Matthew 16:13-16 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” 14They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” 16Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

 If you are at all like me, you would recognize that this text presents a rather interesting challenge. It is a challenge not only because of the truly remarkable confession of Jesus that is presented but also because of the challenging question that is raised that brought about this confession. What do I mean?

 Well, here is Jesus asking his disciples what people thought about him. If you don’t think any further about that, you simply figure this is truly a human thing for Jesus to do. Jesus wanted to know (just like almost every human does) what other people thought about him. Again, how truly human that is on Jesus’ part. Yet I want to think deeper. I ask the question, “Since Jesus is the Son of God shouldn’t he have known what people thought of him?”

 There is an interesting question. It is in contemplating this question that the reality and wonder of what was going on hits you. Jesus wasn’t asking for himself. Jesus wasn’t just being human. Jesus was serving as the Savior, working to bring souls to the wonder and marvel of God’s gracious love. So let’s go ahead and answer that question.

 The answer is a resounding, “Yes!” Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus as God is all knowing and even in this period of humiliation, where Jesus does not use the full powers of his Godhead, I think we can be assured that Jesus knew the answer. Jesus knew what people thought of him. For that matter Jesus even knew what his disciples thought of him. Jesus knew! So why ask the question? Sometimes when answering a question one must consider the reason, the motivation for the question. Jesus was not out to bring praise and honor to himself. Jesus is working to help his disciples. Jesus wants to strengthen and increase their knowledge and understanding. The question was designed to make the disciples think. The question was asked for the disciples own good and faith. All of this is clearly seen when you understand the history which surrounds this event in the life of Jesus.

 Let’s contemplate this question of Jesus for ourselves under this theme: **WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?**

 What I think is important to grasp when it comes down to this text is the general history behind it. Jesus has been involved in his ministry for about 2 and a half years. He has had a great first year of support, what we call the year of inauguration. People were hearing of Jesus, hearing of his miracles and they were coming to see him. This grew into what is call the year of popularity which is probably a period of about 14-16 months. That’s where we are at now. The next year is going to be different. It has already started in the sense that Jesus’ popularity is beginning to fade away. Typically the third year of Jesus’ ministry is called “the year of opposition.”

 That year happens because the Jewish religious leaders have managed to get the people to abandon Jesus as a false prophet and teacher. They did this because Jesus did not fit what they thought the Messiah should be. They wanted a worldly ruler who would use THEM as the heart and core of his kingdom. They were not concerned with a spiritual message or anything to do with forgiveness of sins and salvation because frankly, these religious leaders thought they were holy and perfect on their own. Yet Jesus called them sinners. Jesus called them “**whitewashed tombs, a brood of vipers, blind fools and hypocrites.”** So they hated Jesus and what he was about and they did everything they could in every way they could to undermine and destroy Jesus and his message of salvation.

 This question that Jesus’ asks is basically asked of his disciples, right around the beginning of the year of opposition. Jesus wanted his disciples to think about what the people were saying, people being led astray by false leaders and teachers, people who might have all sorts of foolish ideas of Jesus. Jesus wants his disciples to think of all of this and then also to answer what they thought of Jesus. By the way, the disciples basically spent all their time with Jesus. I am pretty sure if there was anything, anything at all that could dampen or damage what they will confess, they will know it.

 So, **“Who do people say the Son of Man is?”** What is the world stating about Jesus? The answer they give is this: **“Some say John the Baptist, others say, Elijah and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”**

To tell you the truth, I find the answers the people had to be just a bit disturbing. Actually when you look at their answers you realize that there is more superstition and paganism in their answers than there is the Word of God. They think Jesus some sort of reincarnated John the Baptist? Jesus was baptized by John. They walked this earth together and were in fact related to each other. How could two contemporary men be the same man? Utter silliness! Some say Jesus is Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Yet the Bible never speaks of some sort of reincarnation, of one coming back as another, but rather tells us we have one life to live, only one, and then, it’s judgment time. Their answers are those of people who do not know what God’s Word says, people who want to believe half-truths, lies and falsehoods and pass it off as fact.

 When you think about the silliness of what the people thought of Jesus it should serve as a good warning. Don’t figure we are way too smart to do something like that today. In truth, today people on a regular basis deny the truth of Jesus. To them, Jesus is only a great teacher, who came to show us how to live and how best to please God with our works. Or people teach that Jesus is just a guy who came to show you how to stand against the man, stand against authority and those who want to lord it over you. There are people who want to use Jesus as the teacher of social justice and equality for all. Listen to what is being said out there. People who reject that Jesus died for our sins. People (yes, churches) who deny Jesus rose from the dead or that Jesus even lives and rules with God for us. You need to grasp that the world is still pretty much uttering foolish and horrid ideas about Jesus. You need to listen so that your confession, the truth of Jesus, becomes all the more precious to you.

