

## Ordinary 21A - 2023

### Who Do You Say I Am?

Jesus and his disciples ventured into the District of Caesarea Philippi, an area about 25 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The region had tremendous religious implications. The place was littered with the temples of the Syrian gods. Here also was the elaborate marble temple that had been erected by Herod the Great, father of the then ruling Herod Antipas. Here also was the influence of the Greek gods. Here also the worship of Caesar as a God himself. You might say that the world religions were on display in this town. It was with this scene in the background that Jesus chose to ask the most crucial questions of his ministry.

He looked at his disciples and in a moment of reflection said: "Who do men say that I am?" The disciples begin sharing with Jesus what they have heard from the people who have been following Jesus: Some say that you are Elijah; others say John the Baptist, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. It's always been this way, Jesus as seen by the masses is seen in so many different ways.

You can speak of Jesus as prophet, holy man, teacher, or spiritual leader, and few will object. But speak of Him as Son of God, divine, of the same nature as the Father, and people will line up to express their disapproval.

Who do people say he is? Who do you say he is? And what are we called to do? (from <http://www.sermons.com>)

### Call Him God

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis addressed the inclination to say nice things about Jesus, but to stop short of calling him God. He wrote, "I am here trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.'" That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg-or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any of that patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. Nor did he intend to."

(by C.S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*, MacMillan, 1943, p. 55-56, with thanks to Paul Janke)

### A Point of Reference

The state highway department in Pennsylvania once set out to build a bridge working from both sides. When the workers reached the middle of the waterway, they found they were thirteen feet to one side of each other.

Albert Steinberg, writing some time ago in the Saturday Evening Post, went on to explain that each crew of workmen had used its own reference point. No wonder they did not connect.

In that same article Steinberg tells about a small disc on the Meades Ranch in north central Kansas where the **thirty-ninth parallel** from the Atlantic to the Pacific crosses the **ninety-eighth meridian** running from

Canada to the Rio Grande. The National Oceanic Survey, a small federal agency whose business it is to locate the exact positions of every point in the United States, uses the scientifically recognized reference point on the Meades Ranch. So far, no mistakes have been made, and none are expected. All ocean liners and commercial planes come under the survey. The government can build no dams or even launch a missile without this agency to tell it the exact location to the very inch. "Location by approximation," the article goes on to say, "can be costly and dangerous."

That's why there is so much chaos in our society today. Everyone's using their own reference point. What we need is a universal reference point so that we can say, "Here. Here is how the good life is lived."

For Christians there is such a reference point - and that is Jesus. What would Jesus do? That is the question that continually helps us in our quest for right living. Jesus not only revealed the character of God but he also patterned the ideal life for humanity. (by King Duncan from *Collected Sermons*, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com))

### **One Generation Away from Extinction**

It has been pointed out that the Church is always one generation from extinction. If we don't spread the Gospel, it will be just one generation away from disappearing from the face of the earth. It's a compelling idea, isn't it? It enhances our sense of Christian responsibility. We need to get out there and work for the Gospel or the Church could fade into history.

Perhaps you have heard the old story about Jesus appearing in heaven just after his resurrection. Jesus is giving a progress report on all that has happened while he was on earth. Moses is there and he asks him, "Well Jesus, did you leave things in capable hands?"

Jesus responds, "I did. I have left behind Mary and Martha and Peter and the other disciples." Moses said, "What if they fail?" Jesus said, "Well, I have established the Church and filled it with the Holy Spirit and they will carry on." And Moses said, "What if they fail?" Came the reply, "I have no other plan." There's a great tension there. God is at work here in our church but we've been given the keys of the Kingdom. We have work to do and Christ calls us to it. The prophet Micah put it this way: "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God." (by Brett Blair, [www.eSermons.com](http://www.eSermons.com))