

## 'Jesus is the Christ.'

A railroad agent in India had been reprimanded for making decisions without first getting direct orders from his superior in headquarters. One day his superior received the following startling telegram: "Tiger on platform eating conductor. Please wire instructions."

And I guess the point of the story is that there are times when we have to make our own decisions in life especially if it's a matter of life or death. And one of the biggest decisions anyone can make in this life because it really is a matter of life or death, is the decision as to **who you think Jesus Christ is?**

We're going to see in our lesson today that many people have got a lot weird and wonderful ideas as to who Jesus is but ultimately the decision has to come from you. In other words you have to make up your own mind as to who you think Jesus is.

Our lesson begins in **Matthew 16:13** where we find "Jesus teaching in the region of Caesarea Philippi". Now the region of Caesarea Philippi was one of the most beautiful places in the country with trees, flowers, and sparkling streams of water.

And on this particular day, as he frequently did, he went off by himself to pray. But whilst he was praying the disciples went looking for Him and according to **Matthew 16:13** "His disciples found him and Jesus asked them, "Who do men say that I am?"

You see loved ones controversy always surrounded the identity of Jesus and people's opinions were in a constant state of flux. And maybe you can imagine on the street corners and in the synagogues where everyone was chatting about Jesus. Some were saying, 'oh this Jesus, is an evil troublemaker', while others were saying 'oh no He must be from God'.

Their reply showed the extent of the speculation surrounding his identity. **Matthew 16:14** "Some people thought that John the Baptist or Elijah had come back from the dead in the person of Jesus. Some thought that maybe Jeremiah or another one of the prophets had come back to earth".

**Was he any of the above mentioned characters, or was he someone else? Who is this person called Jesus?** You see Jesus was aware of what the opinion polls were saying when he asked his apostles who people thought he was. But that wasn't what was really on His mind. He already knew what people were saying but more importantly He wanted to hear what His own disciples thought.

**Matthew 16:15** "But Jesus wanted his disciples to say what they thought about him". Now I know the Bible doesn't tell us but maybe you can imagine a bit of a pause right there and then. As the disciples take a deep breathe with none of them ready to commit to an answer, possibly because they are unsure or afraid of getting the answer wrong.

So our dear friend Simon Peter decided to break the silence and say in **Matthew 16:16** "Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." **How could Peter be so sure about this? How did he know exactly who Jesus was?** Well Jesus gives us the answer in **Matthew 16:17** "He called Peter's name, Simon Bar-Jonah, or Simon son of Jonah " And Jesus said the fact that Peter knew who he was "had come as a divine revelation". **Matthew 16:17**. In other words, God Himself had told Peter.

Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, came by way of divine revelation from the Father and not by human speculation. But let me ask you, **who do you think Jesus is? Do you think He's just a character that we read about in the Bible? Do you think He was some sort of con-artist who wanted people to follow Him? Do you think He was just a good man**

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who wanted to start a new religion called 'Christianity'? You see loved ones that's what you need to decide for yourself this morning. Is Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God?

Following on in **Matthew 16:18** "Jesus told Peter that He was going to build His church, and no force of Satan would ever be able to overcome it. His people would be triumphant and win over evil."

Now let me ask you, when Jesus spoke about building his church upon a rock, what was he referring to? Was He referring to some physical rock where He was going to build a physical church building? Of course not.

In answering this question it is vital that we don't lose sight of what the Father had just revealed about Jesus. You see when the Father approved Jesus as his Son, he was saying that Jesus is God, the Son, equal in every way to God, the Father. Make no doubt about it loved ones; Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

That's why Jesus Himself says in **John 10:30-36** "The Father and I are one." Then the people again picked up stones to throw at him. Jesus said to them, "I have done many good deeds in your presence which the Father gave me to do; for which one of these do you want to stone me?" They answered, "We do not want to stone you because of any good deeds, but because of your blasphemy! You are only a man, but you are trying to make yourself God!" Jesus answered, "It is written in your own Law that God said, 'You are gods.' We know that what the scripture says is true forever; and God called those people gods, the people to whom his message was given. As for me, the Father chose me and sent me into the world. How, then, can you say that I blaspheme because I said that I am the Son of God?"

Loved ones it doesn't make sense to think that Jesus would talk about building His church and, in the very same context, have nothing to say about the revelation the Father had just made known about Jesus' true identity.

When we think of building something, we think of the need for a foundation. If the building is to last, then the foundation must be solid. The church that Jesus came to build must also have a solid foundation.

It will have to be a foundation which has been tested and found reliable, a foundation which can endure for all time, and one upon which all generations of Christians can confidently place their faith.

There is only one Person who qualifies to provide such a foundation, Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter confessed Jesus deity and Jesus deity is the solid rock, the unshakeable foundation upon which the church rests.

The writings of the apostles confirm that the church is indeed built upon Jesus, that He alone is the rock upon which it has been established. Scripture says that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." **Ephesians 2:20**. The apostle Paul also reminds us again in **1 Corinthians 3:11** when he says "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The Mormon church is built on the foundation of Joseph Smith's teachings. The Jehovah's Witnesses church is built on the foundation of Charles Taze Russell's teachings. The Seventh Day Adventist church was built on the foundation of Ellen White's teachings. And the list could go on and on but my point is if the church you're a part of is built on human teachings or man made ideas then that's not the true church.

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The reason we call ourselves 'church of Christ' is because this describes the very Person who owns and died for His church. He purchased His church with His blood and we are a part of His church because we recognise that He is the One whose teachings the church is founded upon.

