

“Will you marry me?” “What major will you choose in college?” “Will you accept the job offer?” “Are you willing to relocate?” “Should we have more kids?” “Should we take Dad off life support?” We’d call those “all-important” questions, right? All-important, because those questions could drastically change your life.

But when you think about it, the questions themselves aren’t all-important. Rather, how you answer those questions is all-important, because different answers lead your life in very different directions. If a woman accepts her kneeling boyfriend’s proposal, she’s committed to him for life. If she says no, she’s committed to starting over. However many kids your family might include, the pictures on your mantel will look drastically different, depending on if you raise them in Wisconsin, or California, or Spain. All-important questions have all-important answers. Answers that change everything.

In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus asks an all-important question, **“Who do people say I am?”** That all-important question has an all-important answer. And not just AN all-important answer, but THE all-important answer. Because how you answer that question directs your life, and determines your eternity. Jesus cares deeply about our answer, **The Answer that Changes Everything.** **“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”**

As Jesus and his disciples withdrew to Caesarea Philippi, about 25 miles north of the contentious or celebratory reactions they encountered around the Sea of Galilee, he asked them what the people were saying. **“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”**

People were proposing many different answers. **“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** Now, this was no list of slouches! People were comparing Jesus to the great prophets of Israel’s history!

Kind of like when a promising young NFL quarterback starts hearing “the comparisons.” “The next Brett Favre!” “Commands the offense like Peyton Manning!” “As competitive as Joe Montana!” And he blushes and spouts some humble soundbites to downplay the comparisons to all-time greats.

But Jesus doesn’t blush and say, “Aww, shucks! I’m no Elijah!” because those answers weren’t enough. “Jesus is a great prophet” isn’t humbling praise. It falls woefully short of the truth! Jesus isn’t one of the prophets, or even the greatest prophet! He’s the one every prophet pointed to when they spoke of the Savior.

If Jesus asked us today, “Who do people say I am?” we could list a wide variety of answers too. “Jesus is God.” “Jesus was an important historical figure.” “Jesus was a political revolutionary.” “Jesus is my life coach.” “Jesus is a role model to emulate.” “Jesus was an ordinary guy whose followers made him something he really wasn’t.” “Jesus is a fraud.” Many different answers that lead people down very different paths.

But notice that Jesus says nothing about the people’s varied answers. Instead, he turns to his disciples. He turns to you for your answer. **“But what about you? Who do you say I am?”** The answer that changes everything isn’t what everyone else says about Jesus, but who you say Jesus is.

Characteristically, Peter answers for the group, beautifully confessing, “You, Jesus? **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** There is so much life changing truth about Jesus’ nature and mission packed into those ten words! “Jesus, you’re more than a prophet speaking for God. You are God! You’re more than just a forerunner preparing the way for the Christ. You ARE the Christ, the Anointed One! The long-awaited Messiah, chosen before time began to save the world from sin and hell. You, Jesus, are the one climactic figure through whom all of God’s purposes will be fulfilled.”

“You aren’t just another sinful son of sinful parents, who needs to be saved. You are the perfect Son of God. God himself, who took on a true human nature to be our perfect substitute; true flesh and blood so you can die the death our sins deserve. You are *Immanuel*-- “*God with us,*” so we can be with God forever. “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Every other answer falls short, because there is only one true answer. Jesus is the Savior. Jesus is God! No other answer leads to Heaven.

But what about you? If Jesus swings the spotlight off Peter and onto you, what’s your answer? I’m confident that you would confess the same. I’m confident that you’re not taking time out of your weekend to worship Jesus because he has some great quotes for your Instagram feed. You’re not going to Bible class, or sending your kids to Sunday School because Jesus was a political revolutionary, and you like his style. You’re here to worship, to grow in Christ, and to encourage your fellow believers, because Jesus is your Savior! Because Jesus is your life! Because your faith-driven answer to the question, “Who is Jesus?” changes everything!

