

The Story Series
Week 25: Jesus, The Son of God
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We have been making our way through the New Testament, retelling the life story of Jesus in chronological order. So far we've covered Jesus' birth, baptism, his encounter with the devil, and his miracles and healings. With every word Jesus speaks, with every act he performs, Jesus is trying to get us to understand that God is with us. Jesus has come among us to help us experience the love of our heavenly Father. By sending Jesus, God is making good on his promise to redeem and save our lives.

Jesus has been teaching us for quite a while now. To see if anything is sinking in, he gives us a pop quiz, you might say. Jesus asks, "Who do you say I am?" It's interesting to note the place in which Jesus chooses to ask this question. It is in the city of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was to religion what Wal-Mart is to shopping. Every variety in one place, and lots of it! Every imaginable god-like deity could be experienced in Caesarea Philippi. And Jesus, surrounded by every imaginable religion possible, asks, "Who do people say that I am?"

A flurry of answers is given. "Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah. Still others say you are one of the prophets." When it comes to talking about the opinions of others, the disciples have no problem answering that question. But then Jesus asks a more personal question, "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" This time, no one but Peter responds. I wonder why that is? Is it because the disciples are still trying to figure out who Jesus really is? Is it because Peter beats them to the punch, or is Peter simply ending an awkward silence and says what he thinks Jesus wants to hear. "You are the Messiah" – an Old Testament term, which in the New Testament becomes "the Christ" – or the Anointed One, the One commissioned by God to redeem humanity.

Surely Peter has thought about this question before. The day that Jesus invites Peter to climb out of the boat and walk on the water with him, I'm sure Peter thought to himself, "Who is this guy?" The day that he took the boy's picnic lunch, and with Jesus' blessing, fed thousands and thousands of people, I'm sure Peter looked at Jesus and wondered, "Who is this guy?"

Peter has considered this question before, and if we are honest with ourselves, so have we. You and I, as we make our earthly journey of faith, do we not wrestle with who this Jesus really is? Are his words true? Can Jesus be trusted? Is he really in control? We ask such question not because we *don't* believe, but because we **do** believe and seek to better understand who Jesus really is, how he works, and what it means to faithfully follow him.

Truth be told, Jesus personally asks each of us, "Who do you say I am?" When people of my generation are in search of something, we go to Google.com on the internet. And so I brought up Google and typed in "Who is Jesus?" and it brought up over 890 million

different websites where I could go to get some information on Jesus. That tells me lots of people are trying to figure out exactly who Jesus is.

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus asks. In response to that question, it’s so easy to rattle off the tenets of our faith: I believe you are God’s Son. You were born of a virgin, crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day you rose again. But that’s not what Jesus is asking. Jesus is asking, “No, what do I mean to you *personally*?”

And that is a totally different question. For me, Jesus is one who – not believing that I had what it takes to be a pastor – Jesus called me, equipped me, and led me to places where God’s glory and love were revealed through me, despite my unworthiness.

For me, Jesus is one who – after twelve years of waiting for a child, and reaching a point where I was ready to give up and accept my fate – Jesus is one who informed me that God had a daddy plan in store for me that only God could conceive. Jesus is one who – after working one miracle after another – taught me the undeniable power of prayer. Jesus is one in whom I have entrusted my life and not been disappointed.

How would you answer that question: “Who do you say Jesus is?” Not the book answer, not the answer you think God wants to hear, but the answer that naturally flows from your heart as you think about your relationship with Jesus. Think about that this week.

I began to wonder: How would Jesus answer that question about himself? “Jesus, who do you say you are?” I’m pretty sure Jesus would respond, “I am the Son of Man.” If Jesus had a business card, I believe it would read, “Jesus Christ, Son of Man.” The reason I think this is because Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man” 80 times within the gospel stories.

But what does that mean? Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. It sounds a bit strange to us, but that title would have been filled with meaning to those living in the 1st century. “Son of Man” means “a human being with divine characteristics.” The origin of the phrase “Son of Man” is from the Old Testament writer Daniel, who had this vision from God and saw “the Son of Man descending from the clouds of heaven. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal – it will never end.”

That’s me, Jesus says. I am the One to whom God has given power and authority over all things – even power over sin and death. I am the One whose reign will never end. It will be everlasting! I have come down from heaven, Jesus says, taken on human form, to fulfill the plan of my heavenly Father.

We also perceive Jesus’ divinity in the seven “I am” statements that he utters in John’s Gospel. I am the light of the world. I am the bread of life. I am the resurrection. Over and over again, Jesus says, “I Am.” It’s the exact name that God uses to identify himself to Moses in the wilderness. When God commissions Moses to go to the Egyptian pharaoh and say, “Let my people go!” Moses inquires, “Who should I say is sending me?” And God says, “Tell

them 'I Am' sent you." For Moses, it was clear that Almighty God will be whoever or whatever God needs to be in order to accomplish his purposes.

So when Jesus says, "I am," he is equating himself with God. In the 8th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I Am!" Granted, the grammar is a tad peculiar, but what Jesus is saying is this: God and I have the same name. God and I are one. Whatever I say to you has been spoken to me by God the Father.

Jesus is indeed God, God in the flesh, God in human form. Jesus is the Son of Man – yes, a human being – but also the Son of God – the very essence or nature of God, the Father. To hear Jesus speak is to hear God himself speak. To watch Jesus in action is to see God himself at work. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: "The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God" (Hebrews 1:3).

God sent Jesus to earth to be our Savior, one who knows our name, one who knows our joys, our fears, our shortcomings. Jesus is one who will walk beside us through life, promising to carry us when the road gets too difficult. Jesus even offers to give his life for us in order that we might live. Jesus promises to do such marvelous things because that's what God would do. Remember, Jesus is God in human flesh.

God sent Jesus to earth as the final step in his master plan to redeem and save us. Next week as we experience the powerful Passion Story of Jesus on the cross, God's love and commitment to us will be undeniable. God will stop at nothing – even if it means sacrificing his only Son upon the cross – to ensure that our relationship with God will be reconciled.

As we continue to follow Christ to the cross, the question will change. Where today the question is, "What do we think of Christ?" the question at the cross becomes, "What does Christ think of us?" The definitive answer to that question will be heard as Jesus hangs on the cross on our behalf. That will be our focus next week.

But today, let us ponder the question Christ asks us. "Who do you say I am?" What difference has Christ made in your life? If the textbook answer is the only thing that comes to mind, I invite you to set aside some quiet time with God this week to discern how the Spirit of God might be at work in your life. God is there. God, in Christ Jesus, has moved into the neighborhood, and he desires to develop a personal relationship with you.

May each of us come to know in our heart that Peter is correct. Jesus *is* the Messiah, the Son of God, the One sent by God to save us, who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is at work in our lives this very day, to bring about his purposes. Thanks be to God. Amen!