)
- vii. It was first called Pnias by the Greeks because it was created to be a shrine to the Greek mythological god, Pan.
 1. Pan was half-man and half-goat, having pointed ears and pointed horns, and seems to always be seen as playing the flute.
 2. Pan was the god of the fields, forests, flocks and shepherds, and rustic music.
 3. Disney created Peter Pan after this mythological god.
 4. The English word panic comes from the god Pan because Pan would make eerie, scary sounds that frightened people.
- viii. Herod Philip II, a son of Herod the Great, was the tetrarch of this region.
 1. He changed the name to Caesarea Philippi and made it the capital of this part of Northern Israel.
 2. The name change was a tribute to Caesar Augustus as well as himself!
 3. Under Herod Philip there was a major increase in paganism and polytheism.
- ix. The Shrine of Pan
 1. Also located at the Shrine of Pan was the Temple of Caesar Augustus, the Temple of Zeus, and the Temple of Pan and the Dancing Goats.
 - a. Goats were worshiped and sacrifices were made to goats at this temple.
 - b. It's horrific to consider, but people had sexual relations with goats at the temple.

3. **Matthew 16:13** – *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"*

- a. Matthew used the title *"Son of Man"* for Jesus more than thirty times in his Gospel.
- b. The title *"Son of Man"* is a Messianic title first used by the prophet Daniel.
 - i. **Daniel 7:13a** – *"I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!"*
 - ii. **Matthew 24:30** – *"Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see*

the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

- iii. **Revelation 1:7** - *“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”*
- c. The disciples told Jesus that people thought he was one of three men who were already dead, Elijah, John the Baptist, or Jeremiah.
 - i. Elijah died eight hundred years before Christ.
 - ii. Jeremiah died six hundred years before Christ.
 - iii. John the Baptist was beheaded shortly before this conversation between Jesus and the disciples.
 - iv. People mistakenly thought that Jesus was a prophet who came back from the dead.
 - v. Herod Agrippa thought the same thing.
 - 1. **Mark 6:16** - *“But when Herod heard, he said, ‘This is John, whom, I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!’ ”*
- d. John the Baptist
 - i. John was a zealous, confrontational, abrasive, unapologetic, and speak-the-truth kind of man.
 - ii. John performed no miracles during his ministry.
 - iii. John’s was a prophetic ministry whose message challenged politicians and the general population.
 - iv. Many people have always liked **the confrontational Jesus**. (Emphasis added)
- e. Elijah
 - i. Elijah was known for his miracles and power-filled ministry.
 - 1. Elijah raised a widow’s son from the dead.
 - 2. Elijah called down fire from heaven to destroy the enemies of God.
 - 3. Elijah touched the Jordan River with a rolled up cloak, which parted so that he could cross.
 - 4. Elijah did not experience natural death but was taken to heaven in a whirlwind!
 - ii. Many people have always liked **the powerful Jesus**. (Emphasis added)
- f. Jeremiah
 - i. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because he wept over the sin of the people.
 - ii. He was known for being tenderhearted and full of compassion for his people, the Jews, who, because they didn’t like his message, betrayed and persecuted him.
 - iii. Many people have always liked **the compassionate Jesus, who is full of grace, mercy, and love**. (Emphasis added)

g. Jesus

- i. Jesus was the confrontational, unapologetic proclaimer of truth like John the Baptist.
- ii. Jesus did miracles and was powerful like Elijah.
- iii. Jesus had mercy, love, and compassion for sinners like Jeremiah.

4. Who is Jesus to the people of our day?

a. Muslims

- i. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet and not the Son of God.
- ii. Muslims believe Jesus was inferior to Mohammed.
- iii. The Koran, which was written six centuries after Christ, teaches that Jesus was not crucified and, therefore, not raised from the dead.
 1. Surah 14.157 – "... their saying: 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary,' the Messenger of Allah – whereas in fact they had neither slain him nor crucified him but the matter was made dubious to them – and those who differed about it too were in a state of doubt! They have no definite knowledge of it, but merely follow conjecture; and they surely slew him not..."
- iv. **Choose to believe eyewitnesses of the first century about who Jesus is!** (Emphasis added)

b. Mormons

- i. Mormons believe Jesus was the spirit brother of Lucifer.
- ii. Mormons believe a council of gods selected Jesus to be the redeemer for the world instead of Lucifer, which caused Lucifer to rebel against God.
- iii. The Book of Mormon was first published in March 1830.
- iv. Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon based on his translation of writings found on golden tablets he said he found in Palmyra, New York.
- v. These tablets were never seen by anyone and mysteriously disappeared.
- vi. **Choose to believe eyewitnesses of the first century about who Jesus is!** (Emphasis added)

c. Jehovah's Witnesses

- i. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus was the created being, the Archangel Michael.
- ii. **Choose to believe eyewitnesses of the first century about who Jesus is!** (Emphasis added)

d. Hindus

- i. Hindus believe that Jesus was simply one of many Ishtas.
- ii. Ishta is a form of the divine.
- iii. Hindus rank Jesus among Rama, Krishna, and Buddha.

- iv. **Choose to believe eyewitnesses of the first century about who Jesus is!** (Emphasis added)
- e. Buddhists
 - i. Buddhists believe that Jesus was just an enlightened man.
 - ii. **Choose to believe eyewitnesses of the first century about who Jesus is!** (Emphasis added)

5. The Discovery of Truth

- a. Pastor Gary said, “In the discovery of truth there is a law of logic called the law of non-contradiction. [It] basically states this: contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time in the same context. Now, two opposing views can be both false, but it is impossible... that two opposing views could both be right. So, when you look at all the various views in the world about Jesus, it is intellectually dishonest to say that the Muslim view, and the Mormon view, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses view, and the Hindu view, and the Buddhist view, and the biblical view are all compatible. Not at all! They contradict the Bible. So, then you have to make a choice and in your discovery of truth, do I want to believe texts that are outdated, that were not eyewitness accounts, that [were] written on golden tablets in Palmyra, New York? Or do [you] want to take what the Bible says at face value as a historical document that records the first century eyewitness accounts?”

