BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

Matthew 16:13-28

As we transition from our study in John to Matthew, the time frame for events is pretty close to the same. Matthew Chapters 15-18 cover a 6-month period of time which occurs between John Chapters 6 and 7. We just finished John Chapter 7 where Jesus has moved from Galilee and goes to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. Well as we begin to look at Matthew, that hasn’t happened yet. Jesus is still in His Galilean ministry. To set the stage for you, Jesus has fed the 5000 and given His bread of life discourse in Capernaum. He continues His teaching and healing ministry in Galilee, mostly up in the northern part. His primary focus during this period of time is to teach His 12 disciples and to get them on board with His mission. As we’ll see they have a lot to learn. I think at this point there is still this concept of Jesus as being an earthly, political Messiah who will soon establish His kingdom and throw off the yoke of Rome. Many people, His disciples included, had this idea about Jesus. As Jesus begins to make it clear that this is NOT His mission, many who once followed Him begin to turn away. Remember in John Chapter 6 Jesus asked His disciples, “Do you want to go away as well?”

The statement I made as we closed out our study of John last week – that there is a lot of confusion about Jesus and that the people are divided about Him – applies to our lesson today. Yes, some believe, but many do not. In fact, most don’t. So today we’re going to pick up the narrative in Matthew Chapter 16. Jesus is traveling around northern Galilee with His disciples…

READ Matthew 16:13-17

So we can see that there are various ideas floating around among the people about who Jesus is. Most of them are wrong. Here we see that some thought Jesus was a prophet of God. Others, including Herod Antipas, who had been responsible for John the Baptist’s death, thought that maybe Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. As we saw last week some think Jesus is a good man, a good teacher, possibly even the Messiah. Others, like the Pharisees believe that Jesus is a dangerous blasphemer. So the thoughts about who Jesus is are widely varied. I’ll be honest with you – as I was working on this lesson I began to wonder what I would have thought about Jesus had I been around back then. Frankly, we are at a major advantage over those people. We can look back and see the cross, the resurrection, His ascension and hear all the insight the Holy Spirit gave the various apostles which we read in our New Testament. The whole picture about who Jesus is has become clearer with time. Honestly, if I had lived back then I would have thought Jesus was no ordinary man, probably from God, but His claims of deity? I’m not sure I would have believed those. I certainly would have been skeptical. So I’m not ready to throw all those people under the bus just yet. I might have been right there with them, confused, skeptical, not sure.

So Jesus asks His disciple, v 13, “Who do you say that I, the Son of Man, am?” And Peter, speaks up on behalf of the other disciples and he makes that great declaration of faith, v 16: “You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Let’s give Peter credit. He gives the right answer. Jesus says, v 17, “Blessed are you, Simon the son of Jonah,” and He refers to Peter by his given Jewish name, by his birth name. You, Peter, just an ordinary Jewish fisherman, with no formal education, have just made a profoundly accurate statement about who Jesus is! How does Peter know this? Many other people out there don’t know this. They have some ideas about Jesus, but most of them are wrong. How then does Peter know this?

Well, Jesus points out something that is so important to understand. It is a theological truth that we need to talk about. Jesus says, first, “flesh and blood has not revealed this (truth about who I am) to you.” So, number 1, Peter did not gain this insight by his own understanding, by human reasoning, wisdom and knowledge, or by persuasive preaching. “but My Father in heaven (He’s the One who revealed it to you).” So, number 2, God is the One who revealed this truth to Peter. And this is a fundamental theological point. Peter, the other disciples, the early Christians, and all believers of all time, including you and me, we did not and we do not and we will not come to faith in Christ, understand who He is, apart from the revelation of God Himself to us through the Holy Spirit and through His written holy Word.

Let me ask you a question, to personalize this. “What was it like when God the Father, through the Holy Spirit and His word, revealed the Son-ship and the Messiah-ship of Jesus Christ to you personally?” You’ve probably never thought about your conversion experience in those terms, have you? So, think back to when you came to realize who Jesus is and you saw Him in all of His glory, beauty, majesty; you saw His great love for you poured out on the cross, how did you feel? It should have been more than just an intellectual ascent and just a gaining of knowledge. It should have gripped you to your core. What an amazing revelation!

In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul puts it like this: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him [they are foolishness], and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” So, bottom line, if we are to gain any understanding at all about who Jesus is, it must be revealed to us by God.

