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Confession

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:15-16

Key verses: Matthew 16; Mark 8, 33; Luke 9:18-27

Key personalities: Jesus, and the Disciples.

Timeline: The God of Eternity; He enters as a Man, being fully God and fully Man, walks this earth as our Lead, 28-29 A.D.

Jesus is surrounded by a crowd of people, all wondering, *who is this Guy?* Perhaps, in the wonder and excitement, the crowd is perplexed and confused; yet, they are willing and able to give their opinions. Jesus, who walked this earth mostly in subtlety, uses this as an opportunity to test His Disciples. *Who do the people say I am? Who do you say I am? Are they ready to know? Do they know?* The women from Canaan knew (Matt. 15:21-28). The context indicates the Leaders must have known, but refused to accept the Truth. Peter boldly steps up with his opinion, which does not adhere to the opinions of the crowd; Peter rises and proclaims his faith. He takes the risk of ridicule from both the crowd and the other Disciples as he proclaims, *He is the Great I Am!*

Key Happenings: Who do you say I am?

The Disciples possibly questioned Peter's confession, "Was it correct? How can this be when Jesus is so humble?" They wondered. Peter's confession is a lesson to us that we have to remain in His truth and not worry about what crowds have to say. Their wonderings are conflicting opinions that are rooted in only ideas rather than facts. Would they want to know the Truth if they knew their beliefs were wrong? Or would they not care, desiring rather to stay in their wrong beliefs? Peter's confession is about not following the crowds, but rather allowing the Father to reveal, by the work of the Spirit, who Jesus is. He IS the One who reveals! There is no person or opinion, no matter how good and informed, that can take the place of His Revelation.

Who do you say? The *you* is plural and is directed at all of the Disciples. Jesus is not seeking information; rather, He is showing His Disciples how to take ownership of their faith and mission by focusing on who He really is and what our response must be. Peter seems to answer on behalf of them all.

- *Caesarea Philippi* was not the coastal city of Caesarea; rather it was a small city, 1700 feet above sea level in the foothills of Mt. Hermon, 25 miles north of the Lake of Galilee and near the source of the Jordan. This was the northern boundary of ancient Israel in the territory of Gad. This land was one of the most distant, culturally, to the Jews, because it was so pagan. It was not the usual place to confess faith. To the Jews, only the Temple or Synagogue would do. Jesus takes faith and brings it to the daily places of life--in the midst of sin--so we can respond to who He is and be free from that sin.
- Peter had the right idea, yet, he did not fully understand at this time. He said *Christ* (Messiah) *the son*, meaning, as *adopted* (Psalm 2:7; 89:27), like David was adopted in God's royal line (2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 2:7). But, Christ is the One who adopts us. The only way we can know Christ is by the Spirit's illumination.

- *Blessed are you*, a standard rabbinic praise meaning, "Peter, I am happy and proud for you!" It is like being told by our parent/father that he is proud of us. This term also conveys an emotional state of satisfaction, well-being, and contentment that results from being approved by God for fulfilling our duty. In the Sermon on the Mount, it suggests enjoying God's special favor as His Grace is working in us (Matt. 5:1-12).

Confession is not just a mere statement. Confession is a realization that take hold of the Father's leading and election and make it real in our lives so we bubble over to tell others about Him.

In the response of Jesus to the confession, it is important to note that the *rock* is the Truth that Peter is confessing--not Peter. Church traditions--not the Bible--stress that Peter is the foundation, and all those who confess build on his foundation. In Catholicism, the line of Popes all directly ascend from Peter--not by birth, as kings, but by confession and the laying on of hands (Isa. 51:1-2; John 6:46-49).

- *Peter* is from the Greek word, *petros*, which means "a small stone" or "rock." The image in Scripture is Christ as the foundation stone and we are as the little stones that lay on His support. We all are called His *living stones*, while Jesus is the ultimate Rock--*petra* (Psalm 118:22; John 1:40-42; 1 Pet. 2:4-8; Acts 4:11-12).
- *Bar-Jonah* means "son of Jonah," and is, perhaps, Peter's father's name; or, it might mean that Peter is finally "getting it," as Jonah did after all he went through. The way someone was properly addressed was by full name with the first name and the father's name as your last.
- *Flesh and blood* refers to study and learning; Peter received his information from Divine illumination.
- The "rock" Jesus refers to is not Peter himself, but rather the foundation that His Church is built on. The foundation is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph2:19-22). The O.T. often spoke of people being used to build a foundation (Ruth 4:11; Jer. 1:10). The key is God, and our prayer for Him that build us up (Psalm 51:18; 69:35; 147:2; Jer. 24:6; 31:4; 28). We become the living stones who remain in Him by the confession of our faith, as Peter did.

Death cannot silence His message or His church. These are great words of hope and comfort for the soon-to-be persecuted Church.

- *Gates of Hades* refers to the realm and power of death and not necessarily the actual place of Hell. *Hades* normally refers to the place of the dead, not just Hell and torment. But, in this phrase, death itself shall not stop us who are in Christ. Not immortally, in a physical sense, but our place in eternity is secured (Job 38:17; Psalm 9:13)!
- *Church* (Greek *ekklesia*) means "to call out." This term was used by the Jews, then for a "remnant community" such as the Qumran community who composed the Dead Sea Scrolls and who founded this term (versus the name of a synagogue or gathering). The Greeks used this term to refer to people assembling in the cities for clubs or organizations. Later in the NT, this term jumps to its full meaning as *the ones who are called out* (Acts 7:38). In its context, Jesus is using this term to expand His claim of Messianic leadership (Matt. 16:21-23; 18:17; 26:28).
- *Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* differs from the "Keys of Heaven" that only Jesus holds. (Rev. 1:18). The Key is our faith that turns the tumblers in the lock of His door, locked because of our sin. He is the One who opens the door for us. In ancient cultures, the person who had the keys was the most powerful, the leader of the servants. In the OT, a high official held symbolic keys to God's Temple. A key represents the authority to choose who would enter (Isa. 22:20-22; Mark 13:32-34; Matt. 18:18; Acts 2; 8:14-25; 10; 14:27; Eph. 3:5).

