

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Thou Art the Christ Matthew 16:13-20

Christ knew that the eternal destiny of all men was dependent on their relationship with Him. A relationship with Him based on an accurate understanding of who He really was.

Though He was honored for His miracles and teachings, only those who understood that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, could benefit from the work He came to do. For this reason, He kept pressing men and women to make up their minds about Him.

Though Peter had already recognized Him as “the Holy One of God,” Christ kept probing his mind and heart. He also wanted the other disciples to clarify their own understanding of His person and work.

This was all particularly important at this time because hostility was beginning to build toward Christ from the Jewish religious community and He would very shortly be making it very clear to His disciples that He would very shortly have to suffer and to die.

The Sculptor was cutting away any misgivings His disciples had. The choice was clear: If He is God in the flesh, serve Him; if He is anything less, consider Him only of passing interest.

Jesus was in the area of Caesarea Philippi, about 30 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, about six months away from going to Jerusalem to die. Here at the base of a mountain (most likely Mount Hermon), He asked His disciples a series of questions that would force them to clarify their understanding of Him. He was not taking an opinion poll, nor did He ask these questions because He was seeking information for His own good. He was asking them these questions as a part of their learning process.

Let us read this particular lesson in Matthew 16:13-20.

Verse 13, “**Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is? And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets’**” Notice what is missing. Missing is any reference to Jesus as the Messiah. This is puzzling in light of the fact that months earlier multitudes appeared to be convinced that Jesus was the promised One. It might have been because of increasing opposition to Christ that people became fearful of sharing their convictions about Christ. Another possibility might have been that they had become convinced that their original opinion of Him was mistaken.

Both of these are possibilities but I believe that there is a better explanation.

Popular opinion held that the Messiah would be a resurrected figure from the past. If you look at the list of people that are given as possible answers to the question that Jesus asked, they are all prophets from the past.

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It appears that people most likely were not rejecting Jesus as their Messiah at all. In fact they had gone beyond viewing Him simply as their Messiah and were embracing the additional thought that Jesus was also in fact a resurrected prophet. Even though I believe that we could reasonably conclude that the people had not rejected Jesus as their Messiah and by their answers obviously continued to hold Him in high esteem, they had not gone as far in their understanding of Jesus as they needed. They had not gone as far in their thinking as we will see that Peter and most likely the disciples had, as we shall see. But before we do this, let us examine the list of people that people had begun to identify Jesus with.

John the Baptist, “Why would some think Jesus was John the Baptist?” This rumor began with King Herod who had murdered John the Baptist. Recall that the king had put John in prison because the prophet had boldly told him that it was not lawful for him to take his brother’s wife. He married her anyway and when the daughter of his new wife danced at a party, Herod promised her anything she would ask, up to half of his kingdom. Her mother, now in the king’s court, was so incensed about John the Baptist’s petty moral judgments that she requested his head. To please his new bride and to save face, Herod had John executed (**John 14:2-12**).

Understandably, the king had some sleepless nights about this shameless murder and was haunted by the possibility that John might rise from the dead. Christ’s miracles made him think that this dreaded possibility had come true. When word reached him about the activities of Christ, he said, “**This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead; and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him**” (v.2). So the rumor circulated among the masses, “This is John the Baptist.”

Others said Christ was Elijah. This was based on a prophecy in the last chapter of the Old Testament, “**Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord**” (**Mal 4:5**). Many believed that Elijah would literally return.

If they had paid close attention, they would have realized that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of this prophecy. He was not the reincarnation of Elijah, but he had a similar ministry. The explanation of this prophecy is found in the words of an angel to John’s father Zacharias: “**And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah**” (**Luke 1:17**). Yes, in this sense Elijah had come, but they didn’t realize it.

Others said Jesus was Jeremiah. Why they might have said this is not clear. And in addition to these three there were apparently other Old Testament prophets mentioned.

People in Christ’s day certainly had a positive view of Jesus. People in Christ’s day even understood some things about Jesus. But it was equally true that apparently at this point in time in Christ’s ministry just 6 months before His death on the cross people were very confused. Would the disciples be as confused as the people. It was very important to Jesus that they had a clear understanding of who He really was.

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Peter's Personal Conviction

Like an arrow aimed for its intended target, Jesus now turned to His disciples and asked a pertinent personal question: **(V. 15) “He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”** And Peter, ever the first to speak, answered magnificently, **(V. 16) “And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** It is not as if Peter had just now come to realize what he has just stated. But never before had he stated his conclusion so clearly, so briefly, so memorably.

He stated very clearly two things about the person of Jesus:

1. He had come to know Jesus as the “Christ.” “Christ” means the “Anointed One.” He recognized Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah. He truly believed that it would be through Jesus that his nation would be delivered from their sins and from their present bondage to enter into the blessings of the messianic kingdom. Did he view Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, as a reincarnation of an Old Testament prophet? Consider the next thing that Jesus knew about the person of Jesus.

2. He had come to know Jesus not only as the “Christ” but as the “Son of the Living God.” What is the significance of this confession? When Christ spoke of Himself as a Son, and God as His Father, the Jews accused Him of blasphemy, making Himself equal with God (**John 5:18**). They understood that this kind of sonship implied equality with God. Christ's sonship does not refer to time, but to rank. God the Father did not exist before God the Son. Both the Son and the Father existed from all eternity.

By asking this question, Jesus brought Peter's faith to its clearest public expression. Here, for all to see, was the earnest response of his heart. This was another one of Peter's finest moments. Jesus continued on later in **V. 18** to say, **“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the Gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”** This is the only prediction Christ made about the establishment of His church, a prophecy that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. This is the church of which He is the head, the church for which He died, and the church for which He will someday return.

