

August 23, 2020

Matthew 16:13-20

“Who Do You Say That I Am?”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our Gospel lesson for this morning Jesus asks what people think about him. Most people saw him as a good moral man or a prophet who made many profound statements on life and morality. Others sought to get rid of him. Things have hardly changed in our day. But here's the twist. If you want to take the position that Jesus was a good moral man or a prophet who made many profound statements you must also face the fact that he claimed to be equal with God - the Son of God - Savior - and able to forgive all sins. In our appointed text, Simon (also known as Peter) confesses that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Jesus doesn't correct him. Rather, he calls Simon (Peter) "blessed" because he knows and believes it. In his book titled *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to ..."

Take your pick. Jesus was one of the three: liar, lunatic, or truth-teller. Liars lie for gain. If Jesus was a liar he sure was a lousy one, for he died. Insane? Most people do not take the insane seriously and simply ignore them or lock them up in a safe place where they can't do any harm. If Jesus was insane he sure was unbelievably convincing. That leaves truth-teller. He who says "I am the way, the truth, and the life" is asking you: **"Who Do You Say That I Am?"**

To know and believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God is an incredibly great revelation from the Father. Faith in the forgiveness of sins through the life, sufferings, and death of Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit through the testimony. To know and believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God is truly a most incredible gift! Let's take a look at those words of Simon (Peter) as our own words, and then we will see what Christ promises and bestows upon all who know, believe, and confess the same.

When Simon confesses to Jesus "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" he is encompassing the entire doctrine of the Christian faith - the person and work of Jesus who is the heart and center of all Scripture. All Scripture speaks about him. Luther writes: "It is of no avail for salvation if you think of Christ according to human opinion - that He is a righteous, holy, good man or prophet, even the greatest one. Rather, the Father's revelation from heaven must be added: that He is the Christ, the Son of God - that is, that He is true man and true God, and then that He is the promised King and Priest." Indeed!

Jesus is true God and true man. Whatever Jesus did and still does is designed to serve one purpose: to save sinful humanity. He is called "Christ" or "Messiah," that is, the anointed one or the one set apart from all the rest. He is our prophet, priest, and king. In other words, he was anointed to proclaim himself

as the good news of salvation, the sacrifice to pay for all sin, the resurrection and the life, and the ruler of all things for our salvation that we may have forever fellowship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The entire Apostles' Creed is contained in the confession of Simon (Peter). It is the heart of what we must know, believe, and confess to be one of his disciples. Let's expand.

Our Savior had to be true man in order to act in our place under the law and fulfill it for us. Though Jesus was the giver of the law, he put himself under the law, and lived a perfect life on our behalf, so that we might be counted acceptable in the sight of God. It says in Romans 5:19, "Just as through the disobedience of the one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Jesus had to be true man in order to be able to suffer and die for our guilt because of our failure to keep the law, as it says in Hebrews (2:14): "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil." Jesus became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.

Our Savior had to be true God in order that his fulfilling of the law, his life, suffering, and death might be a sufficient ransom or payment for all people. A mere man could never have redeemed us. A sinner cannot save himself much less one of us. And a perfect person, if there were such a thing, would indeed be saved, but would not be able to pass that salvation on to us. The fact that it was the Son of God in Christ who fulfilled the law, and suffered for our sins, gives infinite value and saving power to the work of our Savior. As it says in 1 Peter 1:18-19, it was "not with perishable things such as silver or gold" that we were bought from the empty way of life handed down to us from our forefathers, but with "the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or defect."

Furthermore, our Savior had to be true God in order that He might be able to overcome death and the devil for us. Had it not been for the sustaining power of his divine nature, Jesus' human nature would never have been able to bear the crushing load of the sins of the whole world. Imagine how unbearable the burden must have been for Jesus, on whom God laid the sins of every single human being from the time of Adam to the end of this world! Only because his human nature was united with his divine nature was Jesus able to endure such an incredible weight of guilt. Luther writes:

If Christ is not true and natural God, born of the Father in eternity and creator of all creatures, we are doomed. For what would Christ's suffering and death avail me if Christ were merely a human being like you and me? As such he could not have overcome devil, death, and sin; he would have proved far too weak for them and could never have helped us. No, we must have a Savior who is true God and Lord over sin, death, devil, and hell. If we permit the devil to topple this stronghold for us, so that we disbelieve his divinity, then his suffering, death and resurrection profit us nothing. Then we are bereft of all hope of eternal life and salvation; in short, we are not able to comfort ourselves with any of the consoling promises of Scripture.

But we are able to comfort ourselves with the consoling promises of Scripture aren't we? The Scriptures speak to us the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done in order to undo who we are and what

we have done and left undone. In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son. As priest he has made purification for all our sins. He is now seated at the right hand of God. His throne is forever and ever. He is the King of Peace - our peace - the peace that passes all understanding.

It is my prayer that the confession of Simon is your confession. Now, we have spent most of our time looking at what this confession is saying. We have looked at the words of Simon as prayerfully being our own words. Now, we need to say a few things about what Jesus promises and bestows upon all those who know, believe, and confess what Simon knew, believed, and confessed. All we need to look at is what Jesus promised and bestowed upon Simon. It is the same for us, though we are not apostles.

After Simon says "You are the Christ," Jesus says "You are Peter." In other words, "Simon, you are a rock." He does not become a rock in any other way but by being hewn from the Rock of our Salvation, Jesus. It is as it says in Isaiah 51:1, "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." Yes! Simon is Peter - a rock. In the same way we are all rocks if we know, believe, and confess the same thing. Again, hewn from the Rock of our Salvation. And when you are cut from the Rock who is our Savior, the gates of hell cannot prevail. The promise and what is bestowed is victory - keys that open heaven - the forgiveness of sins.

The core of what Jesus is saying in our text is this: "My Church is the one that possesses the revelation which you, Peter, are confessing here." I leave you with the words of Luther:

[It is as if Jesus were saying] Truly, you have hit the mark, for everything rests upon this. My Church is the one that possesses the revelation that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God. Upon this Rock I shall build My Church. This is where to stand, whoever is to be saved; and this is where to abide, even if all the gates of hell are grasping robbers and rage against Me and you, yet they will accomplish nothing, because you, Peter, have said, and rightly, that I am the Son of the living God and the Christ. Therefore, blessed are you; blessed are all who believe this, and thus remain steadfast. I declare them to be victors over the gates of hell, that is, over sin, death, and hell, no matter how much those gates may rage, since I am the Foundation of the Church [1 Cor. 3:11] (that is, of those who, like you, believe and confess); I am sufficiently faithful and have not been conquered. For it is through Me that they will conquer; in Me they will have peace and be able to do all things."

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott