

Sermon for August 16, 2009

Boscobel & Mt. Zion UMCs

Text: Matthew 16:13-20 (21)

Title: "Who Do You Say That I Am?"

Introduction: So, ever wonder why we do this? Ever wonder why we have church? Some of us were taught as kids that this is just what we do. It's Sunday morning and we go to church. That's what our parents did and that's what we are going to do.

But, why?!? Why invite a bunch of people to get together to worship God on a Sunday morning? Is that our purpose? Is it to come together once a week; see some of our friends; worship God and then go back to life as usual? Or is there something more?

Did whoever invented this Church thing have more in mind than that? Does God want more out of what we call Church? Are we wasting God's time and ours this morning? And, whose idea was this anyway?

Great questions ... today, we get some answers.

We are in the 4<sup>th</sup> week of our tour of Israel. Brief recap (MAP) = we flew into Tel Aviv, the nations largest city. Tel Aviv sits on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We spent our first week on the coast of the Mediterranean in Joppa and Caesarea by the Sea.

If you recall, we used Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10 to help us get acquainted with these cities and why they are important to us today. This story shows Peter using his keys to the Kingdom of God to open the door for Gentiles (non-Jews) to learn the Good News and be baptized into the faith. We will connect with Peter again this week ... only 10 years before his encounter with Cornelius.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> week we traveled to Nazareth, which is the boyhood home of Jesus. In Luke 4, we found Jesus visiting his hometown as an adult rabbi. He taught in the Synagogue—said things that were offensive to the Jewish people in his home synagogue—and was taken, on the Sabbath, to be stoned on the edge of town. He left.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> week, we found out that when Jesus left Nazareth, he went back to his adult home in Capernaum, along the Sea of Galilee. So, last week we were on the Sea of Galilee as Jesus took the disciples to "the other side of the sea"; which we found out was like going to "the other side of the tracks". Jesus took his disciples in Luke 8 to Gentile territory ... the Region of the Gergesenes. On the boat ride over to "the other side of the sea", Jesus is woken up from a nap by the disciples. They thought they were all going to die, but Jesus made sure they got to their destination. Then Jesus saved a man (or two) and sacrificed some pigs.

If you have missed any parts of this worship series, I invite you to check out our website, [www.bmzchurch.org](http://www.bmzchurch.org). There you will find audio versions of all of our messages as well as my notes to follow along with. These are also available on podcast.

At this time, I invite you to take the insert out of your passport/program. On one side you will find our Scripture for today and on the other side you will see a brief outline with fill-in-the-blanks. I hope you will fill those in as we go through the message and also jot down whatever other notes you think will be relevant for you in your faith journey. Take this insert home and refrigerate it so you can look at it throughout the week. The more time we spend with scripture, the closer we can come to God in relationship. For those of you listening online, our program/passport is downloadable, so pause here; print off the insert, and then you also can fill in the blanks!

Our Scripture for today is from Matthew 16. Now, right before we pick up our reading for today, Jesus has been doing ministry in the area of the Sea of Galilee (that's where we were last week!). He has been healing many people. He just fed the 4,000 men—not counting the women and children—with 7 loaves of bread and a few fish. He has a run-in with the Pharisees and Sadducees and warns the disciples about what those religious leaders are all about (Check out Matthew 15-16 on your own).

Today, we find out that Jesus is on the move again; north from Galilee. Listen:

### **READ MATTHEW 16:13-20 NOW AND PRAY!**

- I. Caesarea Philippi
  - A. Jesus and the Disciples are now about 25-30 miles north of the Sea of Galilee at the southwest base of Mt. Herman (MAP).
  - B. Again, Jesus has taken the disciples out of their comfort zone. They are back in Gentile territory.
  - C. Caesarea Philippi had a history of pagan worship. It had been a center for the worship of Baal; the Greek god Pan had shrines there (This area was also known as “Banias”; trickled down from Pan to Panias, etc.) (SHOW PICTURES) and Herod the Great had built a temple there to honor Caesar Augustus.
  - D. It was this area that was rich with pagan gods that Jesus asks his disciples...
  
- II. “Who do people say that I am?”
 

The Disciples reply with some examples of what they've overheard people saying about Jesus. And for most people the comparisons would have been nice... very flattering in that day. Now, whether they were saying that Jesus actually WAS John, Elijah or Jeremiah is not clear. They might have been saying that Jesus really REMINDS US OF John the Baptist, Elijah or Jeremiah.

  - A. John the Baptist
    1. Jesus could not be the reincarnated John the Baptist, because John had just been beheaded months or at the most a couple of years before this.
    2. BUT, for many people, the only person that they had experienced or heard of in their lifetime that spoke as powerfully or with that kind of authority was John the Baptist.
    3. That was all they had to go by, so, the people used John the Baptist as a comparison ...
    4. Wow! He shoots like Jordan. He throws like Elway. He hits a golf ball like Tiger, etc.
  - B. Elijah (prophet)
    1. Elijah was different than John the Baptist in that he had died many years before Jesus was born. Also, many believed that Elijah would return (Malachi 4:5). This could be the reincarnation they were looking for.

