

## Knowing Me, Knowing You...

Good morning!

Who am I?

That's a fundamental question for every human being! In fact, it's the fundamental question that one way or another each of us seeks an honest answer to!

It's a question that each of us, deep in our own hearts and souls, has to sincerely ask and have answered before we can cobble together any kind of real significance or meaning in our lives.

Who am I? Who are you? What's your identity?

Do you know?

If we don't know... I mean really know... who we are, how can we know where we came from? And if we don't know who we are or where we came from, how in the world could we ever have the slightest idea of where we're going?

Who am I? Who are you? Who are we? What is our identity?

There was a university that offered a class on ornithology, the study of birds. The class and its professor had a reputation as being extremely difficult.

On the first day of the class the professor announced, *"In 40 days, we will have a major exam. The results of this exam will make up a large portion of your grade in this class. To have any hopes of passing this class, you must do well on that exam. You have been warned!"*

So the students did their best to be prepared for this test. They took copious notes... they studied hard.

When the day of the exam came, the students arrived in class anxious, and apprehensive. In the front of the room was a long table with five cages on it. Each cage was covered so that the only thing visible, were the lower part of the legs and the feet of the birds.

The professor announced, *“Here is the test. You can see there are five birds, you must correctly identify these birds by only looking at their legs and feet.”*

Though everyone had studied hard, they weren’t prepared for this kind of exam. They were all struggling to try to remember something that would help them identify the birds. The tension in the room was incredible! Finally, one student had had enough and he snapped! He stood up and shouted, *“This is ridiculous! This is the craziest test I’ve ever seen! You’re the worst professor in this entire university! And I’m quitting this stupid class!”*

The professor was outraged at the distraction and said to the student, *“Just one minute young man! Who are you? I demand you tell me your name right now!”*

The student glared at the professor. And then, pulling up both of his pant legs, the student said, *“You tell me!”*

Who are you? Who am I? It is the question that every human heart seeks the answer to! The question we humans seem to struggle with the most!

Who am I?

We live in a time and in a culture, and among a people who really have no idea! And that’s a huge problem! It’s a huge problem for each of us individually, and it’s a huge problem for all of us collectively as a society.

Identity theft is huge problem these days. People stealing other people's personal information and hard earned reputations for a quick profit.

But I would argue that Identity ignorance is an even bigger problem for this society, for this world!

People who truly don't know who they are, or how to find out who they are!

But there is good news for them, and good news for you, if you're struggling with identity ignorance.

That good news is Jesus Christ! Because when you meet Jesus, when you know who He is, Jesus absolutely provides you with not only your true identity, but your true life's meaning and purpose as well!

The order there is important. Too often we get it backwards. We try to figure out who we are first, before we take the time to acknowledge God and find out who He is!

That says a lot about our nature, the sin that outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are bound by. We are so self-absorbed, that is, we are so focused on our lives, on us being on the throne of our lives, on us being the center of our universe, that we don't, we can't look up and see the truth! The truth that it is God who sits on the throne of the universe! The truth that it is God who is calling us to life eternal with Him, through His Son Jesus Christ!

Open your Bibles to the book of Matthew. The passage we're going to exam today is **Matthew 16:13-19**.

It's an awesome story and one we've all heard, it's the story of Peter's great confession of Jesus as Messiah.

**Matthew 16:13-19**, are you there? I'm reading from the English Standard Version in case you're interested. You may have a different version, that's OK, but here's how the ESV tells this story:

*<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

*<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> 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.*

*<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

So, here's Jesus, with his twelve disciples, in the northern part of Israel in a town called Caesarea Philippi, which is located by Mount Hermon in what is now the Golan Heights.

The disciples and Jesus had lived with each other for about three years at this point. And as Jesus ministry on earth was winding down, Jesus knew the disciples needed to know who He really was. And He knew they needed to know who He really was, in order to understand what all this discipling was really all about.

Jesus starts the conversation by asking His disciples, "*Who do the people say I am?*" And they *answered...* because they'd heard the people talking about Jesus. It was hard not to hear people talk about Jesus. People, it seemed, were talking a lot about Jesus, particularly about who Jesus was.

So when the Disciples answered, *“They say you’re John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets”*, they were repeating what they heard, and maybe, a little of what they believed themselves.

And what they believed was what Jesus was after. That’s why Jesus’ follow up question was really rather direct: *“But, who do you say I am?”*

After all, the disciples had lived with Jesus. They had listened to His teachings and marveled at His wisdom. They witnessed His miracles, the multitude of healings, even watched Him raise people from the dead!

They had experienced all this with Jesus, and even though they were shallow, thick and slow, they still had to know deep in their souls know, that this Jesus was more than just a prophet, more than just a really good guy! But how much more? Who was Jesus, really?

That’s the question Jesus knew His disciples had to know the answer to if they were ever going to be able to do, to accomplish, what He was about to ask them to do, what He was about to charge them to accomplish!

And Peter in one of his finest moments, answers. His answer is there in verse 16:

*<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

Never in the history of the world, has a question been answered more correctly!

Peter, even though he couldn’t possibly fathom all of ramifications of his answer, was spot on!

