

## Who Is This Savior?

On RESURRECTION SUNDAY, let us not assume that we come with a clear understanding of WHO HE IS. What you determine about the person of Jesus Christ is the most important decision that you will ever make!

Our text on this Resurrection Sunday is Matthew 16:13-15.

*“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” ” (Matthew 16:13–15, NIV)*

### Jesus Among Other Gods

There were many gods that were worshiped in ancient times. We tend to think that idolatry exists only where pagan cultures worship little deities carved out of stone and wood. Make no mistake, we have our own little gods of our day. The gods of pleasure, academics, television, self-will, addiction, and many other philosophies that capture our hearts, our devotion and time.

In first century Israel, Caesarea Philippi was a poignant location for Jesus to ask this question, “who do you say that I am?”

- **Northern most point** of Jesus earthly ministry
- The **southern foothills** of Mt. Hermon
- One of **three springs** feeding the **Jordan** river
- **View** of the Jordan valley
- OT times - a place where **BAAL** was worshiped (Josh 11:17)
- **GREEKS** worshiped their god **PAN** (god of the pasture)
- **ROMANS** worshiped the **EMPEROR**.
- **HEROD** built a **temple** which he **dedicated** to **AUGUSTUS CAESAR**.

(SOURCE: Easton Bible Dictionary elec ed., and Erdmans Bible Dictionary, elec. ed.)

So, in a location well known for its deity worship, Jesus asks, “do you truly believe that I am the Sovereign God?” THIS is not a question that we normally ask! IN FACT, when someone **does not know who they are**, the reason is either AMNESIA, DEMENTIA, or MENTAL ILLNESS! But the CLAIMS of JESUS will not allow us to escape this question! His question to the disciples in Caesarea was not the only time that Jesus raised this question. Accepting His deity and mission from God is the essential element of being one of His children.

- (John 8:24–25). JESUS TOLD us we must believe HIM. *“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” “Who are you?” they asked. “Just what I have been claiming all along,” Jesus replied.* ”
- John 6:35 *“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”* ”
- John 8:12. *“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

- John 14:6. “*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*”
- John 11:25. To WEEPING MARTHA. “*Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”*”

His RESURRECTION is the SIGN that ALL THESE THINGS ARE TRUE.

## **Jesus - God of the Sabbath**

Another illustration of a question regarding the question, “Who is this Jesus?” is found in Matthew 12:23-24. “*All the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”*”

Matthew includes this question about the identity of Jesus immediately after a series of controversies with the Pharisees over His authority over the Sabbath. Rules about the Sabbath were one of the most important issues for the Pharisees of Jesus day. Obsession over Sabbath rules continues to dominate many aspects of Judaism even to this day.

Jesus’ disciples plucked grain and ate it - Matt. 12:1-3

Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. Matt 12:9

After these two events, the people ask, “*All the people were astonished and said, “**Could this be the Son of David?**” But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”*” (Matthew 12:23-24)

Notice the Savior’s reply. He tells them that the only sign (and the greatest sign) would be His resurrection from the dead.

“*Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.” He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*” (Matthew 12:38-40)

Jesus claimed to be God. He asked those around Him if they understood this claim. There could be no misunderstanding of the clarity of His own belief that He was God come in the flesh. Most importantly, His own resurrection is the guarantee that all He said about himself was true! Now, there are many things that I could claim *might* happen in the future to set myself up as an expert. I might even be able to manipulate some of those things. But after my death, I would be completely powerless to influence ANYTHING! This is the ultimate validation!

## **It all Hinges on Christ’s Resurrection!**

All of Jesus claims are FALSE without the RESURRECTION! Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter. “*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*” (1 Corinthians 15:13–14)

The beginning of this chapter lists all of the appearances of Christ following His resurrection. 1 Corinthians is one of the earlier epistles (written about 55 AD). It was written within the lifetime of those who were alive during the crucifixion, and could have easily refuted these words. But they were not refuted then, and they cannot be refuted now!

His APPEARANCES. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8

The verifiable nature of Christ's resurrection is also offered at the beginning of the book of Acts, written in the early 60's, also within the lifetime of Jerusalem eyewitnesses. *"After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."* (Acts 1:3, NIV)

## So, What Keeps Us From Believing?

We SUPPRESS the truth.

