

May 13, 2018

“Jesus, the Christ”  
Matthew 16:13-20

FCF: Danger of missing the forest for the trees

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Jesus is the Christ, come to renew all things,  
(anchor) for whom we must long and to whom we must look.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

The English language has some funny expressions, one being, “*He cannot see the forest for the trees.*” It’s used of someone who is too involved in the details of a problem to be able to perceive the situation as a whole. “*The congressman was so involved in the wording of his bill that he couldn’t see the forest for the trees; he did not realize that the bill could never pass.*”

This makes me think of cases in which we give so much attention to particular words and phrasing within a larger statement that we lose sight of the main point. Unfortunately, we can do that with the Bible at times. And our text this morning is certainly a classic example of that.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 16:13-20](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

There are many types of picture puzzles. Think of “*Where’s Waldo?*” or “*Try to find the hidden keys*”. Another is “*What’s wrong with this picture?*” That can be said of our lives too.

What’s wrong with this picture? We have this nagging sense that something isn’t right. Or perhaps it’s more like a piercing scream. Childhood diseases, political corruption, rampant poverty, senseless crime - we know something isn’t right. Nearly everyone feels this. “*It ought not to be this way.*” Which, of course, implies an “ought”. But that’s a sermon for another time.

Every culture has felt this. Ancient Israel certainly did. And their Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, spoke of One to come who would reclaim, redeem, restore, and renew all things. This Son of Adam - one from the line of Abraham and David - would be the Christ, the Messiah. Well, there is good news. They were right and He has come. His name is Jesus. Jesus is the Christ, come to renew all things, for whom we must long and to whom we must look.

And how do we see that? How is He revealed as the Christ? Our text speaks to this both explicitly and implicitly. First, in a confession. Second, with an assurance. And, third, by a prohibition. Each of these makes clear that Jesus is indeed the Christ, come to renew all things.

**I. THE CONFESSION**

First, the confession ([READ Matthew 16:13-17](#)). There are some things worth noting.

*A) The Setting*

Certainly the setting, there at Caesarea Philippi, 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

1. Background

This was a Gentile region. At the time, it was a center of Caesar worship. In years before that, Baal and Pan. A place of human sacrifices. You can see the ruins of the cave and shrines today.

2. Significance

And Jesus chose this spot to press these things into the minds and hearts of His disciples.

*B) The Titles*

Which brings us to the confession itself and these exalted titles given to Him.

1. The crowds

Jesus begins with a question about the opinion of the crowds. And the common thread of the survey data is that these men were all prophets, spokesmen for God. Which sounds good.

2. The disciples

But was not enough. So Jesus presses the disciples. And Peter, the spokesman, answers (**READ Matthew 16:16**). The Christ - the long awaited Messiah, the ultimate prophet, priest, and king. The Son of the living God - in stark contrast to the counterfeit gods on display all around them.

*C) The Insight*

This was great insight on Peter's part. How did he know? Where did this come from?

1. Not naturally

Jesus refers to Peter's father and flesh and blood. The idea being this wasn't natural insight.

2. But super-naturally

It was super-natural insight. The Father had graciously opened Peter's eyes so that he could see who Jesus really is. For only God can reveal God. Only God can reveal God. And He had.

The point - Jesus is revealed as the Christ in what Peter says and how he came to say it.

*Application:*

All of which should fill us with humility, wonder, and awe. Let's just drill on this for a moment. How do any of us come to know anything true about Jesus? Remember that only God can reveal God. It's never by our cleverness or another's arguments. If we know anything about Jesus, we should be filled with gratitude that our hearts have been so warmed. And we should be filled with patience and committed to prayer that others would be so warmed as well.

Again, Jesus is the Christ for whom we must long and to whom we must look.

**II. THE ASSURANCE**

Which brings us to this great assurance (**READ Matthew 16:18-19**). What's going on?

*A) The Foundation*

1. A riddle

There's something of a riddle here, a play on words. In the Greek, Petros will be the petra.

2. Its meaning

What does this mean? The Roman Catholic position is that the rock is Peter. But that would be too unstable. And elsewhere, Jesus says He is the foundation. As a corrective, many Protestants say the rock is Peter's confession. But that doesn't go far enough. Peter and the other apostles are the rock as they confessed Jesus as Christ. On that foundation, He then builds His church.

