

"THOU ART THE CHRIST"

Matthew 16:13-17

Intro: This same account is given in Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21, but neither of the others is as full as Matthew's account. Both Matthew and Mark recorded that this took place in Caesarea Philippi; Luke simply says that the Lord had been praying, that His disciples were with Him, and that He asked them this question which all three Gospels record: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" Only in Matthew's account is it mentioned that the Lord called Himself "the Son of man."

Caesarea Philippi was located at the northern end of the land of Israel, near the source of the Jordan River, and a place where the Lord was not as well known. There He would have had more of an opportunity for prayer, as Luke suggested, and where He would have been able to give more time to His disciples. Doubtless many things took place during those days that our Lord had with His disciples, but the part that the Holy Spirit has seen fit to record was the questioning that the Lord did with them.

There are many things about this event in the life of our Lord with His disciples which we do not know certainly, but there is enough here that we do know which can make it very profitable for us to consider. I am not going to take the whole account, but just down to Peter's well-known confession and what the Lord said to him in return.

But now let us look at:

I. OUR LORD'S FIRST QUESTION (Matt. 16:13).

We really don't know if this was a case where the Lord was not exercising His omniscience, and asking for information, or if this was a question which He could have answered but wanted His disciples to think about.

The question is, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" The order of the words in the Greek text would allow us to translate His question this way: Whom do men say that I am, the Son of man? This, from Daniel's prophecy, was a Messianic title. Cf. Dan. 7:13. No one ever called the Lord, the Son of man, but He used it frequently of Himself.

It is important in looking at this question to see that the Lord was not asking about the scribes and Pharisees. He knew how they felt. But the Lord wanted to know what kind of a message was getting through to the people. The scribes and Pharisees were doing everything that they could to discredit

our Lord before the people, and so it was very important that it be known what kind of a message was getting through to the people. They heard Him gladly. They followed Him in great numbers, and brought their sick to Him until He and His disciples had practically no time to eat. But the important thing is what did they believe about the Lord. What were they saying about Him as they talked with each other.

If the Lord had been anyone but Who He was, this would have been a most inappropriate question. In fact, for a mere man to be asking a question like this would have been considered arrogant.

In John 1 when the delegation came up from Jerusalem to find out who John the Baptist was, and what he was saying about himself, you will remember that his answers were only given with great reluctance, and very briefly. The priests and Levites said, "Who art thou?" He answered, "I am not the Christ." Then they said, "What then? Art thou Elias?" He said, "I am not." Then they said, "Art thou that prophet?" John the Baptist answered, "No." Then they said, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. **What sayest thou of thyself?**" And then John said,

I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,  
Make straight the way of the Lord,  
as said the prophet Esaias.

John obviously had no interest at all in saying who he was; he wanted to talk about the Lord. (All of the above is found in John 1:19-23.)

But that was not the case with the Lord. He wanted to know what people were saying about Him, and if they were recognizing that He was the Son of man, the Messiah.

However, all of this is as it should have been. Every miracle that the Lord performed was done to make the people know Who He was. Cf. John 20:30, 31. He had come as the Redeemer of Israel and of the Gentiles. When His conversation with the Samaritan woman got around to the subject of the Messiah, the Lord said very plainly to her, "I that speak unto thee am he" (John 4:26). The Lord wanted people to know Who He was, but He did not want it to be just a popular opinion that was being circulated. He wanted it to be a matter of deep personal conviction with each person who said that He was the Messiah.

There is no more important question that we can ask of the people of the world. Later in Matthew's Gospel we have the record of our Lord's dispute with the Sadducees, and then with the Pharisees, and He frankly asked the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" (Matt. 22:42).

This is one way we can introduce the Gospel to people, not just asking it without any preparation for it, but looking and praying for opportunities to ask people what they believe about Jesus Christ. Once people really understand Who He is, from then on everything that He ever did or said takes on the greatest significance. And, on the other hand, no one will ever really turn to Christ for salvation until they realize Who He is.

Now let us look at:

## II. THE DISCIPLES' ANSWER (Matt. 16:14).

There evidently were three men who stood at the top of the list from all that the disciples knew: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, followed by other suggestions which were not as prominent as the first three.

As you look at this list you can see one thing that these men had in common: They were all prophets. They were all men of God, men who respect by the Jews. So, although their knowledge was incorrect, they did believe that the Lord was a prophet, and that He did have the right to teach and preach.

This also showed that the people believed in resurrection. We probably wouldn't find people speaking about our Lord in this way today because people are inclined to reject life after death. But apparently it was no problem to the people to think that the Lord could have brought these men back from the dead. You will remember that even Herod thought that the Lord was John the Baptist. Cf. Matt. 14:2.

So there was widespread belief in the supernatural in those days, and in the certainty that there would be a resurrection.

It is interesting to consider why these three men would be so prominent.

They might have thought that our Lord was John the Baptist because He had succeeded John and enjoyed the same kind of popularity with the people that John had.

They might have thought that our Lord was Elijah because Malachi had predicted that he would come. Cf. Mal. 4:5. But also Elijah was one of the few miracle workers of the OT, and so that would make him a likely prospect.

As far as Jeremiah was concerned, perhaps the solemnity of our Lord's ministry, and the warnings He issued reminded the people of the days of Jeremiah. He was known as the weeping

prophet, and our Lord was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

However, all of these answers, plus the other prophets who had been mentioned, all indicated that there was a very real connection between Jesus and God.

