

Matthew 21-05-02a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're continuing our study this morning in the Gospel of Matthew, resuming in chapter 16.

We will be picking up in verses 13 through 20. Matthew 16, verses 13 through 20. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and our study.

And we'll begin. Father, we're so grateful for another opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and discussion and reflection on the truth of your word. We thank you for these truths and the power that they impart to our souls for faith and obedience, the transformation of our minds and the preparation for the eternal future that we find here under the ministry of your Holy Spirit.

We pray that as we look together at your word, that the Holy Spirit will be present and effective in giving us clarity of understanding and unity of purpose and the fruitful application that is the real purpose for which we come together and study these truths. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Well, this, uh, is a very well-known passage. It is dear to the hearts of Catholics everywhere.

And, uh, all of you, uh, present and former, uh, Catholics will enjoy our look at this passage today because we discover that contrary to a widely popular opinion, Peter is not the Pope. Wasn't the first Pope didn't start the line of Popes. If you, you know, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

If Peter is not the apostolic link for the Popes, then all the rest of the Popes kind of fall to the ground as just men in funny hats. So we want to understand what does this mean? It's pretty easy to figure out what it does not mean. And so let's read our passage together when Jesus, this is first, uh, 13 of Matthew 16, Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi.

He asked his disciples saying, who do men say that I, the son of man am. So they said, some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

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. And I say also 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.

And I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on

earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Then he commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ. I defy you to find a modern church that makes any pretense of being fundamental or evangelical who has as their verse printed on the front of the pulpit. He commanded his disciples that they should tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ.

Well, let's begin at the beginning here. Jesus opens this particular episode with a question. He's in Caesarea Philippi.

This is up north and is not Jerusalem. It's not Nazareth. It's not Capernaum.

It's not Cana. It is a town that has been, uh, Romanized, given a Roman name and dedicated, uh, to Caesar. Who do men say that I, the son of man am? Who do men say I am? And opinions were divided.

Some thought that he was John the Baptist raised from the dead. This was Herod's theory. And the interesting thing about that, as I've pointed out before, is we think that resurrection from the dead was very difficult for people to believe, but they had no trouble believing it in those days.

Herod thought John had come back from the, this is the Herod that saw John's head on a plate. Now you can say maybe he didn't really die on the cross. It was cool in the tomb.

He revived and staggered out. You don't revive from having your head cut off and your head carried away at a quite a distance from your body. And yet Herod was convinced that Jesus was John raised from the dead and he was an eyewitness to his beheaded cranium on a, on a platter.

So when people say the, the obstacle to belief in Christ is, is resurrection from the dead. That's really not the obstacle. The obstacle is Jesus himself.

You go to Luke 16 and you remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and the parable consists of a dialogue between Abraham and the rich man. The only two people who speak is Abraham and the rich man. And after the rich man asks for Lazarus to comfort him and Abraham says, sorry, there's a great gulf fixed.

His second request is send Lazarus to my brothers. If he can't come and touch my tongue with a drop of water on his finger, then send him to my brothers so that they don't come to this place. And what does Abraham reply? They have Moses and the prophets.

Let them, your brothers hear them, Moses and the prophets. And if they do not believe and respond to God's revelation in scripture, neither will they respond though one were to be raised from the dead. It's Abraham's specific statement from the lips of the Lord

Jesus.

They won't believe even if someone is raised from the dead. Isn't it interesting? They might believe that the man was raised from the dead, but they won't believe his message, which is harder to say to this man, your sins are forgiven or rise, take up your bed and walk. But so that you understand that the one is true, I'm going to say the other take of your bed and walk.

He stands up and walks. It's, it's the same idea here. Can you believe that someone was raised from the dead? Can you believe that Jesus is the savior, the son of God, that everything he represents from the invisible world, God, the father, heaven, creation, the purpose of mankind on this earth and so on.

Can you believe that? Can you believe that someone is raised from the dead? So when they say, some say you were John the Baptist, one or two things would have to be true. If, if they believe Jesus is John the Baptist, there are people floating around in Israel saying, Oh, that, that's John the Baptist. Why would they believe that? John did no miracles, never healed anybody, never called a storm, never fed a crowd with multiplied bread and fish.

Why would they associate Jesus with John? It is because of his radically different message, right? He's not saying what the Pharisees say. He's not saying what the Sadducees say. So he's John in the sense of being an unorthodox messenger with an unorthodox message.

And I choose that word carefully. Orthodox means traditional accepted by the powers that be. It was unorthodox.

