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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
September 10, 2017  
14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 6:2-8; Romans 11:33-36

Hymns: 239; 352; 360; 644 (244:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

<sup>14</sup> So they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

<sup>20</sup> Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO:** Internet truth.

“How do you know that?” Someone tells us something we’ve never heard before and we will probably ask that question. “How did you find that out?” We are interested in the authority behind our friend’s new found knowledge or wisdom. In our day and age it may be a different answer than in years gone by. In earlier days one might have answered, “I read it in the newspaper.” To which you might have replied, “Well, you can’t believe everything you read in the newspaper!” Now we might be told, “I saw it on the internet!” We might question the authority of the web site. Perhaps we wouldn’t go so far as to say our friend was wrong or gullible, but perhaps we would hold our own judgment on the matter in abeyance. Sometimes it’s because we don’t want to believe something, or the evidence for a certain conclusion doesn’t completely add up for us. At other times it may be because one article says one thing, and a short time later another article with equal authority, (or lack of it) says something else. We learn that one needs to be careful about new ideas.

It seems however that this caution isn’t always observed in things spiritual. The tendency in much of our society is to accept anyone’s ideas as having equal authority, and that some truth can be found in all religions, or in any individual’s thoughts. It comes down to what people think about Jesus. Is there room for a wide variety of different ideas about Jesus? That was the question that Jesus himself addressed with His disciples in our text, and the lesson is clear: we need to know --

**THEME: The Rock Solid Truth About Jesus Christ.**

We shall see that this truth doesn’t just come out of the air. It is --

### **I. Truth Revealed by God the Father**

Jesus poses the question to the disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”(v.13) Perhaps the disciples were already talking about the different ideas that people were throwing out about Jesus. It is only natural to listen and even consider what others are saying, especially when it is regarding those things that might seem a little more abstract, not so solid, not so absolute.

Religious ideas, philosophical ideas can easily play on one's mind. After all, there are a lot of smart people out there in the world. Maybe we need to listen to what others have to say about things. It's only natural, so it was only natural for the disciples also. Besides, some of the things that were being said about Jesus sounded pretty impressive: "Some *say* John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (v.14) Those ideas had to make an impression on the disciples. "Think of it, people are comparing our friend, our teacher to some of the greatest prophets in all history, Jeremiah, Elijah, John the Baptist!"

These ideas were not expressions of the truth about Jesus. While they might have sounded impressive they *detracted* from Jesus' person and mission. They led away from the truth instead of towards the truth. The thing is, as smart as some people may be there are areas of knowledge and truth that the mind of man cannot fathom or discover. The knowledge of man is then reduced to vain speculation, and as impressive as some ideas may sound, they are baseless and without true authority. So it was with the speculations of the crowds that had gathered and in their excitement talked about Jesus without understanding the great truth that stood before them.

So it remains today. We must be careful about giving credence to the vain speculations of man. Doctorate degrees presented by universities of this world bring one no closer to the truth about Jesus than anyone else. The university or the PhD is not what leads one to know the truth about Jesus. So then, what is that truth, and what authority establishes that truth?

Let us consider the response from Jesus' follow up question:

**Matthew 16:15-17** He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Simon Peter gave the right answer, the answer we all need to know, *Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God!* I'm afraid that when we hear Peter's answer we don't comprehend exactly how loaded with truth this brief answer is. Not even Simon Peter himself was fully aware of how great a confession he had just made. It was indeed a great confession of wondrous truth! Jesus is the Christ! Jesus and only Jesus is the one promised by God since the fall into sin. Jesus is the Messiah who was to come into the world to destroy the works of the devil, to crush the serpent's head, to deliver us from the curse of sin and the fear of death. Jesus is the Son of the living God! There is one God, only one living God. All others representations of gods are dumb idols. The philosophy of the idols of the world make this abundantly clear. One philosophy presents the devil's lie that we may be like God and attain a status of righteousness and true holiness each on our own. The other philosophy is that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live by Him. It can't be both. Jesus is the Son of the living God who came to this world that we might live through Him, be freely given His righteousness, and possess the hope of everlasting glory by the grace of God alone.

How do we know that Peter was right and the whole world wrong? Isn't that awfully presumptuous to think like that? No, it is not presumptuous because it wasn't Simon Peter's authority that established this as truth. **It was God!** Jesus emphasized that point. The knowledge of the truth about Jesus did not come to Peter because somebody was smart enough to figure it out. You know, I am so impressed with how people do figure things out, and make things, I can't even begin to fathom how a cell phone works, and yet so many people think that they are smarter than God, or smart enough to know all about God, and what is true all on their own, or because somebody else said so.

