

“Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”

Johnny Dean said, “People see things differently all the time. For example, three people - a minister, an archaeologist, and a cowboy - were getting their first look at the Grand Canyon one day. The minister exclaimed, ‘Truly this is one of the glories of God!’ The archaeologist commented, ‘What a wonder of nature this is!’ And the cowboy said, ‘Can you imagine trying to find a lost steer in there?’ People see things differently.”

Dean concluded, “The Messianic hope of those in the Jewish community who held such a belief was that the Chosen One would reestablish the supremacy of Israel among the great nations of the world. The assumption was that this would be accomplished in a violent and vengeful manner, with the forceful overthrow and total destruction of the current ruling powers. But before this happened, the prophet Elijah would return to herald the coming of the Chosen One. As a result of these hopes, Jesus had to somehow communicate to his disciples and others, who had such high hopes for him, that what he was offering was something completely different from what they expected.” (Johnny Dean, The Pop Quiz)

When folks ask someone what people are saying about them, their questions are often an attempt to puff themselves up – to stoke their egos. When Jesus asked his disciples about what everyone was thinking about himself, he was not wanting to make himself feel more important and powerful but to lead his disciples to better understand his identity and its importance for their lives. Yes, Jesus’ tasks and purpose as Messiah and Christ was very different from the expectations of the general populace.

Jesus began to explore this issue with his disciples as he asked them in **verse 13b**, *“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”* It should not surprise us how people during the public ministry of Jesus and up through the present think of Jesus in terms similar to those reported Jesus’ disciples. If you were to survey your friends, neighbors, and coworkers about Jesus, then I suspect many would say he had been a very wise and martyred Teacher, Prophet, Philosopher, or Religious Leader – an admirable and godly person of the past. Some may even go on to say he paid for their sins, so they will go to Heaven when they die. However, few would perceive Jesus as having much to do with their lives in the present. Yet, as there were some, who were very focused on the scary prospect of Jesus bringing about the end of time in the First Century, so there are some, who are fixated on the end of the world today.

Sermons.com reminds us that in a Peanuts comic strip, “we see that the television is on but there is no one in the room listening to it. The announcer is talking about a golf tournament that is in process. He says: ‘Smith has to make this putt to win the championship. There will be no tomorrow.’ And just as he says, ‘There will be no tomorrow,’ in walks Lucy. She immediately goes into a panic and starts running around and yelling to the other children: ‘The world is coming to an end. They just announced it on television.’ Her panic quickly spreads as we see all the peanuts kids as they go wildly screaming about. Finally in the last square we see all of the children huddled on top of Snoopy’s doghouse waiting for the end of the world. And Charlie Brown finally speaks up with a puzzled voice: ‘I thought that Elijah was supposed to come back first.’”

The Staff of Sermons.com concluded, “Well Charlie Brown knew his Bible. Elijah was supposed to come back before the end time. When the disciples told Jesus that some people thought he was Elijah, they were expressing a common thought among the people that the end was very near.” (Staff, www.Sermons.com)

After receiving the report of the disciples on who the people said Jesus was, he went forward with them to check out their own growth in understanding his identity. So, in **verse 15**, *“What about you?’ he asked them. ‘Who do you say I am?’”* That is the central question for each of us today. **Who do you and I say Jesus is?** If we answer, as the people did during his public ministry, then we are missing much of Jesus’ purpose and identity.

In verse 16, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.’” According to Matthew, Jesus promised Peter great power and rewards for his declaration! I’m sure Matthew was very happy to report such praise being heaped on Peter by Jesus, since the eldest disciple was a favorite of the gospel author.

But, Jesus did not start that discussion to conclude with profuse praise of Peter! Instead, he was setting forth a very important process for all his followers. Indeed, each of us needs to truthfully answer Jesus’ question, **“Who do you say I am?”** Before we delve a little deeper into our own faith and understanding, let’s hear the answer from another committed and passionate believer as reported in this video.

[Please play the video, “No Other King”.] Each of us has our own vocabulary and way of stating our beliefs and understandings. Although I would not put as much emphasis on some of what the author of the video shared, there are important insights provided in it. For example, Jesus’ identity and tasks were addressed – he is “Not just another king. Not just another prophet. Not just another Teacher. He was the one the world had been waiting for. The one to deliver us from captivity – the Son of David and Abraham’s chosen seed. He is the goal of the Mosaic Law – Yahweh in the flesh. He is the one to establish God’s Reign and Rule – to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, freedom to the prisoners, and proclaim good news to the poor. This Jesus was the Creator come to earth and the beginning of a New Creation.” Do you perceive Jesus to be much more important to Life and Creation than a Teacher or Prophet or just another King?

Putting his testimony in relational terms the video declared, “He is the Father’s Son, Savior of the World ... – more Loving, more Holy, and more Wonderfully Terrifying than we ever thought possible. He is our Jesus and there is no other king like him. ... There is no other king like him. There is no other King.”

How would you describe Jesus’ meaning for you in relational terms? **Who do you say Jesus is?** God’s Son, Jesus the Christ, is both the source of life and of my New Life in Christ. His life and words are the crucial examples for me. Even though I may find comfort and feel affinity for some philosophical and political views, when they are in conflict with Jesus Christ, then my allegiance belongs to him and with his bold and sacrificial agape love. Yes, through Jesus, I am better able to recognize and appreciate our Divine Parent! He is the ultimate revelation of God’s Agape Love for me and all people.

Further, Jesus Christ is not just my Lord and Savior but Life and Truth for all of humanity, so I am to always remember every person is a child of God – someone, who is to be treated with respect, consideration, agape love, forgiveness, and justice. If I fail to live my life with that recognition and commitment, then my Christ and God are too small – not the True and Wonderful source of Light, Love, and Life!

Who do you say Jesus is? Is he crucial to your life and how you live it? Does your relationship with God and Jesus Christ change the way you relate with other persons, even those who are rejected or outcasts by our society? **What does your life say each day about who Jesus is?** Is your understanding of and commitment to Jesus growing each day? Show your love for him and God by the way you follow Jesus’ example of agape love toward all people! Amen.