Within Christ's prophecy concerning the church, which was yet future we notice three different features.

1. Christ owns the church. He said, **“I will build MY church.”** If Peter, or any one of us for that matter, should ever use the church as a platform to enhance our own personal interests, rather than the interests of Christ we are making a very serious error. What else do we notice about His church.

2. He builds the church. He builds the church by granting eternal life to those who were chosen from before the foundation of the world. Then He gives each of its members spiritual gifts so that the ministry might flourish. When Cromwell ruled in England, he sent a delegation throughout the land searching for silver so that he could mint coins. His men returned to say that virtually all of the silver was contained in the statues within the churches. Cromwell is said to have replied, “Melt down the saints and put them into circulation.”

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If Christ's church is going to be built, each one who has been granted the gift of life through a personal faith needs to be in circulation, putting to good use the gifts that God has given us to achieve His purposes.

3. Christ empowers the church. After Jesus said, **“You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church...”** Jesus said, **“and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”** We are in a world that is ruled by the Prince of the power of air. The world is Satan's domain. And yet, we as Christ's church are being sent out against the very strongholds of Satan in order that Christ's church might be built. Will we be successful? And the answer is YES!!! If we would wholeheartedly give ourselves to this task and prayerfully move out we will be victorious.

Peter's dramatic confession initiated a moving response from Christ, a personal affirmation that the church was about to be built. Peter would play a leading role in the drama.

Peter's Personal Promise

The sand dune became a rock. Look at **VV. 17-18, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.”**

Jesus refers to Peter as “Simon Barjona,” which is simply another way of saying “Simon, Son of John.” This is the how Jesus referred to him in their very first meeting along the banks of the Jordan River. The prediction that Christ made in that first encounter is now in a very real sense, been fulfilled as Christ makes the change in names official. The shifting sand had become a rock.

This raises the first of two very controversial questions in the passage we are looking at this morning. What did Christ mean when He said that His church would be built on “this rock?”

Let us go back to the original phrase, Jesus said, **“You are Petros (PETROS which means “rock”) and upon this rock (PETRA) I will build my church.”** Some would look at the difference between the word PETROS translated Peter and PETRA translated rock, and would conclude that there obviously is a distinction being drawn between the two and therefore they cannot be one in the same. This is intriguing but not necessarily true for the simple reason that PETRA, the common word for stone or rock, being feminine, had to be changed to a masculine, hence to PETROS, to indicate the name of a male person, Peter. Understanding this we would reasonably conclude that when Jesus said **“upon this rock I will build my church”** He was referring not to someone or something different than to Peter but in fact he was referring to Peter himself.

Does this separate Peter out from the other apostles and make him somehow special? Absolutely not!! Peter is simply serving as the spokesman in this situation for the apostles. He is saying what they themselves would have said. When Christ therefore responds to Peter He is referring to all. This certainly is clear in **Eph. 2:19-20, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built upon the (foundation of Peter?.... No) foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”**

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The second controversial question is found in **V. 19** where we find Jesus continuing to address and Peter, and He says, “**And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**” So what is the question? What are the keys which were given to Peter?

The passage is very clear, the keys which would permit entry into “**the kingdom of heaven**” are the keys referred to clearly and unmistakably in this passage. The gospel of Jesus Christ!!! What does **Romans 1:16** tell us? “**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jews first and also to the Greek.**” As before Jesus is only addressing Peter as a representative of a larger group.

Properly understood, the church today can still exercise the responsibility of administering the “keys” by welcoming sinners into the church, affirming that if they accept the gospel of God’s grace they will be saved. On the other hand, we can also affirm that if they reject the gospel of God’s grace they will be damned.

Peter obviously had made an extraordinary statement which very well sums up the teaching of the Scriptures about the person of Christ. Which led to Christ’s response to Peter as a representative of the apostles and in respect to the keys even all future disciples of Christ. But where did Peter’s faith come from?

Peter’s Personal Revelation

Let’s consider the words of Christ in **V. 17**, “**Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”** Where did Peter’s faith come from? Was it inherent within his own nature, just waiting to be drawn out at the right moment? Was Peter’s conclusion the result of careful thought and human investigation? No, the origin of Peter’s faith was not flesh and blood, but a revelation from the Father. All the natural endowments of human nature could never have produced this theological insight. His statement was the result of a miracle of personal enlightenment.

God was the origin of Peter’s faith. Peter was not mouthing the words of a creed, nor even drawing some legitimate conclusions based on his careful observation. This was a faith wrought in the depths of his being, it was a gift of God. It was a faith that was personal and final. Nothing except a revelation from God can give us a view of Christ that fills our hearts with adoring wonder. The darkness can only be dispelled by a miracle, a shaft of divine light. To cure our spiritual blindness is a divine work.

The great German preacher Helmut Thielicke tells how on a cycling tour of southern Germany he came to a village at midmorning, ravenously hungry because he had missed breakfast. To his delight he saw a shop window in the village street with a notice, “Hot Rolls.” With his gastric juices flowing in eager anticipation, he went inside only to discover that the shop sold no rolls, either not or cold. It was a print shop; the sign on the outside was simply an example of the kind of lettering the shop could produce.

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So it is with those who use words, but neither understand nor trust their meaning. Think of the millions who have recited the words of a creed affirming the divinity of Christ and yet are eternally lost. The words may be true, but the personal affirmation is needed before they are applied. Like a sign on a window, letters can be glued on the outer shell of an empty spiritual life.

CONCLUSION

My prayer this morning would be that we might answer as Peter answered to Christ's question. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Words, not simply learned and repeated, but words planted in our very bosom the God which would lead to by faith alone to trust Him for our salvation.