

Sermon for September 27, 2023 – 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 16:13-20 (EHV)

Theme: Jesus is the Christ,

- 1) Whom we are blessed to know.
- 2) Whom we are blessed to share.

¹³When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. ¹⁹I 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.” ²⁰Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

Who is Jesus? Muslims consider him a great prophet like Mohammed. The famous Hindi activist Mahatma Gandhi once said, “I know of no one who has done more for humanity than Jesus.” Even the outspoken, militant atheist Richard Dawkins said: “Jesus was a great moral teacher.” Yes, most people are willing to call Jesus a great man and an excellent example to follow. But if that’s all Jesus was, how would that help you with your sin, guilt, and feelings of shame? What peace, meaning, and hope could he bring to your life? The answer is none.

This is why it is vitally important to know who Jesus truly is. And who is He? As our sermon text reveals, Jesus is the Christ, 1) whom we are blessed to know, 2) and whom we are blessed to share.

Part One: Jesus is the Christ whom we are blessed to know.

Our sermon text finds Jesus near the height of his ministry. He had performed miracles throughout Judah and Galilee: healing the sick, raising the dead, and feeding thousands on two occasions. All these mighty acts were meant to get the people to think who he was. He wanted them to understand from the prophecies of Scripture that he was the promised Saviour. Therefore:

¹³When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

Jesus’ favourite title for himself was the Son of Man. Why? Perhaps because it reminds us that he is fully human and, as such, faced the same trials, temptations, and sorrows we face. Be that as it may, there is another profound reason Jesus called himself by this title. The Old Testament prophet

Daniel once saw a vision of God's throne, concerning which he wrote: *"With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man... ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him... ⁱ*

By calling himself "the Son of Man," Jesus identified himself as the promised, divine Saviour that Daniel saw in His vision. All Jesus' preaching and miracles testified to this truth, but did the people perceive it?

In answer to Jesus' question, *"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"* the disciples replied, *"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* In other words, the people were ready to recognize Jesus as a great prophet, but that's it. They did not perceive his true identity as the promised Saviour. How could that be when everything he taught and did testified to that fact? Because, as the Scriptures say: *the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*ⁱⁱ In other words, we humans are so blinded by sin that we can't even recognize the true Messiah even if he were standing right before us, fulfilling every prophecy of Scripture!

That led Jesus to ask the disciples: *"But you, who do you say that I am?"* ¹⁶Simon Peter [speaking on behalf of all the disciples] answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

While Jesus' disciples had called him the Son of God before then, did you know that this was the first time they identified him as the Christ? Why is that significant? Because it meant that the disciples understood that Jesus' mission was not just to be "a great example" but to establish an everlasting, spiritual kingdom. You see, the term "Christ" means "the anointed one". In Old Testament times, prophets, priests and kings were anointed into office. All those anointings foreshadowed the coming of the divine Saviour who would be our eternal prophet, priest, and king. As our divine prophet, he would reveal the truth about God and his forgiven love for us. As our divine priest, he would offer the once and for-all sacrifice of himself to save us from our sins. As our divine King, he would rule over us forever, protecting us from all evil and granting us everlasting peace with God in paradise. Even though there was much that they still did not understand about Jesus and His kingdom, the disciples nevertheless acknowledged what Israel's top scholars failed to perceive: Jesus is the Christ!

Members of Divine Word, do you also perceive that Jesus is the Christ? "Pastor," you might be thinking, "Of course I believe that. Why would you even ask such a question?" I ask it because I know how the devil often overwhelms me with such feelings of shame over sin that I feel like I must do something to make myself right with God instead of simply trusting that Jesus is the Christ – my Saviour – who fully paid for all my sins. I sometimes feel it is totally up to me to protect my family from all the evil influences in the world instead of trusting that Jesus is the Christ who defeated Satan and promises to hear my prayers and watch over my family. And as the devil tempts me, I am sure he tempts you too.

Therefore, I ask again, do you perceive that Jesus is the Christ and apply that truth to your life? Though we all may waver at times like the disciples – not understanding the full meaning of that truth, we Christians nevertheless answer with Simon Peter: Yes, we believe that you are the Christ,

the Son of the living God.

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Note what Jesus said to Simon because it also applies to you. You are truly blessed to know Jesus is the Christ, your Saviour from sin. How so? Because God the Father worked this faith in you, revealing how much he loves you. Without God’s work in your heart, you would still be blinded by ignorance and miss out on Jesus. More than that, you would still feel the burden of your sin weighing on you.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate what I mean. The Heart Institute chaplain called me this past week and asked me to visit a patient who wanted a Lutheran pastor. When I met the patient, he proceeded to tell me how he was about to undergo surgery. He didn’t care what kind of pastor I was because he viewed every denomination as basically the same: trying to follow the good example of Jesus. He confessed to me that he didn’t live up to that example, how guilty he felt about that, and how he hoped I could offer him some comfort and encouragement.

