

Matthew 16:13-20; Luke 9:18-21*NIV Harmony 116-17; Loyal 141-48; Compassion 121-22***Introduction**

1. Do you ever wonder what people think about you? What names or labels do they associate with you?
 - a. We hope that they are good ones, like friend, servant, faithful, or loved one.
 - b. We certainly hope they are not bad ones, like enemy, trouble-maker, or no good.
 - c. Our worry about the labels others attribute to us is sometimes motivated by pride, ego, or guilt.
2. In this passage, Jesus asked His disciples what titles or labels others attributed to Him and then what one they themselves gave to Him.
3. Jesus' motivation was not from pride, ego, or guilt but from the knowledge that correctly identifying Him was a mark of faith leading to salvation.
4. **Read Matthew 16:13-20.**

A. The First Question (Mt 16:13; Lk 9:18; cf., Mk 8:27)

1. Jesus and His disciples travelled north from Bethsaida "...to the region of Caesarea Philippi" (Mt 16:13; Mk 8:27; Lk 9:18).
2. Caesarea Philippi lies about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and is the location of the spring that forms the headwaters of the Jordan River.
 - a. Craig Blomberg notes, "Formerly known as Paneas, a center of worship for the Greek god Pan, the city recently had been renamed by Philip the tetrarch in honor of himself and Augustus Caesar" (Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* in NAC, 250).
 - b. Warren Wiersbe writes, "Jesus took His disciples to Gentile territory, in the region of Caesarea Philippi....The region was strongly identified with various religions: It had been a center for Baal worship; the Greek god Pan had shrines there; and Herod the Great had built a temple there to honor Augustus Caesar. It was in the midst of this pagan superstition that Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God. And it was probably within sight of Caesar's temple that Jesus announced a surprise: He would not yet establish His kingdom, but He would build His church" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 141-42).
3. Jesus, speaking "in private" with His disciples (Lk 9:18), asked them a question, recorded in slightly different forms by the three gospel writers.
 - a. "'Who do people (Gk., *hoi anthropoi*) say the Son of Man is?'" (Mt 16:13) – "Son of Man" was one of Jesus' favorite titles to use when referring to Himself.
 - b. "'Who do the crowds (Gk., *hoi ochloi*) say I am?'" (Lk 9:18)
 - c. "'Who do people (Gk., *hoi anthropoi*) say I am?'" (Mk 8:27)
4. The basic question is the same: "Who do people say I am?"
5. Why was this question important? Wiersbe writes, "If anyone else asked, 'Whom do men say that I am?' we would think him either mad or arrogant. But in the case of Jesus, a right confession of who He is is basic to salvation (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 John 2:18-23, 4:1-3) (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 142).

B. The Disciples' Answers (Mt 16:14; Lk 9:19; cf., Mk 8:28)

- a. G Campbell Morgan notes, "The disciples...told Him only the best things they had heard about Him. Although they had heard men say, He is beside Himself, He hath a devil;..." (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 208). The Jewish leaders called Him a disciple of Beelzebub (cf., Mt 12:24).
- b. All three gospel accounts record similar answers, which are a summary of the various answers that the disciples had heard from others.
 - 1) Matthew recorded, "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" (Mt 16:14)
 - 2) Luke recorded, "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.'" (Lk 9:19)
 - 3) Mark recorded, "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.'" (Mk 8:28)

- c. All three gospel accounts agree on His identification by the people as John the Baptist or Elijah. They also agree that some thought Jesus was one of the other prophets.
 - 1) Herod believed Jesus was John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, come back to life (cf., Mk 6:14).
 - 2) The Jews believed the Prophet Elijah would come again before the great Day of the Lord as prophesied by Malachi: “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction” (Mal 4:5-6). They had missed the fact that John the Baptist had fulfilled this prophecy (cf., Mt 11:7-14).
 - 3) Matthew added the specific name of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, as one of those past prophets.
 - 4) Jesus spoke with prophetic authority and passion. So, it is no wonder that many people believed Him to be one of the past great prophets come back to life.
 - 5) The people knew that Jesus spoke and acted with authority (cf., Mk 1:27, 2:12), but they weren’t clear on exactly who He was. Perhaps He was another prophet sent by God after four centuries of prophetic silence? He seemed important, but they didn’t clearly know who He was.

C. The Second Question and Answer (Mt 16:15; Lk 9:20a; cf., Mk 8:29a)

1. Jesus then asked His disciples a second question which is worded identically in all three gospels: “‘But what about you?’ He asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’” (Mt 16:15; Lk 9:20a; Mk 8:29a)
2. Peter stood as the spokesman for the disciples in answering Jesus’ second, more personal, question.
3. Peter’s confession is slightly different in all three accounts but carries the same powerful meaning.
 - a. “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (Mt 16:16)
 - b. “Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God.’” (Lk 9:20b)
 - c. “Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ.’” (Mk 8:27)
4. All three accounts agree that Peter confessed Jesus to be “the Christ.”
 - a. The Greek title Christ (Gk., *Christos*) comes from the Hebrew *Mashiah*, which means “anointed one.”
 - b. This title appeared in the Old Testament in reference to one who was appointed or sent from God with a special purpose or task.
 - c. Ultimately, the Jews looked for a great and final Messiah, who would be sent by God to vindicate His people and judge the earth on the great and dreadful Day of the Lord.
5. Luke added that Jesus is the “Christ of God.” The addition “of God” seems unnecessary but it is a slightly more specific reference to Jesus as the ultimate “anointed one” sent by God to redeem His people.
6. Matthew’s account gives a fuller specification of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

