



## **Matthew 16:13–16**

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is? 14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. 15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am? 16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

## Reflection

The second year of Jesus' public ministry is drawing to a close. It has been an explosive one. The first year was a year of relative obscurity. But this second year, based in the region of Galilee, has seen Jesus become almost a household name. People everywhere are talking about him. They can't stop talking about the one who has miraculously healed thousands of people, fed tens of thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and a handful of fish, the one who has walked on water, calmed storms with a word, cast out every manner of demon and even raised people from the dead. Who is this man? And one who teaches with such authority! The way he brings the Scriptures to

life, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law don't hold a candle to him, in fact they can't stand him. But they can't stand up to him either. Like the prophets of old he's fearless in the face of Pharisee or king. Who is this man?

Today, for the first time in his gospel, Matthew is going to answer this question explicitly. This man is Jesus Christ. 'Christ', you'll remember isn't a surname, it's a title. In Greek it is 'Christ', the direct equivalent in Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages of the Jews in Jesus' day, is 'Messiah.' Both words mean 'anointed one', God's anointed one, the rightful king of God's people. The rightful king of the Jews.

Ominously, Jesus and his disciples travel to Caesarea Philippi for this pronounce-

ment. It's ominous because up until recently the city had been named Paneas. Its name was changed by Philip the Tetrarch to Caesarea Philippi, in honour of two kings, himself (the Philippi part) and Caesar (the Caesarea part). In the region of their newly renamed city, Peter will today pronounce Jesus the rightful king. A dangerous pronouncement indeed. Add to this the hostility of now both the Pharisees and Sadducees towards Jesus and it's clear that Jesus' third and final year of ministry on earth will be of a very different nature to these past twelve months.

But it is time. It is time for the world to know who Jesus is and for him to finish what he's come to do. And so in Matthew 16 Jesus will not only say clearly who he is, but also reveal to his disciples the reason that he

has come to earth. It all begins with Jesus asking them a question,

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

The ‘Son of Man’ is Jesus’ favourite term for himself; perhaps because it’s so enigmatic. While it’s used extensively in Ezekiel, Jesus is most likely referring to Daniel chapter 7 in which the Son of Man is a messianic figure come to bring in the kingdom of God with power. But in Jesus’ day, calling himself the ‘Son of Man’ would have drawn blank stares. People would have asked, ‘Who?’ But if Jesus had come right out and called himself the Messiah or the Son of David, the people would have known exactly what he was talking about. Only, their teachers and their tra-

ditions had built into these terms all sorts of wrong ideas. Military victories over the Romans would have flashed before their eyes, politics, and a leader who would restore the Israelite nation to the glory and independence it once had under King David.

But this was a wrong view of the Messiah – so diminished and impoverished. Jesus hadn't come to conquer Caesar, he'd come to do far greater than that. He'd come to conquer Satan, sin and death, to bring final justice on earth and to set God's world right again. He hadn't come to take back the Promised Land of Israel that was now occupied by the Romans, he'd come to open up a way, to lead God's people through death, to the eternal Promised Land of heaven. So Jesus has been enig-

matic until now, taking his time to teach and train his disciples and the crowds about the true nature of the Messiah, God's anointed king, and the true nation of the kingdom of God. Now for the unveiling, on the lips of Peter, words placed there by God.

But the disciples speak first in reply to Jesus' question.

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

With these responses we see in what high regard the crowds held Jesus. They took him for a prophet. Prophets were men and women in the Old Testament who stood up and spoke God's word fearless-

ly against wicked and rebellious kings no matter the personal consequences. Jesus was acting like a prophet: not simply 'one who foretells the future', but one who was God's mouthpiece against injustice and wickedness in high places and in every place. Some like Herod thought Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life, others thought he was Elijah, one of the first and greatest prophets. Others still Jeremiah, a prophet of repentance and coming judgment. It's very clear from these responses that the crowds held Jesus in the highest regard; but do you notice that none of them identify him as the Messiah. Jesus simply hasn't met their misguided expectations as to what the Messiah would look like. Even despite more than a year of teaching them about the kingdom of God in sermons like the Sermon on the



Mount; and more than a year showing him what the Messiah looks like, time and time again fulfilling prophecies about the Messiah from the Old Testament. Still they don't understand, still they don't yet see ... but his disciples are beginning to see.

15 “But what about you?” he asked.  
“Who do you say I am?”

Peter, their spokesperson, the leader of the disciples, answers better than he knows (as we'll see in a couple of day's time). But he still answers correctly.

16 ... “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus Christ. The first time in Mat-

thew's gospel that Jesus has been explicitly identified as the Messiah. A highpoint, a turning point, and a crisis point as we'll see over the next couple of days.

## **Think & Pray**

But for now, who do you say Jesus is? Is he your king? Come into your world to deliver you from Satan, sin and death, to set your world right again and to lead you through death into eternal life? Is your Jesus the Jesus of Philippians 2:

Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be used to his own  
advantage;  
7 rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature of a ser-

vant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance  
as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the  
highest place

and gave him the name that is  
above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every  
knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under  
the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

Is this your Jesus? If this is who you say

Jesus is, and if this is what you believe Jesus has done for you, then consider today if your life reflects appropriate allegiance to your king. Consider if your life reflects appropriate relationship with your brother, who died for you. With your Saviour who right now is exalted in heaven, interceding with his Father for you, preparing a place for you. Consider Jesus. Meditate over him now as you start your week, pray to him, confess your sins to him, praise him, and seek his guidance, wisdom, courage and help as you head out into your week. In his name we pray. Amen.