

What is the key to a good conversation? It may not be the key, but a key would certainly include asking good questions. When you ask thoughtful questions, it shows you are interested in the person you’re talking to, and if you ask the right questions, you may unlock some great insight or information from your conversation partner. That’s why we like to watch or read interviews of people who interest us. A thought-provoking question can produce a fascinating answer.

In that spirit, then, I’m here to ask: who do you think Jesus is? That’s thought-provoking, to be sure. I’m sure your answer would be fascinating. More than that, I would contend that it is the most important question you will ever answer.

There are all sorts of questions you must answer over the course of a lifetime: What are you going to do with your life? What vocation will you choose? Who will you marry? Your answer to these will set the course for your life and have far-reaching implications. Yet behind and above them all is that first question, “Who do you think Jesus is?” It’s a question that was first asked a couple of thousand years ago, and since then, billions of people have dealt with it; some have wrestled with it; others have had their lives changed by it; others have been haunted by it; still others are thrilled to answer. What’s yours? More is riding on your response than you may imagine.

The first time this question was asked, it was asked by Jesus himself and He asked it of his disciples. It was a pivotal moment in their relationship, although they couldn’t have realized it at the time. Looking back on it, the apostles definitely realized the magnitude of this moment; we know this because Matthew, Mark, and Luke each include it in their accounts of Jesus’ life. Wisely, our Lord begins the conversation with a warm-up. He asks his followers who people say that He is. What is the word on the street about my identity? He wants to know. And the answers that trickle back vary; some say Jesus is John the Baptist; others say Jesus is Elijah the prophet, apparently returned from heaven by horse and chariot; they are answers that sniff around the truth but never quite dig it up.

Not much has changed in two thousand years. Who do people say Jesus is? Some would say He’s an enlightened spiritual teacher; some would say he’s a fraud; some say he’s an extraterrestrial (not making that up); yet others say that he never existed at all. And then there are over a billion Christians in our generation alone who believe that Jesus is the only Son of God the Father, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose again and ascended into heaven. We could spend days on end talking about who people think Jesus is, and it would be a fascinating conversation. At times it would get pretty heated, pretty intense. But in the end, it’s not enough to have the conversation. It’s not enough to talk *about* Jesus. What matters, finally, is the second question Jesus asks. Who do you say that I am?

So there it is. What’s your answer? Everybody has one, even if the answer is “I don’t know” or “I don’t think Jesus existed.” I’m guessing your answer is a little more developed than that, but

only you know for sure. Who do you say Jesus is? Think about it. Then listen to the way the disciple Peter answers. He says, “You are the Christ.”

What does that mean? Peter is saying that Jesus is the anointed One; that’s what “Christ” means. It’s not Jesus’ last name; it’s a title. Calling Jesus “the Christ” is calling him the one God was talking about all the way back in the Garden of Eden, following the Fall—the One who would crush the head of the tempter serpent. Calling Jesus “the Christ” is calling him the prophet God promised to send who would be like Moses; it means calling Him the suffering servant shown to Isaiah who would take the punishment of his people; it means calling him the one who looks like a Son of Man, seen in Daniel’s vision, who is given the throne of Almighty God and His kingdom to rule. Calling Jesus “the Christ” is calling Him the Rescuer, the Redeemer, the Savior. The Messiah. Matthew and Luke fill in Mark’s blanks: Peter goes on to say that Jesus is the Son of the living God, and Jesus does not disagree with Peter’s statement. In fact, he calls Peter’s statement the Rock on which His Church will be built. Clearly, this is how Jesus wants to be regarded.

Who do you think He is? Is your answer close to Peter’s? Do you call Jesus your rescuer—your Savior from the guilt of sin, the sting of death, and the torment of hell? Do you call Jesus the Son of the living God—truly God and truly man, both/and? Do you call Jesus Lord and ruler of your life? Do you understand why your answer is so important?

If you said that your answer means the difference between eternal joy and eternal sorrow—the difference between heaven and hell—you’re right. The apostles boldly preached, “There is no other name (than the name of Jesus) by which we can be saved.” Saved from what? Saved from having to pay the penalty for our sins on our own. Saved from self-destruction. The name of Jesus tells us who He is and what He does—Jesus means, “The Lord Saves.” So yes, your destination for eternity is riding on your answer. But that’s not all.

If you say Jesus is your Savior, do you know what you’re saying? You are admitting that you are a sinner who needs what Jesus alone can provide. You’re admitting that you have no standing before God that can help you. It all rests on what Jesus has done, by dying on the cross in your place and rising from the grave alive. That’s the gospel, and as the gospel gets worked into you, it’s going to make some changes. If you say Jesus is your Savior, that means you’re going to stop grading yourself against other people, because you’ll understand, we’re all in the same boat—sinners who depend 100% on God’s mercy. If you say Jesus is your Savior, that means that as the gospel gets worked into you, you’re going to value your forgiveness so much that you become a more forgiving person. If you say Jesus is your Savior and Lord, then at the very least you will find yourself thinking about what matters to Him, and where you’re headed is actually giving Jesus control of your life. You see, calling Jesus your Savior isn’t just getting an answer right on a test so you can go to heaven when you die. Calling Jesus your Savior—and trusting in Him for salvation—changes who you are today. Not only does the gospel of Jesus bless you, it makes you a blessing to others.

Who do you say Jesus is? Is your answer changing you?