

“Kingdom People” – Week 24

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2026 - MICHAEL BOWERS



Summary - “Who Do You Say That I Am?”

Last week we looked at Matthew 16:1-12 and saw that Jesus had just been questioned by the Pharisees and Sadducees for a sign. He announced there is only one sign, the sign of Jonah (which he had already explained and connected to himself in Matthew 12). In giving Jonah as a sign He connected this moment in Matthew 16 to His future death, burial, and resurrection as the only sign anyone will ever need for hope, salvation, and eternity. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is our hope and salvation. Jesus then re-entered a conversation with the disciples regarding the leaven, or false teaching, of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They were initially confused by the warnings of Jesus, yet by the end, they began to connect the dots and clearly see that He was referencing the false teachings of anyone who would demand a sign from heaven. This week we pick up the interaction with Jesus and the disciples in vs. 13. This moment takes place in Caesarea Philippi, quite a distance from the crowds surrounding the miracle-working moments near the Sea of Galilee. They have moved to a more remote location with His closest followers. Jesus is finally alone with His disciples and He is going to use this time to ask two very direct and very hard questions: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” and “Who you say that I am?” These men had spent the majority of their past few years traveling with Jesus, listening to Him teach, watching the miracles, seeing His practices of going to pray, and simply being close to Him. They were taught by the life and teachings of Jesus. And while they would have more interactions with Jesus, this moment is truly to test them to reveal what they truly believe regarding Him. Obviously, the disciples did not live in a bubble, and they were traveling with one of the most intriguing teachers/miracle workers in all of history! No doubt they heard the comments and were asked questions about the validity and authority of Jesus. Who do people say that I am? Jesus knows people are asking. The disciples explain that some think He is John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others say Jeremiah. Interesting that all of the examples that the people have given regarding who Jesus are all tied to dead prophets. Clearly Jesus’s teachings, life, miracles, and power was making enough of an impact for folks to believe that it was tied to the supernatural. After all, they believe He is functioning as a resurrected prophet of sorts. What they do not yet understand is that He is so much more; He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. God reveals this truth to Peter first, but it is a truth that we must also realize today. Our culture claims Jesus to be many things, yet few want to truly announce, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” This is also a question that each of us must answer as well. Who do you say that the Son of Man is?

Scripture - Matthew 16:13-20 (read entire chapter for clarity)

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock^[a] I will build my church, and the gates of hell^[a] shall not prevail against it. 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^[a] in heaven.” ²⁰ Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

Key Apps, Websites, and Online Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- <https://biblehub.com/>
- <https://www.youversion.com/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://bible.org/>
- <https://netbible.org/>
- <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/>
- <https://www.gty.org/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/>
- <https://carm.org/>
- <https://dwellapp.io/>

Further Scripture Study

Matthew 16:12-20 & 28:18-20; Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-22; Eph. 2:1-21; 1 Peter 2:1-11

As you study the scripture verses provided for this week, study for right context and right questions..

Right Context:

- The verse itself and key word(s) that stand out in the verse (meanings)
- The verses around the verse, the section of scripture, the chapter, the book, old/new testament, and relation to the rest of scripture
- Author and Date (Who wrote the book and when?)
- Audience (Who is the book written to? Main characters in the story and/or text?)
- Main points and overall purpose of the book
- Historical background, cultural significance, setting, people, rulers, etc.
- Scripture references; let scripture interpret scripture as much as possible

Right Questions:

- What does this passage say?
- What does this passage mean to its original audience?
- What is this passage teaching me about God?
- What does this passage tell us about man?
- What does this passage demand of me? (Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a sin to avoid? How is this applicable to me?)
- How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (What actions must I take in response to this passage?)
- What does this passage prompt me to pray? (For God, for others, for my community, for family, etc.)

Key Thoughts

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (vs. 13)

Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes in his book *Insights on Matthew*, “It is interesting that all of the options for the answers from others regarding Jesus are someone who would have had to come back from the dead, or, in Elijah’s case, return from heaven. The people knew the supernatural nature of Jesus; it was undeniable, yet they failed to see Him as the promised Messiah.” (vs. 14)

Many Americans would still affirm belief in Jesus. A 2015 study found that about 85% of Americans believe Jesus was a real historical person, and most of those say they believe He rose from the dead. But believing about Jesus is not the same as believing in Jesus.

In verse 15 Jesus drills down deeper on this question by asking specifically of His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”

Jesus moves from the outside (people in general) to the inside (individual, personal belief). This is not a study done on 1,000 people to determine the validity of Jesus. As David Platt asks in *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, “Who exactly is the Jesus that you believe in?” This is the heart of the issue.

Who you say Jesus is will determine everything about how you follow Him. If you think Jesus was a good teacher, then you will follow Him like you would a good teacher. You would show respect, but not surrender.

If you think Jesus merely had some good ideas, then you will listen to what He says every once in a while. If you think Jesus was a good example, then you will try to follow His example. But you may have a few other people to follow as examples as well.

However, if you believe that Jesus was and is the promised Messiah who came to the earth to save us from our sins, to conquer sin and death, and to reign and rule over all as Lord, then that changes everything about how you live.

Jesus was not establishing a program, but a people. Jesus was not building a fan base, but a family. Jesus was not building an earthly kingdom, but leading people to a heavenly one. And Peter, whether or not he knew the magnitude of his reply, states in verse 16, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Christ means the anointed one, the one chosen by God and anointed one. You are the Messiah, you're promised one, you're the one the prophets have spoken about. You're the Christ; you are the Son of the living God.

Key Thoughts

Now Jesus calls himself the Son of Man. Peter answers that you are the Son of the living God, you're Son of Man and Son of God. The idea of the Son of God is that he's got the essence and nature of his Father. You are the Son of the Living God. It is an affirmation of his deity. You're the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Peter did not come up with this answer on his own. This knowledge was a gift from God. God had revealed this truth to him, and he spoke with boldness. (vs. 17)

Verses 18-19 have been analyzed and scrutinized in church history regarding Peter, his role in the early church, his authority, and its implications for the church. Some believe that Christ built the church upon Peter and in many cases this idea leads to a false worship of Peter and the role that he played. Many believe Him to have been the first Pope and that the keys of Heaven themselves were given to Peter alone to carry. We want to clarify this by looking at scripture so that we can properly understand the context and what these verses are really saying...

- Peter is the first apostle who makes this declaration of Christ's identity, and he is the apostle upon whom much of the church's message and movement would be built, beginning in Acts 2.
- Jesus, however, makes a wordplay here. Peter's name means "rock," but when Jesus says "on this rock I will build my church," He uses a different form of the word.
- The emphasis in the Greek is not on Peter as the foundation, but on the truth Peter just confessed – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.
- Jesus is NOT saying that Peter is the foundation, but rather that He is building the church on the foundation of Peter of what Peter just said regarding Christ.
 - First - Jesus says, "I will build my church." It isn't Peter's church. It is Christ's church.
 - Second - in vs. 21-23, is one example of many, where we see the incompleteness of Peter's understanding of who Jesus is at this point and what will transpire.
 - Peter will eventually deny Christ, stand up for Christ, be forgiven and restored by Jesus, and be commissioned by Jesus.
 - Peter plays a vital role in the early church.
- As a result of Peter's first preaching of the gospel in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, around three thousand people were saved (Acts 2:41).
- Right after this, the early church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching of the Word, and thousands more came to Christ in the days ahead (Acts 2:42-47).

The church- the ekklesia, literally means, a community called out from the world for a specific purpose. While Jesus introduces this term to the New Testament accounts, it is only used two times by Jesus, yet as scripture continues, it is evident that the significance and purpose of the church, not a building, but a called-out people.

Key Thoughts

Jesus was building His church, and Peter continued to play a central role in this mission throughout the first 12 chapters of Acts. But Peter was not alone.

The church is the people of God, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

- If this truth is removed from the church, then we are no longer the church.
- If we try to tone down our sinfulness and desperate need for the grace and mercy of Jesus, then we are no longer the church.
- The church has often been mistaken for a structure instead of a called-out people. In fact, you can travel the world and step into some of the most beautiful physical and artistic structures known as temples, sanctuaries, or cathedrals, but it is not in the name "church" that we find the called-out church.
- Christ's church is in a group of called out people with a distinct purpose.
- That purpose and message we saw last week, "to communicate the truth of our need for the hope found in/through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus."

Again, as Chuck Swindoll writes, "The church is made up of people who believe in Jesus and know Him intimately. As those who know Jesus intimately, the church is also the community of people who proclaim Jesus confidently."

Further truth we can dig out of this passage and especially verses 18-19:

- Jesus is the foundation. (1 Peter 2:4, Eph. 2:19-20, 1 Corinthians 3:9-16) Peter, you will be incredibly important to the early church, the mouthpiece of the early church, but make no mistake, what Jesus is going to establish and is first mentioned in this verse, the church, is going to be built upon Jesus Christ, not Peter
- Death & Persecution will come, but not even death will stop the church. (vs. 18)

JC Ryle writes, "Jesus makes a promise here that has been proven true for 2,000 years. Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy [the church]. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, or burned. But the true Church is never altogether extinguished: it rises again from its afflictions; it lives on through fire and water. When crushed in one land, it springs up in another. The Pharaohs, the Herods, the Neros . . . have laboured in vain to put down this Church. They slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church outlives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. [The Church] is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still."

Empires have risen and fallen. Kings have come and gone. But the church of Jesus Christ is still standing. The church, the people of God, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, will face persecution and great trials, however; the church has been given the authority to preach the Gospel regardless. (Matthew 16:19, 28:18-20)

Key Thoughts

David Platt writes, "When Peter or the other apostles, or any follower of Christ for that matter, proclaims the gospel, it is done under Jesus' authority—His authority to save sinners and to judge sinners. Jesus' authority to save means that we can say to any person in the world, "If you turn from your sin and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, you will be free from sin forever." That's a guarantee based on the authority of Christ and His Word. At the same time, we can also say to any person in this world, "If you do not turn from your sin and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord, you are bound to your sin and its payment for all eternity in hell." Authority has been entrusted to us as the church to proclaim this message."

The Gospel is what makes the church different from any organization that has or ever will exist. Because of this Jesus strictly charges them in vs. 20 to tell no one that He was the Christ. They are beginning to understand who He is, but they had not yet understood what He came to do. When we come to vs. 21-23 this is evident that they knew he was the Messiah, but they had not yet grasped the cross, his coming death, and resurrection.

If they were to promote Jesus as the Messiah, a group of people would have heralded him as the next great military leader, a revolutionary vs. Rome. Jesus wanted them to grasp, as The Messiah He would not conquer Rome. Rather, He would conquer sin and death for eternity.

Reflect & Respond

Jesus first asks His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" What danger lies in this question regarding the culture people live in and/or the opinion of others?

God reveals the truth to Peter and He answers, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." What does this truth demand of us regarding Jesus? How does this statement alone challenge you personally regarding your own surrender to Christ. What areas of your life do you find hardest to surrender to the Son of the Living God, the eternally ruling and reigning Messiah?

Peter did not come to this understanding on His own, rather it was revealed to him by the Father who is in Heaven. Think back to your own understanding of Christ as Savior and Messiah of your life (your Give Your Life to Christ moment). How was this truth of who Jesus truly is revealed to you? How did you come to truly understand this? Do you regularly thank God for revealing this to you?

What beliefs and/or confusion have you had in the past regarding Peter and his role in the church? How has the teaching this week on the "rock" helped you to understand that it is Christ's church and that we all play a role as believers?

If Jesus asked you today, "But who do you say that I am?", what would your honest answer be based on your actions this past week?