

“The Most Important Question You’ll Ever Be Asked”

(Matthew 16:13-18)

For Your Life in Christ the 10th Sunday after Pentecost

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Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

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Introduction: The Great Challenge of Our Time

- A. Alister McGrath in his book *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* explains that the 18th century Enlightenment established human reason as the highest standard for knowledge and truth, but it gave way to the late 20th century into-the-present worldview called postmodernism (182f).
- B. Once upon a time, we thought we had everything figured out through human reason, but two things happened: 1) we discovered human reason isn’t as accurate as we thought (e.g. we thought that Newton’s physics was fairly seamless, then along came Einstein!); 2) the reliance on human reason ushered in horrible atrocities like the Stalinist purges and the Nazi extermination camps. We are now no longer so willing to boast in human reason.
- C. So what are the implications of the new view? We can’t really know anything with certainty and what is true and what is real depends on a person’s personal view. Postmodernism is the age of relativism. Welcome to the present!
- D. Interestingly enough, our post-Christian era is looking a lot like the pre-Christian era. During that era (before the establishment and explosion of the Christian Church), Jesus asked this as recorded Matthew 16:13:

Matthew 16:13: “When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’”

- E. Various disciples chimed in to give answer. These are translations of the relative answers recorded:

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1. Jesus is a great king who has come to threaten Herod’s rule. That is a political figure, but still a man.
 2. A great herald of Messiah who had returned to continue the work of preparing for the true Messiah, but still a man.
 3. A great prophet who is legend who perhaps had risen from death, but still a man.
- F. What do all of these have in common? Jesus = still a man!
 - G. As one theologian put it, ***“They thought well of Him, but not well enough.”***
 - H. ***In our sin, we think well of Jesus...just well enough to coax our consciences, but in sin we limit who Jesus is...we do not want to answer to Him as Almighty God, we want His Word to be relative. In our sinful hearts, we don’t believe in truth! Just versions of the truth! We don’t think of Him well enough!***
 - I. In his book *The Case for the Real Jesus*, Lee Strobel refutes among other things the popular assertion, “People should be free to pick and choose what to believe about Jesus.”
 - J. This is exactly what we do, but here’s the problem:
From Strobel: “...truth is true even if no one knows it, admits it, agrees with it, follows it, or even fully grasps it...The problem is that people can have beliefs that are ‘useful,’ maybe temporarily and for certain ends, but they may be completely false (236).”
 - K. In today’s Gospel, the Word asserts that there is an authoritative viewpoint: God breaks onto the scene and asks ***the single most important question you will ever be asked in your life:***

Matthew 16:15: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

Part I: While You Still Live and Breathe, What Do You Say of Jesus?

A. The foolish opinions about Jesus, Jesus didn't even care to discuss.

B. There is only one answer Christ commends:

Matthew 16:16: "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

C. Jesus praises THIS answer, because it is THE answer!

Matthew 16:17: "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"

D. Crucial components of what we've just read:

1. What is that revelation from God? (from vs. 16)

a. Jesus = "the Christ, the Son of the living God."

b. Epiphanius the Latin (5th or 6th century): "If Christ is the Son of God, by all means he is also God." (Ancient Christian Commentary, lb, 45)

c. The Venerable Bede (c. 672/673-735): "*He calls Him the 'living' God by way of distinction from the false gods which heathendom in its various delusions made to itself to worship, either of dead men, or – greater folly still – of insensate matter.*" (The Lutheran Study Bible, 1616)

d. That is, since Jesus the Son of God *is* God, then He is also the Living God which means that ***Jesus is the source of life!***

E. Do we believe this? When we doubt and we seek answers for our burdens under every rock and yet all the while refuse to worship Jesus Christ and call on His Name. Instead we rely on "flesh and blood" = "[the] mortal state of weakness and fallibility." (Lenski, 623)

Part II: On the Other Hand: God Must Grant the Revelation to Us!

A. Jesus teaches that there is nothing in our nature, will, efforts,

nor intellect that can give us the truth of God's revelation!

B. "The Father revealed Jesus to Peter through Jesus himself, and he endeavors to do this in the case of all men by bringing Jesus into contact with them (Lenski, 624)."

C. We confess as much in *Luther's Small Catechism*:

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him."

D. Jesus said clearly:

John 15:16: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..."

E. I will never forget a very long dialog I had with a skeptic. He kept resisting the idea of faith. He simply believed he could never manufacture the ability to just believe and admitted that his intellect, doubt, and skepticism just would not allow him. He was SHOCKED when I told him that he was absolutely right! When I shared with him that faith is a GIFT, something that ***must be given to us, you should have seen him! It was as if he had just struck a gold mine...he was stunned and overjoyed...faith did not depend on him. For years he had been downcast. Not anymore!***

Conclusion: OK, so How Do We Get The Answer & Faith?!

Matthew 16:18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

A. In this verse, WHO builds the church? Answer: Christ!

B. He builds YOU to be a member of this Church of faith "on this rock" = Jesus is the rock.

C. He gives you Himself, your sure foundation for faith, through the Word and Sacraments. They join you to Jesus!

D. Through His shed blood for you & His victory over death = Jesus builds YOU. This is the source of truth and of faith!