

The logo for 'Central Strong' is written in a white, cursive script on a black background. The word 'Central' is smaller and positioned above 'Strong'. Two yellow dashed arrows are present: one starts at the top right of 'Strong' and points down to the right, and another starts at the bottom left of 'Strong' and points up to the left.

WEEK 1

STUDY GUIDE

BY: RANDY KIGER

SEPTEMBER 12-16, 2022



Monday, September 12, 2022

Read: Matthew 16:13–20

Scripture Verse: *“Jesus went to the area of Caesarea Philippi. There he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Matthew 16:13*

Today's Thought:

Have you ever been somewhere on vacation or traveled through an airport and thought you saw someone famous? We all have our favorite famous people that we follow on TV, in movies, in sports, or on social media. With that in mind, it doesn't become a stretch for us when we see people who look like or resemble someone we admire, to believe that's them. Maybe we even get brave enough in those moments to approach them and inquire about appeasing our curiosity. We have all probably done it sometime in our lives, especially when traveling in areas of the country where such spotting is more likely. As Jesus' reputation grew, and as He became more recognized around the villages, people began to do the same to Him. People would ask if He was the One, they had heard about from others. The question we investigate today is the one that Jesus asked his disciples, "who do people say that I am?"

Jesus traveled with his disciples from the Galilean Lake area into Gentile territory in Caesarea Philippi, about 120 miles north of Jerusalem. Caesarea Philippi was an area filled with people who strongly identified with many pagan gods like Baal and the Greek god Pan. It was amid all the pagan influence of the region that Jesus asked the disciples, "who do the people say that I am?" It is also important to point out that as Jesus asked them this question to remember that He had just had another mini confrontation with the religious leaders who continued to reject both His identity and mission, despite all the evidence of the miracles before them. Jesus warned his disciples to avoid the teachings of those groups and to gain a proper understanding of His identity and mission from Him. With this question recorded by Matthew, we begin to see a transition in the message Jesus was conveying to them. He wanted them to change their focus from the kingdom to the cross.

Today, if someone walked up to us and asked, "who do people say that I am?" We might think that person is crazy or arrogant. But for Jesus to ask such a question was nothing of the sort. It is an appropriate question necessary for a proper confession of Jesus' identity, and the answer

becomes the basis for our understanding of salvation. As the disciples began to answer Jesus' question about what people were saying about Him, they replied with answers like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Although it was prophesied that Elijah would come again, Jesus did not minister as he did; it was John the Baptist who had come in the spirit and power of Elijah to set the way for the Messiah. And Jeremiah, who displayed an attitude of tenderness and brokenness by his nation's decay, was also an attitude Jesus shared as a Man of sorrow, but He was not Jeremiah. Who Jesus is and His work must be kept together and never separated.

As we close, we need to understand the purpose of Jesus' question not only for the disciples then but for us today. Jesus wasn't interested in what others thought of him or what they were saying. It was important to Him to know that what others were saying about him wasn't wrongfully influencing what his followers were thinking. He didn't want them to listen to the false teaching of pagan gods or the selfish and ignorant teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus' goal was to rightfully establish His identity and mission with and for the disciples. It is also crucial for us to have a proper understanding of who Jesus is and what His mission is for us. Each of us must answer Jesus' question on our own. No one can answer for us, nor should we listen to what others think or say. We must know and respond in our hearts that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, because it is the key to our salvation! And it informs our mission!

- What is significant about where Jesus took the disciples to ask his question?
- Why do you think Jesus asked the disciples about who people thought he was?
- What was the purpose for Jesus' question?
- Why is it important for each person to answer for themselves?

Further Reading: Joshua 3:10; Luke 9:18-19

Tuesday, September 13, 2022

Read: Matthew 16:13-18

Scripture Verse: *"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Matthew 16:15*

Today's Thought:

Yesterday, we discussed who people around the Caesarea Philippi region thought Jesus was as he traveled and taught. Many believed he was someone else who came back from the dead, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets of old. However, we quickly discovered that none of those answers were correct. After the disciples had given Jesus the information they had been hearing from the people, Jesus turned the question back on them. Again, we know that Jesus knew what people thought about him and what they were saying everywhere he went, but that's not what concerned him. What concerned Jesus was what His disciples thought.

Matthew seeks to point his readers in a new direction, beginning with understanding who Jesus is and his mission. Jesus had spent much of his time teaching and announcing the coming of the kingdom of heaven to earth. Many Jews, including some of his followers, anticipated the kingdom's arrival to mean Jesus would overthrow the Romans and set up his kingdom now. Although we know that Jesus will someday set up his kingdom on earth and rule over it, the time has not yet arrived.

