

Matthew 16B

- Over the past several weeks, we've watched in bemusement as Jesus trained His disciples how to serve the Kingdom program
 - Those men struggled to make sense of it all, and to be fair Jesus' lesson would have been hard for anyone to grasp
 - Because Jesus wasn't running just another rabbinical school preparing men to perpetuate Pharisaic Judaism
 - Jesus was a rabbi unlike any other...and therefore His ministry would be unlike anything else the disciples had known before
 - The Lord was preparing these men to lead a new, worldwide movement of God
 - They would live on the frontlines of a spiritual battle for truth and the salvation of the world...and that's no small assignment
 - So where do you start in preparing someone for such a high calling?
 - Well, Lesson #1 is knowing that Jesus is God... they were in the company of the Messiah, the Lord's anointed One
 - And Lesson #2 is appreciating the significance that God became man to live and die for us
 - Because at the end of the day, the Church isn't about miraculously feeding hungry people or healing diseases
 - Our mission as ambassadors of Christ is saving souls, calling men and women to be reconciled to God...that's what all this is about
 - So understanding that Jesus came to bring forgiveness and hope and eternal life to lost sinners is paramount
 - And more than that, those men needed to understand that they were to do it as Christ did it, following in Jesus' footsteps
 - Just as the Son of God came to seek and save the lost, so will His disciples seek to serve the lowly and needy with the good news
 - Grasping all that is a tall order, so perhaps it's understandable that these men were so slow to catch on to what Jesus was saying and doing
 - But last week they had a breakthrough of sorts

- Look back to the end of prior passage in vs.11-12

Matt. 16:11 “How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Matt. 16:12 Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- Jesus chastised them for their lack of faith in Him and for failing to pay attention to all they had seen and heard
 - The final straw was their ignorance of Jesus' comment about beware the leaven of Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians
 - Jesus was speaking of the dangers of each group's false teaching while the disciples were thinking only of trivial matters
- After Jesus corrected them, Matthew says then they understood what Jesus meant, and that gives us hope they turned the corner
 - Maybe they were starting to grasp the enormity of what was happening around them
 - And most importantly, maybe their hearts were finally opening to Who Jesus was and what His arrival meant?
- Well there's only one way to find out...so Jesus decides it's time to test their understanding starting with Lesson #1

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

Matt. 16:14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

Matt. 16:15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Matt. 16:16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

- Matthew tells us that Jesus goes to the district of Caesarea Philippi
 - This district sits at the base of Mt. Hermon, the tallest mountain in the Middle East, nearly 9,000 ft high
 - Today, the northern half of the range is in Syria and the southern half is in Israel

- In Jesus' day, the region was largely Gentile, much like the eastern side of the sea of Galilee
- This area was under the rule of one of Herod the Great's descendants, Herod Philip II
- And at the foot of Mt. Hermon sat a small town called Paneas, which Philip renamed Caesarea to honor Caesar
 - At that time, there was already another city called Caesarea in Judea built by Herod the Great on the Mediterranean coast
 - So to distinguish one town from the other, this Caesarea became known as Caesarea Philippi
- It's original name, Paneas, came from a temple in the town dedicated to an ancient pagan god, Pan
 - Pan was a figure of Greek mythology depicted as half man, half goat
 - He was the god of nature and outdoors, and his followers engaged in wild fertility rituals and other extreme behavior
 - For that reason, we get the word "panic" from the god's name
- The temple of Pan was located in a cave at the base of Mt Hermon, the ruins of which are still visible today
 - Scholars have assumed that this encounter between Jesus and His disciples took place somewhere near the Pan temple
 - But Mark says this conversation took place among the men as they traveled to Caesarea Philippi
 - So perhaps they were near the Pan temple, perhaps not
- In any case, Jesus asks His disciples who do the people say the Son of Man is, and Mark records the question as who do they say I am?
 - For the first time, Jesus acknowledges the elephant in the room...the question of His identity
 - The answers they offer reveal the confusion and mystery that surrounded Jesus' ministry
 - But remember, Jesus already knew what was being said, so He's not asking the disciples this question because He was curious

