

The Mind of Christ Who Do You Say That I Am?

INTRODUCTION:

- I. As Jesus reached the mid-point of His three-year earthly ministry, He was well aware of the opposition that was gathering around Him.
 - A. By now, He had seen the hatred that filled the hearts of some, and He knew that in the end His enemies would take His life – all in keeping with the eternal plan of God.
 1. Jesus didn't just see the POSSIBILITY of the cross, He saw the AUSOLUTE CERTAINTY of it.
 - B. With so much yet to do, and so little time to accomplish it, Jesus needed to make CERTAIN His disciples were beginning to get a clear picture of WHO He was and of WHAT He had come to do.
 1. Their understanding had been CLOUDY to say the least.
 2. Even at the point of His crucifixion, and later at His ascension into heaven, His disciples STILL didn't FULLY understand what He had come to do.
 - C. Therefore, Jesus needed to clarify ONE VERY CRITICAL fact in their minds.
 1. He needed to make CERTAIN they knew WHO He was.

- D. That's why Jesus set out for a territory north of Galilee with His little company of disciples where He could get away from all the tensions and threats that surrounded them – He needed be alone with them.
 - 1. To do this, He went to the region of Caesarea Philippi – an area ruled by Philip the Tetrarch.

BODY:

- I. It would be here that Jesus would ask His greatest question, and issue His greatest challenge.
 - A. Matthew records this gathering of Jesus and His disciples in the sixteenth chapter of his gospel. **(Matthew 16:13-23)**.
 - 1. What we see in this picture is a wandering Galilean preacher, Who had BEGUN as a carpenter in Nazareth, and Who NOW didn't even have a place to lay His head.
 - a. With Him was a little company of men – without education, without money, and without prestige.
 - b. Plus, at that very moment, the orthodox religious leaders were determined to put Jesus to death as a dangerous heretic, and He was already well on His way to being legally classified as an outlaw for Whom the cross was a certainty.
 - c. So, from a purely HUMAN standpoint, Jesus was a failure.

2. Jesus was FAR from the popular concept people had of the Messiah.
 - a. As a matter of fact, He was absolutely NOTHING like the popular concept of the Messiah.
 - b. He had no political power, and no army. He was planning no military campaign against the enemies of Israel.
 3. And yet, Jesus challenged His disciples with a question that demanded only ONE possible answer – that Jesus was the Son of God.
- II. Jesus first began by asking His disciples what the PEOPLE were commonly saying about Him: **Matthew 16:13** – *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"*
- A. So the disciples told Him He was being identified with certain great figures – in fact, some were saying Jesus was John the Baptizer who had come back to life.
 1. In fact, this was the very thing Herod Antipas believed.
 2. **Matthew 14:1-3** – *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus, and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in*

him." For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

3. Herod eventually ordered John to be beheaded.
 4. But when Herod Antipas began hearing about all the miracles and all the wondrous works of Jesus, Herod became convinced that it was John the Baptist raised from the dead.
- B. Others said Jesus was Elijah.
1. This was a VERY high honor to bestow on Jesus – to be likened to Elijah.
 2. To the Jewish mind Elijah had two distinctions:
 - a. First, Elijah was always regarded as SUPREME among the prophets. Even after the other great prophets had come on the scene, Elijah was STILL considered as supreme among the prophets – just as Moses was considered as the supreme lawgiver.
 - b. Second, it was believed by the Jews in Jesus' day, and still is, by the way, that Elijah will LITERALLY return to the earth to herald the coming of the Messiah. This belief is based on the prophecy of Malachi.

- (1). **Malachi 4:5** – *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.*
- (2). But Jesus said the prophecy of Malachi was fulfilled in the coming of John the Baptist – not Elijah.
- (3). **Matthew 17:9-13** – *Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.*

C. Still others said Jesus was Jeremiah.

1. It was believed that before the Jews went into exile, following the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, that Jeremiah had taken the

ark of the covenant and the alter of incense out of the Temple and secretly hid them on Mount Nebo.

2. The Jews believed that before the coming of the Messiah, Jeremiah would literally return and produce those treasures, and the glory of God would be restored to Israel.

- a. Cf. **2 Macc. 2:1-8**

- D. Last of all, Jesus was told that some people thought of Him as one of the prophets.

1. In other words, even if they didn't recognize Jesus as having the greatness of Elijah or Jeremiah, they at LEAST recognized Him as a prophet sent from God.
2. In fact, this is how Nicodemus saw Jesus. (**John 3:1-3**)

- E. However, Jesus wasn't satisfied with these answers.