READ Matthew 16:18

This is the first time in the Bible that the word “church” is mentioned. Whose church is it according to v 18? It’s Jesus’ church. [show Gary Griffin slide]

What is the “rock” that Jesus builds His church on? What is the foundation on which the whole church rests? Is it on Peter? No, because Peter is flesh and blood, he is a human being. Is it on Jesus? Well, yes, but more specifically it is on WHO Jesus is – the foundation upon which the true church of Jesus Christ rests is on the fact that HE is the Son of the living God, He’s the Messiah that the Old Testament talks about. He’s not just a great teacher, or a good man, or a prophet. He’s the Son of God whose death on the cross paid the penalty for our sins and thru whom we have eternal life.

One last thing about v 18: “the gates of hell” refers to death. Even death, the ultimate weapon of Satan, has no power to stop the church. In fact, if you look down through the annals of church history, the deaths of martyrs have actually caused the church to grow and to be strengthened in her resolve. And on top of all that is our hope of the resurrection!

READ Matthew 16:19

Keys represent authority. The church then has been given authority by Jesus. Let me read what John MacArthur said on this: “Any duly constituted body of believers, acting in accord with God’s word, has the authority to declare if someone is forgiven or unforgiven. The church’s authority is not to determine these things, but to declare the judgment of heaven, based on the principles of the word. When they [the church] make such judgments on the basis of God’s word, they can be assured heaven is in accord.”

READ Matthew 16:20

Why would Jesus say that? Jesus’ instruction is based on the fact that His disciples and most of the people had a misconception of what the Messiah was going to do. So, it would be detrimental to Jesus’ mission of going to the cross if the masses were to instead elevate Him up as their king (recall lesson in John 6 after He had fed the 5,000 and they tried to take him by force and make Him king).

READ Matthew 16:21-23

Jesus is letting His disciples know His mission and it is not what they wanted to hear – “OK guys, there’s not going to be a kingdom, I’m going to die, and most of you are going to die also.”

And so Peter, again speaking on behalf of the other disciples, takes Jesus aside and rebukes Him. Peter rebukes Jesus, “No, Lord! You’re not going to die.”

Jesus realizes this is a ploy of Satan to try and move Jesus away from the shame and redemptive work of the cross and toward the glory and honor of men. This goes back to Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, Chapter 4, Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “These could all be yours, Jesus, all you have to do is fall down and worship me!” What was Jesus’ response? Matthew 4:10: “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” So Jesus recognizes this as Satan’s attempt to distract Jesus from His main mission. The people of Jesus’ day, including the religious leaders, would have rallied around Jesus and supported Him had He given them the Messiah they were looking for. But Jesus was operating on God’s plan and His mission was to die for the sins of the world. His mission was to go to the cross, not to defeat Rome.

READ Matthew 16:24

Wow, there’s a lot here! If you are going to come to Christ there are 3 things you must do if you want to truly be His disciple: (1) SELF DENIAL – recognize you cannot save yourself, you cannot be good enough to please God, you’re a wretched sinner, spiritually destitute – “poor in spirit.” (2) CROSS BEARING (Luke’s account says that this is done daily) – it’s a commitment, an attitude – it’s our willingness as those who name the name of Jesus Christ to endure ridicule, persecution, hostility, reproach, and suffer, possibly even to the point of our own death. (3) LOYAL OBEDIENCE, “Follow Me!”

When you get ready to go on a long trip, what is it you do? You say goodbye, you pick up your bags, and you follow the route you planned. The Christian life, in a sense, is a long journey and we can’t be sure where the journey will take us. But we are committed to staying the course.

At the end of this lesson we will be singing an old hymn, “Footsteps of Jesus” written by Mary Bridges Canedy Slade in 1871. One of the verses in that hymn talks about bearing our cross as we follow Jesus. Mary Slade put it like this: “If Thy way and its sorrows bearing… We go again… Up the slope of the hillside bearing… Our cross of pain. Footprints of Jesus…That make the pathway glow… We will follow the steps of Jesus Where’er they go.” There is no guarantee that the way will be easy, in fact, it probably won’t be.

READ Matthew 16:25-27

Don’t gamble with your eternal destiny. Your soul’s not worth anything this world has to offer. Rest assured there is coming a day of accounting, when Jesus will render His righteous judgment on everyone, v 27. By the way this is the first mention of the Second coming of Jesus in the New Testament. Here Jesus says that “He will repay each person according to what he has done.” Romans 2:6-8 says, “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

Jesus closes out our passage with a word of encouragement for His disciples… Matthew 16:28

I believe that this verse refers to the transfiguration of Jesus which will take place in the very next chapter. Jesus says, “some standing here…will see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” It will be Peter, James and John (3 of the 12) who will see Jesus in all of His glory, all of His royal splendor. John states in his gospel, “And the Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). Peter mentions in his second epistle that “we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

So Christians, how are you doing? Are you denying yourself? Are you taking up your cross daily? Are you following Him no matter where it takes you? Let’s sing a wonderful hymn about that – “Footsteps of Jesus.”