

The Right Answer

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“Who do you say that I am?” (Mt. 16:15) This is the question Jesus put to His disciples – and the right answer, given by Peter but shared by all of them, that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, is what Jesus said would be the foundation of the ekklesia, His people called out of this world’s darkness to be citizens of His kingdom of light.

How we answer this question effects *everything* about how we will go about practicing the way of following Him.

We must also examine the answer that Peter gave – for that answer stands alone as a blessing of God. Let us also note that this answer is given at least three different ways, surely in an attempt to keep us away from the human tendency to turn spiritual truths into lifeless, dead and impotent formulas.

- “You are the Christ (the Messiah).” (Mk. 8:29)
- “You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God.” (Mt. 16:16)
- “The Christ (the Messiah) of God.” (Lk. 9:20)
- “You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God.” (Jn. 6:69)

When Peter gave this answer, Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 16:17)

Peter, unlike most modern-day hearers of the gospel, received a spiritual insight from the Holy Spirit of God that enabled him to understand and believe that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah. Most modern-day hearers of the gospel are told by flesh and blood preachers (men) that Jesus is the Messiah and far too many never get the spiritual revelation from the Holy Spirit of God or, if they do receive revelation, never seem able to separate that which is merely intellectual knowledge from that which is spiritual insight. Their faith, at best, thus rests almost entirely on the words of men and the fruit of their lives confirms this to be true. Such as these are content to sit idly and passively at the feet of their preferred spiritual guru, allowing him to “feed” them as he soothingly and addictingly scratches their ears. (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Peter – as is true of nearly all modern-day hearers of the gospel – did not understand what the statement “You are the Messiah” really meant. “While there were many strands to Messianic expectation in 1st-century Palestine, ... the dominant popular hope was of a king like David, with a role of political liberation and conquest, and it seems clear that this would be the popular understanding of *christos*.” (R.T. France, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1985, p. 770)

It is obvious that Peter subscribed to the Conquering King interpretation of “Messiah.” Immediately after Peter declared Jesus to be the Christ, “Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again on the third day.” (Mt. 16:21) In short, Jesus began teaching them that He was not yet to be the Conquering Messiah-King of popular imagination

but rather the Suffering Servant who would take away sin. “Far be it from You, Lord,” Peter said, “this shall not happen to You!” (Mt. 16:22) Peter was soundly rebuked for this and the process of learning what Jesus meant would have to wait until Jesus “opened [his] understanding, that [he] might comprehend the Scriptures...all things [that were] fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning [Christ].” (Lk. 24:44-45) Then, after the Spirit was poured out, Peter would preach and expound those Scriptures as if he had known what they meant all his life.

Peter had spiritually received the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah and had to learn that Jesus was the Suffering Servant-Messiah before Jesus could truly be King in Peter’s life. Those modern-day hearers of the gospel who have been told by man that Jesus is the Christ need to first have that knowledge transformed into spiritual light. These who have intellectually grasped or deduced that Jesus was the Suffering Servant who was to take away the sins of the world. (Jn. 1:29, 1 Jn. 2:2), after having this fact spiritually transformed into life-giving light, must learn that unless He is the Messiah-King of the individual’s heart and life, that individual has failed to enter and remain within the kingdom of God, that realm where Christ is truly obeyed as King.

It will do no good to claim to belong to “the church.” The “church” was allowed to come into existence so that the tares could grow to maturity in close proximity to the wheat. Both are planted in the field which Christ said was “the world” yet the tares are later removed from the kingdom. (Mt. 13:38, 41) Since the kingdom is described as being “in your midst” (Lk. 17:21), once the tares are removed from the midst of the wheat, they can no longer said to be “in the kingdom.” The precision of Christ’s prophetic phrases solidly places the “church” as a portion of the field, the world – and this is amply evidenced by its very structure. Truly it has been said that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God yet it is the “church” that came into existence.