1. As far as He was concerned, to describe Him in even the HIGHEST human terms would be inadequate.
 - a. To call him Elijah or Jeremiah would be a great honor – but it would fall FAR short of Who He REALLY was.
 - b. As far as Jesus was concerned, the ONLY way His disciples could POSSIBLY see Him would be as the Son of God. If He wasn't that to them by NOW, He may never be.

III. Therefore, Jesus asked, "*But who do **YOU** say that I am?*" (**Matthew 16:15**)

A. Jesus had never posed this question to His disciples before this moment – but as He got closer to the cross, He wanted to make CERTAIN that, at the VERY LEAST, they had a basic understanding of Who He was.

1. Peter EMPHATICALLY responded, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (**Matthew 16:16**)

2. This isn't the first time Peter made this confession of faith in Jesus.

a. In the sixth chapter of John, after the crowds deserted Jesus in Capernaum and "*walked with him no more,*" Jesus turned to the twelve and asked, "*Do you ALSO want to go away?*" (**John 6:67**)

b. Peter responded, "*Lord, to whom shall we go? YOU have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (**John 6:68-69**)

B. This confession embraces two propositions:

1. In proclaiming Jesus to be the Christ – the Anointed One – Peter was declaring Jesus to be the Messiah, the long-anticipated deliverer of Israel.

2. In proclaiming Jesus to be the Son of God, Peter was attributing deity to Jesus.
 - a. This is VERY significant because the Jews in Jesus' day generally weren't expecting the Messiah to be divine – but rather a special man whom God would bless.
 - b. But Peter's proclamation rose ABOVE the popular theories, and declared Jesus to be *"the Son of the Living God"* – the Supreme God of heaven and earth.

IV. Immediately after Peter made this great declaration of faith, Jesus replied with a declaration of His own, followed by a series of promises.

A. Jesus began by declaring, *"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."* **(Matthew 16:17)**

1. Peter hadn't come to this conclusion based on anything he had learned from others, but rather by seeing the working of God through the miracles of Jesus.
2. The GREATEST work of God that would eventually prove beyond doubt the deity of Jesus was yet to come – the day when He would be *"declared to be the Son of God with power according to*

the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

(Romans 1:4)

- B. Jesus now proceeds to give a series of promises, beginning with the words, "*Upon this rock I will build My church.*" **(Matthew 16:18)**
1. Several theories have been advanced over the years as to the meaning of the word "*rock.*"
 - a. Some have suggested the rock is Peter, and that the church would be founded on him (Roman Catholic view).
 - b. Still others (such as Luther) have suggested the rock is Peter's faith, and that His initial faith was the spark from which the church sprang.
 - c. Finally, it is suggested that the rock is the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God – the bedrock of truth on which the very existence of the church is founded.
 2. The scriptures support the view that the rock is INDEED the bedrock of TRUTH that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God – the TRUTH upon which the church would be built, and upon which it will forever stand.
 3. Consider two passages written by the apostle Paul:
 - a. **Ephesians 2:19-22** – *Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints*

and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

- b. **1 Corinthians 3:10-11** – *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

4. The foundation upon which the church was built was a foundation laid by the apostles through their preaching – namely, that Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One – The promised Messiah), and the Son of God.

- C. Next, Jesus promised that, *"the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."* (**Matthew 16:18**)

1. Several theories have ALSO been advanced regarding THIS statement.

- a. Some have suggested that Jesus was delivering a message directly to Satan himself – telling Satan that he will NEVER be able to prevent the establishment of the church.
- b. But the scriptures seem to support the conclusion that Jesus was actually speaking of His pending death on the cross.
 - (1). Although the disciples didn't fully understand all that Jesus was going to accomplish, He at least wanted them to understand what lay before Him – He was going to Jerusalem where He would eventually be put to death. **(Matthew 16:21)**
 - (2). Jesus was trying to tell His disciples that His eventual death on the cross would NOT prevent Him from establishing His church.
 - (3). I say this because the word "Hades" used in this passage ("hell" in the KJV) is actually a Greek word that means "the grave," or "the realm of the dead."
 - (4). This is the SAME word used by Peter on the day of Pentecost **(Acts 2:27)** when, quoting from a psalm of David, he affirmed that Jesus' soul was NOT left in "Hades" – meaning Jesus did NOT stay in the world of

the dead. Peter was affirming the fact that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead.

