

Matthew 16:13–20

¹³When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it. ¹⁹I 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.” ²⁰Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

1. Heartfelt words that express God’s truth
2. Words placed into our hearts by God himself

Sermon for Pentecost 14, St. Paul’s Green Garden, MI

Text: Matthew 16:13-20

Theme: “Know the Words We Must Speak”

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow redeemed,

When we look carefully at Jesus’ words and his teachings we have to come to the conclusion that he was more interested in what was in people’s hearts than simply what they did in their outward actions. Remember that Jesus said in the Sermon on the mount, “**When you give your gift to the poor don’t announce it with trumpets.**” If you do your good deeds only to be admired by people that is the only reward you will receive. Rather, Jesus said, when you do your charitable acts, do them because you love your Lord and because you want to express your love to him in a tangible way by showing your love to others.

Jesus told the Pharisees, “**out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.**” He was telling them, “**If your heart is devoted to God because he has saved you from your sins that is going to come out in your words and then in your actions.**” The same is also true if you are only trying to please God in an outward way; that too, will come out in the words you speak.

In Matthew 16 we find Jesus asking his disciples a question that every disciple, yes, every one of us, needs to answer. Jesus asked this most important question because the answer reveals what we believe about him. In other words, how we answer Jesus’ question shows whether or not we believe and receive him as

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our own Savior from sin. Peter's answer shows us the words we must speak. These most important words are heartfelt words that express eternal truth. When such words come from our hearts we can be sure they are words placed into our hearts by God himself.

The Savior had trained and taught his disciples for about two years. During that time they had walked with him around Galilee and Judea and to outlying areas of what we call Palestine. In Matthew 16 he and his disciples were in Caesarea Philippi, a town near the headwaters of the Jordan River, north of the Sea of Galilee. Finally, after two years of teaching Jesus had the opportunity to ask his trainees, what the common people were saying about him. **“He asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”** This was not a question Jesus asked as if he wanted to find out how popular he was with the people. He was not interested in being a celebrity. His mission was to seek and to save the lost and he wanted to know what people believed about who he really is. The disciples quickly supplied the answer: **“They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** You can see that people had all kinds of false ideas about Jesus. Many were not even thinking in terms of the Savior, the Messiah whom God had promised. By this time Herod had put John the Baptist to death. As time passed some people who heard Jesus preaching about the kingdom of God, probably noticed the message was the same as John's. Some believed that John had come back to life. Herod himself even thought this about Jesus for a time. Others knew the prophecies from Malachi, that before the Messiah came to the world Elijah himself would come. But Jesus had already told his disciples that John the Baptist was the second Elijah prophesied by Malachi. Others labored with the mistaken idea that Jesus might even be one of the Old Testament prophets who had come back to life, perhaps to prepare the way for the Messiah.

It should not surprise us that even though Jesus preached and taught among them, most of the Jews didn't accept Jesus as God's promised Savior, even though they longed for him and wanted him to come. Their idea about what the Savior should be was very different from what God had promised. The Lord promised a Savior from sin and rescue from Satan's power. The Jews wanted a return to the earthly glory they had under kings David and Solomon, and a quick fix to the problems of government oppression by the Romans. But that was not why Jesus had come. So the Savior proceeded with his question, asking his own disciples, “Have you understood what I am teaching. What about you? Who do you say that I am?”

Today people have many of their own ideas about who Jesus is. Islam, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses among others all believe that Jesus was a

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great prophet. They would agree he spoke much truth. But look at each of those religions closely and you will see that they teach we can be saved by the good works we do. Each one teaches that God is pleased with us if we do the works he commands. And my sinful nature does not object to that sort of teaching. My sinful nature has not changed since sinfulness was born in the Garden of Eden. And your sinful nature and mine will never admit that IT needs a Savior. This is why we need to keep drowning him each day by recognizing and admitting our sins against God and repenting before him for all our wrongs.

So we listen carefully as Peter answered Jesus' question for all the disciples, **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** When Peter called Jesus the Christ he was saying, **"We need a Savior from sin and you, Jesus, are that very Savior whom we need and whom God promised."** You see, Peter was admitting that Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden of Eden had infected all of us with sin. There is nothing that any of us can do to save ourselves. We need to have God save us by his grace. So when Peter confessed, **"Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God"**, he was saying Jesus, **"I receive you as my Savior, who came by God's grace and who saves me by his grace."**

And we don't have to look very far back in our own lives to see our own filthy attempts to save ourselves. Each time we offer God our own works, or think that we have made up for a sin because we have now obeyed a command of God, or when we think that God should surely love us for some good thing we did, we are telling Jesus we don't need him as our Savior. When we take a good look at ourselves and recognize the deep sinfulness of our hearts then we flee again to Jesus and confess, **"You are the Christ, the Messiah I need because I am a sinner."** And our Lord Jesus receives us each time as we accept God's promise that Jesus' righteousness is the payment for our sins. These are the words we need to speak, because they are God's truth. And we are saved only through God's truth.

