

## Written Copy: Matthew 16:15-20 “Who Do You Say Jesus Is?”

Proper 16 -12<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

### Text: Matthew 16:15-20

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

### Exegetical Statement

Following the demand of the Pharisees and Sadducees from Jerusalem for a sign proving Jesus' claims to be the promised one sent from God, Jesus crosses the Sea of Galilee and heads 25 miles north to have some special time alone with His Disciples. The subject is who Jesus' really is. As a point of contrast Jesus asks them who the people have been confessing Him to be. They cite the identity that King Herod Antipas held that Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnate. Others identified Him with the promised forerunner of the Messiah Elijah. Others indemnified Him with the second coming of one of the other great Old Testament prophets such as Jeremiah. With those incorrect answers out of the way, Jesus wants to know who they, His Twelve Disciples confess Him to be. Peter answers on behalf of the Twelve with the answer revealed to him by the Father through the Holy Spirit. He is the Christ: The Anointed One promised to come as the descendant of King David who would save the remnant of Israel. But added to this is Peter confessing Him to be "The Son of the Living God". Here Jesus is connected with Divine identity in a way that they have not confessed Him to be before. Jesus responds that not only is this correct, but because He has been given this revelation from The Father alone, He is greatly blessed (even saved). Then Jesus identifies Peter as the stone, which is a part of the huge rocky ledge upon which Jesus will build His Church. This is to say that Peter as the faithful truthful confessor of Jesus is the foundation of the Church the Apostles will build after Pentecost. While it will be attacked by evil forces, they will not overpower it or be victorious against it. Further, as one representing the 12, and the Church they will establish based on Peter's confession, Jesus grants the Keys of the Kingdom by which the salvation and damnation declared in heaven based on this confession will be made the reality in the lives of individuals. Those who confess as Peter and believe in Jesus will be loosed from judgment and eternal death. Those who deny and refuse this confession will be bound by their sin to eternal judgement. Then, because in the Disciples' minds as well as the minds of the people this confession of who Jesus is needs to be filled in through His teaching, and His future work on the cross and in the resurrection, He commands the disciples not to share this confession with anyone just yet.

### Focus Statement:

The true confession and faith in who Jesus is must come from the Father through the Holy Spirit. He is the "Christ": the man descended from the line of David sent to fulfill the prophecy of the Savior of all mankind. He is "The Divine Son of the Living God" who is Himself the author of life and giver of life now and eternal life to come.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

In our shorthand thinking of "I believe in Jesus" we run the risk of losing what stands behind that confession and the power that it has in our life and the lives of others. No man can come to grips with who Jesus really is and what He came to do on their own. Those who deny the true confession of who Jesus is are bound to eternal judgment.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Ponder what it Peter's confession means for the Church as the rock upon which it is built, and the promise that the gates of hell will not overcome it.

### Subject Sentence: Knowing the real Jesus opens the gates to Eternal Life

## **Introduction: Who Are You?**

Who are you? I mean who are you really? If I didn't know you and you didn't know me how would you answer that question? You might start with your name, although that really doesn't tell me much about who you really are. Maybe if our names were more like those of Native Americans, then telling me your name might be more helpful. If you were called "Running Bear" I might be able to assume that I should stay out of your way when you are really hungry. If your name was "Sleeping Lion" then I might think twice about calling you early in the morning before you've had your coffee.

But In this age of the internet, just knowing your name can tell me more than it used to. With Google I could search your name and possibly find out a lot of useful information. Some of it good, some of it not so good. Now with the advent of Facebook one can find out a wealth of information about another person. Facebook was just coming into its own in the years before I left my job at Hillers. But as someone who hired young people it became a very useful tool. People would post all kinds of things about themselves on their Facebook page, things they never realized could become detrimental to them. We would take a look at an applicant's Facebook page and see picture after picture of them drinking, references to drug use, skipping out of work at previous jobs. All these were useful tools in weeding out the undesirables. People would even post about how they called in sick for no reason at all.

But the best way to get to know someone is to spend time with them. Listen to what they say, listen to the stories about what they've done in their past, and what they dream about doing in the future. When you spend enough time with a person you can begin to see who they are when no one else is looking. They reveal what makes them happy, sad, and who they are when they experience these emotions. But what if the person we want to get to know is Jesus? In our Gospel Lesson Jesus is asking who the Disciples to consider who He really is, with surprising results.

## **The Gospel Lesson: Who is Jesus?**

As our Gospel Lesson opens Jesus has led His disciples 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. 25 miles north of where He had been doing most of His preaching, teaching, and miracles. He leaves behind a crowd that follows Him in search of another miracle to fill their bellies, or heal their sick, but hasn't wholly accepted who He has claimed to be. He leaves behind the religious leaders of Galilee who have already begun plotting to kill Him. He also leaves behind Pharisees and Sadducees who have traveled up from Jerusalem demanding He give them a sign to prove He is the Messiah. It is coming to a crucial time in His ministry. While He does want the world at large to know and believe in Him, right now His first concern is with these 12 men who have been following Him, and have seen and heard revelations that have been for their eyes only. Before He heads to Jerusalem for the last time, He wants them to consider who He really is and why He has come.

