

Matthew 16:13-20- The Church Is Built on One Confession

Who do you say Jesus is? In today's world there are many different versions of Jesus, what he allows, and what he teaches, it just depends upon who you ask. A study recently came out which asked people that very question. "Who do you say Jesus is?" Some of the more common responses: "He was a great teacher, an intelligent pacifist, a sensational public speaker who could get a point across." Unfortunately, for many, that is all he is. Sadly, some completely miss the point.

That was also the case in today's Word from Matthew's Gospel. When Jesus asked his disciples, "***Who do people say the Son of Man is?***" Their response was nearly identical to today's. People saw him as an amazing man, a great prophet, and a good example for us to follow. In other words, he was another Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist. Our Lord knew many back then would reject him. But he also knows that you, dear Christians, see the same rejection of your Lord. So instead of focusing on that discouraging truth today. In his Words from Matthew, Jesus turns to *you*, his disciples, and asks, "***What about you...Who do you say I am?***"

And how you answer that, how your children would answer that question, is eternally important. Your Lord doesn't ask that question to try to confuse you or cause you to doubt your place in heaven. He asks because he knows there's so much 'stuff' in the world today trying to distract you, confuse you, and keep you away from the one person who holds all things together. He asks because he knows that, in the middle of a world already full of enough things you can't count on, you need one thing that you can.

The people in today's Gospel, those confused souls in Caesarea Philippi, were very mixed up on the person of Jesus. Being surrounded by hundreds of gods and pagan practices muddled their lives, made it difficult to hold firm to any faith or belief. Yet this is exactly what Jesus wants today from *his* disciples, from you and from me. Even in the distracting world where we live, there is one rock-solid foundation to which you can keep coming back, to which you can keep bringing your family, again and again. One confession that will leave you, like Peter, '***blessed***' in the end. Jesus reminds us in today's Gospel that **His Church is built on one confession.**

Part I

Can you imagine how frustrating the disciples' response must have been for Jesus? Even after his miracles and his tireless ministry with the Word, so many are still confused. So Jesus turned to his own followers, the very men who claimed to be his most loyal disciples. He asked them, "***What about you...Who do you say I am?***" Jesus is essentially asking, "Now that there are no miracles to give me away, no signs to work faith in you; now that you've got all these distractions and mixed opinions around you, do *you*, my disciples really believe in me? Or has the rest of the world gotten to *you* as well?" Christians, how do you respond to such a question?

We've all seen those bumper stickers. The stickers which display the word, "Coexist" in different symbols. They include the symbols for Islam, Judaism, the Wiccans, the yin-yang for Confucianism, and last, the cross for Christianity. With this word, the world says, "We are all the same, we all believe in the same God. We just call him by a different name." When we hear it often enough, we may begin to ask ourselves the question, "Are we really that different

after all?" You may have even heard people say, "The Bible is outdated, get with the times, live and let live, Christians are ignorant for having such closed and single minded beliefs." When you hear that, does the devil ever whisper in your ear, "Maybe they're right...maybe I *am* being too close-minded?"

Don't you think the disciples encountered that same temptation? I can tell you for a fact that they did! But when Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" could he have given a better confession? "***You are the Christ,***" Peter says.

"Christ" is a Greek word which means "anointed" or "chosen." So to Peter, Jesus *was* the chosen one. *The* Christ, the Son of the Living God, chosen to be *his* savior, to one day die, have his limp and lifeless body be dropped into the dirt beneath him, and rise three days later, so that he, Peter, could one day walk into heaven, sins forgiven. What a confession in this simple phrase.

So now I ask you Christians, once more, Who do *you* say he is? If he's only an amazing man like Jeremiah, a prophet like Elijah, a great example to follow like John the Baptist; if he is only someone who gives your family a nice little set of morals, a shoulder to turn to, but only when things get rough, or only on Sunday mornings; if he is anything less than the air we breathe and the only reason a sinner like me gets to walk into heaven, then Satan has won. He has you believing in the wrong person, which is the only thing he's interested in. Because Christians, Satan is only interested in what *you* think of Jesus.