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!

And it was crucial that Peter knew that! It was crucial that the rest of the disciples knew that! Just like today, it is absolutely crucial for us, those who claim to follow Jesus, to know that!

I mean to really know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!

When Peter said, and when we say, that Jesus is the Son of the living God... we understand we are proclaiming Jesus is God!

John is absolutely clear about that in his gospel! In fact, that's how John starts off his gospel.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3)*

And in **John 3:16** that statement is underscored by Jesus' own declaration, <sup>16</sup> *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Notice the phrase there, "begotten Son". That's key!

C.S. Lewis says this:

*"When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers... But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam. . ."*

In other words, God created man. And even though we're created in God's image, we're not gods. But God beget Jesus. Jesus is of the same kind as God, Jesus is God. Like God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, Jesus is God.

That truth is foundational to our faith!

Do you know that Jesus is God? I mean do you really know that?

Jesus is God. He's not some nice guy, not some decency cop, not some heavenly hall monitor, Jesus is God!

We often say it this way: Jesus is Lord!

The word Lord is a title, it means owner or master. Both are good descriptions of who God is to us.

Is Jesus your Master?

Masters, true masters, can be hard to live with. Jesus is no exception! He demands our absolute loyalty. Jesus says in **Matthew 10:37-38**,

*<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Those are hard words! And if we're honest we each know how we measure up on that scale!

It's hard to make Jesus your Master, the Lord of your life! It's hard to surrender all that you think you are, and all that you have, all that you want, to lay it down and walk away from it and run toward Jesus!

But that's what Lord Jesus is asking of you!

That's exactly what Paul is saying in **Philippians 3:7-8**, when he says;

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

*<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

Jesus as our God, and Jesus as our Lord, and Jesus as our Master... that's scary to us! Especially in the age in which we live... especially in the culture in which we live!

And so... in order to not just flat out reject Jesus as God, Lord and Master... because of the realization of the true cost of what that would mean to us, we attempt to piecemeal Him out! We attempt to domesticate Jesus! We attempt to tame Jesus!

We attempt to tame Jesus by focusing on just certain aspects of Jesus, like His love for us. Not a bad thing, but not the whole thing!

We attempt to tame Jesus by claiming Him as our friend and then running that friendship through the lens of what we know about friendship, how we experience friends in this world. Again, not a bad thing, but not even close to the whole thing!

We attempt to tame Jesus by showing up at church on Sunday to worship Him and hear His Word preached and then going home and living the rest of the week like Jesus is still back there at the church just waiting for us to come back next Sunday! Not a good thing, not even close to a good thing! But, unfortunately a way too common thing!

Keep your place in Matthew, but turn in your Bibles to the book of Revelation, Chapter 3, verses 14-22. I want to show you the actual results of our attempts to tame Jesus.

**Revelation 3:14-22**, this is Jesus talking! Listen to what He's saying:

<sup>14</sup> *“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.*

<sup>15</sup> *“ ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!*

<sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

<sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. <sup>19</sup> Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. <sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. <sup>21</sup> The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. <sup>22</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ' ”

The church of Laodicea was a church that thought they had enough!  
Really, in their mind they thought they had it all! They thought they were rich, and in their society and in their culture they were!  
But in Jesus' eyes, in reality, they were poor!

People! That's us! The Laodicean Church, is the Church of America! We have so much... but what we have, too often causes us focus on what we have as our identity and to move away from Jesus as the giver of our identity, our first love!

Look at verse 20, famous verse, this is what I want to show you.

Jesus says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.*

We've all heard this verse and we read it as if it's written to an individual.

While it can be taken as Jesus speaking to each of us individually, that's not the context here! Jesus is speaking to the church of Laodicea! He's speaking to a church! And when you see this verse in that context... it kind of smacks you right in the face! What is Jesus doing on the outside of His church, having to knock on the door to be let in? It's His church, right? How come then, He's not inside where all the people are, and where they're supposedly worshiping Him? And how do they not even know He's not there?

It's because even back then, when the church was less than 100 years old, this group of church people who claimed to love Jesus and serve Jesus, had done their best to domesticate Jesus, to tame Jesus to fit their needs! Just like way too many of us here today have tried to piecemeal Jesus, tame Jesus, because Jesus as our God, Jesus as our Lord, Jesus as our Master is just too much for us to wrap our minds around! Our responsibility to a master like that seems almost impossible for us to wrap our hearts around and surrender our lives to!

But people! Surrendering our lives, our hearts, all that we are, all that we have, is the only way to really make Jesus our Lord, our Master! And knowing Jesus, for who He really is, is the only way we're going to know who we really are!

Jesus' words to us in **Matthew 7:21-23** are a sobering reminder to us as we teeter on the brink of that decision, the decision to surrender to Jesus, to make ourselves make Him our Lord and Master!

<sup>21</sup> *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

<sup>22</sup> *On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’* <sup>23</sup> *And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*

But here’s the good news! Here’s the rest of the story! When we get to that place, where we’ve surrendered our lives to Jesus, when we truly call on Him as Lord, as Master, it’s then that Jesus can tell you who you are! It’s then that Jesus can properly answer the question every human heart struggles with!

