

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." ³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

³²He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

³⁴Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.

LIKE PETER, WE ARE A SPIRITUAL WORK IN PROGRESS

- i. *We confess Jesus willingly*
- ii. *We struggle with kingdom values*
- iii. *We need to let God be God*

Dear Fellow confessors of the Lord Christ,

On Wednesday evening during bible study of First Corinthians we discussed what points you would want to make, if you were telling someone what the message of the Gospel is. After several suggestions were mentioned, we concentrated on a definition which we all knew from memory. It's the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed. The Second Article is concise and covers the bases. It is a confession that defines the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is all contained in the words of Peter's confession here in our text. Peter confessed, ***You are the Christ.***

By confessing that Jesus is the Christ, Peter was confessing that Jesus is the Promised Messiah. Jesus is the One promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden who would crush the serpents head. He is the One that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the other believers of the Old Testament were convinced would come. This was the One who would save them from the curse and guilt of their sins and secure them as members of God's Kingdom. They also knew that this salvation was not going to be cheap. It would cost the Messiah, the Christ, His very life because He came as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed to save us all. Peter knew that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. That picture was held before their eyes every morning and every evening in the evening and morning sacrifices that took place at the tabernacle or temple compound. Blood had to be shed in order for sins to be forgiven.

But Peter's faith and spiritual life was a work in progress. He was still learning. He was still growing in spiritual insights into the world of the kingdom of God. This becomes quite clear in our text for this morning. After such a wonderful confession, Peter has a meltdown later to what he had confessed. By later I don't mean years later, months or weeks, but perhaps only moments. But don't be too hard on Peter in your assessment of him. Because you and I walk in those same shoes don't we? It's easy to gather in this sanctuary and confess the words of the creeds of the Creeds and we mean every word of it. And yet, when push comes to shove we bail out. We miss the mark. Because our own heads and our own attitudes often get in the way. Our own desires present roadblocks to the truth and to living our confession.

As we study these word before us, let us consider the theme: LIKE PETER, WE ARE A SPIRITUAL WORK IN PROGRESS. First we will note that we confess Jesus willingly.

I. We confess Jesus willingly

During the time spent in the area of Caesarea Philippi at the northern end of the Jordan River valley, Jesus continued to instruct his disciples. It was an intense but slow process to bring about a change in the mindset with which the disciples had grown up. The religious leadership of that time had twisted any number of teachings to suit themselves. In doing so they distorted the Truth of God by teaching that a person's eternal well being was dependent upon how he lived and that the kingdom of God was a reference to the restoration of Israel. It was a reference to the political Israel as an independent nation in which peace and prosperity would flourish.

How well had the disciples learned the lessons Jesus was teaching them? Jesus raised the question, "***Whom do people say I am?***" This was an easy question to answer. The disciples only had to repeat what they had been hearing as people spoke of Jesus. The answers varied because different people had different opinions as to who Jesus really was. Some believed that Jesus was Elijah, who had returned to the earth. Some were of the opinion that Jesus was the reincarnation of John the Baptist. These were two outstanding and strong individuals of the past who had exercised a powerful influence on the people. Or Jesus could be one of the other prophets of times gone by. There didn't seem to be a strong commitment to any one of these opinions.

It would make sense that some people thought of Jesus as the return of John the Baptist. The people could easily remember John. He was a contemporary. John's preaching was "Repent for the kingdom of God is near!" This is also the message of Jesus. As those who flocked out to the region of the Jordan to hear John preach now heard Jesus pursuing the same message and doing so with the same authority, they easily drew the conclusion that John had returned. Elijah was the great prophet of the Old Testament. He fearlessly took on the opposition and challenged them. His contest on Mt. Carmel was an outstanding example of Elijah's uncompromising determination to faithfully communicate God's truth. The description of these two men could easily be superimposed over Jesus.

Then Jesus made the question personal. "**Who do you say I am?**" Now it is not a matter of repeating what someone else has said. Now the disciples were asked to think for themselves and to speak from their own hearts. Think about it. Who else could turn water into the finest wine in an instant? Who else could raise a person from the dead simply by saying the word? Who else could drive out demons from the possessed with a word? Who else could restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, the ability to walk to the crippled, or the ability to speak to the mute? The answer is obvious, isn't it? This man is God. This is the Messiah.

We know this too, don't we? Like Peter, we freely confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior. It is personal for us. We are willing to stand up and make a confirmation confession any day. We know that we cannot save ourselves. We know also that all the foul words we have spoken, all the rotten thought we have entertained, our thefts of the ideas and the property of others, our lusts and lies, our greed and hatred; have all been purged away in the blood flowing from the cross of Jesus. We know that the hell Jesus suffered was ours to bear. What grateful love we have for this Beautiful Savior!

II. We struggle with kingdom values

We also, along with Peter, have to struggle with the truths of the kingdom. Listen, **He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.**" Peter was offended by the idea that Jesus would willingly go to Jerusalem and allow Himself to be captured and mistreated and finally be put to death. Peter's problem was that he was looking at the kingdom from his perspective and not from Jesus' perspective. Peter was looking forward to a garden paradise here on earth when Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel. Peter's picture of restoration meant gaining political supremacy not going to Jerusalem to be cut down by sufferings and death. Peter wanted a living leader. He wanted Jesus standing tall at the head of Israel.

This thought of Jesus suffering and dying, even though he was aware that the "most wanted" posters had been put up, this was so reprehensible to Peter that He dared to take Jesus aside and tell Him that this should not happen to him. Peter was prepared to block the way. I am sure that there were all kinds of emotions running wild in Peter's mind. He loved Jesus. He did not want to see Jesus suffer. He did not want to have his dream of the kingdom shattered. The thought that the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law would be the ring leaders in the passion of the Christ must have also been hard to comprehend. The result was that by the time Jesus told the disciples that after He was put to death, He would rise again in three days, it went right over their heads.

III. We need to let God be God

Peter was interested in a kingdom on His terms. This is what Jesus told him. **You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.** Every time you think or say to yourself, "I don't like that part of God's Word," you are telling Jesus that you want His kingdom on your terms. The person who says that he or she wants a place in the kingdom of God while practicing a gay life style wants the kingdom on the basis of his or her own terms rather than according to God's terms. The person who says that fornication and adultery are outdated standards for today's society and can be practiced while anticipating a place in the kingdom of God, has not listen to what God says. The person who is secretly involved in internet pornography believing that what is done privately does not negate his public confession, does not believe Jesus when He says that to look in lust is sin. They are not willing to let God be God.

What Jesus teaches us here is that His Kingdom comes as He has planned it to come. We may struggle to understand some of the things God has revealed to us but it is not for us to say we will cast aside what we don't understand. We will build our own path to the gates of pearl. This kind of attitude serves the devil's purpose, not Christ's and repentance is called for. Neither our piety nor our performance is going to get us there. That will only succeed in getting us a first row seat in the judgment of God. We are all a spiritual work in progress of the Holy Spirit. But we need to remember that the Holy Spirit works through the Word which He inspired. Humble submission to the Word is what Jesus is calling for when He says that we should willingly take up our cross and follow Him – we should be willing to lose our lives for the sake of Jesus and many have. But they have not lost as far as the kingdom is concerned. Obviously then, we should listen to it, believe it and gladly hear and learn it. Amen.