So the association there is with what they both represent. And to that extent, there is a perception because John was commissioned from heaven. He got his baptism from heaven.

He got his message from heaven. And so did the Lord Jesus and more about that coming up shortly. So some say you are John the Baptist and you are upsetting the apple cart of traditional religion.

And they are either explaining away his continued presence as well. The rumors of his death were premature or maybe he's back from the dead. But it doesn't seem to have been a stumbling block to Herod or these people who think Jesus is John that, well, he's back from the dead.

And it gives you an idea of the mysticism that was not far below the surface that would also cause people to engage in idolatry. Why would you be an idolatry? You look around in our post modern scientific age, would somebody get an image of the Buddha or the Virgin Mary? You see these, what was I, I saw I was driving by someplace and looked

over in the yard. You know, sometimes there's an actual little altar with a statue of Mary there.

And other times I looked in there, there was a porch. It made me smile because there was a porch and it had all of these little cast figures on it. There was Bambi and a rabbit and frogs and all of this.

And in the midst of all of this statuary, there was one of those Virgin Mary statues. And I thought, you know, if you're going to put Mary out there and you want to honor Mary, you don't set her between Peter Cottontail and Kermit. You know, you need, you need a little bit of distance and, and a separation of ideas there.

But it was one of those Marys that you sometimes see in a little meditation corner in somebody's yard. Usually a Catholic will do this and they want to honor the Virgin Mary, you know, good luck with that. But I just, I've never seen a Mary statue in a context of these garden gnomes and, you know, the guy with the lamp out by your driveway.

And then here's Mary just in the mix, just like I like all statues, but there there's a mysticism that is willing to believe that there are other gods, other forces. And you see it today. The snake oil industry is not dead.

It's just dressed up as in commercials. You know, there's fine print down below that says, these statements have not been verified by the fruit and drug administration. And you know, no medical benefit has ever been found for this, but you know, get these pills, these work for people.

Here's my testimonial. I eat this powdered fruit and it's great or whatever. But in many and most cases, there's no science at all.

And yet this stuff sells by the millions of bottles because there is underneath our scientific rational mind, a desire to believe in magic. It's pretty much just that simple. There's a desire to believe that you can just take a pill and you'll lose all kinds of weight, that you can get a plastic set of pedals, bike pedals and, and set them under your chair and just move your feet in a circle and you'll get in shape.

They sell these things. Listen, why? You remember me telling you this before when I worked at, when I worked at, uh, at, uh, the Brown truck people, UPS for a month. Uh, Suzanne Summers was on TV with the Thighmaster and, and the Belly Buster.

And we carried thousands of those things in one month. I know I personally packed onto trucks, hundreds of these Thighmasters. Do you see anybody on earth with a Thighmaster today? Because it's such an effective fitness and weight loss device.

It was a gimmick. You know, does anybody still use the Flowbee to cut their hair? Does anybody still have a Vegematic? Does any, you know, there's, but people want to believe

that there is a quick fix, that there's a simple solution, that there's an easy answer. Conspiracy theorists.

I don't want to believe, uh, one thing. So I'll believe something else. Sands, evidence or facts.

The reason I'm belaboring this is it's in our verse and it's quickly overlooked we have to examine ourselves to see if we are in a mystical belief system or if we are in the faith. If we believe that Jesus is John the Baptist, so to speak, if we believe that attending Bible class or tuning into Bible class or reading a few verses is a talisman against evil or is a good luck charm or is a quick shortcut to spiritual success and happiness in life, we're of this kind of thinking it's in our nature. It's woven into our humanly corrupt DNA and we have to watch out for it.

We have to identify it and eliminate it. Are there areas of my life where I've reduced the power of God to a convenient little puzzle piece that I just pop in? There's a gap. I'll just pop that in.

Well, prayer works. If I pray, good things will happen. Is it really that simple? Do you want to simplify prayer to just, well, I'll speak it to God and that will put in a plug on the positive side of the equation.

What do you know about prayer? It has to be based on what you know and you have to be invoking things that interest God. Oh Lord, please heal Uncle Joe. Oh Lord, I heard that so-and-so's got a pain in their sacroiliac.

Please comfort them. That is not biblical prayer. That is mystical thinking that you can just mention something to God and he's going to act on it.

That is not prayer and don't think that it is. If you are going to bring an issue before the throne of the creator of the universe, you had better do what Daniel did. Remember Daniel is a chapter eight where he spends so much time in preparation in reflection, in scripture reading before he brings his issue that the 70 years is up and it's and it's his hope that God will graciously restore Israel to the land.