But before we pat ourselves on the back for knowing the answer, remember Jesus’ words to Peter after his faithful confession. “***Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in Heaven.***”

You don’t confess your faith in Jesus as your Savior because you were smart enough to crack the code. No, your faith and subsequent confession of Christ is a gift of God’s grace! You didn’t pull back the curtain on your heart that was cloaked in unbelief. The Spirit went to work through God’s powerful word, and the Father revealed Christ to you. As baptismal waters were poured over your head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit-- the Spirit, creating a new life in your spiritually dead body allowed you to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” by faith. Not a role model, cheerleader, or life coach. But your Savior. And that God-revealed answer changes everything.

But does it always? Someone who answers “Jesus is a philosopher” will hear God’s Word, but only apply the philosophy when convenient. Do we confess Jesus as Savior on the weekend, but live like Jesus is just a philosopher during the week? Someone who answers “Jesus is a role model” will strive to live like him, but be racked with guilt when they can’t. Do we confess Jesus as Savior on the weekend, but spend the week hopeless and heaped with guilt over our sin? The person who answers “Jesus was an important historical figure, but only mildly important now” will think of Jesus only when all other priorities are taken care of. Do we confess Jesus as Savior on the weekend, but place growing in our faith and understanding of God’s Word at the bottom of the pile, behind sports practices, dance recitals, and Netflix binges? The person who answers “Jesus is a fraud” will keep Jesus absent from their lives. Do we confess Jesus as Savior on the weekend, but make Jesus quickly disappear when we’re around our friends and co-workers?

If Jesus is Savior, then everything changes. Or, at least it should. That’s why it’s so vitally important that Jesus is indeed the Savior. Because we need him to forgive us for all the times we live our lives in ways that answer “Who is Jesus?” with “Not that important.” But because Jesus is Savior, everything changes. Our sins are forgiven, and Heaven is ours.

We don’t need other “gods,” because our God provides everything we need. We don’t have to fear hurricanes or wildfires, because our Savior created the world, and still controls it. We don’t have to feel unloved, because in love Jesus gave himself for us. If Jesus is Savior, then our worldview, the way we treat our family, and our reaction to death will all be changed. If Jesus is Savior, then our only desire is to live a life of thankful service to the one who saved us, a life of service that satisfies every desire.

And “Jesus the Christ” has service for us to do. Jesus tells Peter, “***And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.***” Now, your local Catholic priest might try to convince you that this means Jesus

appointed Peter as the first Pope, and that all subsequent popes also speak for Christ. Not really what Jesus meant.

Jesus would build his church on something far more solid than sinful flesh and blood. In Greek, Jesus basically says, "Peter, you're a stone, a pebble. And I'm going to build my church on bedrock; on a solid, immovable, unbreakable rock ledge." Jesus wasn't going to build his Church on Peter or the disciples—mere stones-- but on their God-revealed, faith-driven answer to "Who is Jesus?" God's Church is built on the rock-solid, changeless good news that Jesus is the Christ, the merciful Savior who takes away the sin of the world.

God wasn't going to build his Church on the foundation of Peter. But that doesn't mean Jesus didn't have plans for Peter and the other disciples to participate in this building project! Jesus commissions all believers to **"Go and make disciples of all nations,"** to build on that solid foundation, by sharing with others the answer that changes everything, that they too might know Christ by faith.

That's God's plan to build his church. And he doesn't have a Plan B. The task of building his church is given to us, his Church, to whom the Father has revealed the Son by faith.

Does that make you nervous, as you see Christian church membership declining throughout the country? Are you afraid because the answer "Jesus is God" is increasingly viewed with disgust and hostility? Do you feel hopeless as day by day it seems like Satan keeps winning victories? Then listen closely to the life and eternity-changing promise that Jesus makes to his people. **"On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."**

I won't lie, fellow Christians. That means there will be dark days when you'll wonder about your impact; wonder if the Church will survive; wonder whether you're cut out for this mission. Dark days when the world seems to grow increasingly darker and further from God. But God's Church will not fall. Satan's armies will not win the victory over the Church, because the Church isn't built on a role model, a philosopher, or a fraud. The Church isn't built on a foundation of sinful flesh and blood. The Church is built on the rock-solid, immovable foundation of Christ. Our motivation, our confidence, and our victory cry. Who is Jesus? "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" The answer that changes everything...that cannot fall.