



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

• WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? TOUGH QUESTIONS: JESUS EDITION • MATTHEW 16:13-20 •

MAIN POINT

Belief in Jesus as the Son of God is the foundation of the church.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the different ways you have heard Jesus described by non-Christians, either people you know or references you have heard in pop culture?

Why do you think people vary so widely on who they understand Jesus to be?

What do you consider to be the most important thing to believe about Jesus?

There has never been a person more famous, or controversial, than Jesus. Even during His day, everyone seemed to have an opinion about who He was and what He came to do. Some thought Him to be a great teacher; others saw Him as a miracle worker; still more concluded that He was possessed by a demon. Similarly, opinions still abound today about who Jesus is. The question of Jesus' identity is the most important question any of us will answer in life, and it is the foundational truth that unites His church.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 16:13-14.

Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man.” What does this title infer about Jesus’ character and mission?

“Son of Man” is the title Jesus used most often for Himself. More than 80 times is this title used in all four Gospels. It is a messianic title that refers back to the mysterious figure in Daniel 7:13-14 who would be given rule over all nations of the earth forever. Further, it is a title that highlights Jesus’ role as a humble servant who came to forgive sins, and a suffering servant who would pay the penalty for sins through His death. Yet because of these things, the title also infers that Jesus is the glorious King and Judge of the world who will one day eternally establish God’s kingdom on earth.

What do the different answers given by the disciples say about Jesus’ reputation in the culture at the time?

How would you describe who Jesus is to someone who isn’t a believer?

All the opinions the disciples reported were complimentary and demonstrate that Jesus remained quite popular. The crowds viewed Him as some kind of spokesman for God.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 16:15-16.

Rather than question the merit of their answers, Jesus questioned the personal beliefs of His disciples. Why was this the case?

Jesus wanted the disciples to move beyond the culture’s understanding of who He was. He wanted to know what they personally believed about Him, and as we see later in the text, He wanted them to know what they must believe about Him. Jesus also wanted to be sure His disciples were prepared before His death and had to know if they understood His identity, in particular that it entailed suffering. Because the disciples would carry His message into the world, they needed to be clear on His identity, not given to whatever the culture at the time thought about Him.

What do we learn about Jesus from Peter’s response?

What implications for someone’s life does claiming that Jesus is the Christ have?

To this pointed inquiry, Peter affirmed his faith in Jesus with two specific titles: Messiah or Christ (“anointed one”) and Son of the living God. Peter declared publicly that Jesus was the promised One from the Old Testament who fulfilled all the prophecies of God’s

anointed messenger. But Peter's answer didn't come on His own; it came because God had revealed it to him. As the Christ, Jesus brought God's complete message to earth; no one would ever be greater. The time comes when we must answer for ourselves who Jesus is and what He came to do, and see if our actions line up with our beliefs.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ MATTHEW 16:17-20.

Why do you think Jesus praised Peter for his confession?

Jesus affirmed Peter's response for at least two reasons: it was true, and it was revealed to Peter by the Father. Others who looked at the evidence attributed Jesus' work to a human prophet. Peter looked at the same evidence and pronounced Jesus the Christ. Jesus attributes to Peter's confession insight stemming from divine revelation rather than human deduction. The language does not specify how God revealed Himself or require some sudden flash of insight, but it does affirm that God led Peter to his correct understanding.

These verses help us understand that Jesus' confession of Jesus as the Son of God would become the foundation on which Jesus would build His church.

Why is this the only sure foundation for the church?

How can reaffirming Christ as the foundation of the church help us be more effective in reaching others with the gospel?

What forces at work in our society seem to threaten the church? How does it feel to know that nothing can overpower it? How does it impact our work in proclaiming the gospel through it?

As Christ's followers, we cannot become so inwardly focused on the church that we forget its mission—to proclaim the gospel to the world. Only Christ can overcome the darkness, brokenness, and lostness of our society. The gospel isn't just for us. The gospel is for the world. When we come to a place where we know who Jesus is and defend Him as Lord and Savior, we're called to live out His Word and share that truth with those around us.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

If you are a Christian, then what was the most significant factor that led you to confess Jesus as the Christ?

How can the reality that God's church is unstoppable because of its foundation impact your life today? Tomorrow?

What are some specific ways you can engage those around you with the truth of the gospel?

PRAYER

Close in a prayer of praise and gratitude to God for sending Jesus to be our Messiah and for establishing the church on the sure foundation of Him.

COMMENTARY

| MATTHEW 16:13-20

Jesus wanted to be sure His disciples were prepared before His death and had to know if they understood His identity, in particular that it entailed suffering. His question invited the disciples to reflect on the many opinions about Him. He was certainly a well-known figure. Because the disciples would carry His message into the world, they needed to be clear on His identity. Each of the proposed identities was highly respectful and recognized in some way Jesus was God's special spokesman. But "you" reflects the emphatic nature of Jesus' question.

Peter's answer was accurate. His claim is a far greater than any of the other opinions. To be the Messiah meant Jesus was God's chosen servant and Son. He brought God's complete message to earth. No one ever would be greater.

Jesus affirmed Peter's response in a typical Jewish manner, "you are blessed." All genuine spiritual insight is a gift and not a matter of human ingenuity or flesh and blood. We never really figure out God. He reveals. Thus Jesus affirmed Peter's confession came from the Father in heaven.

Jesus used a play on words to underscore the importance of Peter's confession. Peter in Greek is Petros, and the Greek word for rock is petra. Peter's insight was highly significant. Though we may rightly assume he spoke for the group, he nevertheless was the first one to voice this important identification. Peter seldom chose the path of silence; and though

he was not always right, he was never in doubt. In this case, however, he was perfectly right; and in keeping with his personality, he confidently expressed his opinion.

So what did Jesus mean by on this rock I will build my church? Possibilities include Peter himself, his faith, his confession, Christ Himself, or a combination. We can acknowledge Peter had a primary place in the early church, appearing first in every list of the disciples and being the focus of the first half of the Book of Acts.

The word "forces" refers to the limited power of Hades, but the church's power in Christ is limitless. Jesus meant the forces of hell could not defeat or impede a faithful church that is focused on Him.

Keys are a symbol of authority and imply the power to bind (forbid) and loose (allow). The phrases are often interpreted to mean the actions of the church are anticipated already by heaven and will have been ratified already there. This interpretation emphasizes the truth that "earth follows heaven, and heaven does not follow earth."

Jesus' point is not that God delegates His authority to the church, or to Peter specifically, to act on its own. The church neither forgives nor retains sins. It does not deliver people to heaven by its own work. It does, however, serve as the main instrument through which God works to proclaim the gospel.

The charge to keep silent is often found in the Gospels. Jesus knew that the Jews' view of the Messiah as a political, military deliverer was vastly different from the kind of Messiah He was. Jesus was a suffering Messiah who would save people from their sins, not a political deliverer. Announcing that He was the Christ might confuse the crowds at this point. Later the disciples could announce His identity. Keeping silent reflects the fact that, prior to witnessing Jesus' suffering, the disciples would have shared an incomplete message of who the Messiah was and what following Him means.