D. Next, Jesus promised, *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."* **(Matthew 16:19)**

1. Some contend this promise was given only to Peter, while others say it was given to all the apostles.
 - a. This phrase "to give someone the keys" was an old rabbinic saying, meaning that anyone who possessed keys in this sense was empowered by God as having special authority and power.
2. To explain what He meant by the *"keys of the kingdom of heaven"* Jesus goes on to say, *"whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* **(Matthew 16:19)**
 - a. The *"keys"* would give the apostles the special authority and power to bind and loose.
 - b. Actually, in the original Greek, Jesus said that whatever is bound or loosed by the apostles, will have ALREADY been bound and loosed in heaven.

(1). God would empower the apostles to BIND new laws on earth, but ONLY in keeping with what God has ALREADY declared to be according to His will.

(2). Likewise, God would empower the apostles to RELEASE mankind from certain laws, but once again, ONLY in accordance with what God has ALREADY declared invalid.

c. The apostle Paul made this PERFECTLY clear in His letter to the churches of Galatia.

(1). **Galatians 1:11-12** – *But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

(2). Paul was saying our authority is not from men but from Jesus Christ.

V. There is one last thing to add to this story of Jesus.

A. Matthew says, *"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders*

and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." (Matthew 16:21)

1. Peter immediately takes Jesus aside and begins to REBUKE Him:
"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (Matthew 16:22)
 - a. Peter's reaction was actually prompted by two things:
 - (1). First, no one wanted to hear someone they dearly loved talk about their own death. Peter deeply loved Jesus, and was heart-broken to hear Jesus talk in this manner.
 - (2). But second, Peter had just acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the promised Messiah, and NOTHING like this was supposed to happen to the Messiah – Peter simply couldn't think of the Messiahship of Jesus in terms of suffering and death on a cross.
2. This is the very reason why Jesus charged His disciples in **verse 20** to tell no man He was the Christ.
 - a. The disciples, and the people in general, believed the Messiah would be a conquering, fighting, nationalistic Messiah.

- b. And if the disciples had gone forth proclaiming that Jesus WAS that Messiah, the end result would be just another bloody and disastrous uprising against Rome – like the uprisings of so many false Messiah's before Him.
- B. But in response, Jesus STRONGLY rebuked Peter for his remarks.
1. He turned and said to Peter, *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."* **(Matthew 16:23)**
 2. Without realizing what he had done, Peter had tempted Jesus in the SAME manner as Satan had tempted Him in the wilderness.
 - a. On THAT occasion, Satan challenged Jesus by saying, "If you are the Son of God, " and then enticed Jesus with opportunities to PROVE His deity.
 - b. Satan even offered Jesus ALL the kingdoms of the world if He would ONLY fall down and worship him.
 - c. Jesus knew the EASIEST way would be to fulfill the expectations of the people and become the kind of Messiah they were anticipating.
 - d. But Jesus had ABSOLUTELY NO intentions of becoming THAT kind of Messiah, nor to establish THAT kind of

kingdom. His kingdom would be within the hearts of those who would willingly submit themselves to the will of God.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Although His disciples didn't understand all He had come to do, at least they knew WHO Jesus was.
 - A. Therefore, Jesus could NOW move forward with the final preparations for His awesome task of redemption.
 1. Jesus would go forth knowing His disciples were FULLY convinced that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
 2. That faith would have to sustain them through the most trying periods of their lives.
 - a. For the day would come when they will come face to face with the reality of the cross, and a crucified Savior – and would be shaken to the very DEPTHS of their souls, because NONE of it would make any sense to them WHATSOEVER.
 - b. All they would be able to cling to would be the memory of THIS moment, when they knew beyond ANY doubt that Jesus WAS the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

B. When the world comes crashing down around YOUR shoulders, will YOU have faith to sustain you?

1. Your world will SOMEDAY be rocked by some tragic loss, because suffering the loss of the things we value and the people we love is just a part of living.

a. When that day comes, will YOUR faith sustain you?

C. The answer to that question depends entirely on WHO Jesus is to you. Have you ever thought about that? Suppose He could look into YOUR eyes. How would you answer Him if He asked, “Who do YOU say that I am?

1. Is He the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Savior of YOUR soul, YOUR Lord and Master, and the King of YOUR life?

a. If Jesus is NOT the Lord of your life, you can change that this very morning – you can come to the Lord in genuine repentance, confessing your faith in Him, and being buried with Him in baptism for the remission of your sins.

b. But if you claim that Jesus IS the Lord of your life, are you REALLY living a life of faithful service?

(1). Jesus asks, *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? "* **(Luke 6:46)**

- (2). Merely CLAIMING that Jesus is the Lord of our life doesn't make it so, unless we are doing the things He says.
- (3). Therefore, you can begin this very morning to TRULY make Jesus the Lord of your life by confessing your sins, and by living from this day forward like the Christian you claim to be.