

Who Do You Say That I Am

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I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew, the first gospel in the New Testament chapter 16. Matthew chapter 16.

In all my years of traveling quite a bit across the country one of the things that I enjoy are seeing the names of towns or the names of places. And every now and then you run across a place where you see the street signs and you wonder, how did they come up with that name?

A few years ago I was out in the deep South of east Texas, so to speak, and I came across a town. I was with a friend called Cut 'n Shoots—Cut, apostrophe n, Shoots. I was like, how do you come up with a name Cut 'n Shoots?

And he said, “Well, actually that is a pretty good story I think you will enjoy.”

And so he shared with me that a long, long time ago back when it was just a small spot on the road that there were two churches in that town. There was a Baptist church and there was a Methodist church, but there was only one building. So they had come to a peaceful agreement that what they would do is that they would use the building every other week for their services. So the Baptists would meet, theoretically on the first and the third and the Methodists on the second and the fourth.

They went on for several years. It was a very peaceful situation. Everybody was happy with it. And then somebody had the bright idea that on Easter Sunday they ought to all just be together. I mean, enough of this coming every... we need to come together for one large Easter service. And they had a service and they had an eating on the grounds and it was at that point in which they were eating. Don't mess with Baptists when they are eating, ok?

At that point they are eating on the grounds and a conversation was struck up. Somebody mentioned, I don't remember which one of the denominations it was, that the next week that they would be at the church. And the person who they were eating with disagreed being of the other denomination because they said, “No, no, no. This was your week so we are next week.”

And they said, “No, no, no, you don’t understand. This week doesn’t count, because that we were here together. We will be here next week.”

And, as you can imagine, pretty soon things got a little crazy and a little heated. It went on for several hours and they decided to have a joint business meeting. I cannot imagine a business meeting with two different churches in the same place, but nonetheless they did and things got a little heated and somebody ran out and ran back to the town and said, “Everybody come on down to the church.”

They said, “What is going on?”

He said, “I don’t know, but they are about to start cutting and shooting.”

And that is how Cut ‘n Shoot, Texas got its name.

Now that sounds humorous, but it is the real name of a real town. But in Matthew chapter 16 we are going to look at a passage beginning in verse 13 that more cutting and shooting has gone on than any other passage in Scripture.

You know, the Bible is a bloody book. It doesn’t take long you get to chapter three and there God is literally sacrificing an animal to atone for sins of Adam and Eve. Chapter four you have got Cain and Abel. There is bloodshed all throughout the Old Testament as you have got the Israelites doing battle with the Philistines, the Amalekites and every ite that they can find.

But the bloodiest passage in the Bible is Matthew chapter 16, not because it deals specifically with the cross, but because of what humanity has done with this passage over the last 2000 years. Those black eyes of humanity such as the crusades and the inquisitions and other things were all done in the name of Matthew chapter 16. There has probably not been a more potent, more explosive passage in all the Scripture.

Now I am convinced this morning that this is one of the easiest portions of Scripture to understand if we will just take our time, look at what it says and allow God to just speak to us.

Matthew chapter 16 beginning in verse 13. It says:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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.¹

This has been the focal, foundational passage over the years, 2000 years where those of different denominations, those of different faiths within supposedly the umbrella of Christianity have decided to start cutting and shooting each other over and decide who is right and who is wrong.

So let's begin to diagnose. The first thing we have got to deal with is this. Two questions are asked by Jesus. The first question is a very simple one. He says, "Who do people say that I am?"

If you will read through the gospel of Matthew up until this point over the last couple of chapters he has been dealing with the Pharisees. He has been dealing with the Sadducees. He has been dealing with the publicans. He has been dealing with the sinners. He had been dealing with all kinds of people who have all kinds of different opinions.

Notice what the disciples say in verse 14. They say, "Well, there is really four rumors going around. Some say you are John the Baptist. Some think you are Elijah. Some say you are Jeremiah. Or some think you are just a pretty good old guy."

Notice, none of them are negative. The rumors going around aren't that he is a scoundrel. The rumors aren't going around that he is cheating people. The rumors are not going around that he is a magician. In other words, the rumors that are going around is that he is somebody significant from the Old Testament who is come to give a special word to them.

The first choice is this. Some say you are John the Baptist.

