

Sermon for September 14, 2014 - 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 16:13-20 (NKJV)

Theme: Who Is He?

- 1) *The Christ – revealed by the Father.*
- 2) *The Christ – who will not let the devil defeat us.*
- 3) *The Christ – who empowers us to represent him.*

¹³ *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* ¹⁴ *So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* ¹⁵ *He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"* ¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* ¹⁷ *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* ¹⁸ *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* ¹⁹ *"And 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 commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.*
(Mat 16:13-20)

You would be hard pressed to find someone who has something bad to say about Jesus. Muslims consider him a prophet as great as Mohammed. The famous Hindi activist Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I know of no one who has done more for humanity than Jesus." Even the outspoken, militant atheist Richard Dawkins said: "Jesus was a great moral teacher."

But is this who Jesus is? No. It is not enough to see Jesus as the world's greatest moral teacher. It is not enough to view him as the example you should follow, or as a miracle worker who can get you out of trouble. So what if Jesus is these things? None of them speak of how he can save us from our sins. None of them recognize his true greatness.

Who is Jesus? With the evangelist Matthew as our guide, let us learn that he is: 1) *The Christ – revealed by the Father.* 2) *The Christ – who will not let the devil defeat us.* 3) *The Christ – who empowers us to represent him.*

Part One: The Christ - revealed by the Father.

Our text finds Jesus in the most northern part of Galilee. By this time in his ministry, Jesus was well known. On two separate occasions he fed thousands of people. He performed many mighty miracles and preach many a powerful sermon. All of these things were meant to get the people to think – to consider whether or not he was the Messiah. And this is why he asks the question:

"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

Jesus favorite title for himself was the Son of Man. It reminds us that he, like the rest of us, is fully human - having faced the same temptations, emotions and sorrows we face. And yet there is something more to this title . . .

Whether the people caught it or not, whenever Jesus called himself “the Son of Man”, he was alluding to the prophecy recorded by Daniel: *“I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! . . . to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, . . . And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed.”*ⁱ

But did the people perceive that Jesus was the prophesied Christ? The disciples replied: *“Some say [you are] John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

In other words the people of Judea were more than ready to recognize Jesus among the greatest prophets that ever lived – and maybe even a precursor to the Messiah himself. But that is as far as it went. They did not see him as he truly was: their Savior God clothed in human flesh and blood.

But his miracles are all so obvious! How could they not believe in him? Actually, the fact that they could not recognize Jesus as the Christ should not surprise us. And why not? Because the Scriptures say: *the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*ⁱⁱ The people could not perceive Jesus was the Christ because, even though his miracles made it so obvious, their sinful hearts - ever prone to unbelief – would not accept him.

And the same holds true today: even though the works of Christ are so obvious that almost every person on this earth will call Jesus a great man – the stubborn unbelief mankind inherited as a result of the fall into sin prevents people from acknowledging who Jesus actually is.

And this is why Jesus asked his disciples: *“But who do you say that I am?”*

¹⁶ *Simon Peter [undoubtedly speaking on behalf of all the other disciples as well] answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

Acknowledging Jesus as the Christ – and all that it entailed – was a huge deal. It meant that the disciples got it. They understood Jesus' mission was not to be “a great man,” but that he came to establish an eternal kingdom – a kingdom composed of people who would look to him in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins. Sure, they still had some false notions about Christ's kingdom that Jesus would have to correct later on in his ministry, but the disciples believed what most of Israel's top scholars failed to perceive: that Jesus truly is the Christ.

Brothers and sisters in the faith: praise God that you are able to confess Jesus as your Christ – your Lord and Savior from sin. So many people in this world are unable to see this truth – hindered by their own unbelief to accept what we now see as self-evident. Praise God for your faith and do not neglect it. Why? Because this faith is not something you came to on your own. It was revealed to you by God himself, as Jesus tells Peter:

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. Peter's faith was all a result of God's gracious love, which sent the Holy Spirit to awaken this knowledge in Peter's heart through what he saw and heard. And the same is true with us.

