

Text: Matthew 16:13-20. Great questions of Christianity. **July 6, 2014.**

God's love is yours through Jesus. Amen.

I'll never forget her name: Robin. I'll never forget our conversation. I was riding a bus to Chicago with a pastor friend of mine and we started talking about God and Jesus and the Bible. Robin overheard us and starting asking a few questions. Lots of questions. But we kept coming back to Jesus. Who is Jesus? Who was Jesus anyway? My pastor friend and I shared our belief that Jesus is God. Robin kept saying, "I respect that opinion. I have a different one." I respect that opinion, but I have a different one. Can there be different opinions about who Jesus is? Can we just agree to disagree and all just get along? It doesn't matter what I think. It doesn't matter what Robin thinks. Finally, for yourself, it only matters what you think. What do you think? Who is Jesus?

There were popular opinions about Jesus at Jesus' time, very similar to the popular opinions about Jesus today. Some people said Jesus was a good teacher. Sound familiar? Some people called him rabbi, which means teacher. People listened to him with delight. He told good stories. His parables were taken from daily life. He was relevant. He was real. He hung around with ordinary people and shunned the high and mighty and self-righteous, a real man of the people. Is that what you say? That Jesus is a good teacher and nothing more? That he taught some good rules for us to live by and if we listen to his advice, we can make better choices and we'll be happier in life? But what's missing from that popular idea of a good teacher? There's no Savior. There's no real love. Jesus becomes just a Dr. Phil with some good advice and I can take it or leave it. I can follow his suggestions or find someone else with some different suggestions. Is a spiritual Dr. Phil all you are looking for? Is that what you say about Jesus?

What about the next popular idea? He was a prophet. Again, very popular at Jesus' time. A prophet is someone who speaks for God. So this idea is getting closer to saying Jesus is God, but not quite going that far. Some at that time said Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life. Others said Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. But these prophets were men with shortcomings. John had doubts. Jesus wasn't the person John thought he would be. Jeremiah was plagued with doubts. Read the words of the prophet Jeremiah. At times he rants and complains to God that no one will listen to him. Jeremiah gets upset that he speaks for God and all he gets is grief and unpopularity. Is that who Jesus is? A guy with doubts, a guy who complains to God? A guy who was unwilling to carry out God's plan? Consider this also. The prophets always pointed to someone greater. John the Baptist was very plain. "A greater one is coming. I'm not worthy to untie his sandals." Jeremiah spoke about a coming time when a righteous branch would come, a greater king who would rule. Is that what Jesus did? Did he point to someone else, someone greater? And who was that someone greater? If Jesus isn't the One, who is? If Jesus isn't God, isn't the Savior of the world, who is?

Can you see why these ideas of teacher and prophet are popular? If Jesus isn't the One, if Jesus isn't the Savior, maybe I can be. If I can minimize Jesus to prophet or teacher, I can put his teachings on trial. I don't have to listen to Dr. Phil. I don't have to listen to Jesus. But if Jesus is more than a teacher, if Jesus is more than a prophet, if Jesus really is God, then uh-oh. Now I'm on trial. Now the times that I have ignored Jesus' words are not just ignoring some suggestions, but ignoring the voice of God himself. If I can reduce Jesus to teacher or prophet, I don't have to confront my sin in the face of a holy God. And there's the real issue. My sin. No matter how I look at it, no matter how I define it, no matter what euphemisms I use, bad choices, lapse of judgment, carried away in the moment, it's still sin. I know it. I see it. I feel it. I can't escape it. I don't want to call Jesus Savior because then I have to face my sin. What do you say? Who is Jesus?

What did Jesus' closest followers say? Jesus put them right on the spot. Cut the garbage. Don't give me the popular opinions. What about you? Who do you, you, who do you say I am? Wow! It just got real. With no hesitation, no fumbling for words, Peter clearly says, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." Notice all the thes. The Messiah. The Son. The living. Jesus, you are the one and only. You aren't one among many teachers, or one among many prophets. You are the one. The One Messiah. Messiah was a special word for the specific One, chosen by God to carry out God's plan to save the world from sin. The Son doesn't mean less than God. The Son means God

himself. People then were clear about that. The Bible is clear about that. The one, the only, the Messiah? How could Peter have such a radically different opinion? How could his view of Jesus be so much higher and so much better? Peter didn't come to this conclusion on his own. It wasn't revealed by flesh and blood. It wasn't just a human way to think. This was God's way of thinking. Jesus is God. That view only comes from God working in a heart. No person convinced Peter.

And no person can convince you. I can never convince you that Jesus is God, the Savior of the world. Yes, we can point to 39 ancient sources, other than the Bible, that corroborate over 100 facts about Jesus also found in the Bible. We can point to the unparalleled influence Jesus has had on the world. Look at the history of art. Look at the enduring influence of the Bible. Look at the number of Christian churches 2000 years after Jesus. Look at the hospitals and orphanages started by Christians, St. Mary's, St. Francis. Look at the closest followers of Jesus who all died for their faith. Let me tell you about a friend of mine who went to a secular college and was told to write an essay on the most influential person in history. But even the non-Christian professor had to say, "You can't write about Jesus. He's obviously the person with the most influence on history. It's not even close." No rational arguments will convince you. No statistics will change your heart or mind.

Only Jesus can. Being a Christian isn't about statistics, or arguments, rational reasoning. Being a Christian is about a person. Jesus. Being a Christian is about that person giving you a relationship, a relationship with himself. This relationship Jesus gives is far different from any other. It's a relationship based on undeserved love. Jesus promises extravagant love, love that went all the way to death. Jesus gives forgiveness before you sin, before you even ask. Jesus loved those who love to hate him. Jesus didn't put your sins on trial before a holy God. Jesus put your sins on himself. Jesus put his holy life on trial, so that his holiness is all God can see. Jesus listens when you pray to him, not just about the big stuff, but about the construction traffic that makes you late for work. Jesus has a plan to make even your worst sickness work out for good. Jesus is always with you, always protecting you, always comforting you. Jesus can do this. Jesus does do this because of who he is and who he claimed to be: God, the Savior of the world. Yes, Jesus himself, when asked point blank, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?" Jesus said, "I am!"

So that really only leaves us with three options to answer the question, "Who was Jesus anyway?" Either he was deluded, deceiver or Divine. Deluded, deceiver or divine. If Jesus was just a teacher, but claimed to be God, maybe he was deluded. Is that what you say about Jesus? If Jesus was a prophet but claimed to be God, he was deceiving his followers and let them all go to their death. That's the ultimate deception. Is that what you say about Jesus? Or else, Jesus was divine. Look at his love. Look at his cross. Look at his empty tomb. Look at Jesus. Listen to his promises, "Surely I am with you always. I have overcome the world. No one can snatch them out of my hand." A one-time skeptic who investigated the claims of Jesus and eventually became a Christian said, "If Jesus is false, he is of no importance. If Jesus is true, he is of infinite importance. Jesus has not left the good teacher option open to us. He does not intend to." Deluded, deceiver or Divine? What do *you* say about Jesus? Amen.