Many of you know John the Baptist was born six month prior to Jesus Christ. His parents, his mother being Elisabeth gave birth to him. He was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He was prophesied in Isaiah chapter 40. He is mentioned in Malachi chapter four. He comes out of the desert.

Now listen to this, ladies. He comes out, that's right, and stands eating locusts. He is not your dream date. Ok? He comes out smelling and stinking. Deodorant is not a word that he understood. He comes out of the wilderness saying this message, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

He was the prophet of all prophets. In fact, Jesus said he was the greatest of the prophets, but yet the smallest in the kingdom of heaven would have been greater than he.

Why would some people say he was John the Baptist? Well, Herod had a good reason. King Herod put John the Baptist to death. Remember, he put his head on a charger for a little dance that took place in his palace. Yet he kept John the Baptist in seclusion in his

¹ Matthew 16:13-18.

prison because he could not get the message out of his head. The one thing that John the Baptist kept preaching to Herod was this. The relationship you are in with that woman is sin and God will not bless you.

When John the Baptist was killed his head was put on the charger. His death was ensued. His disciples took him away. When Jesus rose to prominence after that, King Herod was frightened that John the Baptist had come to life.

In fact, many people thought maybe he was John the Baptist because their messages coincided so much. That which John the Baptist prophesied Jesus came and he verified.

But John the Baptist was this. He was a religious leader. That is what he typifies. He was a man that had all types of people who were following him doing religious things. They were listening to sermons. They were getting baptized in rivers. He was a preacher. He was religious. But one thing we need to understand about John the Baptist is this. Everything he did was to point to Jesus Christ. Nothing pointed to himself. In fact, he said this one phrase that I love.

He said, "I must decrease. He must increase."

In other words, everything he said pointed to Jesus Christ and yet we have people today who find that Jesus Christ is a religious leader. He is not a religious leader. He is a relationship leader. We will deal with that in just a moment. But often times we as the world fall into this trap, that Jesus is the leader of one of the largest religions in the world.

Listen to me. Christianity and the world religion should never be put in the same sentence. They are not the same thing. Religion is doing something to gain favor of God. Relationship is having that favor in spite of what you have done.

But the second option, some say you are Elijah. Some of your Bibles will read Elias, just a Greek spelling of the Old Testament Hebrew word Elijah.

So why is this significant? The oldest, quote, religious holiday of humanity is what we know as Passover when the Jewish people, the Israelites celebrate coming out from captivity in Egypt. And when they do that Passover meal one of the portions of the service is they go and they open the door to see who has showed up? Elijah because the Bible prophesies that Elijah would show up again.

I don't think it is by any coincidence that in chapter 17 of Mathew Jesus is on the mount of transfiguration. He comes and he shows the brightness of his glory. Who is there with him? Moses and Elijah.

You get to the book of Revelation. You find about these two witnesses. You find Moses and Elijah.

And they said, “This is Elijah. This is the forerunner of Christ. This is the one who we speak about in the Passover.”

Who was Elijah in Old Testament history? He was a miracle worker. You think of the ministry of Elijah. Everything he did was magnificent. Everything that he did was supernatural. He could make bread and wine last longer than it was supposed to. He could pray and it didn't rain for three and a half years. He prays again and it starts to rain. He hangs out with the Baal worshippers. They pour his sacrifice with water. He says on simple prayer to God and fire consumes everything.

Everything he did was supernatural. He is upset after he eliminates the Baal worshippers. They are going to go tell Jezebel that awful queen what he has done. He outruns the chariots. I don't know how he did that except supernaturally. He was an incredible miracle worker and yet today just like in Jesus' day there are people who see Jesus as only a miracle worker.

He is the one we call on when we are sick. He is the one we call on when our marriage is in trouble. He is the one we call on when we have cancer. He is the one we call on when our baby is not born the way we desired our baby to be born. He is the one we call on when we have been fired from our job and we have no hope. He is the miracle worker. He works miracles, but he is more than a miracle worker.

If you see Jesus as simply somebody who can heal you of an infirmity, you miss the mark, because we are going to see in just a moment what Peter says back to Jesus is none of these options even though they are all aspects of who he was.

Then there is the third option. Some say you are Jeremiah.

