Questions God Asks
Week 6: Who Do You Say That I Am?
Scripture Focus: Matthew 16:13-19

Introduction

When I was in college, my younger brother also attended the same college. We lived on opposite sides of campus and had different sets of friends. One afternoon, with a carload full of friends, I drove by the student center in the middle of campus. I stopped for a group of students to cross the street, when I recognized my brother in the group. I blew my horn and yelled, “Hey Tony!” to my brother.

My brother’s name is Paul, just like my dad’s, but we called him Tony, short for Anthony, his middle name. Tony did not respond to my shout, but his group of friends did. “Who are you talking to?” they asked. “No one here is named Tony!” “Yes, he is,” I said as I pointed to my brother. “He’s Tony,” as I continued to point. “No he’s not!” the group insisted. “Yes he is. I think I know my own brother’s name,” I said.

My brother never looked up during the exchange. I could see the small grin on his face. He seemed to enjoy the exchange between his friends and me. So the group walked on, and my friends and I drove on our way. After that day, I began to call my brother Paul-Tony. The name stuck. But who was he really – Paul or Tony? It depended on who you asked. But from that day on he became Paul-Tony. A new identity? No, not really.

If someone were to ask you, “Who are you?” How would you respond? How we identify ourselves is closely connected to the different roles we fill and our relationships with people. Who are you? Who would others say you are?

Questions to Discuss: Where does our identity come from? Does your name, your role, your relationships, or responsibilities give you your identity? Does your identity come from your family or your heritage?

Examining Scripture

In today’s lesson, we pick up in Matthew 16. Jesus has been performing miracles – turning water into wine, healing the sick, raising people from the dead, and feeding the five thousand. He has barely returned to Jewish territory (after preaching to the Gentiles) when the Jewish authorities begin questioning Him yet again.

In Matthew 16:1, we find the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to Jesus to ask for a sign from heaven. This prompts Him to leave the area once more and go across the lake to Caesarea Philippi – Gentile territory. While He and His disciples are on their way, Jesus warns the disciples to be on their guard against the Jewish leaders, but the disciples don’t understand Jesus.

Can you imagine how frustrated Jesus must be at this point? He’s spent nearly three years walking with this group of knuckleheads and even they don’t understand who He is. After seeing Him perform so many miracles and spending every day with Him for the past 3 years, shouldn’t they of all people “get” Him?

Let’s read this passage of Scripture together.

Matthew 16:13-19 (NLT)

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”
14 “Well,” they replied, “some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.”

15 Then he asked them, “But who do you say I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

17 Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. 18 Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

Question to Discuss: Look at verse 15. Why do you think Jesus asked this important question of the disciples?

Unpacking the Scripture

In Matthew 16:13, Jesus begins by asking his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Jesus wanted to know who those on the outside of his circle of close friends say He is. How do they identity him? But before we examine the answer He receives, let’s look closer at the question.

Jesus uses the title, Son of Man, to describe himself. Son of Man is a Messianic title. Jesus is proclaiming Himself Messiah. This title also states that Jesus is fully human; He is a human son. Therefore, Jesus is fully God (Messiah) and fully human. So Jesus is stating who He is, even as He asked them…Who do they say I am?

The disciples answer Jesus with the commonly held view. Some people say John the Baptist, or Elijah, and still others say Jeremiah. People thought Jesus was one of the great prophets who had come back to life!

Jesus now asks His disciples, those whom He is closest to, “Who do YOU say I am?” We don’t know if there was a long pause, or if the disciples looked at each other with quizzical looks. Maybe one of them thought, “Come on Jesus! You're Joseph and Mary's son.” Or maybe, “You're the best thing to come out of Nazareth!” Did they think something directly related to their relationship with Him like you are our friend, our leader, etc?

What we do know is that Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus responds by blessing Peter, and saying God has revealed this truth to Peter:

Peter has identified Jesus by stating His role – Christ (Messiah) - and His relationship – Son of the Living God. In saying this, Peter has revealed the true identity of Jesus. Jesus then reveals Peter’s true identity. Peter is the rock, not for his character; but because of the role Peter would fulfill as the leader of the Church. Jesus has placed this call, this role and purpose on Peter. In fulfilling this, Peter will know his true identity and purpose.

Questions to Discuss: If Jesus were to ask you, “Who do you say I am?” what would you be thinking? How would you respond? What role does Jesus fill in your life? Lord, Redeemer, Savior, Friend? What is your relationship with Jesus like?

Bishop Willimon tells the story:

“Back in high school, every Friday and Saturday night, as I was leaving home to go on a date, I remembered my mother bidding me farewell at the front door with the weighty words, ‘Don’t forget who you are.’ You know what she meant. She did not mean that I was in danger of forgetting my name and my street address. She meant that alone on a date, in the midst of some party, in the presence of some strangers, I might forget who I was. I might lose sight of the values with which I was raised, answer to some alien name, and engage in some unaccustomed behavior.

‘Don’t forget who you are’ was her maternal benediction as I left home.

It is difficult in modern life, amidst the conflicting claims and confusion of names, to remember who we are. We are forever answering to some false name, forever misunderstanding who we are and by whom we are named. It is easy to forget.”

(Excerpt from *Remember who you are*, page 105, William H. Willimon. Bishop Willimon served as the Bishop to the North Alabama conference, 2004-2012. He currently serves as the Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School, and is Pastor of Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham, North Carolina.)

Peter also reminds Christians of who we are in 1 Peter 2:4-6.

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.  

6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

We, as Christians, are the church built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus as the cornerstone. Jesus praised Peter for his faith, and He wants to build you up too in your faith. Your response to Christ will determine not only your values and lifestyle, but your eternal destiny as well.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Matthew tells us:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  

20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In these verses, we as Christians, and each of us individually, are commissioned and commanded by Jesus (He who knows you and who you really are) to go out and train everyone you meet, those near and far, leaving no one out. We are not to use our own judgment, but are to include everyone as commanded by God, so they too can know who they are by knowing who Jesus is.

To know who you are (Christ’s chosen ones, a disciple, a royal priesthood) is to know your true identity, your true purpose. You are to answer the call of the One who names you Christian; the One who calls you into the family of...
God (relationship) and has a purpose (role) for you and your life.

Remember who you are because you know who Jesus is, and like Peter, you will be blessed!

**Question to Discuss:** Does knowing who Jesus is help you to know who you are? How? Think again, if he asked you, “Who do you say I am?” Would you respond differently now? What will you do now that you know?

**Prayer:** Jesus, help me to know you. Empower me to speak the truth of who you are in my life. Remind me of who I am because of the relationship I have with you. Give me the courage to accept the call and commission you have placed on me to share the truth of who you are with everyone. In the name of the One who knows my true identity, Jesus Christ, Amen.