Yes we see him working in our society. But if we think we're immune to him just because we come to church on Sunday, then look at the proof of how the devil works on Christians. Why else would church attendance be decreasing? Why else would Biblical illiteracy be growing more and more among Christians? Why else would thousands of people organize their schedules around a weekly football game, or their child's sports activities, but when it comes to Bible study or sitting down with our children at night to get to know our Savior on a higher level, well...those things aren't as easy to find time for are they?

The devil knows "***There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.***" He knows that "***salvation is found in no one else***" and that "***No one comes to the Father except through [him].***" Yes Christians, the devil knows that Jesus is "***the Christ, the Son of the Living God.***" What *we* don't know is when Jesus will ask us who he is for the last time.

But that's why you are here today isn't it? That is why you long for His Word at home. That is why you say prayers with your children each night. Because you know what your Savior means to you. That he *is* the reason for your life, the object and foundation on which your faith is built. He is the one who offers you an eternity of joy.

Friends, we are not the same as the world, no matter what anyone says, no matter what a bumper sticker reads. We are part of a very special family who confesses, "***You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.***"

It is on that confession of Peter that we have a rock to stand amid a world of sand. Follow the example of Peter, let your daily habits, your actions, and your words clearly **confess your faith in the architect of the Church**, Jesus, the son of the living God, and your Savior.

Part II

Peter made his confession, and now Jesus makes a confession about Peter. But in order to understand Jesus' words to Peter, I want to tell you a little bit about Caesarea Philippi.

In Caesarea Philippi, there is a cave that is naturally formed into a cliff, and it is still there today. In Jesus time, this cave was believed to be a gateway to Hades, to the underworld. So naturally, the pagan society there turned this monument, this gateway to hades, into a pagan temple.

Now listen to Jesus' words to Peter as he stood below such frightening monument, “**And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**” What a powerful, but at the same time, comforting statement! Though they were surrounded by the enemies of the church, there was no fear. For not one of those gods, shrines, or temples had the power to overcome the Church which Christ built on Peter's confession.

Christians, doesn't it sometimes seem like the Church will never last? That our children and children's children will find it so difficult to hold onto the faith? We're surrounded by immorality, and it doesn't even take a Christian to see that. You turn on the tv to see the glorification of sin. Homosexuality is something to be celebrated. Even some churches accept these lifestyles. These things can be depressing for a Christian to see can't they? But that's another way in which Satan lies to us, telling us he's in control.

But was the church's strength ever found in acceptance, in glorious buildings, in social gospels, in watered down words that are pleasing to the ear?

Remember once again Jesus' words to Peter. The Church's strength, its rock, is found on the confession of Jesus Christ, and himself crucified. And nothing, “**Not even the gates of hades will overcome it.**” Oh the devil will try with his lies, with his deceit. We certainly see in our own lives how he uses sin to break Christians apart don't we? But Jesus has given us a mighty weapon to overcome this.

He reveals that at the end of today's Gospel, “**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[c] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[d] loosed in heaven.**” The keys are one those things we don't think of that often. But what a blessing they are! Just think of how this special ability to forgive restores happiness to a family. Hearing those words from your spouse, from your parents, from your child, “I forgive you.” It strengthens us!

He who through his innocent bloodshed, forgave a wretched sinner like me, now gives me the opportunity to show the same selfless love, to say to my brother or sister, “I forgive you, and God promises that he has forgiven you as well.” **What strength is found in that promise of the builder of our faith.**

So Christians, what about you.... who do you say Jesus is? He is the one who gives me strength when I am weak. When I am discouraged, he's the one who picks me up with his enduring Word. When my sins are weighing heavily on my heart, He is one who came through on his first promise to set me, my family, and yours, free from sin, gives us another promise of eternity. He is the Christ the son of the living God, and we are his body, brought together and strengthened by one faith, one hope, and one Lord. We are the one church for which He died. A Church which has been built on one confession: Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Confess Him boldly and find strength in His promises!