Now there is no indication in the Old Testament that there was this concept or this idea that Jeremiah would be raised from the dead. Obviously they knew that he was deceased. He had been dead for centuries. But the life of Jesus and the life of Jeremiah were very much in parallel. Jeremiah was the only prophet in the Old Testament told never to marry. He was not to have a wife. He was not to have children. And here is this Jesus of Nazareth. Here is this man. He is coming. He doesn't have a wife. He doesn't have children.

They say, “Where do you lay your head?”

He says, “Wherever the foxes do. I just hang out. I go wherever I am.”

This is a lot like Jeremiah.

In addition, Jeremiah was strongly one who rebuked the nation of Israel. He exposed the sins of the politicians. And yet there are a lot of people who say, “Aha, this is Jeremiah.”

I think we can see this in today's society. There are some people who only see Jesus as the head of a political party. Folks, Jesus isn't a politician. He is a Savior, ok? And let me just be up front with you. He doesn't care what side of the aisle you sit on. Heaven isn't made up of Democrats. It is not made of Republicans. It is not made up of Independents or Green parties or Purple parties. We will find that in just a moment.

But yet at the same they said, "You know, there are some people who see Jesus as just a political figure."

I had a wonderful conversation with someone this week. We were discussing this very matter. And it is based on a book that we had both read recently and such and we both agreed on this statement, that there is a lot of people today who call themselves Christian because they want to be right. And everybody else is wrong.

Did you in the United States of America today some 90 percent of Americans claim to be Christians. I can promise you not 90 percent of America are true believers. I can promise you not 90 percent of America is going to end up in heaven one day because a lot of them fall into the trap of a Jeremiah or at least how the world saw him as Jeremiah because we want to say, "Hey, when we look at all the religions of the world, obviously Christianity must be the right one."

It is not about choosing which one is right. It is not saying this one is better than this one. It is not, well, in comparison to Islam or in comparison to Hinduism or in comparison to Atheism. That is not what makes a person a Christian. By the way, it has nothing to do with your morality. Your morality is based on your faith, but your faith is not your morality.

Those of you who read the Tupolo newspaper this weekend got a shocking glare at a study that was done over the last couple of years by the Barna Research Group. They discovered that a person's faith has nothing to do with their morality anymore. We don't do or we don't practice what we claim we believe anymore. And I will tell you why, because we don't believe it. If we believed it, we would change it. We will get to that in a moment.

Fourth option. He is a prophet. In other words, he fulfilled prophecies. He speaks prophecies and they come true.

In today's modern vernacular it is simply this. He is a good old guy. Jesus is the best of the lot. Jesus isn't the best of the lot, he says, "I am the only lot. I am the way." Not I am the best way. "I am the life." Not I am the best life. "I am the truth." No, no, no. Not the best truth, "I am the truth."

The first question Jesus asked, he said, "Who do those who do not understand me say that I am?"

Some people say he is a religious leader. Some people say he is a miracle worker. Some people say he is a political revolutionary. Some people say he is a prophet and a good man, but in verse 15 Jesus asks the second question.

Now remember, there is 12 disciples here, 12 apostles. They are all gathered up and he is teaching and he asks, “Who do you say that I am?”

Now notice. He did not use southern here. He didn’t say, “Now who do y’all think I am?”

Now that is what we would have said, right? Oh, we know who the world says you are, but who do you all? Or some of those from up north, who do you guys say that I am? He doesn’t say that. He says in the singular, “Who do you say that I am?”

And the one who speaks up is often the one who puts his foot in his mouth, but he is not going to this time.

Verse 16.

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”²

There couldn’t be a more potent statement in any of the Scripture because Jesus says what or whom do you say that I am. And Peter says, “You are the Christ.”

Now I want you to notice what Peter did not say because Peter says, “you answered correctly.” I am sorry. Jesus says, “You answered correctly.” Jesus says, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.” Jesus says, “The only way you answered the way you do is because the Spirit of God moved you to do so. Nobody convinced you. Nobody persuaded you. The evidence didn’t lean in my corner, but that God himself, the Father in heaven has shown you this answer.”

He says, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”³

Now notice something. He did not say, “You are Jesus.”

We live in a world today where people want to talk about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Let me tell you what Jesus is: the most popular name in Mexico.

Some of you say, “Well, that is offensive.”

No, it is not. Do you know what the name Jesus means? Redeemer. The question is this, redeemer of what? We use the phrase, “Jesus is Lord.” No. Jesus is the Lord. Hindus say, “Jesus is Lord.” He is one of the 300 million gods to them and have become a society, we have become an area that says this. “Oh, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” He didn’t call him Jesus. He didn’t say, “Oh, you are Jesus of Nazareth.”

² Matthew 16:16.

³ Ibid.

I mean, after all, there was lots of Jesus' running around. So many Jesus' that they had to identify him by his geography.

Now one of the things that I am getting used to living here in northeast Mississippi is something you all do that I appreciate. It is very reverent. When somebody addresses me they call me brother Jeff. That is not something people regularly do in the Dallas Fort Worth area. In fact, when I went to college I found out that the name Jeff was a very popular name.

If my wife Tracy wants to get my attention in a crowd, do you know what she calls me? Meyers. Why? Because I was in a specific organization in college. We had about 75 guys. We had five of us named Jeff. So we all went by our last names so we would know when we were being summoned. We knew when we were being called, because if you said "Jeff" on the campus of Baylor University when I was there, half the guys turned their head. That was just a very popular name.

Jesus is a popular name. Do you know why? Because it was the modern name of Yeshua, the Redeemer. It was a name you wanted to name your children.

Now think about Old Testament names. We don't name our children Nebuchadnezzar. We don't name them all those names that have negative connotations. When is the last time you have seen a kid named, oh, Beelzebub? You don't find it. But Yeshua, Redeemer? I mean this is a great name. This is like in the New Testament when we name our children Matthew. We name them Mark. We name them Luke. We name them Paul. Why? Because they are names with wonderful connotations from the Scripture. Jesus was a popular name.

He does not say, "You are Jesus." He does not say, "Oh, you are Jesus of Nazareth." He says, "You are, listen. The Christ, the Son of the living God."

Let me tell you what Peter was saying. This is the profession of professions. When he said, "You are the Christ," what Peter was saying to Jesus isn't, "Oh, you are a religious leader." He wasn't saying, "Oh, you can heal the lame even on the sabbath day." He wasn't saying, "Oh, you are leading a revolution." He wasn't saying, "Oh, you have fulfilled prophecies." He was saying, "You are the Savior of the world."

Now let me tell you what he meant by this phrase, "The Christ."

Let me put the whole Old Testament in about five minutes for you. Number one, the Christ, the Savior of the world, in order to make the statement, "The Christ," you have to come to an understanding that you are a sinner.

See, when Peter said, "You are the Christ," what he was essentially saying is this. I messed up. I have sinned. I have gone contrary to God's rules. I have gone contrary to God's law. If I say you are the Messiah, then I am admitting that you are right and I am

wrong. You have the answers. You have the keys and I do not. He was admitting that he was a sinner.

Second of all he was admitting this. By saying that Jesus was the Christ he was admitting that Christ was without sin. He was admitting that he was sinless, that nothing he did was in error.

Now, folks, this is important. Because in just a few verses Peter and Jesus get in a verbal battle. They get in an argument. And Peter disagrees with him on something. And addressing Satan behind him he says, “Satan, I rebuke you. Get behind me.”

He admitted that he didn’t have all the answers that Jesus did. He was sinless.

But by saying the phrase, “You are the Christ,” what he was saying is this, that the only means of salvation, the only means of atonement, the only means of forgiveness is in you. Not in a church, not in a special healing service, not in a political revolutionary, not in some fulfilled prophecy that salvation that forgiveness comes in you and you alone.

Now let me give you a little heads up. Peter did not quite comprehend everything that he was saying, because in a few verses Jesus makes this statement. He says, “I am going to suffer and I am going to die by the hands of those who oppose me. They are going to nail me to a cross.”

And Peter says, “Uh, uh, not my Christ.”

And that is when he says, “Get behind me, Satan.”

He recognized he was the Savior. He recognized he was the one who would forgive him. He just didn’t like the method he was going to do it.

When he says that thou art the Christ, let me tell you another thing he was recognizing, not only that he was a sinner, not only that Jesus was sinless, not only that he was the Savior—by they way, it says the Christ not a Christ not just Christ, the Christ—he was confessing that our sins have to be transferred to somebody else and that person is Jesus Christ.

One of the things that some of you may have noticed in the last couple of months, when I pray publicly I have tried to consciously make an effort to say the name Jesus Christ. Why? Because there is a lot of Christs running around. Jesus prophesied it in Matthew chapter 24.

He said in the last days there was going to be people coming saying, “I am the Christ. I am the Christ.” There is all kinds of people claiming that they are anointed. That is what the name Christ means, by the way. Do you know that that is the same name as Satan had when he was Lucifer?

Ezekiel chapter 28 describes him before his fall. It says he was the anointed cherub. Let me tell you what the word anointed is. Christ. That is literally what it is saying in Ezekiel 27. He was the Christ cherub. He was the anointed cherub.

But when here Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,”⁴ he is saying, “You are more than just being anointed. You are more than just being special. You are more than just a person of Nazareth. You are more than a miracle worker. You are more than a political leader. You are more than a religious leader. You are the only means by which my sins will one day be forgiven.”

It is the greatest profession that we have.

Nicodemus, the great man from John chapter three said, “Jesus, I don’t understand what you are talking about.”

The rich young ruler walked away because he did not know what to say, but here we have a response from Peter.

Now I want you to notice how Jesus responds back.

Verse 17.

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”⁵

Now he said something very clear here that most of us miss. He says the only way that you are able to say this, the only way you are able to profess this is if the Spirit of God moves and leads you.

I am going to share with you a frightening statistic that I learned this week. I am a die hard Southern Baptist. I know that. I have been one nine months longer than I have been alive. There are 16.3 million Southern Baptists in America. We can’t find 10 million of us.

Now when I say we can’t find, that means they haven’t been to church in so long, nobody knows where they are. Phone numbers have gone bad, addresses have changed. They have gone wayward. And they are so lost among the [?] showed up at another church. Over half of those in a Southern Baptist Church, we can’t find them. That bothers me. Let me tell you why.

Do you know how you become a member of a southern Baptist Church? First and foremost we have aisles, five of them in this church. We ask you to walk down one of them. At the end of the service you walk down the aisle. We consult you about your spiritual condition. Hopefully a person has been guided correctly. You are not supposed

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Matthew 16:17.

to join a Southern Baptist Church until you profess that you have sinned and that Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation and you ask him to save you of your sins.

Typically you fill out a card, a little sheet, something. And then do you know what we do? We baptize you. We schedule a time. It usually takes a couple of days, sometimes a couple of weeks. Get all the family together. We make a big deal about it. We take you up two flights of stairs here. We dunk you. You have got to go through a lot to be a member of a Southern Baptist Church which boggles my mind. Going through all of that and yet over half of us we don't know where they are.

Let me quote Steve Gates, pastor of Bellview Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Last week on his television program it was a replay of the January first service of 2006 and he made an interesting statement about those whom we can't find. We don't know where they are. They have no desire for the things of God.

He says, "The fruit rebuilds the root." And he said, "Based on the fruit, there must not be any roots." He said, "I can tell some of you are upset with me." He said, "Don't get upset with me. I am just the fruit inspector."

That is a great statement.

The question I have to ask is this. If supposedly even among Southern Baptist over half of us walk an aisle, say a prayer, fill out a card, get dunked in water and then have no desire of the things of God, did they truly respond according to verse 17? Because verse 17 Jesus says, "You respond when the Spirit of God leads you."

I am going to tell you something. I have learned and met a lot of people who walked an aisle because someone talked them into it.

Folks, at the end of every invitation you all are used to it. I say it all the time. I probably so say it so much that it is just become another statement. I make this statement so frequently. I say this. If I can talk you into it. I can talk you out of it.

It is a true statement. Some people walk down an aisle because of guilt. I will get momma and daddy off my back. I will get my husband off my back. I will get my wife off my back. This will be a good example for my kids. Whoo. I will be upstanding in the community. I can get the preacher to quit calling me.

Whatever it may be, Jesus says, "You didn't know this because the other 12 or the other 11 talked you into it. You didn't figure this out because you are intelligent. You didn't do this because it is popular, because it was not in those days." He said, "The only way you figured this out is because flesh and blood did not, but the Spirit of God."

By the way, the Bible speaks very clearly that it is the Spirit of God that pulls a person unto salvation. Listen. If I can talk you in it, I can talk you out of it.

There is a lot of people that have been talked into a lot of different things, but they have not been talked into Jesus, because Jesus isn't talked into. He is received by the Spirit of God.

But I want you to notice verse 18. Listen to what Jesus says after it is by the Spirit of God that reveals it. By the way, the only person in the New Testament that is said to have a direct revelation from God in this capacity was the apostle Paul.

It says:

“And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”⁶

Oh, that will get it going. Let's start debating. What is the real Church?

We may save that for another day. You want to get a good cutting and shooting going? Get into a discussion with somebody about what the real Church is, what the true Church is. Jesus tells us here.

He says, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”⁷

I want you to notice specifically four things that Jesus says happens when we respond appropriately. The first thing is this. You get a new name. He says you are now Peter. His name in Aramaic was Cephas. In Greek it was Simon. It simply meant shifting sand. He said, “Your name now is Petros. It is Peter.” It literally means a rock.

Now that rock can be about the size of a baseball up to about the size of a modern day automobile. That is a pretty good sized boulder, maybe a couple of tons. He says, “Your name is Peter.”

That is a new name.

You know, God is in to new names.

In Revelation chapter two verse 17 it says on those who come to him, to those who overcome he says, “I give you a new name that nobody knows.”

You know, everybody in here who has been saved. Everybody here who has come to Jesus for salvation, you have a name other than the name your parents gave you. You don't know it yet. Revelation 2:17 says, “I have given you a new name.”

All throughout the Scripture God renames people and places that he does things with. After all, he named Adam, Adam. Do you know what Adam means? Red dirt. Why did he name Adam? Because he was doing that work in him.

⁶ Matthew 16:18.

⁷ Ibid.

Adam named Eve, Eve, mother of the living. Notice he didn't name her mother of the dead. He didn't name her, oh, hot good looking woman that I like. He could have. But why did he name her Eve? Because her purpose was to bring forth all of us. Her name reflected her purpose.

There is a man going around by the name of Abram. But when God promised him Isaac he became Abraham. God did a new work in his life. He gave him a new name.

There is a man by the name of Saul. He was a murderer. He was a Christian killer. And God renamed him Paul. And here is Simon, shifting sand. He says, "You are now Peter."

Folks, you get a new name when you get saved. You may not know it. Some people actually over in the eastern world actually get a new name. If you have met a lot of Christians over there they have their birth name and then they have their Christian name. They practice that.

But Revelation 2:17 says we actually get a new name.

The second thing you get is this. You get a new foundation. Notice what he says to Peter.

"And upon this rock..."⁸

Now there are those in some belief systems that want to claim that Peter is the rock. If that were the case, why did not Jesus say, "Unto you, Peter, the rock..." He didn't say that. He said, "Unto you Peter, upon this rock..."

I hate to get into semantics, but give me about 30 seconds. The name Peter is Petros. The name for rock is Petra, big difference. Petros means the size of a baseball to a car. Petra means the size of Prentiss County. Petra means rock of Gibraltar. It means big. It means grandiose. It means cannot be moved.

And what Jesus was telling Peter was this, that the profession of faith that you have just said, that I am the Christ, that you are a sinner, that I am perfect, that I can transplant your sins to me and save you, is a rock of Gibraltar that nobody can chip against. No government against him. Nothing can come against because it is the rock. It is the foundation whereby you build your life.

1 Corinthians chapter three says this in verse 10. "No foundation can any man lay, but that which is Christ Jesus."

Not Peter, not in a confession, but who? Christ Jesus. Not Jesus, not Jesus of Nazareth, but Christ Jesus.

⁸ Matthew 16:18.

We get a new name. We get a new foundation, but listen to this. There is a new entity. He says, "I will build my church."⁹

The word "church" εκκλησια (ek-klay-see'-a) simply means an assembly. There are those who want to hedge their entire denominational affiliation upon what the name of the church should be.

Listen to me. If you want to stick to the Bible, do you know what it ought to be? Not the Church of Jesus Christ, by my church. That is what he named it, right? I will build... did he say, "I am going to build the Church of Christ"? Did he say, "I am going to build the Church of God in Prophecy"? Did he say, "I am going to build the Baptist Church"? Did he say, "I am going to build the Methodist Church"?

He said, "I am going to build my church."¹⁰

So if any of you all have a radical side of you and you want to start a true denomination, you need to start the my church denomination, because that is what Jesus called it. He did not say, "I am going to build the Church of Christ." He did not say, "I am going to build the Church of God." He didn't say, "I am going to build the Church of Peter."

