



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 27, 2008
Released on Wednesday, July 23, 2008**

"Christ as Messiah"

Printed Text: Matthew 16:13-23

Background Scripture: Matthew 16:13-28

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7

Place: area near Caesarea Philippi

Time: A.D. 29

Matthew 16:13-23

13 When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?

14 And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

21 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

TODAY'S AIM

Facts: to explore Jesus' dialogue with Peter in Matthew 16 regarding Jesus as the Christ and the Founder of the church.

Principle: to affirm that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

Application: to broaden students' understanding of Jesus' role as promised Messiah.

Introduction

Who do people say Jesus is? The answers vary. That has always been true. And an answer will be heavily influenced by a person's other beliefs. For example, Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century, having discounted miracles, primarily saw Jesus as a commonsense teacher of morality. Some theologians today whose main concern is social justice see in Christ a great liberator of the economic poor, rather than primarily the "poor in spirit."

People tend to make Jesus fit their cultural expectations. The people of the first century A.D. were no different. It is not that the preceding understandings are totally incorrect. Getting the right answer regarding Jesus' person and work must include an emphasis on what He actually did. The divine revelation we have in the Bible is our starting point in that regard. Our focus on this divine disclosure will help keep us from reducing Jesus to fit our own cultural mold.

Lesson Background

The events in today's lesson take place in the regions of Caesarea Philippi. That city was located in the northeast region of Palestine. The Caesarea part of the name was to honor Caesar, the Roman emperor. The Philippi part of the name refers to Herod Philip II. Pagan influence is evident in the fact that the city contained a temple for Pan, a Greek nature deity. The area's massive rock cliffs may help suggest the imagery for Matthew 16:18 in today's text. We should be careful not to confuse Caesarea Philippi with the other Caesarea mentioned several times in Acts.

As Jesus and His disciples traveled to the area of Caesarea Philippi in today's lesson, we find Jesus in the third year of His public ministry. Jesus already had performed many miracles and provoked much opposition. It's time for people—or at least the disciples—to come to a conclusion on an important question: Who is Jesus?

Probing Questions (Matthew 16:13–15) Jesus' First Question (v. 13)

1. Why did Jesus pose the question "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" (Matthew 16:13)

Having completed the major part of His Galilean ministry (Matthew 4:12–16:12), Jesus is now alone with his 12 disciples. Notice that Jesus does not pose the question *Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?* to the crowds. Rather, He asks this question of His disciples in private.

The disciples are allowed to know the deeper realities about Jesus (see Matthew 13:11). Now the time has come to reflect on the various responses to Jesus that His Galilean ministry has evoked. It is time to clarify Jesus' true identity.

The Jewish people of first-century Palestine, including the 12 disciples, have an expectation of a coming Messiah. They also hold certain concepts of what the Messiah will be like. They primarily think of Him in terms of a coming triumphant king, after the model of King David. Further, they think this king will begin His reign on earth by liberating Israel and judging her enemies. If Jesus does not meet those expectations, then who is He?

We can pause to point out that Jesus uses the phrase *the Son of man* to refer to himself more than two dozen times in Matthew's Gospel alone. It is a title with messianic associations, based primarily on Daniel 7:13, 14. Jesus probably favors this title because it is a subtler claim to His messiahship. It is also not as directly tied to, nor limited by, mere earthly kingship.

Various Wrong Answers (v. 14)

2. What was the disciple's response (v. 14)?

The disciples replied that people had varying opinions (Matt. 16:14). Some said He was John the Baptist. John had been beheaded by Herod Antipas, but some thought he had come back to life. Others identified Him as Elijah. From Malachi 4:5 many had concluded that Elijah would literally return to prepare the way for the Messiah. To them, Jesus earned to be fulfilling this role.

Still others thought He might be a resurrected Jeremiah. Jewish writings of the intertestamental period reveal that Jeremiah had become a champion of the Jewish people, and he was believed to have a future role in Israel's history (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Eerdmans). Others were not this certain but thought Jesus might be one of the prophets, either from the past or as part of a new group.

Although opinions varied, all saw Jesus as someone unusual. They could not explain His Person, words, and deeds; so they conceded that something supernatural was at work in Him. People encountering the Jesus of history today also are hard-pressed to explain Him. Even skeptics, if honest, must admit that He was no ordinary man.

Jesus' Second Question (v. 15)

3. Why did Jesus ask His disciples about His identity? (v. 15)

Now Jesus turns the question on the disciples. He asked them about His identity. Since the disciples were with Jesus for over two years, they should have some convictions about Jesus' identity based on their experiences with Him in ministry. They heard what He taught, seen what He did, and saw how He acted. It was time for them to answer the important question.

Jesus' follow-up question presses for personal commitment from all the disciples, since the *ye* is plural. The question tests their present level of understanding and faith. Jesus is not interested in mere academic or knee-jerk speculation about who they think He is. The nature of His work demands a more thoughtful and personal response.

