

"WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Matthew 16:13-18

I was actually there, there at the place where Jesus had this conversation with His disciples in the place known as Caesarea Philippi. The area is today known as Banyas and is located on the terraced slopes at the foot of Mount Hermon at the northern end of what is today known as the Golan Heights. At this location out of a huge open-faced cave in the rock flows one of the principle sources of the Jordan River. And at that same cave at the head of the river are the sites of three ancient temples: one to the Canaanite god Baal-gad. The second, and at the time of the Greeks and after the conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., a temple was built at this site on tip of the old shrine to Pan and the Nymphs. And third, in Roman times, Herod built a marble temple there in honor of the Emperor Augustus and renamed the city Caesarea. I was there where this dialogue between Jesus and His disciples occurred, there in the place where three temples once stood.

So with this in mind, Jesus looks at His disciples and asks them a very pointed question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And we read, now remember this is what other people were saying, "John the Baptist," "Elijah," Jeremiah or one of the prophets." That is what others were saying at that time who Jesus was. Now let me stop us right there and analyze what these disciples have said. The names they gave tell us a lot about how the people at large perceived Him. This is not the "meek and mild Jesus," or the Jesus that puts little children on His lap. No, this is a Jesus like one of the wild prophets of ancient or even recent times who was not afraid to stand up and speak God's word against wicked and rebellious kings who sat in high places. So there was this prophetic ministry of Jesus but it went even deeper than that. And that is why He wanted to find out what they thought and so He asks them. Jesus takes it to another level, for He asks His disciples in verse 15, "But who do you say that I am?" O.K. now Jesus is making it personal; He is bringing it home.

I don't know if there was a pregnant pause, and some shuffling of some feet and some looks away from Jesus, hoping that He didn't call one of them by name and say, "Andrew, what about you" or "James, who do you say that I am?" We don't read any of this. But what we do read in verse 16 is that, "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah [or the Christ], the Son of the living God.'" You see, Jesus was not only God's mouthpiece as the prophets were, but He was God's Messiah. So if He spoke God's word against any rulers who were wicked He was God's king who would replace them. And Peter had come to that conclusion, and maybe others had as well but where not so quick to speak, like Peter. So Peter steps up to the plate and basically says, "You're the One."

The past two Sundays during our 9 a.m. worship service we have ordained and installed or installed 7 Elders and 6 Deacons. They were asked a series of questions and the first one that they needed to respond to was, "Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior; acknowledge him Lord of all

and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?" And today, Sabryna was asked the question, "Do you confess your faith in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord?"

You see, this question, "Who do you say that I am?" is one that each and every person alive or dead has or will have to answer. That is why it is so crucial for anyone who becomes a member of this church or any Presbyterian Church, that is why it is so crucial for anyone who becomes a Minister or Elder or Deacon in the Presbyterian Church has to answer the question who Jesus is. And it is sad to say there are people in our churches who aren't always quite sure who Jesus is. Some might say He was a great teacher; some might say He was a great philosopher; some might say He was a great example; some might say He is just one of many ways to God. So you could have people, even in the church who have different ideas about who Jesus is.

One Sunday D.M. Stearns was preaching at a church in Philadelphia. At the close of the service a stranger came up to him and said, "I don't like the way you spoke about the cross. I think that instead of emphasizing the death of Christ, it would be far better to preach Jesus, the teacher and example." Stearns replied, "If I presented Christ in that way, would you be willing to follow Him?" "I certainly would," said the stranger without hesitation. "All right then," said the preacher, "let's take the first step. He did no sin. Can you claim that for yourself?" The man looked confused and somewhat surprised. "Why, no," he said. "I acknowledge that I do sin." Stearns replied, "Then your greatest need is to have a Savior, not an example!" [Source Unknown.](#)

My friend, Dr. Andrew Purves, Professor of Reformed Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and who, by the way, has preached from this pulpit on a few occasions for our Scottish Sunday, Kirkin 'o the Tartan Sunday writes these disturbing words that should be a wake-up call for the

Church. He writes, "The loss of clarity regarding the identity of Jesus Christ has brought us today to a moment of foundational theological peril of gigantic proportions. The monument to this, as far as North American Protestantism is concerned is, sadly, a disintegrating church and a collapsing ethic. When all around there is a profound sense of spiritual hunger that gives the church an extraordinary evangelical opportunity, the church seems to have become a lifeless bugle that plays uncertain and indistinct notes (I Corinthians 14:7-8), because it has lost confidence in the core gospel message: Jesus fully and truthfully reveals God because he is God, and Jesus alone saves us from sin and brings us home to the Father.

From the very beginning and no less so today, the core issue that has concentrated the mind of the church has been to understand and proclaim with conviction the singular Lordship of Jesus Christ. The position taken on every other issue in doctrine, in practical faith, in ethics and in ministry and mission, without exception, comes from our understanding and acceptance

of the sole saving Lordship of Jesus, the only Son of the Father. One false move here and the whole system of Christian faith and life moves fatally off course. We deny that Jesus Christ is one Lord among many others because we affirm that Jesus Christ is Lord of all." (*The Ordination Vows*, PFR reform, Vol. 1 No. 1, Fall, 1998, p. 10-11)

Earlier today, Sabryna Wilson proclaimed Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. Her parents-Bobby and Wendy Wilson didn't speak for her; her sponsor, Elaine Roberts presented her to the congregation but Elaine did not speak for Nina; neither did her grandparents or anyone else who stood up front with her today speak for her. She spoke for herself. This is her faith and no one else's. For no generation can live off the faith of the previous generation. This is her faith experience and it needs to be firsthand for Sabryna, not something that is handed down, in essence, a secondhand faith. Because when faced with times of trouble, and Oh, there will be times of trouble, the faith that is not personalized is very likely to have problems,

it is very likely to drift and even falter. Now don't get me wrong, it is wonderful that Sabryna's Mom and Dad are believers, that Sabryna's grandparents are believers and the Christian faith goes even further back to other generations in her family. So Nina has a great legacy. But there is no such thing as a secondhand faith. **For if your faith is not personalized, it is not faith.**

C. P. Hia grew up in the island nation Singapore and came to faith in Jesus Christ at the age of 13. He tells the story of growing up in that country and remembering that some of his school friends were kicked out of their homes by their non-Christian parents for daring to believe in Jesus Christ. They suffered for their beliefs and emerged with stronger convictions. By contrast, he was born and raised in a Christian family. Even though he did not suffer persecution, he had to make a decision to follow Christ and he did, at the age of 13.

The bottom line is this- have you made Jesus your own personal Lord and Savior? Don't live a secondhand faith and think that just because your Mom or Dad was a believer then you think that automatically makes you one. Can you honestly answer the question, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" For you see each and every one of us has to have an answer to that question. If you have never accepted Him or made Him your Lord and Savior do it today. For that very decision holds eternal significance for each and every one of us. Like Sabryna, claim Him today, you will not be sorry.

Amen.

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Introduction: I was there...

Caesarea Philippi- the River Jordan and three ancient temples

Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

Jesus asks His disciples, "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter replies...

The past two Sundays and today- "Do you trust in Jesus as your Savior acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church,..." and "Do you confess your faith in Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord?"

This question, "Who do you say that I am?" is one that each and every person has or will have to answer

Thoughts from Dr. Andrew Purves, Professor of Reformed Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Not a secondhand faith

For if your faith is not _____, it is not faith

Conclusion: Have you made Jesus your own personal Lord and Savior? Who do you say that Jesus is?