Jesus' question is a test. The disciples had to answer His question, "who do you say that I am?" and he sought to teach them the proper understanding of His identity and mission, which was shifting from the coming kingdom (future) to the cross (present). Through his teaching, Jesus would begin to show them all the transition from establishing His kingdom to building His Church, and they would be the ones to do it.

I believe Jesus reminds us not to make our spiritual decisions about Him by seeking the latest people polls. Our choices cannot come through following the crowd, right or wrong. What others say about Jesus is not essential, but what you and I speak and believe about Jesus is what matters. Have you answered Jesus' question personally for your life? I hope you have. And tomorrow, we will look at the correct answer as the Holy Spirit revealed it to Peter.

- What is the Holy Spirit saying to you as you read today's text?
- When it comes to taking tests, how do you do?
- How do you think Jesus' question was a test? Why would their answer be important?
- What was Jesus seeking to build through his disciples after the cross?
- Why is our answer to Jesus' question important not only in the present but the future?

Further Reading: Hebrews 3:12, 9:14; 1 John 4:15

Wednesday, September 14, 2022

Read: Matthew 16:13–20

Scripture Verse: *“Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah! No mere man showed this to you. My Father in heaven showed it to you.” Matthew 16:16–17*

Today’s Thought:

This week we have discovered the importance of a question that Jesus not only asked his disciples but one that is directed to each of us. We have learned that this question is not a question that anyone can answer for us. Everyone, on their merit, must answer it at some point in their life. The disciples answered Jesus’ question by telling him what others were saying and believing concerning who He was. It was then that Jesus turned the question to His disciples.

As we ponder this text, Matthew doesn’t give us much information about the look on their faces or what the mood of the moment was. But now, Jesus was asking them personally to respond to his question, “who do you think I am?” I wonder if they stood there a bit in shock. I must believe there was at least a moment of silence as they thought about what they should say. Maybe they were a little timid or scared to speak out. Would they get the answer right or wrong? We don’t know, but it is fun to speculate.

Up to now, all the answers they had given from what people were saying were wrong. Could this be part of the reason for their hesitancy? Maybe. But then, out of nowhere, comes Peter. Peter was never one to hold back and thus considering himself the team spokesman, speaks out his now-famous line, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” In calling him the Christ, Peter had said, Jesus, You are the Messiah, the Anointed One we have heard about and are waiting to come! At Peter’s outburst, we are immediately reminded of the words of the prophets.

- Isaiah 9:6 says, “A child will be born to us. A son will be given to us. He will rule over us. And he will be called Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God. He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever and Prince Who Brings Peace.”
- Jeremiah 23:5–6, “A new day is coming,” announces the Lord. “At

that time I will raise up from David's royal line a true and rightful Branch. He will be a King who will rule wisely. He will do what is fair and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved. Israel will live in safety. And the Branch will be called The Lord Who Makes Us Right With Himself."

- And Micah 5:2 says, "The Lord says, "Bethlehem, you might not be an important town in the nation of Judah. But out of you will come a ruler over Israel for me. His family line goes back to the early years of your nation. It goes all the way back to days of long ago." Bethlehem was also called Ephrathah."

I firmly believe that all the disciples knew who Jesus was from observing Him over the time they had been together. They had seen His miracles, heard His words, and were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. It just took Peter to say it out loud! With his statement Peter, has announced the fulfillment of the prophets of a coming Messiah. By acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, we can see the fullness of His humanity along with His deity as the Son of the living God. Now that we have the answer to Jesus' question, what say you?

- What do you find significant about Peter's confession?
- What do you think the other disciples thought about Peter's answer?
- How does the words of the prophets help us understand what Peter was announcing?
- How did Peter know about Jesus and what to say? Do you think that is why Jesus blessed Peter?
- What else do you think Jesus was trying to teach the disciples in that moment?

Further Reading: Hebrews 2:14; Matthew 11:27; John 1:42

Thursday, September 15, 2022

Read: Matthew 16:13-20

Scripture Verse: *"Here is what I tell you. You are Peter. On this rock I will build my church. The gates of hell will not be strong enough to destroy it." Matthew 16:18*

Today's Thought:

As we move through the text, it would seem a point of national decision has been reached as to who Jesus was, as recorded in Matthew 16:13-20. We know that great crowds still followed Jesus and gathered to hear him teach and rejoice at His healings. When asked about what the disciples were hearing about him from the public, they told him people thought he was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or another prophet, all of which was high praise. The people around the region thought of Jesus as someone under God's blessing and authority. Yet, Israel still hadn't recognized their promised Messiah, the Son of God. They would not acknowledge Him as their King!