There is confession of national and personal sin. There is great preparation. If you are going to go to the chief justice of the Supreme Court and make a case, are you just going to drive by and shout out the window at the building? Hey, chief justice, free my uncle from jail.

He's not supposed to be there. This is what a lot of Christian prayer devolves to. We come to the God of the universe.

We come through the torn veil of the flesh of Christ into the holiest of holies to come before our father in heaven and we toss off prayers without a second thought. It's

flippant. It's disrespectful.

It is abusive of the privilege that the Lord Jesus secured for us and it's mystical thinking. I can just say something toward the direction of the ceiling and God's going to act on it. Prayer is serious.

You are coming into the presence of the God of the universe and it requires preparation. Am I dressed? Am I cleansed? Have I thought about what I'm going to bring before the father? Do I have a basis? Do I have an argument for my case? Do I have a promise that I can legitimately claim and have I met the conditions for that promise? Mystical thinking. You might as well just say, well, Jesus was just John the Baptist and be off about your business.

Horrible mistake. And we know better. We know what prayer is.

We know how serious it is. And if we're going to bring a case, we need to think about it ahead of time, nail down its underpinnings. And in that process, what do we do? As we cycle doctrines and principles and promises through our soul, it corrects our thinking.

It corrects our perception and our understanding and our perspective on situations and people and makes us better servants and better representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we know when to speak and when to remain silent. If we're going to speak, God, the Holy Spirit can put the words in our hearts and in our minds and in our mouths of what to say that will properly and and reverently represent the Lord Jesus.

And we're not shooting from the hip. We're not spraying the area with stray bullets and misrepresenting Christ, misrepresenting Christianity, misrepresenting our father in heaven by shallow and flippant attitudes about what it is to be a believer and what it is to invoke the power of God and request the power of God in a situation. The Lord Jesus himself spent hours on his prayer life.

He didn't shoot the occasional, hello father, could you please keep Peter in line as he's driving down the road? So John the Baptist, some Elijah and some Jeremiah, what's the difference in Elijah and Jeremiah? Why would some people think he was Elijah and others think he was Jeremiah? What did Elijah do? What was the direction of Elijah's ministry? It was against the abuses of the government and it was against the abuses of false religion. Prophets of Baal, Jezebel, Ahab, Ahab and Jezebel had co-opted religion and were using it as a political tool. And so at Mount Carmel and elsewhere, Elijah is pushing against evil government primarily.

It's a, it's a, uh, an upward and outward focus. What is Jeremiah's emphasis? You read his prophecies, you read the message that God brought to Israel through him and it is the people and their attitudes and the impending judgment that is coming because their hearts are hard. Jeremiah is the weeping prophet and the warning prophet.

He is the last prophet before the captivity and it is, it is the hearts and minds of the people that he addresses. So some think that Jesus is here as an anti-religion, anti-Roman force like Elijah. Others think that he is a messenger primarily to the people and in that sense, they would be right.

But is he only that Elijah and Jeremiah are messengers? John the Baptist was a messenger. Each of them has a message in a different, in a different realm. John's message was change your minds.

The kingdom is at hand, right? And as Jesus continues to preach about change of mind and preparation of the kingdom and what the kingdom is like, you think of the, the, uh, teaching on the hill, the sermon on the Mount or the sermon on the plain as representative of Jesus teaching, you need to change your mind, change your thinking. That was John's emphasis. Elijah is, this structure that has been built is false and evil in terms of government and religious leadership.

Jeremiah is, God's judgment is going to come because you haven't put him first. You've corrupted his law. You've broken his moral principles and judgment is coming.

So is, uh, is Jesus just a messenger? He said to them, but who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, you are the anointed one. You are the Messiah. You're not just any messenger.

You are the messenger. You're not just any bringer of the message to change minds. You are the issue.

And we've seen many times, you'll see, uh, commentators point out and say, well, this, this is the first time that, you know, Peter is called out here because it's the first time that it's been said and understood. And that's not really the case. Uh, you can go back two chapters to a chapter 14, verse 33, which we looked at, I think last time, um, when Jesus stretches out his hand and pulls Peter out of the drink and they enter the boat, the wind ceases.

Those who were in the boat came and worshiped him saying, truly, you are the son of God. The disciples in the boat, including Peter are convinced at that point, you are the son of God. Well, why doesn't Jesus give the message that he gives here at that, at that time? Uh, you can see it also in John chapter six, verse 69.