Knowing that I was going to preach on this text this Sunday, I applied it to him – asking him during our Bible study together: “Do you understand who Jesus is? As this text shows, he is not just an example for you to follow; he is the Christ, your Saviour from sin. He lived a life of perfect obedience to God’s law that you failed to live, and died in payment for all your sins. Jesus is your Christ, not your example. Take your sin, shame, and guilt to him in repentance, and trust that he forgives you as he promised!” After expanding on these truths and applying them to him, the man broke down and wept: “You mean to tell me I have been afraid to come to God for all these years when I didn’t have to be? Oh, pastor, you don’t know what kind of weight has been lifted from me. I am so thankful you came to visit me.”

How blessed are you, dear Christian, that God has revealed who Christ is to you! Because this is the case, you didn’t have to live your life like the man I met in the hospital - burdened with guilt and shame. As you look to Christ in repentance and faith, you can live in the peace of His forgiveness. Yes, everyone here who understands that Jesus is the Christ is truly blessed by God – having a peace that the world does not know. Rejoice in the blessing and pray that the LORD prevents you from ever taking it for granted! And what is the best way to avoid that? By telling others about Jesus and what he has done!

Part Two: Jesus is Christ, whom we are blessed to share.

After Jesus told Simon that he was blessed to know him as the Christ, he went on to say: *¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.*

Did you know that Jesus’ words mark the first time in all Greek literature that someone is given the name “Peter”? Peter means “rock,” and the LORD gave it to Simon because the truth he confessed is the foundational bedrock upon which Jesus builds His Church, as the Bible says: “No

*one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ.*ⁱⁱⁱ Yes, on this foundation: that “Jesus is the Christ,” the LORD builds His magnificent, spiritual temple to attract the nations to him – and he has made you a living stone in it!

Did you know that the words Jesus spoke to Peter have application to every Christian? The name “Peter” means rock. Keeping that in mind, consider what the Holy Spirit later inspired Peter to write about all Christians in relation to Jesus:

⁴As you come to him, the Living Stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious, ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, in order to bring spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the people who are God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.^{iv}

Yes, the LORD has blessed us as he blessed Peter. All who put their faith in Jesus as their Christ are built on the rock of Christ. They are his army of light in the world – his priests and representatives – that the gates of hell will never overcome.

I find it fascinating that Jesus uses the term “gate” here. So often, we imagine ourselves on the defensive, under attack by the devil. However, the truth is that we are on the offensive – battling the devil’s spiritual forces at his gates as we witness and proclaim Jesus to rescue His lost sheep. The fighting is often so intense that we might wonder how his church will survive on this evil earth – especially given the godless path our society has taken. Whenever worries like this arise, remember Jesus’ promise: the gates of hell will not overpower His Church.

And, as the LORD equipped Peter to represent him, he equips all of us who, like Peter, are living stones in his kingdom.^v

¹⁹I 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.”

The keys Christ gave us are His Law and Gospel. Whenever Christians warn an unrepentant sinner that their sins are not forgiven, they are not forgiven before God. Heaven is closed to him; hell will be his future unless he repents. And why would God want us to pronounce such judgment on someone? So that, fearing God’s wrath, they might turn to Jesus in repentance to be saved.

And if a person, like the man I met in the hospital this past week, does repent? Then we have the joyful duty of using the Gospel key: telling the repentant person that his sins have been paid for in full through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. Heaven is open to him with all its blessedness and joy. Why? Because Christ Jesus reconciled him to God. He can now live in the peace of God’s forgiveness to the glory of His name. Jesus promises that whenever we proclaim this Gospel to a repentant sinner, it is as valid as if Christ spoke it himself.

Our sermon text continues: *²⁰Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.*

Wait a second: Why would Jesus not want his disciples to tell people He is the Christ? Because he still needed to complete his most significant work as the Christ: our salvation. If the disciples started proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the people would misinterpret it to mean that he was some sort of political Messiah. No, Jesus had first to suffer, die, and rise again so that the people would understand what kind of Christ he was.

But Jesus' prohibition to tell others about him ended after his resurrection. Shortly before his ascension, he commanded all his disciples to go and tell everyone about him, teaching them everything he had revealed to us about himself.^{vi}

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, realize how blessed you are: You know that Jesus is the Christ: your Saviour from sin! Live in the peace of that truth – not letting complacency or worldliness separate you from the joy it brings. Instead, let that blessed truth move you to share the Gospel with others as you warn and encourage those God puts into your life to see Jesus as their Christ! Amen

ⁱ Daniel 7:13-14 EHV

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 2:14 NKJV

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 3:11 EHV cf. Ephesians 2:20-21

^{iv} 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9 EHV

^v Cf. Matthew 18:18 & John 20:21-22

^{vi} Cf. Matthew 28:19-20