From Simon, we learn that God's most essential and profound truths don't always come by human ingenuity but are gifts of God's amazing grace. The recognition of Jesus as both Messiah and Son of God was Peter's confession inspired by the Father. Jesus announced this truth would be the foundation on which He would build His church. This moment transitioned Jesus' announcement of the 'kingdom at hand' to the message of the Cross. It was also the moment Jesus gave Simon the name Peter, which in Greek means "rock." It will be on this "rock" that Jesus will build His church. Jesus is the cornerstone and builder, who uses living stones (obedient humans) to build His church.

The church isn't built on programs, methods, or theologies; it is Jesus who builds it. And because Jesus is the builder, not even the gates of Hell can overcome it! And Jesus placed Peter in a leadership role to establish the church's ministry by giving him the keys of the kingdom as a steward and administrator rather than a gatekeeper. And thankfully, Peter used those keys to permit Gentiles into the church! We continue the mission today when we acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He is the Messiah and the Son of the living God. Who have you told today?

- What was the national decision reached about Jesus?
- Although the decision was made and announced by Peter, who still didn't acknowledge the truth about Jesus?
- How did the recognition of Jesus change His message to the disciples and the people?
- What method of distribution was established for spreading His message at the cross?
- How are you spreading the message that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of the Living God today?

Further Reading: John 14:6-9

Friday, September 16, 2022

Read: 1 Peter 4:1-11

Scripture Verse: *"God's gifts of grace come in many forms. Each of you has received a gift in order to serve others. You should use it faithfully." 1 Peter 4:10*

Today's Thought:

Today we find Peter wrapping up a two-chapter section on Christian ethics that began in 1 Peter 2:11. In his final paragraph, we see two subdivisions or points for us to ponder. In verses 1-6, Peter teaches Christians how we are to live within our contemporary cultures, and in verses 7-11, he concludes his teaching by showing us the way Christ-followers are to live with one another. Peter wants us to live in such a way as not to submit to the ways of the ungodly but live in submission to Christ and harmony with fellow believers. It is this theme of submissive unity that brings his last paragraph on ethics to a conclusion.

We now turn our attention to the last half of today's text, where we find our key verse. As we enter this section, we need to refer back to Peter's opening admonition in verse one to prepare us for living in harmony with one another, and that is to "arm" ourselves with spiritual armor, which consists of putting on the same attitude that Christ had in Philippians 2:5-8. When we are willing to live a life that voluntarily dies to self, we can express the courage and humility according to the spiritual life Christ desires for us throughout our life. When we choose to live for the will of God rather than for the choice of evil human desire, we acknowledge that God has a specific intention and plan for us. In Christ, we no longer desire the old way of life (Romans 13:13; 1 Cor.5:10-11; 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-20; and Colossians 3:5). Christ-followers are encouraged to abandon these kinds of activity because they are contrary to God's intention for his children. Our faith in Christ causes us to think differently which turns our lives in a new direction!

The last five verses speak of the love, humility, and harmony we are to have for our brothers and sisters in Christ. As Peter is writing this letter, we are about 30 years into what we call the "church age," it is also the last age that began with the ascension of Christ and will end with the return of Christ for His church. Because this could fall at any time ushering in the return of Christ, Peter challenges and inspires us to keep a clear mind and to be self-controlled so we can pray for one another and the ungodly. He continues by teaching us to love each other deeply because

in loving someone that much, we can overlook any offense against us or others. We offer such deep love through hospitality and service and do it gracefully without complaining.

Peter follows with a second way we are to demonstrate this deep love, and it is by using our spiritual gifts. Although Paul mentions several spiritual gifts in his writing, Peter provides us with two categories under which all gifts fall, the gifts of speaking and the gifts of action. With the gifts of action, all Christians are to use their gifts to serve others, which is to be done with the strength of God. Serving others in God's power is a spiritual gift for all believers. When we are not using our spiritual gifts, something for the kingdom isn't getting done. Where is God calling you to step in and serve today?

- What is Peter teaching us to do in verses 1-6? 7-11?
- How was Peter challenging believers to live differently?
- What does faith in Christ do to our thinking and how does it affect our lives?
- How would you explain Peter's division of gifts?
- What is our call as followers when it comes to gifts of action?

Further Reading: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

NOTES



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