These would have been flattering suggestions for you and for me. No one has ever thought that I was John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or any other prophet. But they were not flattering to the Lord Jesus. These were great men that the people were talking about, but our Lord is infinitely greater. It was a part of His humiliation that the people generally saw nothing more in Him than they had seen in John the Baptist, or heard about concerning Elijah and Jeremiah.

But then the Lord went on to:

### III. HIS SECOND QUESTION (Matt. 16:15).

The Lord directed this question right at the disciples when He said, "But whom say ye that I am?"

Did you ever hear Christians, or professing Christians, discussing this? What if someone were to come to you and ask you this question? How would you answer it?

The Lord had taken these twelve men, had instructed them, had sent them out to preach, had given them the power to heal and to cast out demons. But He asked them, "But whom say ye that I am?"

There was one in that group who would later show that he could not have given the right answer. Oh, he may have mouthed the proper words, but the light had never dawned on his soul that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God in human flesh. How convicted are you about the nature of Jesus of Nazareth? The world ridicules such an idea. And there are many in the professing church today who do not believe in the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth. They will say that He was a good man, and a great teaching, and yet at the same time indicate that He was the greatest of all impostors. If that were the case, then I suggest to you that our Lord could not have been either a good man nor a great teacher.

Think about this question. It is a good question for all of us to answer: "But whom do you say that Jesus was?"

Who answered the Lord's question? Peter did. What did he say?

IV. PETER'S ANSWER (Matt. 16:16).

You probably know his answer very well, but listen to it again: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It would have been impossible to give a better answer.

He was saying that He believed that the Lord was the Messiah. He saw the Lord as the One Whose coming was anticipated all through the OT. And so in coming to this realization, the OT had taken on new meaning for Simon Peter. But more than just believing that the Lord was the Messiah, Peter believed in the Deity of the Lord. Most Jews had not put those two things together. They did not think of the Messiah as God Who had come in the flesh. But Peter did. Say what you want to about Peter's failures, his answer was perfect. He directed his answer to the Lord, and knew that it could apply to no one else.

It would be interesting to know when and how Peter became convinced about the Messiahship and Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps the conviction came on so gradually that he could not have pointed to a particular time or place when it became final with him. But we know that he was not satisfied with any of the answers that they had to give concerning what people were saying. He had gone beyond them, and knew that it was the Lord Himself Who was their Master.

But now let us look at:

V. THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO PETER (Matt. 16:17).

How do we know that Peter really believed this about the Lord. We know it by our Lord's response to him. The Lord would never have said what He said to Peter if Peter had not been speaking from his heart. So have no doubt but that Peter was saying what he really believed.

But notice three things about what the Lord said.

A. "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona."

"Barjona" means son of Jonah. However, the Lord called Peter HAPPY! This is what "blessed" means. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord had described people who were truly happy, but this is a beatitude which has to stand above them all. There is no joy comparable to the joy of coming to know Who Jesus Christ is. It is the knowledge that can make the most profound change that can ever be made in a person's life. Nothing anybody ever learns is more influential in starting to change a person's life forever than this. The blessing of God was upon Peter, and the joy of the Lord was in his heart.

What wonderful words those are: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona."

But what did the Lord say next?

B. "For flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee."

Peter may have been very smart in some ways, but he was not smart enough to come to this conclusion on his own. And our Lord indicated that Peter could not give the credit to anyone else for coming to this understanding of Christ. You will remember that Andrew, Peter's brother, "brought him to Jesus" (John 1:42), but the Lord did not give Andrew the credit for what Peter had just said.

The kind of knowledge which Peter had expressed does not come primarily from a person's own intelligence, nor from teachers he may have had, nor from books he has read. God may use some of these, but we need to recognize that this is far more than you can expect from "flesh and blood," whether it be Peter's or the "flesh and blood" of anyone else.

How can it be explained? This brings us to the third part of what the Lord said:

C. "But my Father which is in heaven."

The Lord was not congratulating Peter because he had figured all of this out; He was saying that the Father had revealed this glorious truth, this happy truth, to him. The Father had His hand on Peter, and the Father had caused Peter to come to this understanding in a way that Peter could never be shaken from it.

I have seen men go through Seminary, and be involved in ministry for a number of years, and then turn away from it all. How can you explain that? Well, that person had gained a lot of knowledge, but he had never experienced what Peter had experienced. The truth about the Lord Jesus had never been brought home to that person's soul because when the Father shows you who Jesus Christ is, you can never turn away from what He has taught you.

This undoubtedly explains why Peter was so outspoken on the Lord's side, saying that He would never fail the Lord. The Father had other things to teach Peter, but there is no doubt but that this was truth written down in his soul.

Concl: Let me say in conclusion that if you are firmly convinced that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the

living God, you did not learn this on your own, nor was it simply a matter of being told this by somebody else. The Father is the One Who teaches us this. This is when our spiritual history begins. And it is the happiest moment in our lives when we come to this knowledge, this conviction. And from there on we go to greater and greater happiness as we walk with our Lord and learn more about Him.

Make sure that you can give the answer Peter gave, and that you can give it from your heart. What a marvelous thing it is to be taught by God!