D. Jesus’ Response to Peter (Mt 16:16-19; Lk 9:20b; cf., Mk 8:29b)

1. Matthew’s gospel is the only one to record Jesus’ direct response to Peter’s confession.
2. Blessing for Peter: Jesus first pronounced a blessing on Peter for His insightful identification: “Jesus replied, ‘Blessed (Gk., *Makarios*) are you, Simon son of Jonah, ...’” (Mt 6:17a).
 - a. Peter got it right. He had discerned the spiritual truth of who Jesus was. He had looked beyond the physical and seen the true spiritual nature and origin of the one whom he called Master.
 - b. Did Peter and the other disciples fully understand what Peter had just confessed?
 - 1) I don’t believe that they did. Peter and the other disciples knew that Jesus had been sent by God with an important message and for a special purpose. Yet, they did not fully understand Jesus’ God-given purpose or how that purpose would be fulfilled.
 - 2) The spiritually blind eyes of Peter and the other disciples were opening, but they were still not seeing everything clearly.
 - 3) The Master would continue to touch their spiritually blind eyes with His teaching in preparation for the culmination of His ministry as Messiah in Jerusalem.
3. Source of Peter’s Confession: “...for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven” (Mt 6:17b).
 - a. Blomberg notes, “Jesus attributes to Peter’s confession insight stemming from divine revelation rather than human deduction. The language does not specify how God revealed himself or require some sudden flash of insight, but it does affirm that God has led Peter to his correct understanding” (Blomberg, 251).

- b. Wiersbe notes, “This revelation was not the result of Peter’s own investigation. It came as the gracious act of God. God had hidden these things from the proud Pharisees and Sadducees and revealed them to ‘babes,’ the humble disciples” (Wiersbe, 142).
- c. Others had proclaimed this same truth in the past (cf., Jn 1:41, 1:49, 6:68-69; Mt 14:33), often in response to Jesus’ miracles, but Peter’s confession was unique.
- d. Wiersbe comments on two ways this confession was different, “*Jesus explicitly asked for this confession*. It was not an emotional response from people who had seen a miracle, but the studied and sincere statement of a man who had been taught by God. Also, Jesus *accepted this confession* and built on it to teach them new truth” (Wiersbe, 143).

4. Results of Peter’s Confession (Mt 16:18-19)

- a. A Name Change: “‘And I tell you that you are Peter (Gk. *Petros*) and on this rock (Gk. *petra*) I will build my church (Gk. *ekklesian*),...’ (v. 18)
 - 1) Roman Catholics believe that Jesus established the church on Peter. This is why the Catholic Pope, the head of the church, is considered to be God’s Peter on earth today. However, is this what Jesus meant by his statement?
 - 2) Blomberg notes, “It is often alleged...that the ‘rock’ must be Christ or Peter’s confession of Christ, especially since the days of Luther and the Protestant Reformation. These alternatives understandably react against traditional Roman Catholic equation of Peter with the first pope and against an elaborate ecclesiology built on this verse. But a legitimate interpretation of vv. 18-19...predicates nothing of this, so there should be no theological objections to taking Peter as ‘this rock.’...At any rate, there is obviously nothing in these verses of the distinctively Catholic doctrines of the papacy, apostolic succession, or Petrine infallibility or of the Protestant penchant for Christian personality cults” (Blomberg, 252, 256).
 - 3) Wiersbe offers another view as he explains, “These Jewish men, steeped in Old Testament Scripture, recognized the rock as a symbol of God....But let’s investigate the Greek words that the Holy Spirit led Matthew to use. ‘Thou art *petros* [a stone], and upon this rock [*petra*—a large rock] I will build my church.’ Jesus had given Simon the new name of *Peter* (John 1:42) which means ‘a stone.’ The Aramaic form is *Cephas*, which also means ‘a stone.’ Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and confesses Him as the Son and God and Savior, is a ‘living stone’ (1 Peter 2:5 NASB). Jesus Christ is the foundation rock on which the church is built. The Old Testament prophets said so (Ps. 118:22; Isa 28:16). Jesus Himself said this (Matt. 21:42) and so did Peter and the other apostles (Acts 4:10-12). Paul also stated that the foundation for the church is Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). This foundation was laid by the apostles and prophets as they preached Christ to the lost (1 Cor. 2:1-2; 3:11; Eph. 2:20). In other words, when the evidence is examined, the total teaching of Scripture is that the church, God’s temple (Eph. 2:19-22), is built on Jesus Christ—not on Peter. How could God build His church on a fallible man like Peter? Later, the same Peter who confessed Christ became an adversary and entertained Satan’s thoughts (Matt. 16:22ff)” (Warren Wiersbe, 143).

