Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? [14] And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. [15] He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? [16] And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. [17] And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. [18] And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The sand in the hour glass was quickly running out. Our Lord Jesus now had several weeks to live before Roman soldiers pounded 5-inch spikes through His hands and feet,
nailing Him to an old rugged cross. Jesus knew His time was short in His earthly life - and He still had vital things to accomplish. Among them this: He took His twelve men to the lower slopes of Mount Hermon (on Israel's border with Lebanon (Phoenicia in the Old Testament) and Syria to a place we know as Banias. The cave pictured on page 1 is this very spot. It was the wicked, cultic and totally demonic headquarters of the man-made god named Pan - the half goat, half man, mythical remnant of Greek mythology. Jesus wanted all the time remaining to spend with His 12 disciples. He had so much yet to teach them. For that reason He gathered them some 25 miles north of Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee to Banias, nestled in the foothills of majestic Mount Hermon - a truly gorgeous location.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE**

On our trips to Israel, I take our pilgrims to several dozes of biblical locations that had to do with Jesus. One of my favorites is Banias. Jesus would not be bothered here by ruthless leadership here. It was outside the authority of Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee. It was by and large a Gentile area. William Barclay used words to paint the situation facing our Lord:

Confronting Jesus at this time was a demanding problem. His time was short; His days in the flesh were numbered. The problem was—was there anyone who understood Him? Was there anyone who had recognized Him for Who and what He was? Were there any who, when He was gone from the flesh, would carry on His work and labor for His kingdom? Obviously that was a crucial problem, for it involved the very survival of the Christian faith. If there were none who had grasped the truth, or even glimpsed it, then all His work was undone; if there were some few who realized the truth, His work was safe. So Jesus was determined to put all to the test and ask His followers who they believed Him to be.

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Consider this: Banias was a hotbed of religion.

- It was located right on the border with Syria. There were at least 14 pagan temples in the area. This was a center for ancient gods.
- On the front page you see the picture of a great hill, in which was a deep cavern. In that cave, according to belief of that generation, the god Pan, the god of nature, was said to be born.
- The cave was said to be the place where the sources of the Jordan originated (actually there were three such sources throughout that area). Josephus, the historian of that day, wrote: *There is a very fine cave in the mountain, under*
which there is a great cavity in the earth; and the cavern is abrupt, and
prodigiously deep, and full of still water. Over it hangs a vast mountain
(Hermon) and under the cavern arise the springs of the Jordan River.

In this place, Caesarea Philippi, there was a great temple of white marble built to
the Caesar of Rome. It had been built by Herod the Great. Later Herod’s son
Philip further beautified it and added his own name so it became Caesarea Philippi.

Into this false religious center came the Son of the Living God with twelve quite ordinary
men around Him. He stands in an area debauched by temples of fake gods. And in this
spot, Jesus asked His men Who they believed Him to be. He wanted an answer. He
still does - from you and me!

WHO DO YOU CLAIM JESUS IS?

Note carefully the first answers the disciples gave to Jesus:

1. ELIJAH Why in the world would they say that? First, they were giving Jesus very
high place in their minds, just not high enough. Elijah had usually, if not always, given
the highest spot on the list of prophets by the rank and file Jews of that day. But they
were also saying that if Jesus was Elijah, He would have been the forerunner of the
Messiah. They were banking their statement on an Old Testament scripture: Malachi
4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and
dreadful day of the Lord: That answer must have disappointed Jesus for He was not
the forerunner of Messiah; He WAS Messiah.

The title “Messiah” means “the anointed one.” Jewish religious leaders considered
Messiah to be a human leader, physically descended from the paternal Davidic line
through King David and King Solomon. They believed that He would unite all the
tribes of Israel, re-gather them to the sacred Land (Eretz Israel), and rebuild the
Temple in Jerusalem, thus ushering in a golden age. They believed that He would
usher into this world universal peace. In Christianity, the Messiah is called the
Christ. Christians believe the former qualifications listed for Him, but also believe
Messiah is the Son of God.

Muslims believe Jesus was only a prophet and the Messiah sent to the Israelites. He
will come back to earth with His helper, the Mahdi (who qualifies in almost every
respect to the scriptural Antichrist) and defeat anything set up by the false Messiah.
2. JEREMIAH  Why would any Jew claim Jesus to be Jeremiah? It was a fairly common concept about Jeremiah that before the Babylonian invasions (culminating in 586 B.C) that he had taken the Ark of the Covenant and the altar of incense from the Great Temple and hidden them in some remote cave on Mount Nebo (a mountain in Jordan overlooking the Dead Sea). Further, it was assumed by these that prior to the coming of Messiah, Jeremiah would return and produce those sacred relics so that God’s glory would once again visit the land of Israel. So it is rather easy to see why the rank and file Jew might assume that Jesus was either Jeremiah or Elijah.

