

Evotional – 18 August 2013 – Son of Man

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Matthew 16:13-17

Who did Jesus say he was?

Some of the first verbal clues Jesus provides to his identity in Matthew's Gospel are in Matt 8:20 and 12:8 where he refers to himself as 'Son of Man'. This was an enigmatic phrase; it avoided the political and nationalistic associations of 'Messiah'. But in Aramaic it could just mean 'person'. Meanwhile he was doing lots of things and getting lots of responses, eg:

- Healing (nothing like this has ever been seen – 9:33)
- Calming storms (what kind of man is this? – 8:27)
- Casting out demons (could this be the Son of David, or Satan? – 12:23ff)
- Raising the dead (news of this spread everywhere – 9:26)
- Calling and sending disciples (they followed him at once – 4:20, 9:9)
- Walking on water (truly you are the Son of God – 14:33)
- Feeding thousands (twice)
- Breaking traditions (they plotted to kill him – 12:14).
- He was also teaching a lot (which amazed them – 7:28)

... and making it increasingly clear to those with 'ears to hear' (13:43) that the 'Son of Man' was not just anyone but someone who could only be God (see eg 9:6, 12:40, 13:41).

(Later Jesus would say that the Son of Man 'must' suffer and then be raised (16:21, 17:12, 20:17-19) and that he will come in glory and judgement (24:27, 25:31, 26:64). Some of these claims were what got him killed.)

Who did people say he was?

By the time we come to Matthew 16, Jesus still hadn't said exactly who he was, but what conclusions were people drawing? They were Jews so they said prophets, Messiah, Son of God – giving Jesus the highest honour they knew how. This understanding was given by God, but did Peter really know what he meant? Later events suggested not (16:22-23, 17:4-5).

Who do people today say he is?

1. Just a man. People often say Jesus was a great man who taught great things. That's not what Matthew and the other disciples and the religious leaders who knew him concluded. CS Lewis wrote:

'I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. ... Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.'

2. Just God. People inside the church often seem to think Jesus was God the Father dressed up as a person. ('Veiled in flesh the God-head see'.) But see John 1:14. Or as a piece of God that got temporarily separated off and then stuck back. But see Phil 2:6-7. Or as a separate divine person but so much God that he had no human limitations. But see 24:36 or 26:36ff.

In fact Jesus is God and man. The phrase 'Son of Man' hints at both; he possessed both the divine nature we see in Daniel 7:13-14 and the human nature of Ezekiel 2:1. The church agreed on this; the 5th century Chalcedonian Creed says:

'... without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of these natures not being abolished through their union but rather the distinctive characteristic of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same only-begotten Son, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ ...'

Who do I say that he is?

Jesus is firstly my Saviour; I had to know him as that before I could know him as anything else. But he is also my Lord, and that is a constant challenge (see 16:24-28). And he's also the one who knows what it's like to be me (Heb 4:15-16); he is praying for me (Rom 8:34); he is God with me (1:23). I am 'in Christ'; my identity is in Christ; I have died and been raised with Christ (Rom 6:5); I am clothed with Christ; a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

The danger for me is that Christianity becomes what I do; my role or my theology or my community. But Christianity is my relationship with Christ; it's all about him. Do other people know that from how I speak and act?

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?

Prayer:

Dear Saviour and Lord Jesus, please reveal yourself to me in your divinity and your humanity. Holy Spirit, please help me to know and love Jesus better, and to show him and to talk about him to those who don't yet know him. Amen.