

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-28 Peter's Confession of Faith

When a student goes to school, a teacher must impart certain knowledge to that person. Likewise, if someone starts a new job, another worker usually gives training or demonstrates how to do the work. The instructor may repeat the truth many times. He might show the truth or model it to the learner, or ask the student questions about what he has learned. Several times Jesus asked the disciples very powerful questions for that very reason. He was teaching them as well as serving as their example. When Jesus asked questions in scripture, every disciple needed to listen closely. Often when Jesus wanted to reveal a significant truth, he started by asking a question. In this lesson Peter was the one who knew the answer. He actually spoke for the group, and the teacher was pleased.

Jesus and his disciples went to the region of Caesarea Philippi, 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the north of Capernaum. This city near the northern border of Israel had previously been named Pan, after the god of the forest. Recently the name changed and it had been named after the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus and the local governor, Herod Philip. To be a good Roman citizen in that day, one was expected to worship both Pan and Caesar as gods.

On the way Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say, John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." The disciples correctly give the opinion of the masses about the identity of Jesus. The people believed he was someone great, perhaps returned from the dead or from heaven, but they could not agree about his identity. He refers to Himself with His favorite title, the one that connected him with humankind, the Son of Man.

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered for the group, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." This is the correct answer and surely the one Jesus was seeking. He realized that the disciples were learning what was most important. Jesus was the one spoken about by all the prophets of the past. He was the one who would deliver God's people. But even more, as the Son of God, he has a unique relationship with God that no one else ever has had or will have.

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." By these words Jesus meant this truth did not come to Peter through a person or by study, but as a direct revelation from God.

Then Jesus said, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it." Here Jesus is using a play on words. Peter's name means "small stone" but the truth in his confession is that Jesus is the "rock" or cornerstone on which the church would be built. The church that would be established would be Christ's church. He is the Lord of the church and directs it for his purposes. The word "church"

actually means “the assembly of God’s people,” similar to the assembly of the children of Israel in the wilderness. Finally, though the forces of Satan will try, they will not be able to destroy the church or keep it from growing and spreading its message.

Jesus continued speaking, “I 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.” This refers to all godly church leaders, not just Peter, who approve of God’s will by living righteously and making disciples. Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah (Matt 16:13-20). He did this so that he would be able to fulfill God’s will completely and on God’s timetable.

Think about this: Jesus made wonderful promises to Peter and the others about his kingdom. This they understood. What part of God’s plan did they still not understand?

From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Peter did not understand Jesus’ statement about the resurrection on the third day, and so objected to the plan Jesus foretold. Peter, along with all Jews of that time, was looking for a Messiah who would defeat the Romans and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. They all misunderstood the old prophecies which predicted that Messiah must first suffer and die to purchase salvation for all people. This is the first time Jesus shared with them the very difficult truth that he must die to accomplish God’s full plan.

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” Jesus does not mean that suddenly Peter has become Satan or that he is demon possessed. Rather he indicated that Peter was being used by Satan to try and divert his attention from the need to suffer and die on the cross.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

Jesus here teaches the great contradiction for those who want to live the Christian life. As disciples they must deny themselves and join Jesus in the suffering that comes with following God’s plan. Only as one gives away their life, surrendering to God’s will, can Jesus give them eternal life. It’s not that anyone can earn eternal life; it is a free gift based only on faith. It is that when a person receives salvation, suffering will be involved in living for Jesus.

Jesus said, “The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.” When Jesus comes a second

time to earth, he will come not as a baby, but as the conquering king and judge, to reward those who gave their all for him.

Finally Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom” (Matt 16:21-28). The most likely event Jesus could be speaking of was his transfiguration on the mount—the subject of our next lesson. At that event, the three closest disciples saw his glory as it had been in heaven in ages past. Or he might have been referring to their seeing Christ in his glorified body after the Resurrection.

In this passage we have two important, yet seeming contradictory truths. The first is that Jesus is the Messiah, the one who will deliver believers from bondage to sin and death. After Jesus affirms Peter’s confession of his identity, Jesus confirms the second truth that goes with the first. This is the truth that the Messiah had to die. Only by dying on the cross at the hands of the Jewish and Roman rulers could Jesus accomplish the mission of God. Only when the first truth is accepted does the second truth have any meaning. If Jesus was just a man, his death would have no eternal value. Only if God’s sinless Son dies, can people be set free from the power of sin and death.

This story is **important** because it shows that the main purpose for the Messiah’s coming was to fulfill God’s full plan of redemption for mankind and show them what God was like.

The **main truth** of this story is that the true church is built on the foundational truth that he, Jesus, is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What did the people say about the identity of Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, “Some people said Jesus was John the Baptist; others said Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets,” you are correct.
2. What did Peter say about the identity of Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Peter confessed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say would be the foundational truth for the church he would build?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the foundational truth of the church is that Jesus is the Son of God,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn this story by memory so you can tell it to someone who has never heard it. Then tell the story and ask, “What is the true test of whether a group of people are a true church, even if the name on their meeting house is different than the one on ours?” The answer is found in how the people and leaders answer the question Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?”