

Sermon for Sunday August 28 2005  
"The Most Important Answer"  
Matthew 16:15-20

As we continue in our study of Matthew 16 this morning it is helpful to recognize that we are in one of the most important sections of Matthew's Gospel. These verses and the ones we read last week get to the very heart of the Christian faith.

The question at the heart of this chapter is:

"How do you say Jesus is?"

The answer you give to this question is the most important answer, bar none. Because how you answer this question will help to not only shape you life but determine your relationship with God.

This relationship is either one of enmity of friendship

When we live our lives at enmity with God we are so often burdened with guilt and a troubled conscience. We are filled with feelings of resentment ingratitude and negativity.

When we live our lives as God's friends it will determine the quality of life in this world and most importantly it will determine our eternal destiny. So you see there is nothing more important than to affirm as Peter did that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Everything hinges on your answer to the question: "Who do you say Jesus is?"

As we saw last week the crowd had all sorts of ideas about who Jesus is. Some thought that John the Baptist or one of the prophets of old had been reincarnated. But Jesus makes it clear doesn't he, that these answers fall short.

This is obvious because he isn't primarily concerned at this juncture with what everyone else thinks, he wanted to know what Peter, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot thought of him.

And of course because you have gathered here for worship, listening to a sermon on this text, Jesus is also asking you. "So you do you say that I am?"

People have for two thousand years come to all sorts of conclusions about Jesus that have been either wrong or fallen short of the truth. This has lead to such great confusion and people have been lulled into thinking that the answer to this question is relative. You believe what you want to about Jesus and I

will believe what I want to and we will leave it at that.

However, if we are going to take this passage seriously and declare that it is the Word of God that answer will not do.

You see my dear friends, the day will come when you will stand before Jesus, and Jesus will not ask you "What the crowd say about me"? No, he will ask you: "Who do you say that I am?"

And your answer to this fundamental question will determine you eternal destiny.

Notice that it is a personal question and one that only you can answer for yourself. You cannot in the end say "Well, ask my wife Jesus. I think her answer is more in keeping with what you are looking for. I wasn't much into the religion thing while I lived my life"

No, you will need to answer this one for yourself.

And the wonderful thing is we can know now the answer Jesus is looking for and spend the rest of our earthly lives growing up into people whose lives show that we really do believe Jesus is the Christ.

So briefly what does it mean to say that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

It is in Jesus that God's kingdom has come into being. Jesus Christ is the one God the Father has anointed as king and Lord of the kingdom of God.

There was a little song we sang at Junior Camp this year that declares:

He is the king of Kings.  
He is the Lord of Lords.

His name is  
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.  
Jesus is the King!

You see with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, God's Promised kingdom has come into reality

Jesus has been anointed of God to reveal the will and love of the Father. That is why Jesus attracted crowds. They saw the love compassion and kindness of God.

And most importantly of all Jesus was anointed to set us free from the guilt and power of sin. That is why Jesus will spend the latter part of chapter 16, the text we will study next week, talking about his impending death and glorious resurrection.

Jesus died on the Cross for you and me.  
Jesus came into the world to bear our iniquity

and our sins so that through his death he would bring us into his kingdom.

So here are two questions that face you this morning.

Do you want to live your life under the burden of sin and transgressions that have already been forgiven by Jesus Christ on the Cross?

Do you want to live your life in poverty when all the riches of kingdom of God are laid before you waiting for you to receive them?

Through faith in Jesus it is possible for God to forgive you and me so that we can be freed. This is what Peter began to discover on that day two thousand years ago. This is what countless millions down through the centuries have come to know. This is what people who are gathered here with you know to be true. I know it to be true. But the question is:

Do you know the freedom that Christ offers you?

Jesus wants you to answer the question: "Who do you say that I am" the way that Peter answered this question.

Having heard Peter's answer to the questions, Jesus' response to Peter is dramatic.

When at verse 20 Matthew states "Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah" this was not a denial of what Peter had just said. No, he wanted to disciples to stay quiet about who true identity because they didn't know the implications of what this meant yet.

They, like their Jewish contemporaries thought Jesus the Messiah would be a freedom fighter moving Israel's enemies out of the region and then setting them free politically and economically.

We know that this is what the disciples were, in part, expecting because of how Peter rebukes Jesus when Jesus begins to talk about his suffering and death. Peter hadn't heard this description of the Messiah's mission before and so he says 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you. After all you are the Messiah!