He said, "I am going to build my church."¹¹

And it is a new entity. It is a new group. It is a new foundation built on the profession of Jesus Christ.

Listen. A church is not a church on programs. It is on a profession. What makes a church a church is not what they do, but whose they are. That is how you know who the Church is.

By the way, let me give you a scary parable. Jesus said that there are wheat and tares. He said that within every church there are those that are genuine. There are those that are false. In every church there are true believers. There are false believers. He says, "But my Church is on the foundation of the Christ, Son of the living God."

We will save the rest of that for later. But the final statement he makes is a statement that none of us have realized. It is a statement that has become depressing for so many that says, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹²

Two thousand years since the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ, those who profess Jesus Christ as Savior, not just religious leader, not just politician, not just miracle worker, have found themselves in persecution. It took

⁹ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

place in the Middle East. It has taken place in China. It has taken place in Sudan. In very rare accounts it has taken place in the western world.

You cannot go anywhere in the world, literally where you cannot find those who are persecuted for the name and for the belief in the faith of Jesus Christ.

And it looks by all appearances that what Jesus Christ said is not coming true, nor has it ever come true. He says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail.”¹³

Let me be honest with you. If you look at the world today, the world is winning. The world has been winning ever since Jesus ascended up into heaven. And so it appears that when Jesus says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it,”¹⁴ there is this attitude that we—listen—we, the Church of Jesus Christ, my Church, those who profess Jesus Christ, somehow, somehow can take over the world.

Do you know Jesus did not die on the cross and ascend three days later so that you can take over the world. In fact, James and John got ridiculed because they said, “Hey, when we do we get to take charge?”

He said, “This isn’t about taking charge.” He said, “This is about salvation.”

So what does it mean when it says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it”?¹⁵

It says here that hell has gates. I have been to a lot of places that have gates. Sometimes they are large facilities. Sometimes they are country clubs. Sometimes they are homes. They are subdivisions. We have all been someplace where there are gates. A gate is an entry point and it is an exit point. What a gate simply says is this. There is a division between you and me, or us and them. That is a division.

Now the interesting thing is it says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹⁶

Let me share with you the erroneous, the mistaken mentality that the majority of even the true believers of Jesus Christ have. They see verse 18 as a cosmic football game, that there is Satan and his team and there is God and his team. Satan has got his demons and all those that are lost and all those that just reek of brimstone and all the nasty stuff. And then God has got his saints and that there is a scrimmage line, so to speak, and that they line up and depending on how we wage warfare, we either push the ball toward the endzone or we get moved back towards safety.

If you were to use the football analogy of the Church of Jesus Christ and its relationship to the world, I hate to tell you, but we are on our own two yard line. We are not looking good.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

So what does it mean here? Does it mean that we are in this right, great cosmic football game? No. It does not say, “Storm the gates of hell,” does it? Does he say, “By this profession my Church will go and storm the gates of hell?” No. Does it say you will knock it down and beat them? No.

He says, “Pay attention. Hell is not going to win. The gates of hell shall not prevail.”

Let me take you fast forward to the book of Revelation chapter one, the last book of the Bible, Revelation chapter one. There is a place where the apostle John actually physically sees Jesus Christ face to face. He sees him like none other has seen him. His head and his hair are white as wool. His eyes are as a flame of fire. His feet are like brass. His voice is loud. It is such an experience that the apostle John on the island of Patmos in this vision literally falls on his face as if dead.

I want you to notice in verse 18 of Revelation one what Jesus says.

“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”¹⁷

You say, “Well, what does all this mean? I have never seen a gate that didn’t have a key.”

Gates have keys. You have to enter a key to unlock it or to lock it.

What Jesus Christ tells the apostle John is this. “The gates of hell, I have the key to it. I have the ability to open. I have the ability to close. And I have got some great news for the Church of Jesus Christ. The true, born again, saved body of Jesus Christ.” Are you ready for this one? Some day Jesus is coming back. And hell is winning. Sin is taking over and there is this attitude. We can become downtrodden and say, “You know what? We are on our own two yard line. We are backed up. It looks like we are going to get a safety.”

But what Jesus told them in Matthew 16 is this. “Guess what? I have got the key. The gate, I will open it up” And in Revelation chapter 19 I am going to tell you something. Jesus comes back and he lays a whooping on hell.

