

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Why does Jesus speak so much in riddles? Have you ever thought that? I have. And of course, that's why I am asking.

To the scribes, Jesus asked, "***How can Satan cast out Satan?***" (Mark 3:23). To the chief priests and the elders, Jesus asked, "***The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?***" (Matthew 21:25). And Jesus spoke many more riddles.

But today, Jesus asks His disciples the most-important riddle: "***Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?***" (Matthew 16:13).

Christ's disciples respond, "***Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets***" (Matthew 16:14).

John the Baptist sounds like a good answer. He was a man of the people. He may have appeared rugged, and he had some odd eating habits, but he was a strong man of faith. He had the courage to call sinners to repentance.

Elijah appears like a good answer, too. In the first century, there was major speculation that Elijah would return. Since he was taken up into heaven alive in the fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:1-14), he could very well return.

Then comes an odd addition: Jeremiah. Well, maybe not too odd. Jeremiah, like John the Baptist and Elijah were prophets, but Jeremiah didn't have the so-called "cult of personality" that John and Elijah owned. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet. Jeremiah called on the religious leaders to repent. Jeremiah said that Jerusalem and the temple would soon be destroyed because of the peoples' unrepentant sin.

But similarities are there between John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah. Despite their differences, they each spoke what God called them to speak. They each suffered for speaking the very Word of God. John the Baptist, Elijah, and Jeremiah sound like good answers. But none of those answers are correct.

So, there appears to be some confusion on this “Son of Man.” Who is this “Son of Man”? What does it mean to be the “Son of Man”? Riddle me this: “Who is the Son of Man”?

Then Jesus asks, **“But who do you say that I am?”** (Matthew 16:15). Ahh, now we are getting somewhere!

Then Peter answers, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Matthew 16:16).

Here, Jesus has asked the most-important question – *or really questions* – that His disciples would ever answer. First, *“Who do people say that the Son of Man is.”* Then, *“Who do you say that I am?”*

You see, Jesus wants to be known. And He wants to be known by this mysterious title “Son of Man.”

Jesus uses this title “Son of Man” a sum of 82 times. It’s a favorite of Jesus. It’s *the* favorite of Jesus. And so much ink has been spilled through history on trying to figure out what “Son of Man” actually means.

Well, instead of trying to figure out this riddle on our own, why don’t we actually find out if Jesus answers this riddle? And guess what, Jesus actually explains the meaning of the Son of Man.

As Jesus asks the question, the answer is soon revealed. In fact, I already gave it away. Did you catch it? First, of course, Jesus rejects the false definitions: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. But He does give the correct definition. Did you catch it? Did you notice it? The “Son of Man” is “the Son of the living God.”

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16:17).

Peter’s reason did not reveal this fact to him. It was God the Father who revealed this fact to Peter.

The disciples have not always understood. Now, they had their moments of understanding, but somehow, they would always come back to doubts and misunderstandings on who Jesus truly is.

The disciples were in awe of the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 men, plus the women and the children. Soon, they thought Jesus was a ghost walking upon the sea. They cried in fear! But when they realized the ghost was Jesus, they said of Jesus, ***“Truly you are the Son of God”*** (Matthew 14:33). Then, they had a terrible moment as they urged Jesus to send away the Canaanite woman. They are an example of our roller coaster of faith. Some days, you may have faith that could seemingly move mountains, but then the next day, that faith couldn’t even move over an ant hill. So, we have our good days and our bad days. But through it all, we have faith. Ultimately, it’s not about our feelings. Our feelings are flighty. But what never changes is God’s love for you and me. We are faithful because He is always faithful.

Our reason and strength will fail us. So, when you are weak, He is strong. When you cry out for help, He answers you and rescues you. He answered the need for hunger by feeding the crowds with just five loaves and two fish. He rescued Peter who in doubt jumped out of the boat to see if the man walking on the sea was Jesus. He rescued the Canaanite woman and healed her daughter from demon possession.

Today, Jesus desires to be known on who He truly is. He may be a prophet, but He is more than just a prophet. He may be a miracle worker, but He is more than just a miracle worker. Jesus is the Son of Man.

So, Jesus didn’t just want His disciples to know the answer to *“Who is the Son of Man”* and *“Who am I”*? He wanted them to know Him. Jesus would not go on from that riddle until He received the answer.

Back in seminary, I was involved in a group called “Apple of His Eye.” The whole idea of this group was to ask this simple and yet profound question to people, *“What do you think about Jesus?”* I, along with the others, passed out leaflets about Jesus one summer. We walked down the Delmar Loop, which is a business district north of Washington University and Concordia Seminary, which is a hot-spot for college-aged people. Sometimes we were ignored, but other times, we had great conversations on who Jesus is. On one other occasion, we even walked about the St. Louis Pride Festival. There, we received so many conflicting ideas on who Jesus is: an unconditional lover, a judge, a prophet, a great guy, a figment of man’s imagination.

So, like Jesus’ riddle to His disciples, there are still so many questions on who Jesus truly is. What do you think about Jesus? This is the same question that Jesus asks of us. What do you think of Him?

The question about who is the Son of Man was a mystery for centuries before Jesus. One of the most famous Old Testament accounts of this mysterious Son of Man was revealed to the prophet Daniel by the Holy Spirit: ***“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven, there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed”*** (Daniel 7:13-14).

This Son of Man is One who is before time. This Son of Man is One who has been given dominion over all peoples, nations, and languages. This Son of Man is One who has everlasting dominion. This Son of Man is One whose reign lasts forever and not even the gates of hell shall prevail against it.

Who is the Son of Man? The Son of Man is none other than Jesus who is the miraculous Offspring of the human race in whom the Son of God became man. The Son of Man is like us. He has our flesh. He is fully and truly human. He is like you and me, except without sin. The Son of Man is poor as He has no place ***“to lay His head”*** (Matthew 8:20). The Son of Man eats and drinks (Matthew 11:19). The Son of Man is reviled, suffers, and dies (Matthew 17:12, 22-23; 20:18-19). The Son of Man bodily rises from the dead. These all prove that the Son of Man is the Son of God, who has come in our flesh in order to save sinners, like you and me, from eternal death. The Son of Man came to justify us as righteous in God’s sight.

This same Son of Man sees the thoughts of our heart, forgives sins, is the Lord of the Sabbath, sits at the right hand of God the Father as the ruler of the universe, and He promises to return in divine glory to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day.

The mystery is clear. God wants to be known. He wants to be known to you and by you. Today, He comes to us in the mystery of forgiveness spoken through a sinful pastor, He comes to us through the mystery of His Word proclaimed, He comes to us in the mystery of the Lord’s Supper. He comes to us with the purpose on making Himself known as the Son of Man, who is the Redeemer from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. Again, this is the most-important riddle: who is the Son of Man? He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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