Yes Jesus wants to make it clear that for the disciples to declare now that he is the Christ would have caused untold confusion and problems. But after they had witnessed his death and Resurrection he would give them permission to go into all the world telling every one about his rule and his kingdom.

Now lets take a few minutes to zero in on how Jesus responds to Peter's Confession.

At verse 17 we read: "And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For

flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

You can sense something of Jesus delight and hearing Peter's answer. Jesus sees Peter's confession as being so pivotal.

Because you have declared me as the Christ, because you are beginning to see me as I truly am and for who I am, I in turn declare that you are blessed.

The Father's favour and approval rest on you. Peter you are indeed fortunate because you have begun to answer this most fundamental question wisely and with divine inspiration. And as you grow into the fullness of what it means to live out this confession, God's kindness and mercy will be bestowed upon you in increasing measure.

In his first letter Peter shows us how his confession shaped his life and how it can shape ours when he wrote:

"What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus! Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, 4 including a future in heaven--and the future starts now! 5 God is keeping careful watch over us and the future. The Day is coming when you'll have it all--life healed and whole."

Indeed it is a blessing to see God in this light and to understand our destiny as Peter describes it for us here.

So Peter's Confession is first of all cause for blessing and secondly it is a gift from God.

"For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven".

When we depend on public opinion we cannot come to Christ. We cannot primarily depend on our intelligence and logic. Such an insight is a of God. God gives this gift to those who are willing to humble themselves before him.

This humility may take the form of an honest searching. You can say to God: "I don't understand why Jesus is so important and why I need to come to a personal confession, but I want to learn. I want to come to you, please show me how."

If you have a percentage of doubt that Jesus is the Christ you have the need to investigate. And as Jesus promises else where:

"Seek and you will find  
Knock and the door will be open  
Ask and you will receive"

As people come to faith in Christ, it is on this revelation that Jesus will build his Church. It isn't that Peter is the Rock, but rather that when we come to see Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God our lives are built on the one who is the Rock, Jesus Christ.

When we are growing in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ we are part of a fellowship that will never be destroyed.

This is why Jesus says next:

"And I tell you, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Now here is the rub. You will hear people say, I believe in Jesus but I don't think much of the Church. But such a perspective is not biblical because it contradicts Jesus. Notice that Jesus connects faith in him directly to the fellowship of people called the Church.

Faith in Jesus cannot be lived apart from fellowship with others who have also come to the same confession.

What is the Church?

It is that Community of people over which the powers of death and Satan will not prevail. This is the only community that is indestructible because it is the only company that is eternal.

Now notice that the true Church is not based on denominational title or institutional structures. The true Church is found in those gatherings where Jesus is declared to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God and where others are invited to be come part of the gathering of God's people. We see this in what follows.

For having been blessed, and made part of that fellowship that Satan cannot destroy

Jesus next grants Peter permission to give leadership to proclaiming the truth of Christ:

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

Peter is given the keys. This refers to the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel. The ministry of proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. When we proclaim the message of Christ we have the power to set people free from power of sin.

The Gospel are the keys that open the door to the kingdom of God. Every time the Gospel is proclaimed the door is being opened and people have the opportunity to be loosed from their sins and guilt and enter into the eternal kingdom.

But the Gospel also has the power to bind you.

Whenever a person rejects and continues to reject the gospel they are taking the option to be bound in their sin

Your freedom from sin, your eternal destiny, your relationship with God, your entrance into kingdom, depends on what you do with Jesus of Nazareth

If you want to believe he is the Christ, the Saviour of the World you will become blessed of God, a member of the Church and be commissioned and given the power of the keys. Every Christian has the power of the keys to proclaim deliverance to your friends, family, neighbours and colleagues. If you would like to make a confession of faith this morning that will result in your choosing to follow Jesus as the Christ, I invite you to pray this prayer with me now in the silence of your own heart

Pray this prayer with me:

Heavenly Father I thank you that you have loved me so much that you sent your son Jesus the Christ into this world to set me free from sin and from the power of death. I ask you for your forgiveness and as I confess this morning that Jesus is indeed the Christ, my Saviour and my Lord that you will receive me, make me part of your Church and give to me the keys of the kingdom. In Jesus name  
Amen