

CROSS & SPIRE

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From Pastor Ryan's Desk:

[Editor's Note: At the time of printing, Pastor Ryan is heading to Pennsylvania where his father is being transferred to Palliative Care. With the needs of his parents and family imperative, he was not able to provide an article for this issue. In its absence, the editor provided a message. Please keep Pastor Ryan, his parents and his family in your prayers.]

The Question

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-17

During Jesus' life and ministry, people who didn't know him had lots of opinions as to who he was. Some thought he could be someone like John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah; some thought he might be a prophet of some kind. The fact is, they knew he was someone special, but they didn't really know who he was. It's the same today. People who don't know Jesus say that he might have been a prophet or a teacher or a good man of some kind, and some don't think that he lived at all but was a myth made up by people who wanted to start a cult or who wanted to overthrow the Romans.

By the time of Matthew chapter 16, Jesus was well into his ministry. He had taught and healed in many places in Israel, and he had heard that many people wondered just who he was. In Matthew 16:13-17, Jesus asks his disciples what they had heard and what they thought. We read, *"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'"*

"They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

"But what about you?" he asked. 'Who do you say I am?'"

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'"

"Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'"

I want to suggest that this question Jesus asked Peter: *"Who do you say that I am?"* wasn't merely a casual question, but the most important question ever asked. *"Who do you say that I am?"* is the one question that everyone must answer. Just as Jesus put that question before his disciples, he puts it before each one of us. If Jesus is who he says he is, how we answer that question makes all the difference. Even refusing to answer is answering that question.

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says, in his Sermon on the Mount, *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* Our culture says that truth is whatever we make it to be, that we can live any way we want, do anything we want, believe anything we want, and that life has no meaning anyway. If there is a heaven, we're all going there. In other

words, the gate is wide and the road is broad. Jesus says that gate and that road lead to destruction; they do not lead to eternal life.

In John 14:6, Jesus says, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me."* So, what does that mean? Jesus said, *"I am THE way."* There is only one way to be received by God the Father. Jesus said, *"I am the TRUTH."* There is only one truth. By definition, we can have many ideas, many beliefs, but because they conflict, they can't all be true; there can be only one that is true. And Jesus said, *"I am the LIFE."* Again, there is only one path to eternal life. The gate is small, and the road that leads to eternal life is narrow. It is only through accepting that Jesus is who he says he is—the one and only Son of God, who came into the world to offer himself as a sacrifice on the cross, to die an awful, painful death and be buried, and to be raised again to sit at the right hand of God the Father—it is that Jesus that Peter is confessing when he answers, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."* Jesus responded to Peter's confession by saying in verse 17: *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*

Here, in this Easter season, is the perfect time to consider that most important question, the question that everyone must answer at some point in life: *"Who do you say that I am?"* Who is Jesus? Will you answer the question the way the majority in our culture answer it, that Jesus was merely a man, perhaps a prophet or teacher, but ultimately just a man? Or will you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior and answer like Peter: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"* because you know that Jesus is exactly who he says he is and that his promise of eternal life for you and for all who believe in him is true? The way you answer that question will make all the difference.

Dave Cole



GET INVOLVED!

Mark Your Calendar:

- April 2 Maundy Thursday dinners at small group meetings and Bible studies.
- April 3: Good Friday worship service at 6:00 p.m.
- April 5: Easter Sunday
- April 11: **NEW!** Men's Group 8:30 a.m. in the church.
- April 12: Spring Fellowship Lunch after Worship.
- April 26: Annual Meeting after worship.
- May 24: Church Open House after the worship service.

**SAVE THE DATE: SUNDAY,
MAY 24**

First Baptist Church OPEN HOUSE

Come celebrate

Thank our Donors

Bring your friends and neighbors

**Come to the worship service at
10:30 and stay for the fellowship
and tour the building**

Ongoing Small Groups:

Winter is over! It's time to get out of the house. Join a small group or Bible Study, get together with other people, and watch your faith grow.

Monday Evening Prayer Meeting at 6:30 p.m. in the sanctuary. Led by Betsy Wotton, the group prays for individual requests and concerns, requests from the prayer box in the lobby, and for our community and beyond. Just come or see Betsy for details.

