

#24 - Peter's confession of Christ - Matthew 16:13-28

Engage:

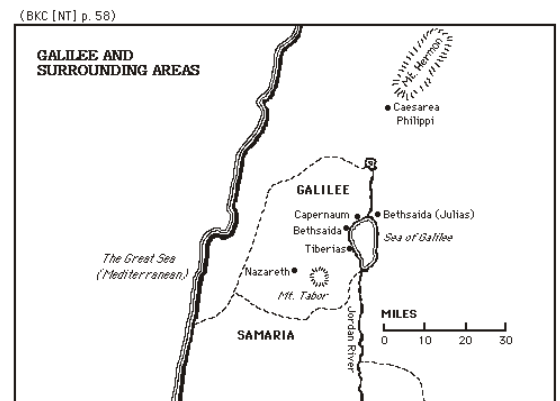
The various ministries of teaching, doing miracles and healing the sick were all used by Jesus to portray Himself as the Messiah to His followers during His ministry years. This story occurs during the 3rd year of Jesus' earthly ministry. It was time for Jesus to survey His disciples to see who they believed He was. He knew that public opinion was divided but He then needed to know what the disciples believed. Note: This story also appears in Mark 8:27--9:1 and Luke 9:18-27.

Thoughts about the story:

Matthew 16:13-20 - Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ

Matthew 16:13-14 – Jesus and His disciples traveled to Caesarea Philippi, about 120 miles north of Jerusalem. This city is over 1,100 feet above sea level, at the base of the snow capped peaks of Mt. Hermon. During the time of Jesus, this city was a center for the worship of Baal. There were shrines to the Greek god Pan. It was in this environment that Jesus asked His disciples a defining question as to who He was.

In Luke's account of this story we see that Jesus had spent time in private prayer before He asked some all-important questions of His disciples (Luke 9:19). Note: Prayer was very much a part of Jesus' response at crucial times in His ministry (See Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:28; 22:41).



First, He asked, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples replied the common answers for that day: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. Jesus was like each of these men in that He confronted the religious and political leaders of that day with the truth, and was persecuted.

Matthew 16:15-16 – Second, Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was. Peter replied: "You are the Christ; the Son of the living God." You never knew what Peter would say, but this was probably one of, if not his best moments. He clearly called Jesus the Messiah. (Note: The term Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term Messiah.) This word means "the anointed one." This person was part of a group which was set apart and empowered to do the work of God by God. This group included prophets (1 Kings 19:16; 1 Chronicles 16:22; Psalm 105:15), priests (Exodus 29:7, 21) and kings (1 Samuel 10:1, 6; 16:13; 2 Samuel 1:14, 16). Jesus is representative of each of these special ministries.

Also, the Old Testament was clear that the Messiah was more than a special person, He is God (See Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 23:5-8 ["The Lord Our Righteousness" means "my righteousness is Yahweh"]; Micah 5:2).

Peter also identified Jesus as the "Son of the living God." This is another way of saying that Jesus was the Messiah, as He was living. The gods of the pagans were dead and still are.

Note: There were other confessions before this one: Nathaniel (John 1:49); the disciples after Jesus calmed the storm (Matthew 14:33); Peter after Jesus' sermon on the bread of life (John

6:68-69). The difference in this confession is that it was not a spur of the moment response to a miracle, but it was based on past experiences.

Matthew 16:17-19 – Jesus responded to Peter’s answer by commending him. But, He clearly stated that the Father in heaven had revealed this answer to Peter. Note: God had chosen to reveal this to these lowly disciples and had hidden this fact from the proud Jewish religious leaders.

– “church” - This is a compound word (Greek - “ek-klessia”) that means “called out ones”. It was used to describe an assembly of voting citizens who came together for the purpose of helping govern a city or district (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Note: The same word was used in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament, to describe an assembly of God’s people (Deuteronomy 31:30; Judges 20:2). When the “called out ones” are followers of Jesus, they represent the people of God who are committed to carrying out God’s purpose on earth. This is the way the word is used 90 of the 114x it is found in the New Testament. It is only used 3x in the gospels, once here and twice in Matthew 18:17.

– “rock” - The name Peter means “rock” (Greek - “petros” - masculine). Peter is the name given to Simon by Jesus when He first met him (John 1:41-42). The church is built on the “rock” (Greek - “petra” - feminine). Note: First, Peter told Jesus who He was. Now, Jesus tells Peter who he is. He would be a leader in the first century church. He would not be alone.

Jesus Christ is the foundation rock on which the church is built. This is the testimony of the Old Testament prophets (Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16), Jesus (Matthew 21:42), Peter (Acts 4:10-12; 1 Peter 2:4-8) and Paul (1 Corinthians 3:11). In this passage, Peter is named as part of the rock foundation. The foundation was laid as the apostles preached Christ to the lost (1 Corinthians 2:1-2; 3:11; Ephesians 2:19-22). When scripture is fully examined, we see that the church is built on Jesus Christ, and not on Peter, as some have said. The 4th century Church Father Chrysostom described Peter as the “mouth of the apostles.” “But his primacy is chronological, not hierarchical” (Mark Moore).

– “gates of Hades” - Jesus followed with both bad and good news. The bad news is that the “gates of Hades” or death will be faced in this life. The good news is that the work of the church will be victorious. (Note: The message of the book of Revelation is a perfect picture of the certain coming victory of Christ over Satan.) The church will not be overpowered by the impact of the death of Jesus, His disciples or others down through the ages. Some include the forces of death (the work of Satan and his emissaries) in this description.