Turn back to our passage in Matthew 16. After Peter’s good confession in verse 16, Jesus says in verses 17 through 19:

*“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*<sup>18</sup> *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.* <sup>19</sup> *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

The first thing Jesus tells Peter is that his identity, who he really is, comes from none other than God the Father! How cool is that! Look back at the last part of verse 17, *For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.*

The truth of the matter is, no one can truly call on Jesus as Lord and Master without first receiving a revelation of Jesus from God the Father! God always initiates the relationship, always!

Jesus tells us that in **John 15:16** when He tells His disciples, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you...”*

And John says in **1 John 4:19**, *We love because he first loved us.*

Don't get confused here! Lots of people will call Jesus "*Lord*"; the passage we just read in Matthew 7 is clear about that! But the people who are truly calling on Jesus as Lord, are doing so in response to God's initiating the relationship.

God initiates the relationship! God always initiates the relationship! But to complete the relationship, to really have a relationship, we have to respond to God reaching out to us!

Imagine you're a lamp. Unplugged, you're really nothing but a collection of metal, plastic, glass and wire that has no means to light yourself. But when you allow yourself to be plugged into the source of electricity, you become what you were made to be, a light!

And here, Peter is responding to the revelation He's received from God the Father, by recognizing Jesus as God the Son!

And Jesus is jazzed by this! He tells Simon he's different now, so much so, that Jesus changes his name! Look in verse 18, "*And I tell you, you are Peter...*"

The name Simon has among its meanings, a "*reed*" as in a big blade of grass. Grass is of course, easily blown around by storms, it's not terribly stable!

Now, after he's declared Jesus the Christ, Jesus changes Simon's name to "*Peter*" which means "*rock*".

Rocks aren't as easily blown around in storms are they? Turns out rocks are pretty good foundational pieces!

This isn't the first time Jesus called Simon, "*Peter*".

That happened the first time Jesus met Simon back in the first chapter of the book of John, *Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). (John 1:42)*

Back then Simon was just meeting Jesus, but here, three years later as Peter stands and declares Jesus as the Christ, Jesus declares the name change, is complete! *“You are Peter!”*

That’s how it works! If you’re searching for the truth of who you are, then first discover who Jesus is. When you do, Jesus will tell you who you are.

He’ll also tell you what you’re to do with your identity! He’ll tell you your purpose! What you were created for! Look down in the last part of verse 18, Jesus tells Peter who he is, then, Jesus says to Peter: *“...and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

Jesus not only tells Peter who he is, Jesus tells Peter he’s a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, and, on top of that, Peter is now a builder of the kingdom of heaven! Do you see that?

Jesus responds to Peter’s good confession, to Peter declaring Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, by saying, *“There’s only one way you know that, and that’s through a revelation from God the Father, and now that you have that kind of connection with God, keep that connection with God and take the keys to the kingdom! Go build this kingdom, my kingdom, here on earth!”*

That's the power of knowing who Jesus is and who you are in Christ! It is kingdom power!

In your relationship with Jesus you find who you are, what you are, and the result of those two crucial truths in your life!

Look back at verse 17... Jesus says to Peter, "*Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah!*" Notice the exclamation point! Don't look past the exclamation point! Jesus is telling Peter he's blessed! Peter is blessed because the person who knows who Jesus is... and knows who he or she is, knows this truth as well: they are blessed, they are loved!

Have you ever noticed how this culture bombards you with the message that you're not enough? You don't look good enough, smell good enough, sing well enough, dance well enough; you aren't smart enough, aren't rich enough; and even if you were, you would still be lacking because no one is perfect, least all you, right? That is the primary message of this culture! Our culture has convinced us that our identity, who we are, is defined by if we buy this, shave that, wear this, drink this, play that, eat this, and listen to that!

Yet none of those things are long satisfying! It's like being thirsty and drinking salt water, no matter how much you drink, your thirst is never quenched!

Knowing who Jesus is, knowing who you are, knowing the great work Jesus has called you to, absolutely convinces you that you, in Christ, are enough! And, you are loved!

It's like the man and his wife who visited an orphanage where they hoped to adopt a child.

In an interview with the boy they wanted, the couple told him in glowing terms about the many things they could give him, good food, good toys, and nice clothing.

To their amazement, the little boy said, *"If all you have to offer is just food, clothes, toys, I think I would rather stay here."* Stunned the couple asked *"What on earth could you want besides those things?"* The boy answered, *"I just really need someone to love me."*

We all want to be loved! Not just for a while, but forever! That craving for eternal love is in each of us! And it's in each of us, because God put it in each of us! And the only way we can know the only love that can satisfy our heart's deepest craving, is to know who Jesus is and allow Him to tell you who you are!

**1 John 3:1** tells us, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

Loved ones! Let us not make that mistake! Let each of us truly call on Jesus as the Son of the living God, our Lord, our Master! And let us allow Jesus to define our true identity, to tell us who we are: eternally connected to Him, blessed citizen-builders of His kingdom, deeply loved children of God our Father!