Then Jesus’ must have stared right into their brains and followed up with this: BUT WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

Matthew reported that Peter said: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”
Mark reported Peter’s words as: “You are the Christ!”
Luke’s response is very strong that Peter said, “You are the Christ of God.”

Jesus must have felt joy that at least someone would verbalize the reality of Who He truly was! Napoleon was once asked about Jesus and he responded, “I know men. Jesus Christ is more than a man.”

The question remains for everyone of us here now. Jesus is asking for your response. Who do you believe He is? One more thing: Christianity does not consist of knowing ABOUT Jesus; it always consists of KNOWING Jesus.

JESUS’ RESPONSE AND MANKIND’S RESULTING THEOLOGICAL ERROR

Matthew 16:17-19

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona (son of Jonah): for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. [18] And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Several denominations believe that at this point Jesus made Peter the founder, the head, of His Church. That is an erroneous conclusion. Verse 18: Jesus said, “Thou art Peter.” In Greek, Peter is petros which means rock or a small stone. Then Jesus said, “Thou art PETRA,” or upon this confession of faith on Me, the Christ and Savior, I will build my
Most Roman Catholics take these passages to mean that Jesus gave Peter the keys which gain one admission to Heaven or to exclude one from Heaven. Further, they claim, that Peter was given the power to absolve a person from his or her own personal sins. With this power given him, Peter therefore has become the Bishop of Rome and his successors retain that same authority.

To be sure, Peter is to be given his rightful due as a great leader in the early church. But no scriptures gave this great man the claim to be founder of Christ’s church. Early church persons made that designation, not God. Saint Augustine took this passage in Matthew 16 to mean: Jesus said, You are Peter; and on myself as rock I will found my Church; and the day will come when, as a reward for your faith, you will be great in the Church. An old hymn declares, My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness! I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ Name! On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand! No one should ever take away the distinctions of Peter the Apostle; but to make him more than what Scripture makes clear is very shaky theology.

THE MEANING OF THE GATES OF HELL

Matthew 16:18
I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Jesus declared, “I will build my church....” That statement should clarify any confusion on Who is the author, the founder, of Christ’s church.”

...and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

What does that mean? What are the gates of hell? I read one writer’s opinion about this. He opined, “On top of the mountain overlooking Caesarea Philippi (Banias) there stand the ruins of a great castle which may well have stood there in all its glory in the time of Jesus.” The writer suggested that “maybe” that old castle was The Gates of Hell. As a matter of fact, that castle was NOT there in Jesus’ day. It is known as Nimrod’s castle and dates back to the Crusades a thousand or so years ago. I have had the joy of exploring that castle (picture on the next page), but it was NOT the Gates of Hell.

Hades is yet another term for Hell. To the ancients, Hell was regarded as the place for the dead. Once there, it was inescapable. The function of the gates of Hades was to contain the dead, to keep them in. The One Person whom Hades could not control was Jesus. So one possibility is that Jesus declared that not even death could hinder His church. We know that Jesus defeated death three days after His crucifixion.
The forboding ruins of Nimrod’s castle, overlooking the hills of Galilee. This structure goes back only to the Crusades. Though wicked, it was not the Gates of Hell.

I lean toward yet another possibility. In that dreadful cave of Pan, with its palatial surroundings, every despicable act ever hatched in the blackest haunts of Hell found completion. Historians even speak of human sacrifice in the bowels of that cave. There is no bottom to the bitter dregs of sin. Satan attacks us humans in every diabolical way he knows to turn us from God and to himself. While we understand the wickedness thrown against us, the Body of Christ, we do not fear. It cannot prevail!

Today our nation is becoming more and more addicted to drugs and booze. Worship of Satan has increased as a result of them. Immorality is flagrant and we are seeing a wave of illegitimate children who will be raised all too-often without fathers in the home. The coming generation will pay a fearful price for this. Mockery of decency and Scriptural truths is seen daily on the “boob tube.” Yes, the Gates of Hell seem to be prevailing in America. But are they prevailing - really? No! proclaims our Lord. The Church will defeat all of it and be ultimately triumphant! NOT EVEN THE GATES OF HELL CAN PREVAIL AGAINST IT.

