

Matthew 16:13-18

**Perceptions and Realities about Christ:** Who do you say Christ is?

We considered in the morning service last Sunday a message entitled, *Caring for Christ's Flock*, from John 21. We saw how Christ forgave Peter and restored him to the ministry and charged him to feed the flock of God. Today, we will consider another conversation between Christ and Peter.

In Matthew 16 Christ asks his disciples two searching questions. First, "Who do **men** say that I am?" Christ wanted to know what men thought of Him. Then, secondly, he asks his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?"

The Lord presupposes that his disciples would not have the same thoughts as "men" had. They would not follow the spirit of the age, and shape their views by those of the "cultured" persons of the period. They would have formed a judgment, each one for himself, by what they had heard and seen while in his company.

Peter speaking for the rest of the disciples answers the Lord “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter’s reply caused Christ to say, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”

In his great confession, Peter confesses Christ to be the promised Messiah. Then he rises higher, echoing the voice from heaven-"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Then Peter adds that Jesus is, “the Son of the LIVING GOD. Peter recognized by divine revelation the essential and eternal life of God in His Son, Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity.

A Christian author writes, “Peter’s confession assumes a deeper level of understanding than other confessions that had been made. This is not the first time that he and the disciples were made aware of the Messiahship of Jesus.

In fact the disciples followed Jesus, believing that He was the Messiah. But their understanding of what Messiah was to do was still weak.

What made Peter's confession so important was the fact that it came against the backdrop of all the confusion and false teachings about Jesus. His confession of faith was so strong that Jesus could begin talking about His death on the cross."

The title of my message for today is, **Perceptions and Realities about Christ**: "Who do you say Christ is?" This question summarizes the most important and essential question we all must answer. We say we believe in Christ; but in whom do we believe?

## *1. Perceptions about Christ*

### **1. Perceptions about Christ during his day**

Christ asked his disciples the question in Matthew 16:13, "Whom do **men** say that I the Son of man am?" He asked his disciples this question, not because he was ignorant what the people thought and spoke of him; but to have the opportunity, in getting an express declaration of their faith from themselves, to confirm and strengthen them in it.

How the disciples answered suggests that there were strange ideas circulating regarding the identity of Jesus Christ.

Some believed that Christ was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Why did people believe this?

Adam Clarke explains, "By this and other passages we learn, that the Pharisaic doctrine of the transmigration of souls, was pretty general; for it was upon this ground that they believed that the soul of the Baptist, or of Elijah, Jeremiah, or some of the prophets, had come to a new life in the body of Jesus."

Albert Barnes adds, "Elias is the Greek mode of writing the Hebrew word Elijah. He was a distinguished prophet, and was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, 2Ki 2:11. The prophet Malachi, (Mal 4:5,6) predicted that Elijah should be sent before the coming of the Messiah, to prepare the way for him.

By this was evidently meant, not that he should appear in person, but that one should appear with a striking resemblance to him; or, as Luke 1:17 expresses it, "in the spirit and power of Elijah." But the Jews understood it differently. They expected that Elijah would appear in person.

They also supposed that Jeremiah and some other of the prophets would appear also to usher in the promised Messiah, and to grace his advent ( Mt 16:14; 17:10; John 1:21). This expectation was the reason why he used the words, if ye will receive it, implying that the affirmation that John was the promised Elijah, was a doctrine contrary to their expectation.”

There was confusion and misunderstanding among people regarding Christ during his day, and it carries over to our day.

## **2. Popular perceptions regarding Christ in our day**

Today people have many ideas about who Jesus really was. Some say that He was a great teacher. Others recognize Him as a great religious leader and the One who founded Christianity. Others believe He was a famous prophet. Others think He was the greatest man who ever lived. Most people today know very little about Jesus Christ, even though they often use His Name when they are angry or when they curse.

A theologian writes, "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say.

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 a 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."

Was Christ just a great teacher and wise philosopher like Socrates or Confucius? No. Christ declares, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Jesus Christ is the God-man, having two distinct natures, human and divine, in one person.

Another false perception many people believe regarding Christ is that He wants all of us to be happy, healthy, prosperous, and successful. The Health and Wealth Gospel thrives in many churches today.

Charles Spurgeon writes, “I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, “Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?” You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live with the object of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian.”

Over the years the message being preached in many churches has changed. Due, in part, to the rise of several ungodly philosophies and movements, a new gospel is being taught today.

This gospel has been ascribed many names, such as the “name it and claim it” gospel, the “blab it and grab it” gospel, the “health and wealth” gospel, the “word of faith” movement, the “gospel of success,” the “prosperity gospel,” and “positive confession theology.”

This gospel teaches that God wants you to be rich (and/or healthy), but He can not bless you unless you first send money to whichever televangelist or teacher tells you about this scheme which has been perfected by Oral Roberts, Kenneth Copeland, Marilyn Hickey, and Benny Hinn.

There is an element of truth in the gospel of health and wealth. It is true that God *may* make us healthy and wealthy in answer to our prayers! It is also true that godly living does have a general tendency to produce both healthy bodies and prosperity. Scripture warns against many sins that undermine health including the drinking of alcohol, and use of tobacco products. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Galatians. 5:22).

Perhaps the root error of the gospel of health and wealth is that it seeks to apply a gospel of future glory to the believer in the here and now. But the Lord Jesus taught a gospel for here and now that both sustains believers in hard times and holds out hope for tomorrow.

There are many false perceptions and misrepresentations of Christ today but Peter's confession points us to living in spiritual reality.