And you can write that out in the margin, John six 69. This is when Jesus talks about eating his flesh and drinking his blood and many disciples turn away. And, uh, Jesus says, do you also want to go away to the 12? Simon Peter answers him in six 68 of John Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

And we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God. If you look at the, the variant texts there, uh, you are the Holy one of God, but the

recognition is substantially the same. So, uh, and of course, if you look in John chapter seven, uh, the controversy is, could this be the Christ? Um, so that question has come up, they believe it, but what does this really mean? And this is the important, uh, theme for our study this morning, because we want to turn the corner with none of us have any question that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God.

We have that affirmation. It's the foundation stone of our salvation. Uh, confess with your mouth, the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God is raising from the dead.

You're saved, right? Romans 10, nine and 10. So the key to this confession is the question that prompts it and the statements that follow it, the question ahead of it and the statements after it are not found in Matthew 14 and they're not found in John six or in John seven. It is the context here that helps us understand what Jesus is really talking about and why he emphasizes this particular confession, what it does and does not mean for Peter and the disciples soon to be apostles and what it means for us.

So our first point of observation, interpretation and application today is to look at the question Jesus asks, who do men say that I am and who do you say that I am? Is there a difference in the way we understand the Lord Jesus, what we say about him, what comes out of our mouths related to him in speaking the truth in love, in conversation, in testimony and essentially in prayer to God, whether we're speaking to God or speaking to others, what do we say and on what basis do we say it relative to the Lord Jesus? Are we saying it because he is the Christ, the son of the living God? What do you know about prayer? You know, three things, three inviolable rules about prayer. It is in it's addressed to whom the father only exclusively we pray to the father in what name the name of the son in what power the power of the spirit we do not know how to pray as we ought. Paul says the Holy Spirit takes our prayers and converts them into heavenly language.

Groanings that cannot be uttered by mortal men. God doesn't hear any of our prayers until the Holy Spirit conveys them like the smoke coming up from the altar of incense. They are converted from materiality to ephemerality.

They go from the material to the spiritual. They are changed at the altar of incense into that smoke that can ascend. It's no longer in the form that it was brought and laid on the altar.

It's changed. The Holy Spirit does that. All three members of the Trinity are involved in our prayers.

Any single prayer that we pray, all three members of the Trinity touch it in some way. It goes to the father invoking Jesus Christ, not just speaking the name Jesus Christ, which isn't actually his name. Do you want to say Yeshua Mashiach? That's a whole lot closer to his real name.

You want to say Yesu Christu in Greek, Jesus Christ is third hand away from his original name. What are we really saying when we pray in the Lord's name? What is name? He made a name for himself. He's, he is, uh, remember, uh, Junia and, uh, Julius who are of note among the apostles, they have a reputation, their deeds, their attitudes, their character are known.

So we should pray not just using in Jesus' name as a formula, but as we say those words saying father, the authority and the foundation for what I am saying to you is my savior, Jesus Christ who died for me, who gave himself for me, who has atoned for my sins, who has cleansed me, whose torn flesh provides my entrance before your throne to represent myself under his high priesthood in this holy of holy place. Anything less than that. You're really not praying in Jesus' name.

We're back to John the Baptist is alive. Mystical thinking. It's a serious thing.

If it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, if it was a fearful thing for Esther to go uninvited into the throne room of Xerxes, her husband, what do you think it is for us to go toddling into the throne room of God with our leaky unchanged diaper, not having given a thought to what it took for us to have that privilege and not having a thought about what we are going to babble in his presence, not having thought it out, not having done the preparation and given God the respect and the honor and the glory that is his due angels in his presence bow and declare holy, holy. We're not them. How much more preparation should we have? So the first and most important thing, if we don't remember anything else from our study this morning is mystical thinking is dangerous.

We need faith. We need honor for God. We need recognition and understanding of who we are, why we're here and the basis upon which it is the shed blood of Christ.

It is the torn body of Christ. It is the work on the cross. Hebrews chapter 10 that enables us to come boldly before the throne to find grace to help in time of need with our bodies having been our conscience, having been sprinkled and our bodies having been washed.

Remember that? It's a useful review that we don't have time to do. That's our first principle. Now with Peter's acknowledgement and understanding that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, why does Jesus emphasize this? Why does he say what he says afterward and how should that reflect in my thoughts and my actions, your thoughts and your actions? Well, we'll look at that when we come back from the break, but let's pause here for our intermission and special music.