

Dear Friends,

*“Who is Jesus?”* If you search around, you find a multitude of answers. Some people believe he is a myth. Others believe he was a good and wise man. Still others confess that he was sent by God to save the world. If you press them on what that means, you will get different answers. Some people will tell you that the answer does not matter. The reason is that they don’t see how Jesus changes their life.

The answer to **“Who is Jesus?”** does matter. It matters because Jesus asked the question of his closest associates. **“But what about you, who do you say that I am?”** He was training them to be spiritual shepherds sent by God. They were going to have responsibility for people’s eternal souls.

The answer also matters because Jesus is directing the question to you and me and every human being.

God’s Word tells that the answer matters. In Mark 16:16 Jesus says, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved and whoever does not believe will be condemned.”**

What is the answer? Peter gives the correct answer. He calls Jesus, **the Christ**. We want to see why this is correct. We **Confess Jesus as the Christ**. This is what the Father has revealed to us in his word.

### **1. There is one correct confession of Jesus.**

Today if you tune into a discussion about Jesus and religion, you will hear that it is loving to accept different confessions and beliefs about Jesus and God. St. Peter did not hold this view. In Acts 4:11,12 he confessed, **“Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”** Today, this is considered blasphemy, it is not inclusive of other beliefs. Where did Peter get this? He got it from Jesus. It was here in Matthew 16. Jesus teaches us that there is one correct confession of himself.

A. I mentioned in the introduction that there are many confessions of Christ today. This was also true when Jesus was alive. These are human ideas.

1. When Jesus asked his disciples what people were saying about him, they answered, **“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others,**

**Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”** Note first that Jesus was dwelling among the Jews, God’s people, not the Gentiles. What were God’s chosen people saying about Jesus? That he was a prophet. It was a respectful confession, but it was not a complete or accurate one. Why was this not good? The Jews looked upon the Messiah as God. When they said Jesus was a prophet and not the Messiah they were saying he was not their God and Savior. He was a mere man.

2. This is serious, because Peter makes the point in Acts 4 that Jesus is the cornerstone of salvation and the only name by which people can be saved. Telling someone that not believing in Jesus is wrong, is considered impolite and politically incorrect. However, we care about their soul. We don’t want them to perish. We are going to speak the truth in love.

B. Someone might say, “What if Peter is wrong in Acts 4?” Let’s see what Jesus says in Matthew 16. He tells what the correct confession is.

1. Jesus asks the disciples what they say. Peter answers for the group in verse 16, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”** Peter is not denying that Jesus is a prophet. He is. However, Jesus is also the Son of God.

People today are confused about Jesus, because they don’t know God. There is a real need to get back to Scripture. The Jewish people of Jesus’ day understood that the God, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was alive and holy. They understood that sin comes between us and the living God. People like Peter believed that the Savior was coming into the world to make people holy and right with God. Peter correctly understood that no mere sinner could do this, but God himself was coming into the world to bring salvation.

2. Jesus rejects those other confessions and accepts Peter’s when he says, **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”** Peter is correct and he is blessed in knowing Jesus as Savior and God. The reason Peter got it right was because the heavenly Father revealed it to Peter through God, the Holy Spirit.

I said before that people don’t know God and therefore don’t know Jesus. The reason is that so many churches and people have abandoned hearing, studying and thoroughly digesting the Bible. It is essential that we know Jesus, the Savior. It is essential that we proclaim the Savior to the world. The only way we can do it, is by going to the source, the revelation of Jesus, which is Scripture. St. Paul reminds Timothy in his letter, **“Holy Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation.”** (2 Timothy 3:15)

## 2. The Church is built on this confession.

Someone who is new to Christianity might ask, “How is Jesus the Messiah or the one and only Savior?” Jesus provides several insights that help as he comments after Peter’s confession.

A. Comment #1 comes in verse 18: **“I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church...”**

1. The name “peter” or “petros” in the Greek is a small “pebble” or “rock.” When Jesus says, **“and on this rock”** that word “petra” refers to a slab or rocky ground on which you can build a firm foundation. What Jesus is saying is that Peter and all other believers will be the stones or bricks that are built on the foundational “rock.”

2. What is the rocky slab or foundation that Jesus refers too? It is the confession that Jesus is the Messiah or Christ. We believe that we are by nature spiritually ignorant and cut off from God by our sins. We are destined for eternal death. Jesus who walked on water and raised the dead came into the world to bring us from spiritual death to life.

The religious leaders asked Jesus for a sign at the beginning of this chapter. Jesus said they would be given the sign of Jonah. The prophet Jonah spent three days in the belly of the fish and then came out. Jesus would suffer and die for our sins and after three days rise again. This is our sign that Jesus is who he claims to be, the Son of the living God and our Savior.

B. This confession of Christ is powerful. Jesus tell us that because of it Hades is in trouble. Hades refers to hell, a real place where Satan and his followers will end up.

1. The reason Hades is in trouble is because Jesus has given his church the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is picturing heaven as having gates that lock and unlock. The church locks the gates when a person does not repent of their sins. When someone repents and looks to Jesus for forgiveness, the church has the keys to open Heaven. The key is not a physical key, but it is telling someone *“You are forgiven.”* or *“You are not forgiven.”*

2. Jesus is foreseeing that the disciples will go out with the message and proclaim the Good News of forgiveness in Jesus. As they did this they would be knocking down Hell’s gate and rescuing people from eternal death to eternal life. The forces of Hell would not be able to stop this saving work.

Conclusion: This confession of Peter and the statements of Jesus are among the most controversial.

In verse 20 we see that Jesus ordered his disciples not to say anything at that time. Before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, proclaiming this message may have led to confusion. We find out in the very next verses of this chapter that the disciples did not fully comprehend the mission of the Messiah. They were not yet ready to take up full time Gospel ministry.

You and I who have no such restriction. We have been ordered to share the good news with all creation.

As Hurricanes are crashing down on our nation and earth quakes rattle our world maybe it is time to set aside our timidity and to boldly share the Gospel. We need to be gentle and humble in our confession. Yet, we cannot set aside the truth of salvation for political correctness. God tells us and we need to tell others that there is only one name under heaven by which we can be saved. Jesus is the Christ. This name forgives sins and opens heaven. This is what the church has always confessed. This is what we confess today. Amen.

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Exodus 6:2-8 (NIV 2011)

2 God also said to Moses, “I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty,]a[ but by my name the Lord]b[ I did not make myself fully known to them. 4 I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

6 “Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. 7 I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.’”

Joshua 4:1-9 (NIV 2011)

*Joshua places a memorial near the place where the Jordan River stopped flowing so God’s people could enter the promised land.*

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, 2 “Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.”

4 So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, 5 and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, 6 to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 7 tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”

8 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down. 9 Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been]a[ in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON - Romans 11:33-36 (NIV 2011)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and]a[ knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?”]b[  
35 “Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?”]c[  
36 For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

#### Revelation 7:1-8 (NIV 2011)

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. 2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” 4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

5 From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,  
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,  
from the tribe of Gad 12,000,  
6 from the tribe of Asher 12,000,  
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,  
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,  
7 from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,  
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,  
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,  
8 from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,  
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,  
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

#### GOSPEL READING - Matthew 16:13-20 (NIV 2011)

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, [a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades [b] will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be [c] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be [d] loosed in heaven.” 20 Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.