

# Matthew 16:13-20

## WHO IS JESUS, WHO ARE YOU?

A psychological identity relates to [self-image](#) (one's [mental model](#) of oneself), [self-esteem](#), and [individuality](#). Consequently, Weinreich gives the definition "A person's identity is defined as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future..."

As you can see, in our modern culture, the way identity is defined can be rather fluid. That is unfortunate, but this problem is one in which the Gospel pierces at its core: more on that later.

### ***Mt. 16:13-17***

***13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"***

***14 So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."***

***15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"***

***16 Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."***

***17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."***

Here we have Jesus once again taking His disciples on what can be seen as another retreat. They have headed north once again, as they did into Syro-Phoenicia, (Tyre and Sidon) but this time they are a little farther east. This was the land of Dan in OT times. And while it was a portion of the land of Israel, this area had many negative connotations to it. Anything coming from this area was seen to be evil by Israelites in OT times and this was also the case in the mind of the first century Jew. Israel was almost always attacked and conquered from this direction. The Canaanites, specifically some of the "giant clans" were pushed into this region, if they weren't specifically targeted during the Israelite conquest of Canaan. Later when the nation of Israel split, the 10 northern tribes digressed very quickly into paganism and much of those practices were centered in this area, most likely from the influence of the remnant of the giant clans. Nothing good was seen as coming from this area.

At the time in which Jesus was visiting the area, there was a large pagan influence and population. There was a pagan temple built into the side of a mountainous

outcrop there in which the god Pan was worshipped, along with some other pagan gods of the region. Mount Hermon is not too far away and its snow-capped peak can be seen from the pagan temple on a clear day. These features play a key role insofar as the imagery and points Jesus makes in this passage.

(PICTURES)

Jesus begins the lesson by asking His disciples a question. He asks them, “Who do men say that I am?”

There were many opinions and ideas as Jesus’ identity. As we read in the account, they were all wrong. The idea that Jesus was the Messiah, the king who would come through the line of David, had not been grasped. Most people had linked Jesus to John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other “nameless” prophet. He just couldn’t be pigeon holed into any of these identities. He was much more than these, He was a king, but His message and method was not what they expected. So while the Jews were familiar with a coming Messianic figure, they couldn’t identify Jesus in this way because their picture was incomplete. Many of the Messianic prophecies were not fully understood at this time. Despite His miracles and His message, Jesus was still not seen to be the coming Messiah by most of those who saw and heard Him.

Jesus then asks another question of His disciples.

***15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”***

At first, it may seem strange to ask this question of people you had been living with on a daily basis for over three years. But this goes way beyond Jesus’ name on His driver’s license. This goes to His identity.

This is not just a question of a name such as we would see on a driver’s license or social security card. This is a question of identity. They know His name, but who is He really?

Peter speaks up for the group, as is his normal manner, whether good or bad. And he gives the correct answer.

***16 Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”***

***17 Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.***

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- “The Christ = the *chrystos*, the anointed. This was a title synonymous with a king. Kings were anointed before they took their thrones in Israel. Here Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the coming king, the one who would ascend to David’s throne through David’s line.
- Jesus’ response. Blessed are you – same as in the Beattitudes. (happy, well off)
- Why does Jesus answer Peter in this way at this time when Jesus has already been acknowledged in like manner previously. (As in chapter 14)
- This answer did not come on the heels of some miracle. There is nothing spectacular (in a sense) in this case. There is nothing in this case driving the emotions. In fact, Jesus makes the point that this is actually a revelation from the Father. And that is what it takes to truly “get it.”
- While there is a mental ascent to the truth in most cases. After all the disciples have been watching, listening and chewing on all these things for three years now. They have had to marinate on it. But in the end there is a revelation that comes from the Father that “seals” this in our brains. While we are to use our faculties to discern truth – the Gospel message, the plan of God does “make sense,” there is also the spiritual aspect of it. Peter has “gotten it” and has spoken for the group. I believe the entire group has gotten it, although there may be varying degrees to which they understand Peter’s point. As we will see, there is still a great deal of the plan they don’t yet understand.

***Mt. 16:17-20***

***Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”***

***20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.***

- Peter and the rock. Wordplay and the protestant reaction to Peter as the first Pope. Peter must be the antecedent, grammatically speaking.
- First mention of church.
- Gates of Hades – immediate context, double entendre with Mt. Hermon.
- The keys to the kingdom, context of Isaiah. This explains the binding and loosing verbiage. Rabbis and scribes “bound and loosed” what was to be taught in the synagogues. Jesus is using imagery from Isaiah 22, where a new steward, Eliakim has been installed in the kingdom of David.
- **“If it were not for Protestant reactions against extremes of Roman**

**Catholic interpretation, it is doubtful whether many would have taken 'rock' to be anything or anyone other than Peter." D.A. Carson**

***20 Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.***

Though Peter and the disciples understood who Jesus was, they still didn't fathom the type of king He was. We will see Jesus clarifying this next week.

The application: Who is Jesus and who are you?

I spoke on the modern view of identity at the beginning of the message. We live in an individualistic culture where we "choose and build" our own identities.

Every culture points to certain things and says, **"If you gain those, if you acquire or achieve those, then you'll have a self. You'll know you're valuable."**

Traditional cultures would say you're nobody unless you gain the respectability and legacy of family and children. In individualistic cultures it is different; the culture says you're nobody unless you gain a fulfilling career that bring money, reputation and status. Regardless of such differences though, every culture says identity is performance-based. But Jesus says that will never work.

No matter how many of these things you gain, it's never enough to make you sure of who you are. If you're building your identity on "somebody loves me", or if you're building your identity on "I've got a god career," and anything goes wrong with that relationship or job, you fall apart. You feel as if you don't have a self.

**Can we begin to see just how radical Jesus is?**

It's not a matter of saying, **"I've been a failure, I've been immoral, so now I am going to church and become a moral, decent person. Then I know I'm a good person because I'm spiritual."**

Jesus is saying I don't want you to simply switch from one performance-based identity to another; I want you to find a whole new way. I want you to lose the old self, the old identity, and base yourself and your identity on Me and the Gospel!

But if we just take it so far and stop we are no better off. It can't be an abstract thing. We can't just say, "I can't build my identity on my parents' approval because that comes and goes; I can't build my life on romance, I can't build my life on career and success. I will build my life on God."

If we stop there, God is almost an abstraction and building your life on Him will just become another act of the will. And no one has ever been changed by an act of the

will. The only thing that can change and reforge a life at its root is love.

**Jesus is saying, “It’s not enough just to know me as a teacher or as an abstract principle; you have to look at my life. I went to the cross – and on the cross I lost my identity so you can have one.”**

Once we can see the Son of God loving us like that, once we are moved by that existentially and viscerally, we can begin to get a strength and assurance, a sense of our own value and distinctiveness that is not based on what you’re doing or whether somebody loves you, whether you’ve lost weight or whether you’ve got money. You are free!!!!

In the Bible, particularly the OT, when a person was renamed, he was re-made. (Abram – Abraham; Jacob – Israel)

Simon has had the nickname of Peter for some time now, but Jesus has just made it official. With that name recognition, Peter has a new identity, a new focus and purpose.

With the revelation of just who Jesus is, we can also have a new identity and purpose, we have been re-made, where the playing field is leveled with no reason to feel inferior or superior. We are His and that changes everything.

**Rev. 3:12**

**12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.**

**13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

QUESTIONS:

- How does the Gospel level the playing field?
- How have my own feeling of inferiority or superiority crippled my walk?
- How can understanding the Gospel like this change my life? (relationships, depression, guilt?)