6. **Matthew 16:15** – *“But who do you say that I am?”*

- a. **Matthew 16:16** – *“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ ”*
 - i. The word Christ in English comes from the Greek word Christos.
 - ii. The Hebrew word is Mashiah, which in English is translated Messiah.
 - iii. Both Christ and Messiah mean the same thing: Anointed One.
- b. Peter was declaring that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One who was the fulfillment of the more than three hundred Old Testament prophecies about the one whom God the Father would send to be the Savior.
- c. Pastor Gary said, “Now we can appreciate... why Jesus took them to Caesarea Philippi for this conversation. He wanted to take them to the backdrop of secular views and pagan culture to get them to testify [about who they said Jesus was] against all the various contradictory and confusing voices about who [he was]. He [looked] at his disciples and said, ‘But who do you guys say that I am? Against all of the secular views and voices about me are you willing to believe and to declare my true identity?’ That’s what he [was] asking them. How easy would it have been for Jesus to take his disciples to the synagogue in Capernaum right where he was based [to] have this conversation? Why didn’t he do that? Or it would have been a little bit longer of a hike, but not as far as Caesarea Philippi, to go to Jerusalem. Why didn’t

he go to the Temple and have this very spiritual conversation? ... The reason he didn't take them to the synagogue or the Temple, [but instead took them] to one of the most pagan places in that area at that particular time, was because he was forcing his followers to make a bold declaration. He was confronting them outside their comfort zone. He was taking them to a place that flaunted secular thought, that flaunted pagan culture. And against that backdrop Jesus [asked] not just 'what does the world think of me?' but 'what do you think of me? Are you willing to depart from the worldly views and thoughts in order to definitively testify as to who I really am?' [That's] why he [took] them there. Friends, it's easy to come to church and sing worship songs and in the comfort of church to say, 'Yes, Jesus is Lord.' But your Caesarea Philippi is [outside of the church]! Will you testify of him there? That's the bigger question. Will you testify to who he really is as he reveals himself in the pages of the Bible according to first century eyewitness accounts? Will you testify to who Jesus is in your Caesarea Philippi? ... It's going outside the church against the backdrop in a world that is often dark [and] sometimes hostile against Christianity. [People] have a cynical view of Jesus, even sometimes an evil, perverted view of Jesus. Will you in face of that kind of worldly culture and influence still rise up and declare the true identify of who Jesus is?"

7. Jesus is God

- a. **John 14:9** - *"Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father...'"*
- b. **John 10:30** - *"I and My Father are one."*
- c. **Hebrews 1:3** - *"... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..."*
- d. **John 1:14** - *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*
- e. Jesus was saying that he was God, meaning that he was God in essence and nature, having all of the attributes of God.
- f. Pastor Gary said, "Jesus was just a good man. He wasn't just a good teacher. He wasn't just a popular prophet. And he certainly wasn't the spirit brother of Lucifer! Nor was he the Archangel Michael! He [was/is] the Christ! He is the Messiah! He is the Son of the living God! God in flesh who came to earth to redeem us from our sins, who entered humanity through the virgin womb of a young woman named Mary. Divinity clothed [in] humanity. [Jesus] died on a rugged cross and he rose from a borrowed tomb and he's coming again for a ready bride, [the Church]! That's [who Jesus is]!"

8. Peter

- a. **Matthew 16:17-18** – *“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’”*
- b. Jesus did not establish the Church on a human being.
- c. Jesus gave Simon a new name: Peter.
 - i. The Greek word for Peter is petros,¹ which is a proper masculine noun that means little pebble or tiny stone.
 - ii. The Greek word for rock is petra,² which is a proper feminine noun that means boulder.
- d. The Roman Catholic Church wrongly believes that Jesus made Peter the foundation of the Church.
- e. The Church was built on the pronouncement he made that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.
- f. Pastor Gary said, “The Church might be tested, and the Church might be tried, but the gates of hell will not prevail against God’s Church. ... No political agenda, no worldly ambitions, no satanic schemes will ever prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ, ever, ever!”

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Matthew 16:13-20** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Provide an overview of Caesarea Philippi and its history. (See #1 and #2 above)
3. Read and discuss the Scriptures that speak of Jesus as the Son of Man. (See #3a through #3c above)
4. Spend time talking about Elijah, John the Baptist, Jeremiah, and Jesus. (See #3d through #3H above)
5. Allow the people in your group to share their personal experiences or experiences with other Christians and/or churches regarding the characteristics of Jesus they liked or embraced the most. (See bold font in #3e through #3g above)
6. Spend time talking about who Jesus is to many people in the world today. (See #4 above)

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g4074>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g4073>

7. How did the Holy Spirit minister to you so that you came to believe the eyewitness accounts about Jesus in the New Testament?
8. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about discovery of truth. (See #5 above)
9. Spend time talking about Pastor Gary's comments about the reason Jesus took the disciples to Caesarea Philippi. (See #6 above)
10. Read and discuss the Scriptures concerning Jesus clearly stating the fact that he was God. (See #7a through #7d above)
11. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about Jesus. (See #7e and #7f above)
12. If you have people in your group who have a Catholic background it may be helpful for you to include time for a discussion about the biblical understanding of what the Church is built upon versus the teaching of the Catholic Church that the Church is built upon Peter. (See #8 above)
13. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)