*B) The Certainty*

1. Common teaching

And there is a certainty to this (**READ Matthew 16:18**). You might think this means Satan and his minions cannot withstand the assaults of the church. For gates are part of a city's defenses.

2. Correction

But the "gates of hell" (or Hades) was an expression referring to the realm of the dead. So what this really means is that Jesus is building His church on the foundation of the apostolic witness. And nothing, not even death itself, can stop this. Such is the certainty of His great purposes.

*C) The Testimony*

And how will this advance take place? Our testimony of Jesus (**READ Matthew 16:19**).

1. The imagery

Think about the images. Keys open and close things. They lock and unlock, bind and loose. These are keys in the hands of a steward, charged to care for the master's property, his house.

2. The meaning

Meaning that, as we go forth with the gospel of Christ, one of two things will happen. For those who receive this news, the door will be opened. For those who reject it, the door will be closed. The verb tense is worth noting (shall have been...). The idea is that we speak as messengers but with no authority of our own. We are simply royal heralds, relaying a message from the King.

There is wonder and assurance in this. And Jesus is revealed all the more as the Christ.

*Application:*

These words are especially where we can lose sight of the forest for the trees, the focus on the details hiding the greater picture. This text is where the mistaken idea of the pope as Peter's successor in Rome comes from. And I know I moved fast through the details but hear the certain assurance of this promise. Jesus is speaking of what He will do and how He will do it.

With certainty His purposes for His church will come to pass. No matter what pressure or resistance may come, the city on the hill will stand and draw all nations, all peoples, to itself.

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### **III. THE PROHIBITION**

There's one more thing (**READ Matthew 16:20**). We have the confession, the assurance, and now a prohibition. Put another way, Jesus reveals His person, His purpose, and His plan.

*A) Preparedness*

This may seem odd for Jesus to say. And it's not the first time we've heard this. But it surely does not come from a lack of readiness or any wavering on His part. It's something else.

1. The people

It has to do with a lack of preparedness. First, with the people and their misconceptions of the Messiah. If things unfolded too fast, there could be an uprising that would come to a bloody end.

2. The disciples

And then there were the disciples. Yes, they had come far in their understanding of their need and Jesus' true mission. But they had so much further to go. The time simply wasn't right.

*B) Patience*

The disciples could not have seen all this. So it meant patience, a waiting on His plan.

1. Trust not in yourselves

“Do not trust in yourselves, in what you see, perceive, and think you know so well.”

2. But in Me

“Trust in me and heed my command. Yes, I am the Christ. Live out of that in this very thing.”

He strictly charged them in this. And so we see Jesus as the Christ even here.

*Illustration:*

Our problem is that we are so near-sighted. Certainly I am. I had the prescription for my contact lens changed a few months ago and, while I can see things better at a distance, it's getting tougher to read small print. So you may be seeing some reading glasses here in the pulpit.

My whole life is like that. I am near-sighted. And trouble comes when I think I can see.

*Application:*

Think with me. How many times have our grand ideas collided with His ways and His timing? We're absolutely convinced that we have to have that romance to be fulfilled, that job to be successful, that healing to be whole, that answer to go on. And those things may not be bad in themselves. But Jesus may respond by saying, “No” or “Wait”. It could be the timing. Or even what we're asking. But given what we've seen about His person and purpose, we can trust Him.

Again, Jesus is the Christ for whom we must long and to whom we must look.

**CONCLUSION:**

But, of course, our hearts cry out, “*If this is true, when? When will this come?*” Much like Israel longed and looked for His first coming. Imagine a child and her family on a long road trip to some great destination. So much anticipation. But so much waiting. “*Are we there yet?*”

When will this come to pass? At Jesus' second coming. For now, we live in what the Bible calls the “last days”, the time between the times. That said, we have the assurance that that day is coming. For this is what He has said and His word is true and never changes. His death is a demonstration of His love and secures our future. His resurrection is the “firstfruits” giving us a foretaste and a certainty of the full harvest. His Spirit is at work in us and through us in real and substantial ways pointing and preparing us for what will one day be full and complete.

No, things are not the way they ought to be. That's true. But so too is this. The enemy's insurrection will be put down. The beachhead has been established. It's but a matter of time until the full force lands and all that is rightfully our King's is reclaimed. Jesus is that King. He is the Christ, come to renew all things, for whom we must long and to whom we must look.

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