Note: The King James Version translates the Greek word “Hades” as “hell”. Hades, meaning “the realm of the dead” for both the righteous and the wicked, is the better translation as it is the word found in the original text. The Greek word for hell is “gehenna” which refers to the final destination of those who are lost.

– “keys of the kingdom of heaven” - Jesus promised the “keys of the kingdom of heaven” to Peter. The image of keys communicates the idea of authority. There are several different understandings of what Jesus meant. The following seems to best harmonize with scripture. The keys represent the redemptive message of the gospel. When accepted and obeyed, the believer receives forgiveness, the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit and the privilege of being added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:38-39, 47; also John 20:23). Peter first shared the message of the gospel (or “opened the door of faith” - Acts 14:27) on Pentecost (Acts 2) to primarily a Jewish audience and then later to the Gentile Cornelius and others (Acts 10; also Acts 15:19-20). This message had

first been determined in heaven and was to be shared on earth. Paul followed later by further opening the door of opportunity by sharing the gospel throughout the Roman world. In the same way we have been given the keys to be used to open the “door of faith” for potential followers of Jesus.

– “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” - Jesus did not say that God would obey what they did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed in heaven. The church does not tell heaven what to do, but obeys on earth what God commands the church to do! The NIV Study Bible says it well: “not authority to determine, but to announce.”

Note: Another view holds that the idea of the “keys of the kingdom” and to “bind” and “loose” includes the authority to further instruct and discipline people who are part of the body. Examples of this include Matthew 18:15-18; Acts 4:11-12; 5:1-11; 8:14ff.)

Matthew 16:20 – Jesus told His disciples to not tell anyone that He was the Christ at that time. This was most likely because so many misunderstood what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. See below.

Matthew 16:21-28 - Jesus Predicted His Death

Matthew 16:21 – After Peter said that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus then clearly stated that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, be killed and then raised.

Note: The text says that Jesus “must” (Greek “*dei*”) be killed. The emphasis is that this was God’s plan that must be fulfilled as a means for our sins to be forgiven.

Note: This was not the first time Jesus had spoken about His coming death, although He was much more clear in this statement (See John 2:19-21; 3:14; 6:51; Matthew 9:15; 12:39-40).

Matthew 16:22-23 – Peter spoke. Jesus corrected him. Yes, Peter had just acknowledged that Jesus is the Messiah. But he, nor the rest of the disciples fully understood what this meant. Jesus preceded to

“reorder their thinking about the nature and work of the Messiah. They expect an earthly kingdom with a human army. They get a spiritual kingdom with a heavenly army. They expect liberation from Rome through a conquering king. They will get liberation from sin through a risen Lord. It is a much better deal than they had hoped for, but all this will take time to learn.” (Mark Moore)

In essence, Peter told Jesus that He did not have to die. His motive was pure, but his understanding was lacking. Jesus replied by comparing Peter to Satan at the time when he had tempted Jesus by offering Him an easy way out by just bowing down and worshiping him (Matthew 4:8-10).

Peter had just been praised publically by Jesus. This was one of his best moments. Here he is rebuked publically by Jesus for one of his worst moments. He who had been named as part of the “rock foundation of the church” became a stumbling block (see 1 Peter 2:6-8). “He who received a great revelation from God about the person of Jesus, now confuses his own thinking with the mind of ‘man.’” (Mark Moore).

Matthew 16:24-26 – Jesus defined what it means to be His disciple. The rejection that Jesus knew would come would not be limited to just Himself. Here He warns those who would follow Him by telling them that they must suffer. Luke said this would be “daily” (Luke 9:27).

In Mark’s account of this event, we see that the disciples were not alone with Jesus. They were joined by a crowd of others that were present (Mark 8:34).

Jesus then presented how His disciples are to live. Note the implied contrasts which have been added.

- *Deny yourself* (a command) so that you can live for Christ, versus live for yourself only. See Romans 12:1-2; Philippians 3:7-10; Galatians 2:20.
- *Take up your cross* (a command), versus ignore the cross. Identify with the purpose, suffering and death of Christ by the way you live your life.
- *Follow* (present tense imperative) *Christ*, versus follow the world.
- *Lose your life for His sake*, versus save your life for you your sake.
- *Forsake the world*, versus gain the world.
- *Keep your soul*, versus lose your soul.
- *Share His reward and glory*, versus lose His reward and glory.

If you stand with Jesus now, you will be rewarded at the judgment. Being a disciple is a good investment. See the following passages about works as they will make known one’s faithfulness at the judgment (Matthew 25:31-36; Romans 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17).

Matthew 16:27-28 – These verses raise a question which has been debated over the years. What did Jesus mean when He said that some who were present at that time would not die before they saw “the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Here are 3 interpretations:

- Jesus revealed His glory in a special way at the transfiguration which took place just 6 days later. The question has been asked if this is the reason why Matthew, Mark and Luke record this event right after Jesus spoke about His coming kingdom? At the least, this was a taste of what was to come (Matthew 17:1-13).
- The death, burial, resurrection, ascension and the day of Pentecost were all special events where God’s glory was manifested. Again, this was another taste of what was to come.
- The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a time when God’s judgment was brought upon Israel.

Answer: We really don’t know with certainty what Jesus meant. One of the problems has to do with the statement He made about judgment and rewards (v. 27). The first two explanations do not have anything to do with judgment yet they show glorious events in the life of Jesus. Only the third suggestion hints at judgment. In each case, all three events were powerful demonstrations of God’s glory.

Discussion starters:

- When and how did you come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah?
- In what area does verse 24 strike a cord in your life?
- What perspective does Jesus’ “gain and forfeit” argument (vv. 25-26) give you on your current priorities in life?