- Jesus was actually asking to find out what the disciples are thinking...which view have they accepted?
 - They tell Jesus that some in the crowds were saying Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist
 - We know who was principally responsible for that rumor
 - Matthew told us earlier that Herod Antipas, the man who killed John the Baptist, thought that Jesus was the resurrected John
 - But since both men were alive at the same time, this was a ridiculous conclusion
 - Others were saying that Jesus was Elijah, the prophet well known for being taken up in a chariot of fire at the end of his life
 - Jewish people knew that Malachi prophesied Elijah would return to announce the Messiah's arrival
 - So it was natural to assume that Jesus was Elijah come to announce the Kingdom's arrival
 - But the Bible says John the Baptist was the herald sent to announce the Messiah's first coming
 - And Elijah's return awaits to announce Jesus' Second Coming, so this was also illogical
 - Then others were saying Jesus was a resurrected Jeremiah, which is even stranger
 - The Bible never says Jeremiah will reappear, so perhaps some assumed Jesus was Jeremiah based on similarities in ministry
 - Jeremiah ministered to Judah during a time when a foreign kingdom had conquered Jerusalem and held the city
 - And like Jesus, Jeremiah spoke of a coming Kingdom for Israel
 - But there was simply no basis for drawing such a connection
 - In fact, speculation seemed to be the order of the day, because some were saying Jesus was one of the other prophets resurrected they say
 - It seems as if any suggestion was fair game, and obviously, the people weren't constrained by Scripture or even logic

- Meanwhile, they ignored what Jesus actually said about Himself, as well as His miracles, especially the Messianic miracles
- And they ignored what John and Scripture said about Jesus fulfilling the prophecies of the Messiah
- And when it comes to understanding what God is doing, once you set aside Scripture, all you have left is speculation
- So obviously the crowd has many ideas for who Jesus is, but did you notice the one, obvious option that the disciples didn't mention?
 - Surely, we know some in the crowd were saying Jesus was the Messiah
 - So why didn't the disciples at least mention that possibility?
- I think that's why Jesus began by asking what the crowds were saying... it gave the disciples an easy way to suggest that Jesus was Messiah
 - And yet it seems that most of these guys either hadn't come to that conclusion yet themselves
 - Or they were too nervous to be the first to make that suggestion
 - And in Jewish culture, fear of blasphemy was a real thing, because the penalty was death under the Law
- But thank the Lord that He included Peter in this group, because where others feared to tread, Peter charged ahead
 - Jesus forces the men to enter into the conversation everyone was avoiding
 - He asks them plainly who do you say that I am? It's time to get them on the record
 - And though the text doesn't describe the scene in detail, here's how I imagine it
 - Mark says they were on their way to Caesarea Philippi, so I imagine the men walking in a small group with Jesus in front
 - Looking straight ahead, Jesus asks the question and there's a pregnant pause...no one wants to be the first to speak
 - The men start exchanging glances trying to figure out the next move...do they say the obvious and risk blaspheming?

- Peter senses the awkwardness and can resist filling the silence
- Moreover, Peter knows what the correct answer should be...inside himself the answer seems obvious and surely everyone knows it
 - In fact, he can't understand why the others aren't speaking up
 - And he's even a bit embarrassed at his own silence, so as the seconds tick by Peter finally blurts out...
- He says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
 - But in Greek, Peter's statement has a particular feeling that's not evident in the English translation
 - Before each noun, Peter adds the article "the" which gives his words an emphatic tone
 - Literally in Greek, Peter said you are "the" Christ, "the" Son of "the" God, "the" living One
- All of those articles leaves us with the impression Peter was making a point to someone
 - And given what he's saying, I don't think he was trying to convince Jesus
 - After all, if you believe Jesus is the Christ, you don't assume He needs your help understanding that
- I believe Peter was making a point to his comrades and probably even to himself
 - This was the first time Peter let those words escape his mouth and he wasn't doing it tentatively
 - He's owning it publicly, and he wants everyone to know it
 - And I suspect he's also making a point to the other disciples that their hesitation to speak up was a problem
- This is one of Peter's finer moments... it's the moment Peter assumed the mantle of leadership among the disciples
 - And Jesus recognized and confirmed Peter's leadership, but first Jesus makes clear that Peter's courage and initiative was not entirely his own

Matt. 16:17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

- Peter declared that Jesus is the Messiah, but more than that, he has declared some remarkable things
 - He has said that Jesus is the son of God, effectively introducing the concept of the plurality of the Godhead
 - Then as now, orthodox Judaism didn't acknowledge the Trinity
 - Yet here's a Jewish man declaring that God had a Son spiritually speaking, and Jesus was that Son
 - That was quite a leap in understanding
- Peter stepped forward and in one statement changed the course of Jewish belief and established a fundamental Christian theology
 - He affirmed that Jesus was the promised Seed, the Messiah, the One sent by God to end sin and the devil's reign of terror
 - Moreover, he said Jesus is God himself, incarnate in the flesh
 - Fully man and fully God, the Son of God, a part of the Godhead
- Peter was the first among the disciples to reach these conclusions, and even John, who later tells us Jesus is God and was with God, didn't speak up here
 - No, it was Peter who came to this conclusion first, and as such he deserves our admiration
 - And yet Jesus goes on to say that though Peter was first, he wasn't operating by his own intellect or reasoning
- Jesus says Peter was responding to a work of God in his heart, for it was the Father in Heaven who revealed this truth to Peter
 - Before we consider the significance of this revelation, notice that Jesus' words confirm both aspects of Peter's confession
 - If it were true (as some critics say) that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah, then why didn't Jesus correct Peter here?
 - Instead, Jesus acknowledges Peter's confession saying it was the result of divine revelation, which clearly indicates Jesus agreed