Important Answer

4. What was their response? (v. 16)

Simon Peter responds, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." We should note that Peter was the one who answered the question. As Peter was the unofficial leader of the disciples and since Jesus asked all the disciples the question, we can assume that Peter responded on behalf of the twelve. Matthew here calls him "Simon Peter" probably because Jesus would make use of both his surnames in His reply.

When Peter declared "Thou art the Christ," he recognized Jesus as the long-awaited Deliverer of Israel. Some disciples had suspected this from the beginning (cf. John 1:41, 49), and their walk with Him tended to confirm it (6:68-69). But their experiences were also broadening their concept of the Messiah. They increasingly saw Him as more than a human being (cf. Matt.8:27; 14:33; Luke 5:8).

Peter declared that Jesus was "the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16; cf. John 6:69). "Son" does not imply inferiority to, but identity with God. And, being one with the living God, He shares and dispenses His life. The Christ (anointed one) was thus none other than God Himself. Peter could have given no higher tribute. Yet his confession was only a beginning of insight for him and the other disciples. They had much more to learn.

5. What is the difference between the questions *Who is Jesus?* and *Who is Jesus to you?* How should our understanding of who Jesus is affect our daily living?

Each person is responsible to determine who Jesus is. Solving that question then determines (or should determine) what role He will play in our lives. This

determination needs to be based on the facts of Scripture, not on mere feeling or desire of what one wishes Jesus to be.

The facts are that Jesus is Savior, Lord, king, and the Son of God. Whether or not we allow Him to be those things *to us* is the next issue. As our Savior, we need to know He has taken our sins away and therefore we should forsake sin in our lives. Since He is Lord, we are to be obedient to His commands. Jesus as king requires our submission and loyalty. As the Son of God, Jesus has revealed the Father to us. We are to follow His example as we seek to live for God.

Father's Revelation (v. 17)

6. What was the source of Peter's great confession? (v. 17)

This verse explicitly states that Peter's recognition of Jesus' true identity is because of divine revelation. This fact is also emphasized in this verse by referring to Peter formally as *Simon Bar-jona* coupled with the phrase *flesh and blood*. "Flesh and blood" is a figure of speech used to indicate human beings (see 1 Corinthians 15:50; Ephesians 6:12; Hebrews 2:14).

It is not Peter the mere man who figures this out, but Peter the recipient of the Father's revelation. Peter is *blessed* because he is privileged to receive this revelation and because he expresses it and does not reject it. But how much does Peter really understand at this point? As we will see in Matthew 16:21–23 (below), Peter's understanding of Jesus' divine nature and mission is not yet as deep as it could be.

Resulting Promise (Matthew 16:18, 19)

The Rock and the Church (v. 18)

7. What rocklike characteristic did Jesus find in Peter? (v. 18)

Much of the controversy has arisen over the tendency of some to exalt Peter as the foundation "rock" on whom the church is built. In contrast to this, some maintain that the rock here is Christ, while others say it is the confession Peter had just made.

It appears from Matthew 16:18 that in this conversation, Jesus deliberately called attention to the name He had given Simon—"Thou art Peter (rock)." Since He immediately followed this with "and upon this rock," He must have intended a connection between the two words. In Greek, Peter's name and the word for "rock" differ only in gender, and in the Aramaic Jesus was probably speaking, there may be no difference at all.

So Jesus did have Peter in mind when He spoke of the rock on which He would build His church—but not his human abilities. He had already clarified that when He called him Simon. Rather, He referred to the God-given, word that had produced his confession in verse 16. On this faith Jesus would build His church (see Matt. 10:9–11,13,17), and Peter, the first to display it, would be prominent in its foundation. But others would join him in this faith and become part of this foundation as well (Eph. 2:20).

8. What is the church Jesus is building? When did it begin? (v. 18)

Before concluding our lengthy discussion of this verse, we point out that this is the first occurrence of the word "church" in his Gospel. The word *church* refers to an assembly of believers called by Jesus out of the world.

Since the commission in Matthew 10 sent the apostles only to the "house of Israel," and no further commission was given until chapter 28, there was no worldwide task for the disciples until the physical manifestation of the church at Pentecost.

Jesus himself is the one who inaugurates this community of God's people. They are to be committed to Him and submit to His rule. The church is not an innovation created by His disciples after His death.

Jesus also promised that "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against the church (assembly). Some have viewed this as the inability of hell to overpower the church and see the church as being on the defensive against Satan. However, the phrase "shall not prevail" may be understood as meaning, "shall not stand against." The imagery would then picture the church as being on the attack against the gates of hell. Here hell (Gr hades) probably represents the kingdom of Satan, not just death and the grave. While Jesus' resurrection certainly will overcome the sting of death, it will also enable His church to aggressively and offensively attack the gates of hell (cf. usage as Satan's kingdom in Job 38: 17; Isa. 8:10; Ps. 107:18) by snatching out victims from darkness into His glorious kingdom of light. One does not attack with gates; he defends. It is the church which is on the attack here and hell is on the defensive.