Now if you study the book of Revelation like we are doing on Sunday night there is a passage in chapter nine, it says that 200 million inhabitants of hell come out and they storm the earth. They wreak havoc on humanity. They wreak havoc on those that are the children of God. And what Jesus is saying is that the gates of hell shall not prevail.

He says, “No matter how hard it gets, no matter how bad the persecution is, no matter how much they make fun of you, no matter how much they ridicule you, you can take heart in this. Now listen. I am coming back.”

¹⁷ Revelation 1:18.

Folks, that is the blessed hope that Titus chapter two says.

It says we say, “Well, we have hope in the cross.”

Sure we have hope in the cross. We have hope in the resurrection. Sure we have hope in the resurrection, but let’s be honest. The cross was then. We live now. Let me tell you what the hope is today that the gates of hell shall not prevail and in any time and any moment the sky could open up in the east and he who has the key could come in and gain victory for all of us.

Folks, the gates of hell shall not prevail. So how is it that so many people miss the message?

Back to Matthew 16 and we will close. He says, “The gates of hell shall not prevail.”¹⁸

It goes on further in verse 22.

“Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.”¹⁹

That is a bad thing to do.

“Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”²⁰

Jesus had just said he would be put upon a cross, that he would be killed. Jesus says in verse 23 of Matthew 16:

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.²¹

How could it be that so many people in our culture, so many people in our world have missed the passage? That they have accepted a Jesus who is a religious leader. They have accepted a Jesus who is a miracle worker. They have accepted a Jesus who is a political influence. They have accepted Jesus who is just a prophet, but they have not accepted the Christ, the Son of the living God because the answer is here, you have to understand the cross.

Pay attention to me. The cross is not a fashion statement. The cross is not pretty. We have made it pretty. We have made it something that is [?]. We have made it something

¹⁸ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁹ Matthew 16:22.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Matthew 16:23-24.

we put on t-shirts. We have made it something we put on bumper stickers, we put on the wall, we put on the steeple. We put it everywhere.

In the first century you wouldn't put a cross on anything. No way, Jose. You would have never done it. It would be the modern day equivalent of putting the electric chair on your t-shirt, putting the electric chair around your neck.

Because what Jesus said was this, that the only way to understand is the only way to grasp it is to understand the cross.

Let me tell you something. Here is what the cross is. The cross isn't something that you grab on the way out of church one day because you are feeling guilty. The cross isn't something that you come and say, "Whoo, I am feeling bad about things. All right, Jesus. Let's take care of business."

That is not what the cross is. The cross is that place where the Son of man, the Christ literally gave up his life and your sins were transferred to him so that his righteousness could be transferred to you. The cross is not a pleasant thing. It is a horrific thing. The cross is not something that we should sing and clap about per se. It is something that we should be in awe of. Sure we should get excited about what Jesus did. Sure we could celebrate what he did, but down and dirty, folks, the cross was a horrific event that cost the Christ, the Son of the living God his physical life.

You will notice here in Matthew 16 that he rebukes Peter. Peter didn't get it. Oh, he made a great profession. But he didn't understand. Yes, he knew that he was the Christ, but he didn't understand that it was about the cross.

Folks, how many of you are Peters? Peters of Matthew 16, that you want Jesus because you know he is the right answer, you want Jesus because you want morality, you want Jesus because you want to be part of the religious movement, you want Jesus because he will take care of your cancer?

Folks, it is not about you. It is about him. And the true profession of faith is, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."²²

I am a sinner. You are sinless. My sin is transferred to the cross. Your righteousness is transferred to me.

There has been more cut and shoot in Matthew 16 than any other passage of Scripture. Do you know why? Because most of those doing the cutting and shooting have never gone to the cross. They are fighting over being right. They are fighting over being in power. They are fighting over saying, "I have the answers," when those who have the answer humbly go to the cross.

²² Matthew 16:16.

You read the story of Peter later in the gospels and you find him a humble man who comes back to Jesus and he says, "I now understand."

He says, "Feed my sheep. Feed my lambs."

The question I have for you this morning is this. Are you Simon or are you Peter? Has the profession been made? Has the confession been made?

We live in a world today where over half of those who claim the name of Jesus don't have a relationship with Jesus. They are a part of a religious movement. They may call out in times of the need of a miracle, but the true question is this. Who is Jesus? He is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Let's pray.