Similarly, it will do no good to claim to have prophesied, cast out demons or even to have performed miracles in the name of Christ. To those who do so, Christ will declare, “I never knew you. You are not wheat – you are no son of the kingdom. Leave Me – you did only what was right in your own eyes. I was not your King – you were your own king.” (Mt. 7:22-23, 13:38, Jdgs. 21:25)

Who we say Jesus is is equal in importance with **what** we believe Christ to be. In the “church,” that worldly structure that imitates, counterfeits and purports itself to be the bride and body of Christ, there has arisen what can only be called a “two-step gospel.” Men hear or read that Christ was the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for sin (1 Jn. 2:2), say (perhaps even mean) the right words and reckon (intellectual accounting term) themselves “saved and bound for heaven.” But Christ has not, probably never will, become their King who alone has the right to command obedience and demand all if He so chooses. (Acts 20:30, Mk. 10:21) Since this second step is rarely if ever taken, it nullifies even a genuine first step because Christ is “the author of eternal salvation to all who *obey* Him.” (Heb. 5:9) Put into another picture that Jesus used, there are many who huddle around, perhaps even inside, the gate but very few walk forward on the road that leads to eternal life. (Mt. 7:14) Such a road requires the disciple to bear his own personal cross and follow after Christ (Lk. 14:27) – very, very few who are taught the first part of the “two step gospel” ever find this road. It is precisely here that we can see that “Many are called but few are chosen.” (Mt. 22:14)

When he gave the right answer that Jesus was the Christ, Peter, like most Israelites, believed that Christ was to be a Conquering King who would deliver Israel from its political enemies. Thus very early in His ministry, Jesus began to avoid being overtly called the Messiah.

When the crowds came to make Him king of Israel, He vanished. (Jn. 6:15) His kingdom was not to be of this world (Jn. 18:36) – to gain the kingdom of His Father He would have first have to be the Suffering Servant-Messiah and in this way win the right to be the Conquering Messiah-King for He would thereby deliver all of mankind from its worst enemies: sin, death, Satan and even self. Jesus was not willing to become king of physical Israel just to remove Rome from power and thereby leave sinful men to play their Machiavellian games to gain power over their fellow human beings so as to oppress and exploit them. Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Heb. 12:2), taking His place, not as the king of paltry and worldly Israel, but as the King of the “Israel” of God, an “Israel” not of this world but an eternal kingdom of absolute dominion that includes, even as it obliterates, all man-made divisions: Greeks, Jews, barbarians, Scythians, slaves, free, small and great, male and female. (Gal. 3:8, Col. 3:11) The Christ was the sacrificial Lamb who by His blood redeemed to God people “out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” who would be kings and priests to God “who would reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10), not as merely rulers over the paltry and worldly kingdoms of this world but as rulers over principalities and powers.

Peter, who gave the right answer that Jesus was the Christ (though his understanding at that moment was entirely wrong, perhaps even demonically so – see Mt. 16:23), concluded his second letter, saying, “You therefore, beloved, since you know beforehand [that there will be carnal, false teachers untaught by the Spirit of God – tares, sons of the evil one – and double-mindedly unstable – with one foot in the world, the “church,” and one foot touching the kingdom, as it were – who twist and distort the Scriptures to their own destruction], beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; instead grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord [Master, *King*] and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 3:16-18, also 2:1, Mt. 13:25, 38, Jas. 1:8)

Jesus’ first warning about the end of the age and the sign of His return was, “Take heed that *no one* deceives you.” (Mt. 24:4) False christs, false prophets (Mt. 24:24), false apostles masquerading as workers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15), false assemblies gathering under any basis other than the genuine Headship of Christ (“church”), false miracles, signs and lying wonders (2 Ths. 2:9) – all these and more are arrayed against the end-time follower of Christ. Those who would persevere to the end so as to be saved (Mt. 24:13) will be those who have received the spiritual revelation that Jesus is the Messiah (in all that that means) and they will “become blameless and innocent, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [they] shine as lights in the world, folding fast the word of life...” (Phlp. 2:15-16, also see Mt. 13:43) These will be those who keep themselves pure from false religion, who follow the Lamb wherever He goes, who refuse to lie because they have taken their stand with the slain Lamb who is the King on the true Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and ekklesia of the Firstborn who are registered in heaven...” (Rev. 14:1, 4-5, Heb. 12:22-23)

You: Who – and what – do you say Jesus is? How you answer this question effects everything about how you will go about practicing the way of following Him and, ultimately, will decide the eternal outcome of your life.

Let he who has ears hear.

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