So away from the crowds He sits down with them. For openers He asks them who those crowds that have been following Him confess Him to be. They give the answer that King Herod Agrippa gave when He heard about Jesus' teaching and miracles: that He is John the Baptist returned from the dead. (Even though He and John were both alive at the same time). Others say that He is the prophetic figure that is supposed to proceed the coming of the Messiah, the return of Elijah. This would account for Him doing mighty miracles, yet not exactly filling the role of the Messiah they were hoping and dreaming for. Others consider Him to be another in the line of the Old Testament Prophets. Among these the connection with the prophet Jeremiah is interesting. Jeremiah too spoke the message of the LORD that was not accepted by the religious establishment and therefore suffered shame and torture. The common theme for all these is that they're ideas from the minds of men. On our own, with just human knowledge and wisdom as our guide, we can never truly understand who Jesus is, let alone believe in Him.

That first question was just to clear the air. Right now He's not concerned with public opinion of Him. He knows that will change drastically during His final week in Jerusalem. What He wants the Disciples to consider is who they themselves confess Him to be. We're not told how long of a pause there was before anyone answered. It could have been a very long pause indeed. All we know is that Peter broke the silence in a big way. He spoke a confession that at that time was earth shattering. It was so huge that He didn't quite comprehend all that stood behind it himself. That's because it didn't come from his brain or his understanding. He couldn't have come up with this on his own no matter how much time he spent with Jesus. This confession was given to him as a gift of grace from the Heavenly Father Himself. It came through the Holy Spirit, into Peter's heart, and out his mouth, probably without much pause in-between. It's the confession that is the basis for who we are as the Christian Church. **Matthew 16:16 "Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Peter said it first because it was given to Him first by the Father. But as always, he ends up speaking for the other 11 Disciples. If that wasn't their confession before this, it would become theirs in the days and weeks ahead. It's a confession worthy of being a 'sound bite' in today's day and age. It is short and sweet, to the point, yet packed with a lot of meaning underneath. With this confession out in the open, and Jesus' affirming it by responding in **Matthew 16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven"**. Now the work now begins to unpack what this really means.

First off is the confession that Jesus is “The Christ”. That’s the Greek word that means “The Anointed One”. In Israel’s history Kings and prophets were anointed as an act that set them aside and apart from others, chosen by the LORD for His special purpose. But there was one special “Anointed One” prophesied about from the line of King David. A descendant of King David who would be set aside to save the remnant of Israel from its enemies. He was the one that men of faith were waiting for. He was the Messiah. Although Scripture begins its revelation and promise of the Messiah shortly after the fall in the Garden of Eden, it will progressively fill in the details throughout Israel’s history.

The prophet Isaiah in His words written to the Jews in exile in Babylon provides many details about who this Messiah would be. He is writing prophetic words of hope and comfort to them, that the LORD has not forgotten them and would once again come and deliver them from exile back home. At the same time, He is prophetically describing a greater deliverer who would accomplish a greater salvation. Isaiah’s description was so all encompassing of the role that Jesus would later fulfill that many scribes of Jesus’ day were puzzled as to what it all meant. He seemed to be talking about 3 different Messianic figures. There was the prophetic figure which would, as the newer and better Moses, bring the remnant of Israel back to worship of and faith in the One True God. Then there was the Suffering Servant, which some believed was actually the nation of Israel symbolically referred to as one man. This figure is described as suffering greatly for the nation’s transgression against God. Finally, Isaiah spoke of Immanuel: God with us, God returning to destroy Israel’s enemies and rule over them once again through the descendant of David who would be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He would reunite the kingdom of Israel and make it the superpower it once was during the reign of David, the Messiah’s forefather. No one could understand how these three figures would actually be found and fulfilled in One Man.

With Rome ruling over the Jews with an iron fist it’s understandable why the figure of the Messianic King in the line and spirit of David would appeal so greatly. In the people’s mind that it overshadowed the other descriptions Isaiah gave, especially the suffering servant one. Yet that suffering servant is an important role that Jesus had come to fulfill. The Jews thought that they were the suffering servant, suffering at the hands of Rome, and before that at the hands of the Greeks and the rulers that came in their wake, and at the hands of Babylon who destroyed their city and took them into exile. The problem is they, as a nation, and individually as sinful people, could not suffer enough to appease God’s wrath over their continued unfaithfulness. They needed a suffering servant who could withstand all the righteous anger and wrath the Father had over their sins. One that He Himself had no sins to suffer for. They needed the perfect sacrifice. The wages of sin is death, and they couldn’t die enough to make themselves right with God. But Jesus could

Jesus could because He was a man, descended from the line of David. But He wasn't just a man. He was Immanuel, God with us. He was the King of Kings who came to take on His people's worst enemies: sin, death, and the devil. And He would do that as a human being by giving His perfect sinless life in their place. He could do that for all of Israel, and for all of mankind: Jew and Gentile alike, because He wasn't just a man. He was and is The Divine Son of the Living God. "Immanuel": God with us. God become man, able to fulfill all that Isaiah and the other prophetic voices proclaimed of Him. The divine nature of Jesus Christ empowered His human nature to suffer pain and torture far beyond what any normal human body could tolerate. He suffered enough to be the final sacrifice that atones for the sins of all mankind that has ever lived, lives now, and will live in the future. He is the man who through His divine nature was empowered to suffer eternal death on the cross so that no one else would have to.