Tuesday Evening Women's Small Group meets at 6 p.m. in the sanctuary, co-led by Angie Stephens and Anne Pinilla. The group meets every other Tuesday evening and currently studying John MacArthur's *12 Extraordinary Women*. Just come or see Angie or Anne for details.

Wednesday Morning Women's Small Group meets at 10 a.m. in the sanctuary and is co-led by Carol Rataj and Betsy Wotton. The group is studying Joyce Meyer's *The Battlefield of the Mind*. Just come or see Carol or Betsy for details, or email Carol at carolrataj3@gmail.com

Thursday Evening Millennial Group meets in the church from 5:30-7 p.m. Led by Pastor Ryan, dinner runs from 5:30-6 p.m. followed by a study of the book of Isaiah. Child care is provided. Just come or see Pastor Ryan for details.

Thursday Evening Bible Study meets in various homes at 6:30 p.m. and is led by Roger & Betsy Wotton. They are currently studying the Gospel of John. See Roger or Betsy for more details and for the location of the meeting.

Thursday Evening Bible Study meets in various homes at 7:00 p.m. and led by Rick Pinilla. They are currently studying the book of Romans. See Rick or Anne for details and for the location of the meeting.

Saturday Morning Men's Group begins April 11 at 8:30 a.m. in the church. The group is led by Roger Wotton and will discuss men's roles in the church and family from a biblical perspective. Breakfast is not provided, so eat before you come. The group will meet the 2nd and 4th Saturday morning of each month. See Roger for more details.

Not Yet a Member?

See Pastor Ryan

Ministries:

In these uncertain times, with war in the Middle East and fuel prices soaring, costs of almost everything are going up dramatically and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. This means our Raven Box Food Pantry and Community Dinner ministries will be needed more than ever. For some who use these ministries, it can mean the difference between paying a bill, buying a prescription drug or eating a meal. For all who use these ministries, it is an opportunity to show them the love of Christ.

Catherine Souza's team of 5 dedicated volunteers open the Food Pantry on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month from 10-11 a.m. giving out bags of groceries to those who stop by. Monetary donations are always appreciated. For non-perishable food donations, please see Catherine Souza for pantry food needs. Mike Barragan and Deb Girdwood head up the Community Dinners which are served on the 3rd Sunday of each month from 5-6:15 p.m. in the church lobby. People can eat in the lobby or take out a meal to enjoy at home or to give to someone else. Church members and church groups are encouraged to host a dinner and experience the joy of sharing God's love with others. Please contact Mike or Deb for more information or just come and visit with our neighbors.

Opportunities to Serve:

- Do you love children? Do you feel called to serve them? Have you considered teaching or helping out in Children's Sunday School? Classes for young children through middle school age can use a teacher or helper. Please contact Deb Girdwood or Catherine Souza for more information.
- Providing a fresh clean place to worship is a ministry unto itself. It means so much for some people to come into a beautiful space to worship and fellowship with others. The church cleaning crew needs volunteers to provide that beautiful clean space. Crews come on a rotating

basis for about 2 hours a week to clean and freshen up the building for worship and use through the week. Make a new friend by working alongside an experienced volunteer. No heavy lifting. If you can help tidy up, run a vacuum cleaner or handle a broom, there is a place for you on the cleaning team.

- If you love serving in community outreach, try volunteering for the Food Pantry or the Community Dinner. See the Ministries section above and contact Catherine Souza for the Food Pantry, or contact Mike Barragan or Deb Girdwood for the Community Dinner.