## *II. Realities about Christ*

In Matthew 16 Christ now moves from perception to reality by asking his disciples a personal question, “But whom say **ye** that I am? Emphasis is on the word **you**. Christ wanted to know what his disciples thought of Him.

This is a far more searching question for his disciples. Peter lived in the spiritual reality that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Peter’s confession was not a lucky guess or a stab in the dark.

He did not say, “I think you are the Christ.” Peter’s answer was clear and direct, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Peter’s answer was revealed to him by God the Father, “for flesh, and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father in heaven.” Peter asserts this as an assured fact and not as a mere opinion.

A commentator observes, “Peter does not say, “Scribes and Pharisees, rulers and people, are all perplexed; and shall we, unlettered fishermen, presume to decide?” But feeling the light of his Master's glory shining in his soul, he breaks forth--

not in a tame, prosaic acknowledgment, "I believe that Thou art," &c.--but in the language of adoration--such as one uses in worship, "THOU ART THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD!"

### **1. Peter testifies that Jesus is the Christ.**

The name *Christ* signifies "anointed." It is applied in the Old Testament to the **kings** (1Sa 24:6,10); to the **priests** (Le 4:5,16,); and to the **prophets** (1Ki 19:16) -these all being anointed with oil, the symbol of the needful spiritual gifts to consecrate them to their respective offices; and it was applied, in its most sublime and comprehensive sense, to the promised Deliverer, inasmuch as He was to be consecrated to an office embracing all three by the immeasurable anointing of the Holy Ghost (Isaiah 61:1; compare John 3:34).

**A). Christ was anointed to be a prophet.** We read in John 7:40, "Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, of a truth this is the Prophet." They were referring to the prediction of Moses, that after Moses a prophet would appear who would command the attention of the people and bring further revelation from God.

Deut 18:15, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”

Hebrews 1:1-2 identifies Jesus Christ as God’s prophet, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

Christ’s prophetic ministry continues in the church today as we read and hear God’s Word proclaimed.

**B). Christ was anointed to be a priest.** We read in Hebrews 4:14, “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” As our great high priest, Christ is anointed to forgive us of our sins. No other priests have the power and authority to forgive sins on earth except Jesus Christ.

I John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

As high priest, Christ intercedes for His people.

Romans 8:34, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”

Hebrews 7:25, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

**C). Christ was anointed to be a king.** We read in Revelation 17:14, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is the Lord of Lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

Christ reigns over His people. He is a wise and good king. He is sovereign and in control of the universe, and rules in the smallest and minutest details of our lives.

He is King, and we belong to his kingdom. We are no longer slaves to Satan and sin. We have a new Master and Lord over our lives, Christ.

Hebrews 1:8, “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”

Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ, applied to Christ’s offices of prophet, priest, and king.

## **2. Peter testifies that Jesus is the Son of the Living God.**

In declaring Jesus to be the Son of God, Peter rose above the popular theories as to the personality of Messiah, for the Jews generally did not expect him to be divine.

We read in John 10:29-36, “My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.

Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?

The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Albert Barnes writes, “The term living, was given to the true God, to distinguish him from idols, that are dead or lifeless--blocks and stones. He is also the Source of life--temporal, spiritual, and eternal. The term living is often given to him in the Old Testament, Jos 3:10; 1Sa 17:26,36; Jer 10:9,10 etc. In this noble confession, Peter expressed the full belief of himself and his brethren that he was the long-expected Messiah. Other men have very different opinions of him, but they were satisfied, and were not ashamed to confess it.”

**3. In addition to Peter’s confession of Jesus being the Christ and the Son of God, Christ adds that He is building the church.**

We read in verse 18, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Upon this very rock-this true confession of thine-that I am THE MESSIAH, that am come to reveal and communicate THE LIVING GOD, that the dead and lost world may be saved-upon this very rock, myself, thus confessed (alluding probably to Ps 118:22, The STONE which the builders rejected is become the HEAD-STONE of the CORNER: and to Isa 28:16, Behold I lay a STONE in Zion for a FOUNDATION)-will I build my Church, my assembly, or congregation, i.e. of persons who are made partakers of this precious faith.

Adam Clarke writes, “That Peter is not designed in our Lord's words must be evident to all who are not blinded by prejudice. Peter was only one of the builders in this sacred edifice, Eph 2:20 who himself tells us, (with the rest of the believers,) was built on this living foundation stone: 1Pe 2:4,5, therefore Jesus Christ did not say, on thee, Peter, will I build my Church, but changes immediately the expression, and says, upon that very rock, to show that he neither addressed Peter, nor any other of the apostles.

So, the supremacy of Peter, and the infallibility of the Church of Rome, must be sought in some other scripture, for they certainly are not to be found in this.

The gates of hell means the powers of the invisible world. In ancient times the gates of fortified cities were used to hold councils in, and were usually places of great strength. Our Lord's expression means, that neither the plots, stratagems, nor strength of Satan and his angels, should ever so far prevail as to destroy the sacred truths in the above confession.”

We may firmly believe, that though hell should open her gates, and vomit out her devil and all his angels, to fight against Christ and his saints, ruin and discomfiture must be the consequence on their part; as the arm of the Omnipotent must prevail.

There are three spiritual realities we learn from Matthew 16: Jesus is the Christ, He is the Son of God, and Christ is building His church.



In closing, Christ asked his disciples two questions in Matthew 16, “Who do men say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” Is Christ your Savior? Is Christ your prophet, priest, and king?” Don’t guess where you stand before God today. Know where you stand before the Lord. May we all reply the same way Peter did regarding the identity of Jesus, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Let us pray.