We believe Jesus to be the Christ – our Savior – only because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in our hearts through the proclamation of his Word. His law convicted us of sin – creating in us a longing for salvation. And his Gospel revealed to us that Jesus is the Christ, whose death and resurrection prove beyond any shadow of the doubt that he paid for our sins in full. We are forgiven and free!

Our faith is a gift of God's rich grace! Realize this truth, and don't lose what you have through neglect. It can happen – the Bible has sad examples of this (e.g King Saul or Judas – two people who received the wonderful gift of faith only to squander it away). Rejoice in the gift God has given you – faith that acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ. Treasure it, for the LORD will not allow the devil to defeat those who hold on to him in faith, as he promises Peter:

Part Two: The Christ - who will not let the devil defeat us.

¹⁸ *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*

The teaching that Jesus is the Christ is the foundational bedrock upon which Jesus builds His Church.ⁱⁱⁱ St Paul says as much, when he writes: *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*^{iv} And elsewhere: *[You have] been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*^v

And Jesus promises that no matter how much hell rages against those who believe in him as the Christ, they will not be overcome. And why not? Because Jesus has already won the victory of our salvation. The devil can no longer hold our sins over us because Jesus paid for them in full. Those who confess Christ from the heart belong to Him. They are members of Jesus' army storming the gates of hell.

That's right, brothers and sisters in Christ, even though it may seem as if Christianity is on the defensive – attacked from all sides; the truth is that we are on the offensive – storming the devil's strongholds. This is why the world rages against Christianity so much. When the Church confesses Christ, it is, in fact, storming the gates of hell: snatching souls from the devil's grasp. And, no matter what happens to us, no matter how much we might have to suffer for the sake of Christ, Christians stand victorious.

Imagine the comfort this truth gives those who are mocked, ridiculed, beaten and beheaded for Christ's sake. Though their life and dignity be taken from them, Christ's eternal kingdom remains their own. They are the victors. And this truth empowers us to be Christ's representatives in the world, as Jesus continues:

Part Three: The Christ – who empowers us to represent him.

¹⁹ *"And 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."*

The keys Christ gave his Church are the Law and Gospel. When a Christian tells the self-righteous or those who simply refuse to repent that their sins are not forgiven, their sins are not forgiven. Why? Because Christ says that forgiveness can only be received through repentance and faith. The person who refuses to repent cannot receive forgiveness any more than a child can receive the candy someone is trying to put into his hand when he is making a fist.

Christ gave Christians the key of the Law to lock heaven for a specific purpose: to lead the impenitent sinner to realize the seriousness of his situation that He might repent and be forgiven.

And if he does repent? Then we have the blessed duty of using the Gospel key – of telling the repentant sinner that his sins have been paid for in full through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Jesus is the Christ.

Look to him for forgiveness in faith, and you will receive it. Heaven is open and you belong to God.

When we proclaim this Gospel, it is as valid as if Christ spoke it himself because he did speak it himself when he commanded his Church to use the Keys on his behalf.

Who is Jesus? Peter and the rest of the disciples were right to trust in him as the Christ – the promised Messiah who would rescue his people from sin, death and the power of the devil. This truth was graciously revealed to them by God the Father, and with this truth they were to go out into the world – preaching Law and Gospel for the salvation of many souls. But just not yet, as we read:

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

The time would come when Jesus would want his disciples to tell everyone that he is the Christ, but just not yet. Why not? Because at that time he hadn't completed our salvation. If the disciples started proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the people would misinterpret it to mean that he was some sort of political Messiah. No, Jesus had to first suffer, die and rise again so that the people would understand from the get-go who he is: our Savior from sin.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you know who Jesus is? If you confess him as the Christ – the eternal Son of God who is your Savior from sin, then praise the LORD that you know this truth - a truth that many people in our country and world do not confess. Thank the LORD for calling you to this faith, and remain in it – confident that Christ will protect you from Satan's every evil attack, and willing to share this truth with the world. This is your Savior's desire for your life. This is the purpose for which He saved you. Amen.

ⁱ Daniel 7:13-14, NKJV

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 2:14, NKJV

ⁱⁱⁱ cf. 1 Peter 2:4-6, NKJV

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 3:11, NKJV

^v Ephesians 2:19-22, NKJV