

The Son of Man

Matthew 16:13-20

Peter's Declaration about Jesus
(Mk 8.27—30; Lk 9.18—20)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah,^c the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter,^d and on this rock^e I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was^f the Messiah.^g ¹

Jesus took His disciples to Gentile territory, in the region of Caesarea Philippi, away from Herod Antipas who had had John the Baptist beheaded. They were on vacation about 120 miles from Jerusalem in the northern part of Palestine. The region was strongly identified with various religions: It had been a center for Baal worship; the Greek god Pan had shrines there; and Herod the Great had built a temple there to honor Augustus Caesar. It was in the midst of this pagan superstition that Jesus talked with his disciples, much like Southeastern Michigan were we worship industry, sports teams and gaming. But this vacation was not about play...it was about equipping Jesus and the disciples for the challenges that they were about to face.

Here is a homeless, penniless Galilean carpenter, with twelve very ordinary men around him. At that moment the orthodox leaders are actually plotting and planning to destroy him as a dangerous heretic. He stands in an area littered with

^c Or *the Christ*

^d Gk *Petros*

^e Gk *petra*

^f Other ancient authorities add *Jesus*

^g Or *the Christ*

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 16:13-20

the temples of the Syrian gods; in a place where the ancient Greek gods looked down; in a place where the history of Israel crowded in upon the minds of men; where the white marble splendor of the home of Caesar-worship dominated the landscape and compelled the eye. And there—of all places—this amazing carpenter stands and asks men who they believe him to be, and expects the answer, The Son of God. It is as if Jesus deliberately set himself against the background of the world's religions in all their history and their splendor, and demanded to be compared with them and to have the verdict given in his favor.

If anyone else asked, “Who do people say that I am?” we would think them either mad or arrogant. But in the case of Jesus, a right confession of who He is basic to salvation (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 John 2:18–23; 4:1–3). His person and His work go together and must never be separated. It is amazing to see how confused the public was about Jesus (John 10:19–21). Perhaps, like Herod, the people thought Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead.

It had been prophesied that Elijah would come again (Mal. 4:5), and some thought that this prediction was fulfilled in Jesus. However, Jesus did not minister as did Elijah; it was John the Baptist who came “in the spirit and power of Elias” (Luke 1:13–17). Jeremiah was the weeping prophet whose tender heart was broken at the sight of the decay of the nation. Certainly this attitude was seen in Jesus, the Man of sorrows.

One thing is clear: We can never make a true decision about Jesus Christ by taking a popular poll of the people, although some people do get their “spiritual knowledge” this way! The important thing is not what others say, but what do you and I personally say? The decisions of the crowd (wrong or right) can never substitute for personal decisions.

Peter made the correct response: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” In Jesus were fulfilled all the promises of God to the nation. And as the Old

Testament made clear, the Messiah is more than a human being; He is God (Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5-6; Micah 5:2). Peter acknowledged Jesus' deity as the Son of the living God. The disciples had come to this conclusion as they observed Jesus over a period of time, witnessed His miracles, and heard His words. This confession was Peter's response to the revelation God the Father had given him. This revelation was not the result of Peter's own investigation. It came as the gracious act of God. God had hidden these things from the proud Pharisees and Sadducees and revealed them to "babes," the humble disciples.

We know there had been other confessions of faith prior to this one. Nathanael had confessed Christ as the Son of God (John 1:49), and the disciples had declared Him God's Son after He stilled the storm (Matt. 14:33). Peter had given a confession of faith when the crowds left Jesus after His sermon on the Bread of Life (John 6:68-69). In fact, at the beginning of his ministry when Andrew had brought his brother Simon to Jesus, it was on the basis of this belief (John 1:41).

However this confession, in our scripture, was different from those that preceded it. To begin with, Jesus explicitly asked for this confession. It was not an emotional response from people who had just seen a miracle, but the studied and sincere statement of a person who had been taught by God.

Also, Jesus accepted this confession and built on it to teach them new truths. Jesus knew that Peter and the other disciples could now be led into new steps of deeper truth and service. All of Jesus' ministry to His disciples had prepared the way for this experience. Now he could talk to them of things to come.