Shepherds' Report:

Bobby Souza reports that the City of Lebanon has awarded a Certificate of Occupancy for the church basement. Work will continue on sanding, painting, doors and trim work before opening the basement for church use. Discussion of a church open house to invite neighbors and thank donors set the date for May 24. The Pentecost worship service will acknowledge the funds raised and work done, and after church fellowship time will include tours of the building. Bobby will contact the Hospitality Team to get things rolling. Discussion turned to nominations for new Shepherds and Trustees. Three people will be contacted for consideration. Betty Jackson has been received as a new member by transfer of letter. Ryan will continue to promote new member classes, and a signup sheet is in the lobby. Deb Girdwood reports that children's Sunday School is going well but more teachers are needed. Deb also reports that Rick and Anne Pinilla's Bible Study group hosted a Community Dinner that served 10 people and gave out 9 to-go meals. Deb is hoping the new Community Dinner sign will help spread the word for upcoming dinners. Food Pantry use has been down a bit these winter months, possibly due to the weather. With the recent rise in gas prices and with other price increases resulting, Catherine Souza expects usage to increase as the weather moderates and budgets tighten. Maundy

Thursday dinners will be held in Small Group meetings and Bible Studies.

"God's Light for Dark Times" **by Rick Pinilla, Pastor Emeritus**

In the last ten years or so, I have encountered an increasing number of Christians who are feeling sorry for themselves, or who are at least shocked by a growing hostility in our country toward the Church and Christians. Most of us see that the country is increasingly divided, but we are surprised to find out that, as Christians, we are considered to be one of the hostile camps. When I started as an interim pastor at FBC, the congregation was reeling at being called haters for positions on moral commitment and faith that have been part of Christian teaching for 2,000 years. If you are feeling this way, I have news for you: the writer of Ecclesiastes said, "There is nothing new under the sun." For the first 300 years of the Church's existence, Christians were called, "Haters of the Human Race." They were called that for the same reasons: they said certain popular lifestyles were sin and they taught that Jesus was the only way to God. Despite this consensus among Romans, the Church flourished and spread like wild fire.

Christianity was so successful that its worldview became the center of Western Civilization. That civilization was based on the belief that God had given us the Bible, and that living by his commands led to his blessing and disobeying him led to his active opposition. Of course, that belief collapsed in the middle of the last century. As a culture, we have replaced that view with a self-directed life, so

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our country has no center. The division we see and no doubt at times feel, is the result. Without any change on its part, the believing Church has moved from the center of culture to the periphery. As Christians, we are back where we started when Jesus first sent us into the world to make disciples of all nations 2,000 years ago. A lot has changed, but not very much has changed.

This historical perspective should help us answer the question from Psalm 11 that launched this series of articles: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" It is obvious that the foundation that gave life and direction to the USA since it began is gone. The solutions that many in the Church are drifting toward are self-defeating. Laying low and keeping quiet is often the default response of Christians, but it is rarely publicly expressed. Some put their hope in joining the so-called Culture Wars like the rest of the country and putting their hope in political candidates. Vote we must, but when I hear Christians backing a candidate say we need to take our country back, I cringe.

I want you to imagine being with that crowd that heard Jesus say, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." They were a tiny group of Jews who had become heretics in the eyes of their countrymen and were lunatics in the eyes of the Romans, but they marched out under these orders. It would be hard to find a cause which was less likely to last a decade to say nothing of succeeding in such a huge undertaking. Their founder and master had been executed as a criminal. They were despised and mocked for their faith. Their

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leaders had just abandoned Jesus a few days ago and there wasn't really an outstanding person among them. Yet they took the empire by storm, not by political action but by radical love and sharing the message with those who would hear. The story began with great leaders we all know: the Apostles; but it continued through ordinary people who believed it when they heard that Jesus said, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." Pick up any history of the Church and you will get the same message about the Church in those days: they loved one another so much that the world marveled. They loved the people who persecuted them. They refused to compromise the message or the moral teaching they received, and they continued to share the hope they had with people willing to hear because of their perseverance in faith and matchless love.

I fear that the Church in the USA is suffering from a loss of nerve because of a crisis of faith in the victory of Jesus Christ. I can't see any other reason to explain our abandoning Jesus' orders to love and witness for politicians, or even worse, silence. Love and witness have gotten us this far, why abandon them now? There are Christians all over this planet because ordinary people believed Jesus is Lord and took his orders seriously. "When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Jesus is Lord. The orders haven't changed. Don't get distracted. Stay the course.

The *Cross & Spire* is published and sent out during the last week of each month. Copies are also available in the church lobby. All articles, announcements, and updates are due in the church office no later than one week prior to publication.