I have sometimes told my wife that I would like inscribed on my burial marker, “He was a
church man!” I am exactly that and will be with all my strength. Everything else will
degenerate and disappear! But Christ’s Church will be triumphant! Gloria Gaither wrote a
great lyric to be narrated in their song The Church Triumphant:

God has always had a people.
Many a foolish conqueror has made the mistake of thinking that because he had forced
the church of Jesus Christ out of site he had stilled its voice and snuffed out its life.
But God has always had a people.
The powerful current of a rushing stream is not diminished because it’s forced to flow
underground.
Now the purest water is the stream that bursts crystal clear into the sunlight after it has
forced its way through solid rock.
There have been charlatans who like Simon the Magician sought to barter on the open
market that power which cannot be bought or sold.

But God has always had a people
Men who could not be bought and women who were beyond purchase.

But God has always had a people
There have been times of affluence and prosperity when the church’s message has been
nearly diluted into oblivion by those who sought to make it socially attractive, neatly
organized, financially profitable.

But God has always had a people.
Yes, it’s been gold plaited, draped in purple and encrusted with jewels. It has been
misrepresented, ridiculed, lauded and scorned,

But God has always had a people.
And these followers of Jesus Christ have been, according to the whim of the times,
elevated sacred leaders and modern heretics. Yet through it all, their march is on. That
powerful army of the meek, God’s chosen people, who cannot be bought, battered,
murdered or stilled. On through the ages they march - the church! God’s church
triumphant!

Listen, child of God - it’s alive!
Discouraged pastor, it’s His church and it’s still alive. Lonely missionary, sow that seed
with confidence. The church is still alive! Old saint, you’re not alone or forgotten.
The church is still alive.

Busy mothers, keep trusting Jesus! The church is alive.
And faithful fathers, there’s rest in the Lord. God’s church is still alive! So, family of
God, lift your hands, lift your hands and praise the Lord. The church, God’s church
triumphant, is alive! It’s alive, my friends – Alive and well!

PETER TRIES TO CORRECT JESUS
Matthew 16:21-28

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go
unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes,
and be killed, and be raised again the third day. [22] Then Peter took him, and
began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.
[23] But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an
offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be
of men.

[24] Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him
deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. [25] For whosoever will save his
life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. [26] For
what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or
what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? [27] For the Son of man shall come
in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man
according to his works. [28] Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here,
which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

What a sudden turn-around! A few moments ago Jesus lauded Peter for his faith; now
He rebukes him soundly! It is a startling thing to realize that after three years of ministry
with His 12 disciples, those men still didn’t really understand what Jesus was all about.
So when He told them point-blank that they were all heading south now to Jerusalem –
not to some crowning and glorious arrival - but where He would be put to death and then
rise again three days later.

After all, that is why He came! As a teacher, Jesus was without peers. As a Healer, He
was unsurpassed. As a philosopher, outstanding. But those were not the principle
reasons why He came from Heaven to Earth. He came to die! In that 21st verse, Jesus
could not have made it more clear: Matthew 16:21 From that time forth began Jesus
to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many
things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again
the third day. How could anyone mistake Jesus’ mission after those words?

Well....Peter could. Matthew 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him,
saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. Talk about being
deflated! Just minutes earlier, Jesus had lauded Peter for his growing understanding of
who Jesus really was. And now.... “Get thee behind me, Satan!”

After rebuking Peter, Jesus used the opportunity to teach principles of His Kingdom. He
taught His men about:

1) Caring about issues that were eternal - more than temporary things. In so many
words, Jesus said to Peter, “You are not helping me! You don’t care about the things of God, but only about the things people think are important.”

2) And He warned His disciples about being too encumbered with “things.” “If people want to follow me, they must give up the things that aren’t important to their eternal well-being. They must even be willing to give up their lives. What do you profit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?”

3. And finally, in this passage, Jesus promised, “I will come again in all God’s glory, flanked by the Father’s angels. When that happens, I will reward my followers for what they have done.” I Corinthians 3, to which I often allude, refers directly to this issue.

So in one day, apparently, the Apostle Peter was lauded and lambasted by Jesus. BUT ITS WHAT HAPPENED SIX DAYS LATER THAT WILL SHOCK THREE OF JESUS’ MEN MORE THAN THEY HAD EVER BEEN SHOCKED BEFORE. And that will be theme next week:

THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION