

“Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”

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We just celebrated a great week of crafts, activities, and teaching with our Vacation Bible School. We had over a 100 kids laughing, singing, and learning about Jesus. I had the privilege of teaching these young students and helping them to be introduced to the big questions of life. One of those questions that we spent time discussing was the most important question anyone will ever have to answer. It is the question that Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”

There are some interesting background details that provide an even greater appreciation for Jesus asking his disciples this question. It wasn't that common for Jesus to travel outside of the regions of Israel proper. Yet one day Jesus took His disciples on a trip to the far north at the base of Mt. Hermon. The narrative in Matthew 16:13-27 tells us that Jesus took them to the site of Caesarea Philippi. This was probably one of the most pagan cities in the entire land of Israel, which had temples to Zeus, Augustus and a sanctuary to the Greek god Pan. Why would Jesus take His disciples to this place? Didn't He teach them to worship the true God of Israel only?

It was here in this place surrounded by all forms of idol worship and false religion that Jesus confronted His disciples with the question, “Who do you say that I am?” His disciples had a choice to make. Jesus claimed to be God's unique Son and demonstrated the proof of those claims through miracles and also fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament related to the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah, but His disciples needed to decide whom they were going to put their trust in. Jesus deliberately put Himself in the midst of the other “gods” that were worshiped by others at that time. It was as if Jesus was saying, “which god are you going to worship? I have made some very bold claims, who have you decided that I really am?”

It is no different today. There is so much confusion today in the realm of religion. There are those who follow their religion and rituals of atheism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, etc., but Jesus claimed to be the one and only way to God (John 14:6). These religions all have an answer to Jesus' question even though they diminish who He claimed to be. Atheism has ventured away from denying Jesus' existence. There is too much secular evidence for that. Instead they will acknowledge Jesus as a Jewish guy who died because He was a revolutionary. Islam sees Jesus as a prophet, but denies Him as a crucified savior who is resurrected from the dead and now sitting at God's right hand waiting to return in glory. Hinduism and Buddhism see Jesus as just one of many enlightened “Christ” figures and definitely not having any sort of relationship with the universe that isn't open to other enlightened people. Judaism rejects Jesus as Messiah and sees Him as a wannabe messianic figure that now has millions of deceived followers. Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh (John 10:31-39). His disciples taught that He was the Son of God and thus deity (John 1:1-3; 5:18; 8:58). The Pharisees understood His claims and sought to stone Him for it. C.S. Lewis famously wrote that Jesus is either a Liar, Lunatic, or is really Lord of Heaven. He says, “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his

feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” It’s my encouragement to you to pursue and think out thoroughly your answer to to this question. Philippians 2:10-11 reads, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” We all will be bowing to the Lord Jesus Messiah, but will it be forced or with a great love for Him? The choice is yours. Have a blessed week.

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