Notice Paul's words as he describes the reason for unbelief: *"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,"* (Romans 1:18, NIV). We can see evidence for God's creation, His attributes and His character, but because of our wicked hearts, we suppress what we see!

I was reading a book by Ravi Zacharias this week. He made an interesting claim about those who suppress the truth about God: "(Jesus said) that if you test his claims by the same measure that you legitimately substantiate other facts, you will find Him and His teaching who toughly trustworthy. The evidence is already there. The denial of Christ has less to do with facts and more to do with the bent of what a person is prejudiced to conclude." (Ravi Zacharias, "Jesus Among Other Gods, 50).

Intelligent people have NO DIFFICULTY ACCEPTING:

- a. George Washington was America's First President
- b. Thomas Jefferson owned slaves
- c. Plato was a Greek Philosopher

But somehow, with all of the proof for the accuracy and reliability of the Bible, the same people who accept other historical facts utterly reject what history reveals about Jesus Christ. They do this by lumping the claims of Christ along with all other religious claims into one big pot called "mythology" and dismiss it all. They do this in spite of numerous proofs for the accuracy of Scripture, including:

- a. Fulfilled **OT prophecies**
- b. **Archeological** accuracy of the Bible
- c. Thousands of **NT manuscripts** - more than ANY TEXT of ancient time
- d. The **WORLD CHANGED** through the life of Christ
- e. **Individuals** with changed lives (testimonies)

Atheist BERTRAND RUSSEL was asked the question, "If you meet God after you die, what will you say to Him to justify your unbelief?" He answered, "I will tell him he did not give me enough evidence."

How much more evidence do you need? Disbelief is a matter of the HEART, not a matter of the MIND.

Comedian Mark Lowery, “I don’t have enough faith to be an atheist!”

[Another excuse that keeps us from believing is that We are REBELS at heart](#)

I was reminded of the rebellious nature my heart recently while filling my soft drink cup at a fast food restaurant. The fountain contained about six choices. It brought back a childhood from the Word of Life Snack Shack. I remembered ordering what we called a “suicide.” Don’t let the name fool you, it sounds worse than it was. A suicide was simply an equal mixture of all of the soft drink choices into one cup. Coke, Mountain Dew, Orange Crush and Root Beer all swirled together in and gulped down, just to show that you were not a conformist!

Isaiah reminds us, *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* (Isaiah 53:6, NIV)

We DEMAND our independence. But trusting CHRIST means that I have to live according to someone’s else’s rules. WHAT FOOLISHNESS! **If Christ Arose, then He PROVED His authority as KING and CREATOR!**

Imagine living in England in the 1500's. You’ve been invited to the palace. King Henry VIII enters. Regardless of how rebellious you may feel at the moment, if you honored your life, you bowed in the King’s presence!

Well, Jesus is the King of the universe, it’s creator. He proved it by defying the one thing that none of us can defy - death itself! We refuse to bow to Him at our own peril One day, every knee will bow to him! (Philippians 2:10)

We are only MORTALS. Death reminds us of our limitations. Ravi Zacharias recounts the tragic news of one of America’s worst school shootings in Jonesboro Arkansas in 1998. Relatives had gathered at the local hospital to await word concerning their children. In the confusion and anguish, a woman sat alone in the corner. A counselor approached to ask if she could help. “I just came to find out how to get my little girl’s body back,” she said. Ravi writes, *“What a grim reminder that is to the rest of us. We trivialize the body in our indulgences. We treat it as a means to other ends. But when death comes, we grasp at it and cling to it because it is all we have left.”* (“Jesus Among Other God’s, 71)

Travel to a world capitol and you will find TOMBS of the great men and women. Study the great religions of the world and you will read about the LIFE and DEATH of its founders.

But investigate the claims of Christ.

Weigh the documents of the New Testament.

Ask why the JEWS and ROMANS failed to secure the body of Jesus, knowing that He PROPHESED his own resurrection.

Compare the BIBLE against ANY RELIGIOUS BOOK or ancient text

**TRAVEL to JERUSALEM and visit the GARDEN TOMB**

Answer the question, "Who is this Jesus?" When you answer this question with honesty, you will be forced to bow before him and recognize His authority, His love, His Greatness and surrender your life.