2. Elijah taught with an authority that really got people's attention, much like we hear in the stories of Jesus how people were amazed at the authority that Jesus showed when he spoke and taught.
3. Jesus also had performed many miracles that looked similar to miracles that Elijah had performed.
  - a. Elijah had multiplied oil and flour for the widow from Sidon so that she would not go hungry.
  - b. Elijah withheld rain from the country, so the people had heard about Jesus having command over the wind and the storms as well.
  - c. Elijah brought the widow's boy back to life; much like Jesus did for the widow in Luke 7.
4. All these things would cause people to make comparisons and maybe assume that Jesus was actually Elijah reincarnated.

C. Jeremiah (prophet)

1. Jeremiah was a prophet whose heart was broken because of his country falling away from God.
2. Jesus also cried over Jerusalem and spent many hours teaching the changes that needed to happen for the Jewish nation to be right with God again.

III. Simon Peter

Then, Jesus asks the disciples who **THEY** think Jesus is. And, as usual, their self-proclaimed spokesperson speaks up ... **PETER!** And hear clearly, please what he says:

A. "You Are the Messiah"

1. Messiah means "anointed one". The one promised in the Old Testament. "Christ" also means anointed one.
2. Jesus is the One promised by God throughout the history of their nation.
3. In the Old Testament (Isaiah 9; Jeremiah 23, Micah 5) it is clear that the Messiah is more than just a human being; the Messiah is God.
4. So, here, Peter—a good Jewish man—states that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God.
5. There, in that place (Caesarea Philippi) where they stood and looked at shrines and temples to other gods, Peter declares Jesus as God.
6. I love Jesus' response: "You are blessed..." Jesus knows that Peter did not pull that answer out of a hat or try to give the answer that he thought Jesus might want to hear ... Peter answered that Jesus is the Messiah because God had graciously revealed that to Peter.

7. As Peter observed all that Jesus had done, God allowed Peter, a fisherman, to see clearly what the religious leaders of the day could not.
8. Please understand that none of us will every profess Jesus as Lord and Savior in our lives without this revelation from God and the Holy Spirit moving in our lives.
9. If we will ever be who God wants us to be ... If we ever desire to be in a right relationship to God, there has to be a confession from each of us as to WHO JESUS IS!
10. Peter got it right!

B. The Rock

1. Now, Jesus had earlier changed Peter's name from Simon to Cephas (Peter), which means rock (petros = a small rock).
2. Jesus reiterates that here he is counting on Peter to be a building block for the Kingdom of God.
3. Then, Jesus says that "upon this rock I will build my church"... The translation for "this rock" is Petra, or 'a large rock foundation'. Jesus here is talking about Himself.
4. "Peter, on this Rock that you've just confessed ('You are the Son of the Living God'), I will build my Church."
5. The Church will be built on Jesus with Peter taking a roll in making sure that the Church is built on the life of Jesus and Jesus as God.

C. The Church

1. This is the first time that we find that Jesus mentioned the word "Church".
2. Church comes from the Greek 'ekklesia' ... literal meaning is "a called-out assembly". An assembly of people called by God!
3. For What? What are we called for? In our translation, it says, "and the powers of hell will not conquer it." In other translations it talks about the 'Gates of Hades' not being able to hold the Church back.
  - a. For the disciples, the Gates of Hades was a way to talk about eternal death or eternity in hell.
  - b. Another way of saying it is that the Church will knock down the Gates of Hades and storm in and steal people from their eternity in hell!
4. You ever wonder why we have a Church? You ever wonder why we meet here and worship and have classes and VBS and youth stuff and food and food pantries and mission trips and purple people and music, etc.? This is all preparation for us as "a called-out assembly" of people to storm the gates of hell!

5. Did you know that's what you signed up for? It's like I've said that my life purpose is to stand in God's back yard, reach over the fence and grab as many people as I can and pull them in! Those people outside of God's back yard are hurting in this world and are headed for an eternity in hell. How's that for blunt?!

D. The Keys

1. Then Jesus talks about giving Peter "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" and about whatever Peter forbids on earth will be forbidden in heaven and whatever Peter permits on earth will be permitted in heaven.
2. Let's make sure we translate this properly ... because the church does not get our will done in heaven; it is obedient to God's will here on earth.
3. Better translation would be ... "Whatever you forbid on earth will be what you've discovered is forbidden in heaven and whatever you permit on earth is what you understand as permitted in heaven."
4. Remember Peter on the rooftop in Joppa in Acts 10. Peter realized from the visions of non-Kosher food being offered by God that it was okay to offer a faith in Jesus Christ to Gentiles. Peter permitted that on earth with his time with the Gentile, Cornelius.
5. Peter used the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to open up the door for the Gentiles to come into God's back yard!

IV. Now Where To?

- A. Can you even imagine what this community would be like if each one of us knew the answer to Jesus' question in our hearts?
- B. Can you imagine how you and I would change the world around us if we made all of our decisions in life based on, "Jesus Christ is Lord ... the Messiah ... the Christ ... the Son of God ... and my Savior."?
- C. Can you imagine how our family life would change if each one of us made decisions in light of "Jesus Christ is Lord".
- D. If you and I lived our lives out of "Jesus Christ is Lord" and an understanding of the true meaning of "CHURCH", can you even imagine how eternity would change for our "connection people"?!?

V. The End

<sup>21</sup> From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that he had to go to Jerusalem, and he told them what would happen to him there. He would suffer at the hands of the leaders and the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and he would be raised on the third day.<sup>1</sup>

Guess where we are headed next week?

Let's Pray!

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<sup>1</sup>*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*. 1997 (Mt 16:20). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House.