

A clear confession about Jesus matters.

It is tough when you realize you've asked a question with a very obvious answer. Such as if you ask a resident of Green Bay if they're a Packers fan...if you ask a bride if she's wearing white on her wedding day...if you inquire of someone, "Do you want to have a happy life?"

It's tough partially because you start asking the question and realize before you're done asking it how obvious it is and how silly you might have been to ask it. You knew the answer. It's also tough because then people will let you hear about how obvious it was and how silly you are. Of course people from Green Bay are Packers fans, a bride (unless she chooses otherwise) wears white on her wedding day, and "no duh," I want to have a happy life.

It's my turn now to think these thoughts and feel a little silly as I ask you a very obvious question. "Who is Jesus?" "That's a no duh Sunday school 101. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to save me from my sins. Good. Got it. What more can we learn?"

Well, might there be something to me asking a rather obvious question? It's not like the majority of people here don't know who Jesus is. Some of you may not—which is awesome! You get to learn! Members of Mount Olive or another Christian church know the answer to that obvious question well. Even people who aren't a part of a church family at least have an idea about who Jesus is from what they have heard or read.

So why ask it? As we examine our lives, I can see, as I'm sure you can, too, that sometimes that obvious question and answer is the one we forget to ask ourselves in moments when we really need to remember, "Who is Jesus?"

As life moves on and challenges come and go, this obvious question and answer is not one to gloss over. History shows that we don't always do a great job at remembering something so obvious, which is why...

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Yes, for our eternity. But also for right now. It's not just that thing we know and save for later, but for your soul's walk of faith through life right now. Being very clear about who Jesus is has eternal ramifications and daily blessings for you. I invite you to have that reading from Matthew 16 open as we examine what happens in order to be "rock solid" on our understanding and confession. "Who is Jesus?"

The disciples have seen proof that Jesus is more than a regular man. Recently, Jesus walked out to them on water, when Jesus reached out his hand to save Peter from sinking. They saw the faith of a woman who came to them repeatedly asking Jesus to heal her demon possessed daughter—which he did. They witnessed him feed thousands of people with a little bread and a couple of fish.

But on the flip side, they have heard other opinions about who Jesus is. The Jewish leaders have pushed, prodded, and looked for ways to tear down the idea that Jesus could be God or to simply discredit him and the commotion he's caused by his miracles and teaching. Roman leaders are preparing to squash a rebellion as it seems the Jews have found their next leader to free them from Roman oppression. Many who have heard Jesus speak are demanding signs from heaven to prove he has divine power.

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who are people saying I am?" "Some John the Baptist; others Elijah; others Jeremiah." Right there are three men who aren't scrubs. Those are three of Israel's best. John

the Baptist, who preaches repentance and preparing for the promised Messiah to arrive. Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Testament who witnessed and performed many miracles with the Lord's power. Jeremiah, who preached a message of law to those who turned away from God and gospel comfort to believers that God will not turn his back on them.

You can get a similar feel to how you might hear people answer the question today. "Who is Jesus?" "He was a good role model for a society." "He was a good person who cared for those around him." "He was a wise man with many great teachings that brought people wonderful comfort." All of those are true...but that means Jesus is just a John, just an Elijah, just a Jeremiah. Notable person. That's it. They miss the mark on who Jesus actually is when it comes to a human being's soul's eternal destination.

But Jesus really isn't concerned about what "they" have to say about him, which is why he asks the disciples and he asks you and me, "Who do you say I am?" "Who is Jesus?" The answer is so obvious and at the same time so easily forgotten.

It's not like we're trying to let it happen. But we can be honest about how it does happen. Life starts moving fast, is going well, and Jesus isn't on the mind as much when things are good. We explore freedom from a past way of life so we venture out to find our identity and our place in the world. Or how about when we feel guilty about all the wrong we've done and it's suddenly a question whether or not we're forgiven.

And then notice what happens when we find ourselves forgetting the obvious of who Jesus is—in great and small ways. Jesus becomes absent until needed...and then somehow becomes harder to find as we begin searching high and low for the answers he already has. We look for our place in the world...and Jesus who has a place in our lives at all times and has gifted us an identity in his name is wrongfully removed by us as we believe we've found a place apart from him. Whether or not our sins have been forgiven should never be a question...yet we find ourselves looking for how we can do better to solve a problem we can never fix. How easily we forget who Jesus is really shows how much we need him.

This makes Peter's confession—and our confession—so much more than an obvious question. It matters that we know him for who he is. "Who do you say I am?" Who is Jesus? "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Jesus is not just a John, just an Elijah, just a Jeremiah. He is the Messiah! The Son of God!

Think about the enormity of that. Who is Jesus...for you. The Messiah. The Son of God. When God promises to Adam and Eve after the fall into sin that he will send someone to crush the devil's head, who is that? Jesus. When God promises the Israelites that he will make a covenant agreement with them that is not based upon keeping a list of commands but one based on forgiving and remembering sins no more, who brings that new thing? Jesus. When Isaiah writes how the Lord's promised Messiah will be "pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities..." who is that? Jesus. Jesus who took on human flesh so he could follow the law sinlessly in our place, and who as true God his life and death counted as the payment to redeem the world.

Think also about the enormity of how you know who Jesus is. It's not your responsibility for it. It is his. He created faith in your heart in baptism, where he placed his name on you. It is him that strengthens trust in him through his Word. It is him that makes you blessed as he gifts forgiveness, salvation and a righteous identity. It is him and only him that makes you able to confess who he is. "The Christ, the Son of the living God."

That's why a clear confession about Jesus matters. The facts of who he is for you at all times and in all ways is so great we must have it central in our hearts, minds, and lives...especially when life's hardest moments hit.

A Christian writer said, "A soul must be pretty important if both God and the devil are after it." I'll say that again. "A soul must be pretty important if both God and the devil are after it."

When Jesus brings up the gates of Hades, that can seem like a figurative or distant thing. But evil powers are present. Their challenges are fierce and plenty. There are lots of vulnerable moments in our lives where a clear confession about Jesus matters.

A man who had his life turned upside down in a year, losing his marriage and his father...a family who without warning lost a family member...a teenager who in one month had his mom diagnosed with cancer and a close friend who committed suicide...and you, with whatever evil is troubling your life and your soul...all have worries, griefs, pains...and a question. "Who is Jesus...for me...right now?"

It is very easy to have a wrong approach with your confession. "I know who Jesus is. So I must stand on that confession about Jesus so that I overcome the power of the gates of Hades." When that onus is on us, we fail. When it rests on Christ, our rock, the object of our trust, the Son of the living God, then and only then because of him we succeed.

A clear confession about who Jesus is matters because with a battle taking place for your soul, you cannot stand on your own. Jesus gets us from ourselves and our efforts to focus on who he is for us in those soul-battling moments. For he, "the Christ, the Son of the living God," cannot be overcome by the gates of Hades. Because he won't be, so also you, his child. It's like the devil has walked into battle with a rubber toy slingshot and Christ is standing there with a big red button for a nuclear bomb.

The gates of Hades are overthrown by Christ as he strengthens you with his Word and Sacraments. The gates of Hades are overthrown as he creates new faith in a person's heart through the sharing of the message of Jesus—of which you are a part of—and so he opens the keys to a heavenly kingdom as God's gift. The gates of Hades are overthrown because that's who Jesus is for you.

It is the hope and prayer that something feels even more obvious to you just like it does to me. "Who is Jesus," is never a question to feel silly about asking and reminding ourselves about how presently and eternally impactful its answer is. Who is Jesus? "The Christ, the Son of the living God." *Amen.*