

Walking with Jesus

on the road to the cross

Lent
2021

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Week 4

Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah

Upon This ROCK

Scripture

Matthew 16:13-28

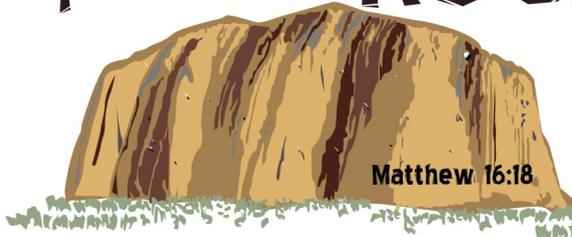
In the region of
Caesarea

Philippi Jesus asks
his disciples, “Who
do men say that I,
the Son of Man,

am?” They tell him that the
people believe that he is some
kind of reincarnation of some
great man who lived in the past.
Jews did not actually believe in
reincarnation but, apparently,
some were saying that he was
John the Baptist, or Elijah, or
Jeremiah or another Prophet.

Then Jesus asked them what
they thought. He wanted to know
their answer. Peter, always quick
on the draw, says, “You are the
Christ, the Son of the living
God.”

That’s the answer he was
awaiting. He could build his
Church on this; this was a
foundation of faith in him as the
promised Messiah, the
‘Anointed’ of God (Matthew 1:1)



I Will Build My Church

and Son of God. This is the rock
on which Jesus would build his
church.

Prayer

Lord, you are the Christ, the Son
of the Living God. If ever we
need to proclaim that loudly and
clearly, it is now! Come among
us Lord, heal our divisions. We
have been shattered by the
ravages of the Covid-19
pandemic, our health services
and financial resources
stretched to the limit, and mental
health as much under threat as
physical. Like those early
disciples of Jesus, we put our
trust in you. You are our Lord,
our hope and our Redeemer.
Lord in your mercy, hear our
prayer. Amen.

Empowered for Mission

We can understand how those first disciples felt being asked that question. It sort of put them on the spot. They had to think about it, they had to make up their minds about the Carpenter from Nazareth turned rabbi. What would they say?

Peter speaks for them; he answers the question and declares Jesus to be the Messiah. This declaration of faith would be sorely tested. They would all soon watch him die on a cruel Roman cross. They would all be scattered and Peter would deny even knowing him, not once but three times. But Jesus went all the way to the Cross alone, rose again as he had promised, and ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of the Father, our Mediator and Advocate.

They had lived with him for three years, eaten with him, laughed and cried with him. They knew he was a real man. He had prayed with them and for them. He knew all the same emotions as they did. But he knew who

he was and was clear about his mission. He loved them and even when they disappointed him, he never gave up on them. After he had risen again he gathered them and restored them. He filled them with his Spirit and empowered them for their mission to preach the Good News of God's love to every nation.

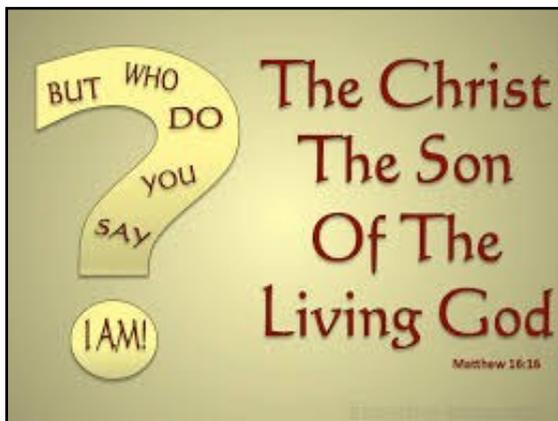


Prayer

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for those, your first disciples, who believed you, laid down their lives for you and left us a rich heritage. We read about these men and women in your Word. We praise you that you fill us with that same Holy Spirit.

What's the secret?

