

If you've ever been to a county fair, than you are most likely aware of the hokey old carnival games that can be found on the midway. Most of them are rigged to extract a few dollars from you, and that stuffed bear you might win is actually worth less than the money you would plunk down on the counter. Still, the games can be entertaining, especially the one where a grizzled carny worker attempts to guess your weight and your age just by looking at you.

Usually they win. But what if that game was played with one crucial adjustment? What if it was played without the person or subject *being seen*? How would they guess your age? How would they guess you gender? What about your marital status or income?

Truth is, it's even *easier* to guess these things sight unseen, than it is for that greasy dude at the fair to guess your age by looking at you. All that's needed is a person's smartphone. Look at the apps on a person's cell, and you can deduce their age, gender, income level, and marital status. Researchers looking at app usage and demographics of 3,700 people found that they could predict a person's gender, age, marital status, and income with a 61 to 82 percent accuracy.

To put it another way, you are what you download! If you have the Pinterest app on your phone, for example, you're most likely a woman. If you're an avid user of Uber, you're probably single! Your choice of app for restaurant reviews says a lot about your income as well. If you earn more than \$52,000 a year it is likely that you use Yelp to find places to eat and if you earn less than that you may prefer using Foursquare.

Not only do our app choices say a lot about us, they also make it possible for the Internet to know us even better than our own family and friends. There's a reason those pop up adds on your phone or internet browsers are so creepily accurate. Apparently your data usage reveals the real "you" in many ways.

Of course, it would have been a lot harder for people in the ancient world to guess someone's age and weight given their many layers of robes, their short life expectancy, and, of course, the complete lack of cellphone coverage and Wi-Fi hotspots. That didn't stop people from trying, however, especially people who didn't quite fit the usual mold.

Take the crowds of people who followed Jesus for example. They had been observing him for some time now, but no consensus had developed about him. In a world where a person's demographics involved a 3G analysis (gender, genealogy and geography), Jesus was an oddity. Consider the info that we actually know about him. + He was born under unusual circumstances and of questionable parentage. + He was from a poor family, but his birth threatened a king and attracted foreign diplomats. + Rather than stay at home and take on the family business, as expected of a Jewish male, he became a wandering teacher who led a ragtag group of disciples. + Rather than take a wife, which was also expected, he remained single and unattached. + He had no visible means of income, and yet spent a lot of time at parties and provided food for thousands. + He performed incredible miracles, but never used his power to benefit himself. + He appeared to be a righteous person, but he hung out with the dregs of society. He even ate and drank with them. + He talked about eternal life, but seemed to be obsessed with death and, in particular, his own death on a cross.

It's little wonder that people were confused about him. The guessing game took place every time Jesus appeared in public and, in fact, even among his closest associates. And this brings us to our narrative for today, where Jesus turns to the question of his real identity. Jesus and the disciples arrive in "the district of Caesarea Philippi" -- a fact which is significant for the dialogue that follows. Pagans living in that region believed that a cave near the city was the residence of the Greek god Pan, the half-man, half-goat god of fright (from which comes the

word "panic") and the entrance to Hades -- the underworld, or the realm of the dead.

The city was also significant because it was built by Herod Philip in honor of Caesar and given the additional designation "Philippi" to distinguish it from another Caesarea, built by Herod the Great on the Mediterranean coast. It seems appropriate that in a place identified with two significant rulers, and also a place identified with the personification of evil and death, Jesus would bring up the question of his own identity as a counterpoint.

So one day he says to his disciples, "Can you Guess my age and weight?" Actually his question was, "Who do people say that I am?" What's the buzz about me right now? The answers offered up by the disciples, as to the crowd's perceptions of him, are all connected to the prophets, even though most Jewish teachers at the time believed that authentic prophecy had ceased. Still, there was some expectation of a return of the prophets at the end time, particularly Elijah. Some thought that John the Baptist was an Elijah figure, but when John was executed by Herod Antipas, they began to transfer that moniker to Jesus.

Many of Jesus' miracles had seemed to mirror those of Elijah -- raising the dead being the most prominent. When Jesus announced God's judgment on unrepentant cities and downplayed the central role of the temple, he sounded a lot like the prophet Jeremiah. The crowds linked Jesus with what they knew from the past, seeing his ministry as a prophetic one, pointing to some future figure who would finally overthrow systems of injustice and oppression, who would introduce the kingdom of God, and rescue them from exile and subjugation.

But those closest to Jesus began to suspect there was more to him than that. Jesus was more than a prophet; in fact, he was the One for whom they had been waiting for. When Jesus asks his disciples the pointed question, "But who do you say that I am?" it's a question that will not only define who he is, but also define

the identity of his followers. Simon Peter answers with confidence, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Simon has examined the evidence and concluded that Jesus is the real deal. But while Simon gets Jesus' title right, he still doesn't quite understand what it means. Like most Jews of his day, Simon had certain Messianic expectations.

Now the problem with expectations is that they often narrow our vision, allowing us to see only that which is compatible with the vision we have. Clearly, Simon's vision of "the Messiah" and "the Son of the Living God" is, like the crowd's, limited by what they've seen in the past. Simon probably knew that the Messiah (which means "anointed one") would be a royal descendant from the house of David. When Simon confesses Jesus' identity as the Messiah and Son of God, he is actually not thinking of him as the second person in the Trinity, but rather thinking something more like, in our own vernacular, "I think you might be our future president."

It's clear from the next section, when Jesus predicts his death and resurrection, that Simon's bold confession, while technically correct, still doesn't fit the full messianic algorithm that Jesus has in mind. It will take the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus to give Simon the full picture.

Still, Simon was technically right. He nails it, and Jesus tells him so." Simon, that is awesome! You totally get it!" Matthew says that his actual words were, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

In a place where Caesar is hailed as a god, and the realm of the dead stands wide open, Simon acknowledges the one person who is really worthy of worship. God revealed this to him, Jesus says. And now, standing there, near the gates of Hades, Jesus proclaims that it is on Simon (now called Peter, the "rock") and his bedrock confession that his church will be built. Even the forces of Hades and

death will not prevail against it. Although we know that Peter the rock will later show some cracks, he is given the keys to the kingdom. Peter's own identity is changed because he acknowledged the true identity of Jesus. Wherever he goes from now on, he will be identified by his association with the Christ.

This brings up an important question for those of us who follow Jesus as well. Like Peter, are we easily identified primarily by our association with Jesus? Keep in mind that factors such as our age, weight, gender, education, or income are not relevant. Jesus only wants us to identify him as our true Lord, and then to work on his behalf, imitating him in all that we do and say. This identification means that we are willing to not only share in his blessings, but also in his cross!

It may be true that the apps on your phone might say a lot about you, but that is really a private matter between you and the Internet advertisers who are collecting your data. Following Jesus, on the other hand, might be personal but it's never private. Even when Peter would later try to deny even knowing Jesus, he couldn't get away with it.

Once we are associated with the Messiah, the Son of Man, it's an identity that sticks. Anyone we meet should be able to tell right away from our words, actions, from our compassion and way of living that we belong to him! They shouldn't have to guess, like that carney worker at the fair! And although Jesus would sternly warn his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah at that stage of his ministry, the secret is out now and we have no such restrictions. The question is whether people we encounter in this world will be able to discover Jesus, be able to see God, through the way we live our lives. And hopefully they won't need an app, or a cell phone to do so!