

QUESTIONS GOD ASKS – ‘WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?’

Col 1:15-20

Matt 16:13-19

If a friend or work colleague asked you tomorrow, ‘What can you tell me about that SA minister of yours – Yan/Jan Hofmeyr?’ You may say, ‘Well, he’s in his 60’s, although you wouldn’t say so looking at him, he’s about 5 ft 7in, he’s been in here in Leatherhead for just over a year now, and he’s married to Angela.’

Now, let’s say this person asked Angela the same question, ‘What can you tell me about your husband?’ She might say, ‘Well, I fell in love with him when he came down the church aisle singing with his guitar; our first kiss was on the dance floor at my school dance; when he’s working in his study he’ll often put his feet on his desk. He’s mostly fun to be around but at times he can get a bit down and depressed.’

Two very different answers to the same question, ‘Who is this Hofmeyr fellow.’ Angela’s reply is much deeper because she knows me so much better and more intimately. In a similar way we can answer that question of Jesus on different levels. Pretty much everyone will have some view about Him, no matter who they are. Someone may say, ‘He was a good man who lived a good life and had some pretty good teachings.’ Another may say, ‘He was a bit of a wimp, talking about turning the other cheek and loving your enemies.’ A third person may say, ‘Jesus is my world. I know he’s always with me; I talk to Him constantly. I can never repay Him for the love and forgiveness He’s shown me, but I’m never going to stop trying. He’s given me freedom from the past and hope for the future.’

Who do you say I am?’ Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ/Messiah; the Son of the living God’. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Jesus says to us. That’s such a vital question. It’s a question we may well be asked at heaven’s gate one day. On that day I don’t think we’ll be asked ‘What was your job? or, ‘Where did you live and go to school?’ I don’t think we’ll be asked ‘Which church did you go to’, or even ‘How **often** did you go to church?’ Because our faith is about a person, not about institutions and activities and achievements. It’s about Jesus and who He is to us. It’s about the relationship we have, or don’t have, with Him.

C S Lewis and some others have made the very important point that when it comes to our view of Jesus there are only three options: Either He is (1) delusional, thinking He is something He is not, or (2) He is a very clever liar, a con man deceiving people into believing something He isn’t; or (3) He is in fact who He claimed to be – the Lord; God in human form. You see, He cannot be simply a good man –that is not an option. Why? Because a good man doesn’t go around telling people He is God when he knows he isn’t. Only a very good liar or a lunatic will tell people he is God when he isn’t. So, we are left with those three choices – either He was a lunatic, a liar or the Lord; either He was mad or bad or God.

But Jesus couldn’t have been a lunatic, because a lunatic doesn’t have the impact on the lives of others that Jesus did. And He isn’t a liar, a con man, because a liar won’t die for something that he knows isn’t true. That leaves us with only one logical possibility - He was and is the Lord.

There’s another reason that it’s no good to view Jesus as just a good man or a wonderful teacher – and that’s because a teacher or a good man cannot save us. It needs someone greater than that. It needs someone who can straddle the chasm that divides us from God; the chasm caused by our sin. It requires someone who has one foot on the human side of that chasm, and one foot on the divine side. It needs someone who can represent us as human beings in our need of salvation before God, and someone who from God’s side can achieve that salvation. Jesus is that mediator between humans and God – He is both fully human and fully divine. As a human being He can represent us and carry our sin on the cross; and because He is divine and without sin, He is the only adequate sacrifice for that sin.

In OT times people had to bring a spotless, perfect lamb as a sacrifice for sin. But an animal could never be an adequate substitute for human sin. An old hymn puts it like this:

‘Not all the blood of beasts, on Jewish altars slain,
could give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain.
But Christ, the heavenly lamb, takes all our sin away;
a sacrifice of nobler name and richer blood than they.’

And so, to answer Jesus’ question, ‘Who do you say I am? We have to say, ‘You are Saviour and You are Lord; You are the Son of Man and the Son of God.’ But, of course, we have a choice whether to accept that truth for ourselves or not. If I accept it and say to Him, ‘Yes, I acknowledge You as my Saviour and accept you as my Lord’, there are some life-altering consequences.

For one, we become a child of God. As John says in his gospel, ‘To all who received Jesus and believed in Him, He gave the right to become children of God.’ We become a daughter or a son of God; we are adopted into His family. Angela and I were watching a movie this past week about a very disturbed young boy who is in protective custody. There is a middle-aged bachelor who is keen to adopt him. But the boy has the option of whether to accept that man’s offer or reject it.

To accept it means that a whole new life opens up for him; he is rescued to live a normal life in a home where he is loved and cherished. But it also means that he comes under the authority of his new father. There are rules he will need to follow if that new relationship is going to flourish to the fullest.

So too with us. God welcomes us as beloved children. But for that new relationship to work best, there are principles we need to adhere to. The greatest two, said Jesus, are firstly, ‘Love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength,’ and secondly, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ Those two commands really encapsulate every other command and principle as we follow Jesus.

Loving the Lord means following His example day by day. Loving Him means obeying Him and seeking to be the person Jesus would be if He were you or me. Every day we are faced with choices and decisions. Either we live out our love for God as we obey His will, or we go against His will. We can either be loving and obedient children who bring pleasure to our Father or disobedient children who bring sadness to His heart. Becoming a child of God is a momentary event; living as a child of God is the task and adventure of a lifetime.

‘Who do you say I am?’ There can surely be no more vital question for you and me.