Many Christians struggle to talk to friends, family or strangers about the Gospel. Often I think that the problem is that we don't know how to start. Most of us don't say anything because we don't want to upset people or lose friends, or even worse be labelled as a Holy Joe.



When I was at university I had a friend called Rory. He had been dramatically converted at the Olympic Games by some Christians from Campus Crusade for Christ. I used to marvel at how he could just talk to anybody about his faith. So I asked him what his secret was.

He said: "Look at how Jesus did it!" and sent me away with a list

of scriptures to read. As I looked through these scriptures I noticed how Jesus, the master evangelist, often used a question to start a conversation. "Who do men say that I am? Who do you say that I am?" That got these disciples talking. Often the first question paves the way for the next, and the next. Try it. It really works. People warm to you when you are interested in what they think and believe, rather than bombarding them with a lot of Bible verses. Start a conversation, talk to people. Pray quietly that the Holy Spirit will lead the conversation and open your friend's heart to what you are saying.

Prayer

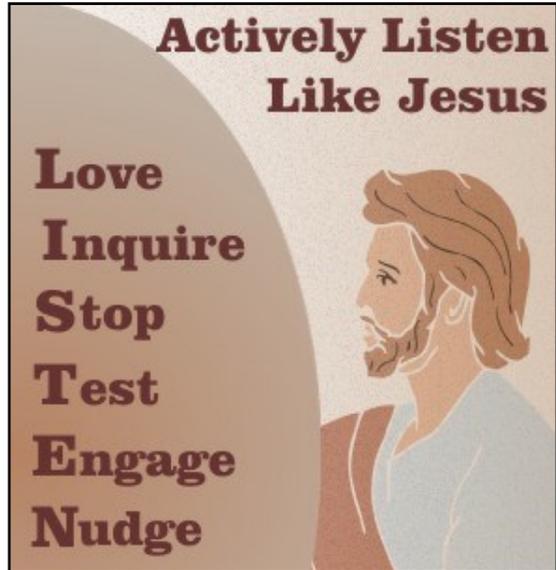
Dear Lord, help me to learn from you and to trust you to help me to share my story with my friends, neighbours and family in a natural way. Help me to ask the right questions and to believe that your Holy Spirit will lead me and guide me each step of the way.

Learn from Jesus

I'm not saying that evangelism is easy. I spent so many years thinking that it all depended on me perfecting my ten point Gospel presentation which I had learned off by heart. But, sadly, I noticed that most people were not interested in being talked at and avoided me like the plague!

When I spoke to Archbishop Bill Burnett, he smiled and said, "Stop trying, and let the Holy Spirit lead you". Well, I was quite taken aback because I thought that was exactly what I was doing! Anyway, to cut a long story short, he and his chaplain prayed for me to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I went off feeling quite different and my friends noticed a huge difference in me. My room-mate asked why I was so happy. I couldn't really answer that question except that I knew that I had changed.

I learned to trust the Holy Spirit to open doors and to turn a simple conversation into an



opportunity for prayer and ministry. I'm absolutely convinced of the power of asking questions.

Take time to read some of the Gospel accounts of conversations Jesus had with people and learn from Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to listen with genuine interest to what my friends are saying and also to what they are not saying, and give me the wisdom to know when to listen and when to speak and what questions to ask.



That same mountain saw the source of the River Jordan, while all around the land was filled with the temples of pagan religion.

Towering above them, resplendent

The uniqueness of Jesus

It is interesting to note the place where Jesus was when he asked his disciples this important question. Matthew tells us “Caesarea Philippi”. (It has since returned to its ancient name of Banias.)

Jesus had taken his disciples north, probably to get away from the crowds, and so he travels 25 miles north-east of the Sea of Galilee in the domain of Herod Philip who had renamed Caesarea in honour of the Emperor. It’s worth a visit.

A grotto under the mountain there was reputed to be the birthplace of the god Pan, the most famous fertility symbol in ancient paganism. He was the legendary god of nature, and his worship was important in the area.

in its white marble and massive dimensions, was the new temple to the Emperor from which the city derived its changed name.

It is against this backdrop that Jesus, wandering carpenter that he was, pitched his claim: “Who do you say that I am?” It was as if here, in the shadow of the symbols of worldly power and ancient pagan religion, that the Son of Man boldly chooses to challenge his disciples to recognise his identity.

Prayer

Lord, our world is a global village with a multiplicity of faiths and beliefs. Help us to hold to the truth of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and of his claims. With Peter, we proclaim, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Defend the Gospel

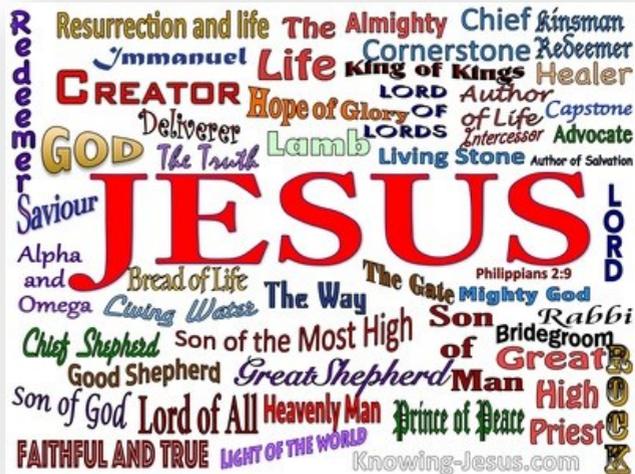
If the place where this announcement was made was remarkable, then so were the titles that Peter gives to Jesus. They were all the more remarkable when seen against the

syncretistic tendencies of the place.

Syncretism is a danger in our culture because it mixes Christianity with something else such that the fusion becomes a different gospel. When anything is added to the message of the Gospel, the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ is compromised, and another gospel can be created that is not the Gospel at all, such as referred to in Galatians 4:9-10.

Even in the earliest years of the church’s history, Paul had to defend the Gospel against false teachers who were attempting to combine the pure message of the Gospel with both Judaistic legalism and Gnostic-type beliefs from the surrounding culture.

Jesus is seen to be the “**Son of Man**” to whom is given the “everlasting Kingdom and power and glory” (from Daniel 7:13-14), the Messiah, or “**Christ**” - (Anointed One), and the “**Son of the Living God.**” (Matthew 16:16)



Prayer

Lord, Jesus Christ. You alone are Holy, You alone are the Most High, God. We worship you alone. There is no One like you. You must have pre-eminence in all things. We are indeed perfect and complete in you. Give us confidence in you so that we know who you are and can tell others what a mighty, all-sufficient Saviour you are. Amen.

Jesus revealed

Finally, we see here what remarkable insight Peter has been given by the Holy Spirit.

Peter recognises that this carpenter/rabbi, Jesus, is the One every Jew was waiting for. This knowledge, Jesus tells us, is not human knowledge but comes from God. Only God can reveal God, and this is what has happened here to Simon Peter.

It's good to remember this. We will not convince people of who Jesus is because that is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Father in heaven who has opened Peter's eyes and heart to grasp this truth for himself.

(Matthew 16:16-17).

Let's remember though, that Peter first met Jesus because his brother Andrew told him that they had found the Messiah, so evangelism is still important (John 1:40-41). We know that Peter became a staunch follower of Jesus and then one day God revealed to him in a deeper and

more personal way who this Jesus was, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Of course, Peter had his doubts, as we sometimes have our doubts. That's why we need to study the Scriptures so that every time we start to doubt, or when the devil tries to persuade us to think differently, we have the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to remind us who Jesus is.



Prayer

Dear Lord, Only you can open the eyes of our friends and family to see who you really are. You opened Peter's eyes, and you promise that you will also open our eyes to see you and to get to know you better.