 So I will tell you it is quite a relief to hear the answer of the disciples to Jesus’ next question: **“But you, who do you say I am?”** Peter is the spokesman here. Peter is answering for all the disciples at this point. They say: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

 How right Peter is when he speaks these words. Jesus is the Christ. He is the promised Savior, the Son of God that God’s Word foretold. He is the one who came to be the atoning sacrifice for sin. He is the one who came and by his life, suffering and death defeated sin, death and the Devil on our behalf. He is the one who came to declare all people from every nation the children of God and heirs of eternal life simply on the basis that you believe Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is the one, the only one who fulfills all the promises of God concerning our souls. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

 Do you grasp how important this confession is even for you and me today? If all you can say about Jesus is that “he showed us how to live” then how is he different than any other religious person who proclaims salvation is by works and here is how to do it? If Jesus is anything short of what He proclaimed and revealed of himself in your heart, then I want you to grasp you do not grasp the true and real Jesus as given in God’s Word. Jesus accepts this confession as true. Jesus proclaims this confession is true and even more pointed yet, Jesus even tells his disciples: **“For flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”**

 Dear people, the whole of God’s Word rests on this confession. Jesus is the Christ. If these words are not true, then nothing in the Bible is true! He is the one who would be as Moses, but greater. He would be a descendant of Abraham, the Son of David and yet David’s Lord. He would be the sin bearer, the propitiation, the mediator of the mercy of God. He would be the bearer of righteousness, the Holy One, the Lamb to be slaughtered on account of the wrath and anger of God against sin. The Christ would be the revealer of God, the Light of the world, the one to die and yet the one who would live forever. He would be God’s prophet, our forever High Priest, and the King enthroned forever. He would be hated without cause, put to death with sinners, have his hands and feet pierced, hung on a tree, and buried with the rich. Most important, everything connected to salvation, grace, redemption, righteousness, perfection, love and God’s mercy is found, seen, and realized only in Jesus. He is the Christ, the promised one, the Anointed one of God!

 But just as important grasp that Jesus here is proclaim **“the Son of the Living God.”** Not just a mere man, but God’s Son, the Living God’s Son. Not a god of your imagination and fancy that you can manipulate and change at your whim but rather the true and Living God. The God who created all that was and is and will be. The God who has revealed his mercy through His plan of salvation given in his Word. The God who has spoken to us, who has revealed his heart and love. I say this because if you don’t grasp the marvel of the true and living God, then you can’t grasp that God could and did give us a precise and error free record and revelation of himself. The Living God, the eternal being of power and majesty who quietly and absolutely worked his way and will to provide a Savior for all who are sinners. The God who has proven himself faithful and true, loving and gracious, so much so that He sent His Son. That is Jesus. Jesus who is one with the Father. Jesus, who to know is to know the true and living God, who gave his life and rose again that you might have eternal life. Jesus, the Son of God, the Living God!

 By the way, as I think about all of this marvel of Jesus, I wonder how Judas fits in. Here is what I think. Right now, as of this confession, Judas is in agreement with these words. But in the next year, as Jesus reveals more and more the plan of God for him to suffer and die, Judas will turn away from this truth of Jesus. Judas, within a year, will reject what he believes on this day. How sad, and yet a lesson for all of us to consider.

 Judas, had trouble wrapping his mind around the idea of the suffering, dying, atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Judas couldn’t let go of the desire for earthly status, that Jesus would be a ruler here, that Jesus would make the world a better place, that Jesus would use him as a ruler and overseer of this earthly kingdom. Judas became focused on worldly things rather than the spiritual and redemptive things of Jesus.

 How easy that is to do. Life is hard and we blame Jesus. Stresses and strains run rampant in our lives, things aren’t going as we desire, the ups and downs of life are taking its toll or maybe it is just age…either way, without our thinking it out, we blame Jesus. If he really loved us, if He really was God, if he really cared about me…this stuff wouldn’t be, my struggles wouldn’t be, and he would make my life smooth. But it doesn’t happen and so we blame Jesus.

 Don’t. Instead turn to Jesus for wisdom, strength and comfort. Hear how Jesus forgives. Hear how the troubles of this world, when measured against the eternal promises of Jesus are to be considered as nothing, temporary problems of a sin filled world. Hear how Jesus does love you, has died for your sins and how Jesus calls you to be his child, an heir of eternal life who has awaiting a mansion in a kingdom of pure joy and wonder. Hear how Jesus will be with you, will guide you, will strengthen you, and will carry you if needed. Hear how Jesus, God’s Son, calls you to be his eternal brother or sister in heaven. His love is there, it is true and real. His redemption makes this world a shadowy valley we will easily walk through, because Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God is walking with us. Don’t blame Jesus, but rather turn to Jesus for help, wisdom, guidance and strength.

 What it boils down to is asking yourself the very same question that Jesus asked his disciples. **“But you, who do you say that I am?”** Who do you say Jesus is? What is it you really believe of Jesus? I pray that you will confess exactly what the first disciples did and that you cling to that truth: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”** Amen.