First Jesus said you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church. These disciples were Jewish men, steeped in Old Testament Scripture. They recognized the rock as a symbol of God. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). "The Lord is my Rock, and my Fortress" (Ps. 18:2). "For who is God save the Lord? Or who is a rock save our God?" (Ps. 18:31)

When they met Jesus had given Simon the new name of *Peter* (John 1:42) which means “a stone.” The Aramaic form is *Cephas*, which also means “a stone.” Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and confesses Him as the Son and God and Savior, becomes a “living stone” (1 Peter 2:5, NASB). Jesus Christ is the foundation rock on which the church is built and the Old Testament prophets born witness to this fact in Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 28:16.

Jesus said on this rock, I will build my church. This is the first occurrence of this important word in the New Testament. It is the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-SEE-uh) from which we get our English word “ecclesiastical,” referring to things that pertain to the church. The literal meaning is “a called-out assembly.” In this first use of *ekklesia*, Jesus had the whole church in mind. He was building a universal church composed of all who make the same confession of faith that Peter made. The disciples would have known this word as it was used of the assembly of Greek citizens that helped to govern a city or district (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Also, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used *ekklesia* to describe the congregation of Israel when it was gathered for religious activity (Deut. 31:30; Jud. 20:2). But Jesus was using it in a new way with His disciples.

Jesus spoke about “My church” in contrast to these other assemblies. In the church, Jesus Christ would unite believing Jews and Gentiles and form a new temple, a new body (Eph. 2:11–3:12). In His church, natural distinctions would be unimportant (Gal. 3:28). Jesus Christ would be the Head and Builder of this church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

Each believer in this church is a “living stone” (1 Peter 2:5). Believers would meet in local congregations, or assemblies, to worship Christ and to serve Him; but they would also belong to a universal church, a temple being built by Christ. There

is a oneness to the people of God (Eph. 4:1–6) that ought to be revealed to the world by love and unity (John 17:20–26).

Jesus explained that the gates and authority of death could not and would not stop this church. By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ would conquer death, so that death would not be able to hold any of His people. Instead, Peter was given the privilege of opening “the door of faith” to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14ff), and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). But the other Apostles shared this authority (Matt. 18:18), and Paul had the privilege of “opening the door of faith” to the Gentiles outside of Palestine (Acts 14:27). Peter and the other disciples were also given the right to speak of binding and loosing, or forbidding or permitting. As the representatives of this church, they would exercise authority according to His Word. But Jesus did not say that God would obey what they did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed. The church does not get man’s will done in heaven; it obeys God’s will on earth.

The Apostles were not to share this truth about Jesus being the Son of God with other people until after His resurrection and ascension. Then the “sign of Jonah” would be completed, the Spirit would be given, and the message could be proclaimed. The nation in general, and certainly the religious leaders in particular, were not yet ready for this message.^{2 3}

Jesus asks the same question today of every person that will follow him...“And you—who do you say I am?”

As then, one can’t have a personal relationship with Jesus based on what and who others think of Jesus, but who each of us know him to be in our lives.

²WiersbeWarren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 16:13

³Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:57

This passage teaches that our discovery of Jesus Christ must be a personal discovery. Our knowledge of Jesus must never be second handed. A person might know every verdict ever passed on Jesus; know every Christology that the mind of man had ever thought out; might be able to give a competent summary of the teaching about Jesus of every great thinker and theologian—and still not be a Christian. Christianity never consists in knowing about Jesus; it always consists in knowing Jesus. Jesus Christ demands a personal verdict. He did not ask only Peter, he asks every person: “You—what do *you* think of me?” With this confession we each become living stones in the church.

Peter had made the great discovery; and Peter was given the great privilege and the great responsibility. It is a discovery which everyone must make for him or herself; and, when one has made it, the same privilege and the same responsibility are laid upon each of us.⁴ Thanks be to God!

⁴ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume 2*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible, Rev. Ed), S. 132