b. The Founding of the Church:

- 1) Wiersbe writes “The word *ekklesia* was not new to the disciples. This word was applied to the popular assembly of Greek citizens that helped to govern a city or district (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Also, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used *ekklesia* to describe the congregation of Israel when it was gathered for religious activity (Deut. 31:30; Judg. 20:2). However, this does not mean that the Old Testament congregation of Israel was a ‘church’ in the same sense as the churches of the New Testament. Rather, Jesus was introducing something new to His disciples. Jesus spoke about ‘my church’ in contrast to these other assemblies. This was to be something new and different, for in His church, Jesus Christ would unite believing Jews and Gentiles and form a new temple, a new body (Eph. 2:11-3:12). In His church, natural distinctions would be unimportant (Gal. 3:28). Jesus Christ would be the Builder of this church, the Head of this church (Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18)” (Wiersbe, 144).
- 2) What did Jesus mean when He said, “...and the gates of Hades will not overcome it....”? (v. 18)
 - a. Wiersbe writes, “‘Gates’ represent, in the Bible, authority and power. The city gate was to a Jew what city hall is to people in the Western world. Important business was transacted at the city gate (Deut. 16:18; 17:8; Ruth 4:11). ‘The gates of Hades’ then would symbolize the

- organized power of death and Satan. By His death and resurrection, Jesus Christ would conquer death, so that death would not be able to hold any of His people. Christ would ‘storm the gates’ and deliver the captives! This declaration certainly is verified by 1 Corinthians 15:50ff, Hebrews 2:14-15, and other Scriptures” (Wiersbe, 145).
- b. Blomberg offers another opinion when he states, “Is Satan on the defense or offense here? The latter seems more likely. In other Jewish literature ‘gates of Hades’ is frequently idiomatic for ‘powers of death’ (based on Isa 38:10). This interpretation fits better in the historical context of the increasing hostility against Jesus and his small band of disciples....Jesus encourages his followers that, irrespective of how Christianity may be attacked in a given place and time, the church universal will never be extinguished.” (Blomberg, 253-54).
- 3) What did Jesus mean when He said, “‘I 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’”? (v. 19)
- a) In regard to Jesus’ statement about keys, Wiersbe says, “A key is a badge of authority (Isa. 22:15, 22; Luke 11:52). ‘The kingdom of heaven’ is *not* heaven, for no man on earth carries the keys to heaven!...We use keys to open doors. Peter was given the privilege of opening ‘the door of faith’ to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14ff), and to the Gentiles (Acts 10). But the other apostles shared this authority (Matt. 18:18), and Paul had the privilege of opening the door of faith to the Gentiles outside of Palestine (Acts 14:27). Nowhere in this passage, or in the rest of the New Testament, are we told that Peter or his successors had any special position or privilege in the church. Certainly Peter in his two epistles claimed to be nothing more than an apostle (1 Peter 1:1), an elder (1 Peter 5:1), and a servant of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:1)” (Wiersbe, 145).
- b) Regarding binding and losing, Wiersbe writes “This was a very familiar phrase to the Jews, for their rabbis often spoke of ‘binding and loosing,’ that is, forbidding or permitting. Our Lord’s statement in Matthew 16:19 referred to Peter. But His statement later in Matthew 18:18 included all of the apostles. As the representatives of their Lord, they would exercise authority according to His Word....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. The church does not get man’s will done in heaven; it obeys God’s will on earth” (Wiersbe, 145-46).

E. The Warning (Mt 16:20; Lk 9:21; cf., Mk 8:30)

1. All three accounts end with a warning from Jesus to His disciples.
 - a. Matthew recorded that Jesus said “...not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.” (Mt 16:20)
 - b. Luke recorded that Jesus said “..[you are] not to tell this to anyone” and that He “strictly warned” (Gk., *epitimesas*) them. (Lk 9:21)
 - c. Mark simply recorded that Jesus said, “...not to tell anyone about him.”
2. All three accounts agree that Jesus did not yet want His disciples to reveal this information about His identity to others. They were to keep the Messianic Secret for now.
 - a. From this first identification of Jesus as the Christ by Peter, Jesus began to teach His disciples about what is to come with His passion (cf., Mt 16:21-26; Lk 9:22-25; Mk 8:31-37).
 - b. The Messianic Secret had been revealed to them, but it was not yet time for all the world to know.
 - c. Jesus would reveal this truth in His passion on the cross that would come soon enough.

F. Reflections

1. Who do you say Jesus is?
2. Are your words and actions each day consistent with your confession of Jesus’ identity? Would others identify you as a Christian?
3. Confessing Jesus as Messiah with your words must be followed by confessing Him as Messiah with the living of your life as His disciple/follower.
4. Unlike Jesus’ warning to His disciples, now is not the time to keep the truth about Jesus a secret. We are commanded by Jesus to make the truth about Him known to all people on earth (cf., Mt 28:18-20).
5. Share the good news that Jesus is the Messiah with others today using both your words and actions.