- Secondly, notice that Jesus says the source was His Father in Heaven, affirming Peter's second statement that Jesus was the Son of God
 - So Jesus confirms both that He is the Messiah and He is the Son of the living God, which confirms the Trinity
 - That God is One existing in Three Persons
- Notice also that Jesus uses Peter's full name which was Simon bar Yonah
 - Bar means "son" in Hebrew and Yonah is Jonah
 - So Peter's full Hebrew name was Simon, son of Jonah
- Why did Jesus start by addressing Peter so formally? Because this was an important, solemn moment...a turning point in Peter's life
 - Peter stepped forward declaring publicly his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and his belief that Jesus was God incarnate
 - And as he did, Peter crossed over a line from which there is no return
 - Either Peter was correct and if so, he has defined the belief that every follower of Jesus after Peter must also confess
 - Or else he was wrong, in which case Peter just committed the sin of blasphemy and should be put to death according to the Law
- This is his defining moment, and Jesus' response makes clear which of those options holds true here: Jesus says that Peter was blessed, not condemned
 - Moreover, Jesus says Peter's remarkable insight was not his own, but instead was a revelation of the Father to Peter
 - What Peter just said, he couldn't have said unless the Father in Heaven had given Peter the understanding he now possessed
 - Without that revelation, Peter would have remained as clueless as the others
 - So as we look at this moment, we need to see it with spiritual understanding, stepping back to see it from God's vantage point
 - Scripture is telling us that in that moment as the disciples stood silently hesitating to answer Jesus' question, the Father was at work

- But His Spirit, He placed the knowledge of the truth in Peter's heart, and that truth was burning inside him
- And it was pressing to get out, to make itself known, and Peter could feel it
- He knew the truth and he knew he had to share it, and so when Jesus asked the question Peter offered his remarkable answer
 - That, my friends, is how faith works in the heart of everyone who has ever believed in Jesus
 - The knowledge that Jesus is our Savior and that He is God incarnate must be revealed to us by the Father
 - Without that revelation, we will never come to that understanding – no matter how often someone tells us
 - And no matter how many miracles or signs and wonders might be done in our presence
- But on the other hand, once the Lord has placed that truth in our heart, as He did for Peter here, we can't bear to hold it inside us
 - It's a truth that we must declare, and once it's taken up residence in our hearts, it's only a matter of time before we make it public
 - And often the Lord will prompt us as He did with Peter here
 - He will move us into a moment like the one Peter experienced where the question comes our way and we know the answer
 - And more than that, we know we're supposed to answer the question
 - That moment we call a confession of faith, and it's the moment where faith in the heart makes itself known through a confession of the mouth
 - And as the two come together in that moment, the truth God planted in our hearts becomes a truth we ourselves accept
 - It's the moment that a free gift of salvation placed in our heart becomes a gift received and affirmed in our minds and words
 - As Paul says:

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Rom. 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Rom. 10:11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Rom. 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;

Rom. 10:13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

- So at some point before this moment (or maybe in the moment), Peter received revelation from the Father to know that Jesus was Messiah
 - And then Jesus prompted Peter to confess what he knew by giving him an opportunity make that confession
 - And this happens all the time...whether through an altar call in church or a conversation with a friend over coffee
 - I remember the way the Lord brought me to a confession...
- So this is Peter's confession moment, and this was also the moment Peter stepped forward and became the leader among these men
 - And Jesus affirms Peter's leadership position

Matt. 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matt. 16:19 "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

- Much has been made of Jesus' statement, and I suspect many of you are aware of some of the controversy that surrounds it
 - For example, the Catholic Church teaches that the pope is the highest representative of Christ on earth
 - And they point to this statement as evidence that Jesus establishes the papacy through Peter
 - Their claims are revisionist history, obviously self-serving and completely unsupported by the text