This truth is what Jesus promised he would build his church upon. He said to Peter, you are *petros*, you are the rock, but I am going to build my church upon the *petra*, the bedrock of the truth you confessed. Jesus' church is built and stands on the truth that he alone is our Savior from sin. The Roman church uses this verse to say that Peter was appointed by Jesus to be the first Pope. This is plainly false as we read the original language. Where the truth of the gospel is proclaimed, where the word of God and the Sacraments are used, there you will find believers who trust Jesus alone as their Savior from sin.

And it is this gospel that Jesus gave to his church as her inheritance to prove that the forgiveness of sins comes from Jesus himself for he said to Peter, **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will**

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be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

The Christian church, you and I and all believers, receive the ministry of the keys to use. This is the gospel of God’s promises to forgive our sins for the sake of Jesus’ death and resurrection. So whenever you tell a repentant sinner that God forgives him for Jesus sake you are relieving him of his burden of sin, you are loosing him from sin.

But when you tell an impenitent person that his sins are not forgiven because he has refused to receive Christ’s gracious forgiveness then you are binding his sins to him, they remain with him and the gate to heaven remains locked to him or her. These also, are words we must speak because they are God’s truth. So when we confess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, when we use God’s word to open or close the gate of heaven, we do others the greatest service possible by telling them who Jesus is and what he has done. We tell them that we believe ourselves to be sinners who are saved by grace alone and that they too, are saved by grace alone. Yet a solid confession of faith, the rock of Jesus’ truth, is not something we have because of our own knowledge. Our sinful nature detests and rejects God’s truth. The only way we can have this truth is when God himself places it into our hearts.

I once had a man tell me, “I am just as moral as you are.” He would not accept the fact that he needed a Savior to take away his sins. He seemed to believe that because I was a pastor I was saved by my works, and that he, too, could be just as good as me. You see how stubborn the sinful nature is. Paul wrote, “**The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.**” The sinful nature rejects all of God’s truth. So even when people think they have so much wisdom and that they know all about who Jesus Christ is and what he taught, they really have no concept of Jesus unless they confess that he is the Savior sent from God to pay for our sins. If they don’t confess those words of God’s truth, they are using only their own corrupt, sinful minds to analyze Jesus. The corrupt sinful nature will only believe what it tells itself, namely, “I can be my own savior and here is how Jesus teaches me to do this.” Words like those show the sinful nature’s rebellion against God.

Despite all this, God in his limitless mercy has revealed his truth to us. This is the same truth that the Father revealed to Christ’s disciples through the teaching of Jesus while he was with them. Not only did God reveal his truth to them, but he caused them to be born again so that they like Nathaniel earlier and Peter now, could confess that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

Jesus told Peter, “**Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah,**” Jesus again used the word “blessed” which also means that the person so blessed is “happy.” Peter could be happy that God the Father and the Holy Spirit had moved him to believe

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and confess that Jesus is his Savior. We also can be happy. We are happy because we are no longer shackled by the chains of the darkened thinking of our sinful nature. God has brought us into the light of his truth, a truth that really does set us free. For now we have the confidence of God's promises that we will never need to despair when the end of life comes. We never need to despair when one of our loved ones dies as a believer in our savior because we know they will be with Jesus. We are happy because we can count on God's sure promises that he loves us and takes care of us. We are happy because even when we experience trials and hardships in this life we are confident that our loving Lord is not punishing us—he promises that he has punished Jesus for all our sins. So we are happy because we know God disciplines those he loves. When we confess that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God, we confess all these truths that God himself has placed into our hearts—truth that comes from him.

Now that God has revealed his truth to us we are convinced that these are words that we must speak. We must speak these words because we like the apostles are our Lord's ambassadors. When he revealed his truth to us and convinced us of his truth he made us his ambassadors of truth. This truth is light in a world of darkness. This is the one truth that needs to be known around the world. When we see news reports and film footage of people in other countries, some of which are patently opposed to the Christian faith, it is a reminder of how many people in the world still do not confess this truth. How sad it is that so many believe their reason for living rises or falls based on something that they can do. How happy you are to know that Jesus, by his reason for living, has proved God's truth—truth that you can confess; truth by which we have life. These are the words that we must speak. Amen.