How much of that did Peter grasp when he voiced the confession given him by the Heavenly Father? Probably not very much. This can be seen not too many pages later in Matthew's Gospel as Peter and the rest show they can't conceive of all that it means that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Yet even with what little about Jesus He did comprehend and believe, it was enough. It was enough for Jesus to pronounce that Peter was blessed. How blessed? That Peter was saved. Peter believed what had thus far been revealed to him about Jesus. More was to come. But this served as a starting point for Jesus in teaching His disciples about who He really is. In His remaining time with them He would work to fill in the details of what it meant that He was God's chosen, anointed one, who came to save them from their worst enemies. He would begin telling them about what was going to happen in Jerusalem. But it would take His death on the cross followed by His resurrection before the Spirit would complete the picture for them.

## **Who is Jesus to You?**

What about you? Who is Jesus to you? Peter's confession in **Matthew 16:16** "**Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**" was beyond any man's comprehension. Even now you hold fast to it as your confession only because the Father has chosen to reveal it to you through the Holy Spirit given at your baptism. You hold fast to this confession through the faith given in the Gospel. You don't need to explain it by writing a thesis worthy of a Doctor of Theology to receive what this confession has to give to you. All you need to know and hold fast to is the simple Gospel Truth: Jesus is God the Son who became man by being born of a virgin. As a man He suffered and died to forgive all of your Sins. As God the Son in human form, His suffering completed all you that you owed the Father and earned for you the gift of eternal life to come. That is the Gospel Truth Jesus' Church is founded on. It's the Gospel Message we were given in order to share with one another and proclaim to the lost around us.

Those words when shared with the lost have the power of God to work wonders. Jesus describes that power and authority by calling it the Keys to the Kingdom. **Matthew 16:19** **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."** By that confession and the faith that comes with it you are given the power to hold it as the absolute truth. This confession is words with power, the power to change lives. That Gospel confession is the key that unlocks the kingdom of heaven, as well as the key that shuts the gates of heaven forever.

Those who deny that confession as the one true faith will find themselves on the Last Day locked out of God's kingdom forever. They will be bound forever by all of their sins which they refused to allow Jesus to make atonement for. They will be bound to an eternity lived apart from God and His love. They will be bound to an eternity of suffering that will be physical, emotional, and spiritual. And the worst part is. it's an eternity that they never had to suffer.

But this confession, when held by the power of faith to be the absolute truth: that Jesus is the once and for all sacrifice for your sins, instead of locking the gate to heaven, it blows it wide open. For all believe this confession their lives are forever changed. All the sin that would bind them to eternal suffering is loosed, released from their eternal record. They are set free from a life lived apart from God and granted life with Him now ending in eternal life to come.

The authority to proclaim this as the absolute truth was given here as "The keys of the kingdom of heaven" It is a part of what we as Lutherans call "The Office of the Keys". It is an authority given to the Church's Pastor to proclaim as the Absolution before the assembled church "in the stead of, and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ." But it has been granted to each of you as well. You can declare to those whom the Lord brings you in contact with that all who deny this confession of Jesus are bound to eternal death. But all who believe in this confession of Jesus by faith have been given life with Him now and eternal life to come. This is the ministry of His Church on earth until the day He returns. **(Matthew 16:18b) And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**

## **Conclusion**

Most people we meet are not named after their special traits like “Running Bear” or “Sleeping Lion”. The friends that become our close friends are those we spend time with and whom we have allowed to reveal to us who they really are. As we spend time with Jesus in His Word, the Father through the Spirit works to reveal who Jesus really is to us. We can learn things about Him on our own by reading Scripture, but they can only really be understood and held as truth through the faith given by the Holy Spirit. The Father has given to us all we need to know to be saved, to have the kingdom of heaven opened to us in the Gospel Message. It is the foundation that the Church is built upon. It is the message that called us to become part of the Church. It is the message we have been called to share with others outside the Church. And the best way for us to do that is the same way we make friends: through personal relationships. As we get to know who another person is, they also get to know us. And as members of the Church, to know us is to know Jesus, who has given us life now and eternal life to come. Through our words and actions, we share the confession that can change the life of those outside the Church: that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And through our personal relationship with them, we can winsomely fill in what those titles “Christ”, and “Son of the Living God” mean as we have come to know and confess them. We can be Jesus’ tool to unbind them from eternal death and loose them to enjoy live everlasting with us. May the Spirit keep that same faith alive in us until our Savior returns. Amen