9. How did Peter later use the keys to the kingdom of heaven? (v. 19)

Our Lord then promised to Peter "the keys of the kingdom." Keys were used by stewards to open the master's storehouse and distribute according to need. The book of Acts shows us this process at work. By preaching the first sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), Peter opened the door of the kingdom for the first time.

The expressions bind and loose (v. 19b of today's lesson) were common in Jewish legal phraseology meaning to declare forbidden or to declare allowed. Peter and the other disciples (see 18:18) were to continue on earth the work of Christ in preaching the gospel and declaring God's will to men and were armed with the same authority as He Himself possessed. Christ in heaven ratifies what is done in His name and in obedience to His word on earth.

A Misunderstanding about the Messiah (Matthew 16:20-23)

10. Why did Jesus forbid His disciples to tell others that He was the Messiah (v. 20)?

Jesus concluded this extraordinary conversation with Peter by forbidding the Twelve to tell others that He was the Messiah. He probably did this because others would not have the spiritual insight to understand what messiahship entailed (compare John 6:15).

At this point in time, it will help ensure that people come to Jesus for the right reasons. Faith, not an expectation of the overthrow of the Romans, is the basis on which people need to approach Jesus.

11. What did Jesus begin to prophesy at this point in His ministry? (v. 21)

From now on Jesus will use allusions that are less veiled to show His disciples more directly what are the necessary aspects of His mission. It is clear that He is the Messiah (v. 16, above). Now His real redemptive mission as Messiah must also be set forth clearly.

Jesus begins by explaining the sequence of events in the final phase of His earthly ministry (His death and resurrection). The fact that He *must go* indicates that there is a divine plan behind this imperative. It also signals that Jesus understands that He is fulfilling prophecy (compare Isaiah 42:1 with Matthew 3:16, 17; Isaiah 61:1-3 with Luke 4:18, 19; etc.).

The Messiah's mission must involve suffering (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). It is both ironic and tragic that it is at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes that this suffering comes. These Jewish leaders should be among the ones most open to welcoming Him.

12. What caused Peter to rebuke Jesus? What was His response? (vs. 22-23)

All this was too much for Peter. Seemingly without even hearing about Jesus' resurrection, he took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. What Jesus prophesied did not fit Peter's image of the Messiah. So he said, "This shall not [never] be unto thee." How could "the Son of the living God" (v. 16) be put to death?

Peter loved Jesus greatly and trusted Him unreservedly; so he could not bear to hear Him speak this way. But he still did not understand all that it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah.

Jesus delivered a sharp rebuke of His own. The person He had just pronounced "blessed" (v. 17) He now called "Satan" (v. 23). Recognizing that His great adversary was using Peter to dissuade Him from His atoning work, He told him, "Get thee behind me," or, "Get out of My sight!" Furthermore, as Jesus had commended Peter, He now called him an "offense" (v. 23), or stumbling block.

Peter was thinking from a human point of view, not God's. The cross was absolutely essential in God's plan. To even suggest that Jesus avoid it was a snare along the road to redemption.

How easy it is to be the mouthpiece of God one moment and the mouthpiece of Satan the next! We should always pray and consult God on His plans and accept them, even if those plans do not make sense to our natural mind (see Proverbs 3:5,6).

13. In what ways are we guilty of rebuking Jesus today? How do we reverse this problem?

Like Peter, we can confidently proclaim Jesus to be the Christ and the Son of the living God. But we may not understand the implications of that confession. We too can be guilty of contradicting Jesus in both attitude and action.

When Jesus says to us that we should turn the other cheek, our response may be one that says, "But Jesus, You just don't understand how badly that person has mistreated me." In response to Jesus' saying to us that we should seek first the kingdom of God, we instead may seek our own desires. Jesus says that the one who would be great must become a servant, yet we may deny this teaching by expecting people to meet our needs. The effect is to rebuke Jesus by not following His desires.

Conclusion

In today's world, people look for security in many places. They place their hope in democratic freedom, finances, military security, etc. In effect, these things become false messiahs. But today's lesson makes clear that God has provided only one true Savior: Jesus the Christ.

Prayer

Father, give us grateful hearts to recognize our Savior's love. May we ever confess Jesus as our Messiah. May we renounce our sins to His lordship. It's in His holy name that we pray, amen.

Thought to Remember

We must confess Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God, just like Peter did.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Our final unit presents images of Christ in. Read James 1. This lesson challenges us to be "Doers of the Word."

Lesson Summarized By

Montario Fletcher

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