Jesus made it clear, the authority to establish the truth about God doesn't come from people. We would never know the truth except that it has been revealed to us by God the Father. He caused the Scriptures to be written by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit and only as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). And God willed Simon Peter to know this truth, and so Simon's heart was opened and moved to believe. And this grace (and that is exactly what it is)

has come to you also. The Lord in His grace has opened your heart to believe that truth which is founded on no lesser authority than God Himself! He has revealed it to us in His Word!

This truth based upon solid authority is --

## **II. The Solid Foundation of Christ's Church.**

Jesus continued this lesson about His person, saying to Peter: **Matthew 16:18** And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Now this verse presents us with that perfect example of how we are so easily influenced by other people's ideas being repeated again and again. Peter is not the solid rock foundation upon which Christ will build His Church. Peter was anything but such a solid rock. Again we need to hear what God Himself has taught us. The prophet Isaiah wrote the words of God: *"Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation'"* (Isaiah 28:16)

The prophecy speaks of Christ. Peter himself will present this as the truth in his first epistle where he wrote by inspiration:

**1 Peter 2:6-8** "Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."

<sup>7</sup>Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient,

"The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone,"

The solid foundation for the Church is Christ and the gospel of God's love and forgiveness. Those who put their trust in Jesus and what He has done for us will not be put to shame when they stand before God. They will know the love and peace that comes to us through Jesus who alone is the way to the Father. That truth shall always stand, no matter who attacks it, or who ridicules those who believe what the Bible teaches, *all* that the Bible teaches.

It is good for us to recall Jesus' closing words to His Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 7:24-25** "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup> and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

It is this truth that has divine authority that directs us through this life, this pilgrimage to our heavenly home which is that place which Christ has prepared for us in heaven.

Today we return to our fall schedule with Sunday school and Bible class following the service. One cannot overstate the importance of Sunday school for our children in addition to attending the worship service. They learn so much more than one might think. By the Spirit's blessing they comprehend, sometimes better than the adults, the significance, the importance of what is going on in church. They need that foundation of divine knowledge and truth to be established in their hearts every bit as much as the rest of us. And the adults, we all need to build our knowledge, to grow in grace, to be prepared to face the world and the weakness of our own flesh. That is what we do with our study and discussions in Bible class. We strengthen one another in the divine truth revealed to us from God.

Is it really all that important? Don't we know enough to get to heaven already? Well, I don't know? Has the devil stopped assaulting you with temptations? Has your conscience stopped accusing you of sin? Has the world given you a pass on promoting its philosophy right in your own home, polluting your mind?

This truth about Jesus is --

### **III. The Rock Solid Assurance of Forgiveness.**

Jesus emphasized the importance of confessing to the world the truth about who Jesus is when He told the disciples:

**Matthew 16:19** “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

It is essential to our salvation that heaven’s doors be open to us. There is only one way to unlock those doors, one way, ONE WAY! That one way is found in Jesus as the Christ. It is this gospel which the Lord has entrusted to His Church on earth that is the key that opens heaven’s door. Without that key one may get to that door and claim to know Jesus, and claim to have done all sorts of wonderful things in Jesus’ name, but if they don’t have that knowledge that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God who came down to earth to save us from our sin, they will only hear, “*I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.*” (Luke 13:27)

We have been entrusted with the knowledge of the truth. Jesus has given us the keys that we might unlock heaven’s doors for grieving sinners. And these keys work! They really work. They work because God laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6) God has changed everything for our good and blessing declaring:

**Colossians 2:13-14** “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup>having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Because of Jesus there is no record of sins written against us. God planned our salvation so that this was what He had to do. John wrote of this grace in his first epistle.

**1 John 1: 9** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

There we have the keys in use. When we confess our sins God is faithful to forgive. That means in spite of our repeated failing because of the weakness of our flesh, we confess, and in spite of our UNfaithfulness, God is faithful to forgive, not because we deserve it, but because of Jesus having taken our sins upon Himself

and paying for our sins upon the cross. God forgives, and forgives, and forgives. It is the only **just** thing for Him to do. See the glory of the gospel! God designed it that this would be the only right thing for Him to do and not deny Himself. Our sin has been paid for, through faith we lay claim to that payment for our sin, and God is just to forgive.

These are the keys put in your hands and mine that we are to use to open heaven's doors for lost sinners. Aren't they wonderful and glorious? And there it is, in comprehending the gospel truth about who Jesus really is.

Oh, yeah, that closing verse in our text that reports how Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Christ: don't let that stop you. They were still struggling with Jesus needing to suffer and die. They weren't ready to use the keys until after Jesus' death and resurrection when Jesus would once again reinforce this lesson on Resurrection evening. You, you go and you testify and you open heaven's doors to penitent sinners. It's why we are here.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.