- *Binding and loosing* were court terms and refer to what was both prohibited and permitted by the Law of Moses and/or civil law (Matt. 18:18).
- Why *tell no one*? This is called the “Messianic Secret.” Most Jews then wanted a military messiah, not the true one. This was to prevent people from an uprising, forcing Jesus into political power. People did not understand the sufferings that had to take place and that could not be impeded (John 6:15).

The Gospel is about One God Who is Sovereign and loves while we are separated deeper and further than we can imagine from His salvation because of our sin. Yet, God is the One Who seeks us out with a love deeper and further than we can imagine and wants to reconcile with us.

The concept of sin has fallen away from secular understanding. People think they are good as long as they have not done anything "really bad" like murdered anyone. They do not understand the depravity and how we are fallen away and are not able to have any relationship with God. Thus, people do not see the reason and need for the Gospel (Acts 17).

When we confess, we must understand the Gospel. When we do, we then apply the Gospel by putting off those sins and desires that are contrary to God's call and principles and put on proper understanding of God's Word to produce His Fruit. In so doing, we put on our good character because He is good and desires to work in and through us. Our ethics come from our relationship with Christ and in understanding His Lordship and the application of His Word, not just from obligation or ritual or law (Eph. 4:25-32; Col. 3:1-17).

Our growth in Christ has value! Real, impacting, growing faith requires our diligence.

We are asked to not stay at the confession, but to continue our Christian growth as an ongoing effort and apply His Truth so our hearts become centered upon Him. Just think what self-control, patience, endurance, godliness, and love would do for you and those close to you (2 Pet. 1: 5-11)! Our failure to obey God will cause us to lose out on so much in life and in eternity. Our diligence to remain faithful and obedient with virtue will help enable others to do so. When we obey God, He will reward us beyond our ability to fathom!

A lot has been said about what the purpose or meaning of life is. Some say the purpose is up to you to figure out, while others say that it is what you do after you find out what you like. It is not enough just to live; we have to have something to live for, a hope and a direction that is imbedded in a prime purpose. Jesus gives us a clear picture of His purpose for us, which is to acknowledge Him as LORD and worship Him. He is our meaning; He is our purpose! This is what we confess, and this is what Peter did. Unless a person comes to faith in Christ, His teachings are meaningless, and we have no purpose. It takes the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to illuminate our hearts and minds so we can receive His Truth, and so we can have purpose. This purpose gives us keys to eternity that death itself cannot take away.

This illumination becomes our faith by Christ's work on the cross. This work becomes our redemption, our salvation; it is not of us--not our repentance or our prayer. It is only of Him. He is our purpose and the meaning of our life, both here on earth and for our life to come. When we have received His confession and have made it our own, we can confess His wonder to others and God will use His Spirit to empower that confession as a small part of His revelation.

Key Takeaway: Confess, and live it out. Grow in Christ and pursue the faith with all due diligence, no matter what! Life is not about our wants, needs, and comfort; it is about Christ working in us more powerfully and triumphantly. The key to turn on this engine of our spiritual formation is our willingness to pursue, endure, and grow. Allow the holiness of our Lord, His grace, His patience, understanding, faith,

loyalty, goodness, and love to be exhibited in you--not by imitation, but with gratitude and submission, *kept by His power* (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:27; Gal. 5:21-23; 1 Pet. 1:5)!

The Call to the Church? How is your church's confession? This is measured in its "fertility." That is, how is the Fruit of the Spirit that should be growing in and through yourself and the people in your leadership and congregation. The fruit is meant to come through you as a collective in all things, to one another and your neighborhood and the world. Our collective faith will be tested--not to attack or cause us to fail--to teach us to be more faithful, stronger, and better so we can be better to those around us. God wants us holy and pure in Him. This is what gives Him glory and builds a great healthy church!

Questions to Ponder

1. How would you answer this question before having a relationship with Christ: *Who do you say I am?* How about now?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus walked this earth mostly in subtlety?
3. What is the best place to confess your faith, a church, a public setting, to your family, or...?
4. What did it take for Peter to boldly step up with his declaration, and not adhere to the opinions of the crowd? What would it take for you?
5. What do you need to do to feel confident in remaining in His truth and not follow what the crowds have to say?
6. How did you find your purpose before you were a Christian? What was the meaning for your life? How has that meaning changed as you have grown in age, in maturity, and in faith? What is it now? What does it need to be?
7. Why do you suppose people are so willing and able to give their opinions, even when they have no idea about what the facts and truth are?
8. When and how did you take ownership of your faith? Did it help you to focus on who He really is? How can you make faith your own, and not just an idea, or what you do, or where you go to church?
9. Confession is not just a statement; rather, it is a realization to take hold of the Father's leading and election, and make it real in our lives. What does it take to make it real at all of the daily places of your life?
10. How and why does Peter take this confession and in a week or so turn it into rebellion and deceit? What have you done with your "Key to the Kingdom of Heaven?"
11. What does obedience mean to you? How have you demonstrated it? Can you recall a situation in which you were *not* obedient and why? How is obedience a call to action? How could your personal and spiritual life be improved with the ability to move faster in your faith?
12. God reveals His Kingdom and Glory to you in many ways--through His Word, through your prayer and devotional life, and through your faith and obedience. Has He revealed it to you? If not, are you really looking? What do you need to do to receive it?