- But Protestants can run too far in the opposite direction by unfairly diminishing Peter's importance as a leader in the early church
 - The truth lies between those two extremes, as this text makes plainly clear
 - On the one hand, in speaking to Peter Jesus says He's going to build the church upon "this" not on "you"
 - So Jesus' choice of words rules out believing that the church was to be built upon Peter himself or that Peter founded the papacy
- But on the other hand, in v.19 Jesus says plainly that Peter will have a special role in leading the early church
 - He will have "keys" to the Kingdom
 - And in some way, Peter's leadership will connect heaven's intentions to the events of the church on earth
- Jesus' two statements are fundamentally important, a key turning point in Matthew's Gospel
 - And if we're going to fully appreciate what's going on in this moment, we need to examine both carefully
 - With the time we have this morning, we will only look at the first one, and we'll save the second for next week
- In His first statement, Jesus begins by changing Peter's name, that is from Simon to Peter
 - Although Matthew has been calling the apostle by the name Peter all along, this is the moment when his name was first given by Jesus
 - Prior to this moment, 2 years into Jesus' ministry, the man's name had been Simon Bar Yonah
 - But Jesus says from now on it's Peter, and Matthew uses the Greek *petros* which means rock in the sense of small stone
 - Later when Jesus says on this "rock" He will build the church, Matthew uses a different Greek word, *petras*, which means cliff
 - These two words are different genders in Greek, so clearly Matthew was trying to make a contrast between the two

- Something about what Peter did in stepping forward to confess Jesus in the way that He did would serve as an example of the church overall
 - We could say that Peter was a chip of the block, a small stone compared to a cliff
 - And the relationship is easy to see, especially if we read Peter's own writings

1Pet. 2:4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,

1Pet. 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1Pet. 2:6 For this is contained in Scripture:

“BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone,
AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

1Pet. 2:7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve,

“THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone.”

1Pet. 2:8 and,

“A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

1Pet. 2:9 But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

- I wonder if Peter was thinking back to this moment at Caesarea Philippi as he wrote his first letter to the church
 - He says to all believers you have come to a living stone, the cornerstone that the builders rejected
 - A cornerstone was the most important stone in construction, because it set the direction and stability of a building
 - If that cornerstone was structurally weak or set improperly, the entire building would list and eventually fall
- Jesus is our cornerstone: sure, strong, unbreakable and true
 - And yet the builders, that is the Jewish nation, rejected the stone

- The Lord builds His kingdom on the promises He gave to Israel, and yet Israel rejected the One upon Whom the building begins
- So that building begins with Gentiles first, with you and me
 - And Peter says that we are living stones God is using to construct a spiritual structure called the Church
 - And the process that led to Peter's public confession is the same way the Lord will fashion us into living stones
 - The Father will reveal to us the truth of Jesus as Lord, and in a moment God appoints, the Spirit will prompt us to step forward
 - And that truth burning inside us will come out as a confession of things that only God could have taught us
 - In that moment, salvation arrives and we become part of something larger than ourselves
 - Jesus says He builds His church through this process of divine revelation and public confession
 - This is the first use of the word "church" in the New Testament and one of only two uses of the word in all the Gospels
 - Mark, Luke and John never use the word "church" at all, and it reflects how new this idea truly was
 - In Greek it's the word *ekklesia*, which means the invited or called out ones
 - Jesus gives us this new term for the body He was preparing to create because none of the existing words could work
 - Since Israel rejected Jesus in Chapter 12, He wasn't going to be building Israel – at least not for a time
 - And He isn't creating rabbis or (God forbid) Pharisees or Sadducees
 - We are the church, the invited ones, and the One doing the inviting is the Father Himself by the revelation of His Spirit
 - And as we respond in faith, like Peter did, we become the called out ones
 - We are called out of the world to be a child of God

- We are called out of darkness and into light, out of condemnation and into mercy and forgiveness
- As we follow in Peter's footsteps, we become another brick in the wall (with apologies to Pink Floyd), another living stone in the Church
- Jesus was telling Peter and the disciples that's what this whole thing was about...building a Church a body of people united by a shared faith
 - As Paul said:

Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;

Eph. 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Eph. 4:6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

- Church is about Jesus as our God and Savior...and we can't ever forget that
 - If you ever find yourself doing "church" in some sense and you realize that it's been a while since you talked about Jesus, stop
 - Our focus as a church can never become programs, buildings, money, growth, image, etc.
 - And here's something that may surprise you...neither can it become about prayer, worship, study or fellowship
- Because those things are merely the means to a greater end...and the end is Jesus Christ
 - Every time we have conversations with an unbeliever about "church" our emphasis needs to be on Jesus and the salvation He offers
 - And every time someone enters this place, the sense they should get is that we are living stones following the cornerstone
- If possible, we want to always and forever live in the moment Peter established by example
 - We are forever declaring by our words and actions that Jesus is THE Christ, THE Son of the THE God, THE Living One

- That there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)
- Lesson #1 is that Jesus is God and we can't ever allow our life as a body in His name to set that focus aside for the sake of lesser priorities
 - Next week, we look at Lesson #2 in Jesus' second comment to Peter