You see Jesus not only tells us that He owns the church but He also says in **Matthew 16:18** "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Jesus says nothing and no-one will overcome His church, there's not a person on earth or a demon in hell that will stop His church from prevailing.

A man stood to watch a cricket game between two young teams. As he walked toward the bench, he asked one of the players, "What's the score?" The young fellow replied, "We're behind 78 to nothing." "Well," the man said, "I must say you don't look discouraged." "Discouraged," the player said with a puzzled look, "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't had our turn to bat yet."

Listen loved ones, the army of Israel faced a giant, but a young man named David thought, "I haven't had my turn," and he won! The twelve disciples saw 5,000 hungry people and said, "Send the crowds away, so they can buy some food." But Jesus thought, "I haven't had my turn yet!" The angry mob had Pilate seal the tomb where Jesus was buried, but God knew, "I haven't had my turn yet!" The church is ready to "go to bat" and like others who have placed their trust in God, we will win!

And after declaring He was going to build His church and nothing would stop it, Jesus says to Peter in **Matthew 16:19** "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Peter was going to have the "keys" of the kingdom and he would tell people the things that pleased God and the things that were displeasing to God. **But what did Jesus mean when he gave Peter the "keys of the kingdom"? How are we to understand these words?** Well by asking a number of other questions to the problem we are trying to solve, we can arrive at the correct answer.

**First, what are keys used for?** Keys are used to allow us access to places previously closed. When Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of God, he gave him the means of opening the way into the kingdom of heaven.

**Second, how did Peter use these keys to allow us access into the kingdom of heaven?** Peter was the first to preach the gospel to both the Jews and Gentiles. Those who believed in Jesus were baptised in his name and entered the kingdom of heaven.

We see this happening first with the Jews in **Acts 2** you remember the story well **don't you?** Peter had just finished preaching to the Jews telling them how they had murdered God in the flesh. **Acts 2:37+38** "When the people heard this, they were deeply troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, "What shall we do, brothers?" Peter said to them, "Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit."

And on that day according to **Acts 2:41** 3000 souls entered the kingdom of God through believing in Jesus and being baptised into Jesus Name. And then over in **Acts 10** we see Peter using another key to open the way for the Gentiles to enter the kingdom of God. After preaching to Cornelius and his household we read in **Acts 10:48** "So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ". So again the Gentiles entered the kingdom of God through believing in Jesus and being baptised into Jesus Name.

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Now we need to remember that the other apostles were also engaged in this evangelistic work, but Peter did have a prominent role to play initially. But keys were spoken about by Jesus on another occasion, the time he rebuked the religious leaders of his day for the way in which they abused the truth that God had revealed.

The way they handled truth was a hindrance rather than a help to those who heard them. **Luke 11:52** "How terrible for you teachers of the Law! You have kept the key that opens the door to the house of knowledge; you yourselves will not go in, and you stop those who are trying to go in!"

When Jesus spoke of the keys of the kingdom he symbolised the gospel, which opens the way back to the Father for all who will embrace its message. The question is, if you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God **are you willing to enter into His kingdom by being baptised into His Name?**

Jesus goes on and says to Peter in **Matthew 16:19** "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

After giving Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus delegated authority to him to carry out his ministry. Now remember this was not a blank cheque for Peter to do whatever he wanted. The authority to bind and loose was given in the context of preaching forgiveness of sins through the gospel.

Which harmonises with the Lord's parting words to the apostles in **John 20:23** "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained". You see binding and loosing are equivalent to retaining and forgiving sins.

**How does this work out in practice?** Well like we looked at a few moments ago on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached the gospel and 3000 people believed that message and received remission of their sins. These people were loosed from their sins when they were forgiven but the other thousands of people who were there on that day who didn't obey the gospel. The sins of those who rejected the gospel were retained or bound.

But in the meantime the disciples need to remember they were working on God's timetable. **Matthew 16:21-23** "Then Jesus told them that they must keep his true identity a secret for a while longer. He would have to suffer and die and be raised again. Peter didn't want to even think about Jesus dying, and one day he said to him, "Lord, this shall not happen to You!" But Jesus knew that Satan was trying to harm Him through the words of Peter, and He said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan."

Now your heart goes out to Peter here **doesn't it?** He has gone from being top of the class in confessing who Jesus was to the bottom of the class for allowing Satan to influence him.

**But can't we all relate to Peter? Don't we all have times when we're on fire for the Lord one minute and then struggling with sin the next?**

When Peter believed that Jesus was God's son, he said it to others, and it made a big change in his life. God could now use him as He wanted. But we sometimes look at God's people, the ones we read about in scripture as if they were always perfect, as if they always got it right. But they weren't perfect, they often got it wrong especially Peter. Peter wasn't perfect.

You remember in **Luke 22** one night he even said he wouldn't deny Jesus, but he did and on three separate occasions he claimed he didn't know Jesus just as Jesus predicted. Now we know that he later was very sorry for saying that but the point I'm trying to make is that when we confess Jesus with our lives and show others that we love Him, God can use us for His purposes.

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If you're already a Christian this morning then look for opportunities, and God will show you ways and times that you can tell others about your faith in Jesus. If you're not a Christian this morning then you need to know that you too can confess Jesus as the Christ, the Son of living God.

You too can be baptised into His Name for the forgiveness of your sins and receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit to help you live the Christian life. And then you too just like Peter did can cause many others to believe in Jesus.