

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 16:13-20
“Who Do You Say That I Am”

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Matthew 16:13-20

Verse 13

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

- Caesarea Philippi was a city in Israel north of the sea of Galilee.
- “Son of Man,” though capitalized as if it was a title, is not a title. It is simply a Semitic way of saying “me.” Therefore, Jesus is asking the disciples who people say that he is.

Verse 14

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

- The answers to this question indicate clearly that the people see Jesus as some special personage. No one considers Him to be ordinary. The responses are also all positive, indicating that the people regard Him as a good person despite the intentions of the Pharisees and Sadducees (See Matthew 16:1-12).
- John the Baptist had been one who held a special place in the hearts of many in Israel. When Herod beheaded him, some apparently hoped that he would rise from the dead. Apparently, some thought that this had happened in Jesus.
- There was a common belief that the ancient prophet Elijah would return to earth to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. Apparently, some thought that Jesus was Elijah.
- Apparently, others recognized in Jesus the attitude and attributes of an Old Testament-like prophet.
- The problem here is that while these titles all acknowledge Jesus to be someone special, none of them catches the full significance of who He really is. These all fall short of the full truth.

Verse 15

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

- Having asked the easy question, Jesus now makes the inquiry personal. He asked the disciples to tell Him what they think about who He is.
- This is the always standing and all important question. Upon our answer to this questions hangs all eternity. Not to know who Jesus is fully is to miss the kingdom of heaven entirely.

Verse 16

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- With these words Peter makes the “good confession.” He acknowledges the truth that Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, the Messiah of Israel. This is the first time in the Bible that this truth is fully and openly acknowledged. It is upon this confession that everything hangs. When we acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of the Living God, the Messiah, we are granted a place in heaven. Without this confession no one enters the Kingdom of God.
- The title “Christ” is the Greek form of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” It is not part of Jesus’ name, it is His title in Greek.
- This confession is the most important acknowledgement in Peter’s life, just as our confession is the most important moment in ours.

Verse 17

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

- Jesus pronounces Peter blessed because he has reached the correct conclusion about the person of Jesus. Indeed, everyone who reaches this conclusion is blessed.
- Jesus acknowledges that Peter did not come to this understanding on his own or by other human means of deduction. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit of God leads us into truth. Thus this knowledge has come to Peter by the action of God’s Holy Spirit. It is a gift of the Father. This is still true. We do not come to this kind of faith on our own or by human means. This faith comes to us because of the work and function of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 18

“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.

- Great controversy has raged around this verse. The Catholic Churches contend that with this pronouncement Jesus declared that He would build his church on Peter, the rock. Protestant Churches claim that it was not Peter, himself, to whom Jesus referred, but to Peter’s confession. By the end of the Gospel, Peter emerged as an unreliable witness, denying he even knew Christ three times. However, Peter’s confession still stands at the heart of the matter. Only those who make the “good confession” are part of Christ’s body, the Church.
- Hades is the place where the dead are kept. This probably means the power of death.
- What Jesus says is that death will not be able to prevail over those who make the “good confession.” As He said later, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:25-26). Death will not prevail over those who confess that Jesus is Lord.

Verse 19

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

- Jesus gave unlimited power to those who make the “good confession to bind and set loose powers both in heaven and on earth. This is verified in Acts 1:8 when Jesus promises that the coming of the Holy Spirit will bring power to the church and confirmed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Verse 20

Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

- First, it was not yet time for the disciples to make this proclamation to the world. They were not yet ready.
- Second. This confession would have caused great argument with the religious leaders of the day, and so would make it more difficult for Jesus to accomplish His mission.
- The people had not yet been led to this truth by the Holy Spirit. The disciples needed to be careful not to get ahead of the Spirit as do we.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Who Do You Say That I Am?* They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)