

Matthew 21-05-09a

Good morning, happy Mother's Day. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are continuing our study this morning in Matthew chapter 16, looking at the Great Confession as it is called.

It's always something of an issue for me when things in the Bible have been given a name that's not in the Bible. The Bible doesn't call it the Great Confession any more than it calls Jesus' entry on Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry. But we have these traditional terms and so the Great Commission, the Great Confession, the Great Entry, Great is in the eye of the beholder.

We will see, however, that the Lord Jesus does approve of and make some statements about this observation that Peter makes. So we'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we will begin. Father, we're grateful for another day, another opportunity to prepare ourselves for future service and function, opportunities to learn and grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

We pray that as we examine these parts of your word this morning, that the Holy Spirit will find us ready pupils and be able to impress these principles and doctrines on our hearts in a way that results in a fruitful application, that we will be motivated and drawn closer together and closer to the example of the Lord Jesus in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

In Matthew chapter 16, Jesus has departed to a part of the country that is a bit off the beaten track. It is away from the, as they used to say, far from the matting throng. There are not as many religious leaders tagging along, trying to subvert, attack and otherwise diminish his influence among the people.

There is a mixed audience. And so in Caesarea Philippi, I was reading a little blurb, I think it was in the chronological Bible, that Caesarea Philippi had four different names as a city. It was called Panos, P-A-N-O-S, which is its original early name.

But it was rebuilt and dedicated to Caesar by Herod. And so it was Caesarea, but there was already another Caesarea down on the coast that was Caesarea Maritima. And so this one needed some distinction.

It's kind of like there's York in England, and so you have to have New York. There's Jersey in England, so you have to have New Jersey. And all of the new Hampshire and new everything that you have on the East Coast is to distinguish it from its old namesake in England.

And in the same way, Caesarea became known as Caesarea Philippi. Later on, it would have yet another name to be dedicated to Nero, and it was Neronius, but that one didn't

really catch on. And after the Romans kind of fell out of power, it reverted to its old name, Panea, which is a variation of Panos.

And that's how it was known down in the Byzantine days. But I think the note authors of the chronological Bible thought it was a curiosity that Jesus is going to ask his disciples, what name do people put on me when he's in a town that has got all these different names that nobody can decide what they ought to call the town. And in any case, you have the discussion here, and we looked at it last time, the significance of recognizing that there's something special and even supernatural about the Lord Jesus and his works and his words.

So some say he's John the Baptist. They don't seem to have a big problem believing in resurrection at that point. Some Elijah, some Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

And this, of course, is because of his chastisement. The warning aspect of his ministry was prominent enough. This is what's notable about the prophets, isn't it? Is they don't come in with the beatific vision and there's going to be little cows and goats and lions and lambs and wolves all laying down in the peaceable kingdom.

There is this warning note and a call to change of mind that is so characteristic of Jesus' ministry and teaching that he is thought to be one of the prophets. And we looked at the distinction between Elijah and Jeremiah. One, as a harbinger of getting rid of bad government, which a lot of people felt like was a good thing in the days of Roman rule.

And then Jeremiah, warning of impending judgment, and as the weeping prophet, decrying the people's distance from God and their covenant with him. We looked at that last time. Now we want to look at the answer to Jesus' question in verse 15, who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, you are the Christ.

And in many Bible versions, that's where the declaration ends. I think in Luke, the parallel says you are the Christ of God. The son of the living God is open to debate on whether it is present or absent in the original.

Scholarly opinion tends to favor the shorter reading because it is much more likely that the scribe will either add something for clarification or that a marginal note will get incorporated in early copying as a part of the text. The first scribe is just making a little devotional comment and the next one thinks it's a correction and includes it. So it is clear that what Peter said without any debate is you are the Christ.

And as we've seen, it's not the only time that the disciples have dwelt on the question of who Jesus is when he stills the storm on the sea. What manner of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him? Who is this? But it is amazing that they don't chant this in unison. It doesn't say, and they replied, Shimon says this.

He replies and says, you are the Christ. We saw in John 6.69 and Matthew 14.33 that this

isn't so much the first time that they've acknowledged this, but it is unique at this point for a couple of reasons. Looking at the preceding context, the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, to what extent has it been incorporated into the unleavened bread of Jesus himself? He is the bread that has come down from heaven.

And in that sense, he is the unleavened bread and to recognize him as the Christ in the context of the meaning of the bread, which is a recurring theme, it's going to come up again the night of the betrayal and arrest and trial. This is my body, which is broken for you. But Jesus responds to this acknowledgement by saying, blessed are you, Shimon bar Yonah, Simon bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven.

The first thing to note about verse 17, our first point of observation is Jesus is not blessing Peter because he says this, because of his acknowledgement. This is not Jesus saying, let me pronounce a new and special blessing on you. This is a declaration that Simon is already blessed.

He has received the blessing. We saw this previously, a preceding chapter when Jesus said, it has been given to you to understand the mysteries. But to those who are outside, everything is in parables.

We saw this a few chapters back, Matthew chapter 13, it has been given to you. You're blessed. It has been given to you to understand.

So when Simon says, you are the Christ, Jesus says, you've got that gift and you're exercising that gift. You are using that gift from God, that gift of discernment of spiritual truth. You are blessed.

I know you're blessed because that's how you know this. This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my father who is in heaven. Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.

Some revelation comes through flesh and blood. Some revelation is confirmed by some material witness. It's interesting to compare this.

Keep your finger in Matthew 16 and flip over to Luke chapter 24. Knowing the geography of the gospels as you do, you remember that Luke 24 is going to be after the resurrection. And in verse 36, after the men on the road to Emmaus recognize Jesus, as he breaks the bread, it's earlier in the chapter, it is in the breaking of bread that their eyes are opened and they recognize him.

He's blessing and breaking the bread. They're real excited. And so they return to Jerusalem in verse 33 and find the 11 and those who were with them gathered together saying, this is 2434 of Luke, the Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon.

He has appeared to Simon. This is the only reference we have that there was a resurrection appearance. You remember Peter and John run to the tomb earlier that day on the word of the women who see the angels and they see the folded napkin and so on.

And sometime between the morning and the appearance, when Mary thinks that Jesus is the gardener and the women return and tell the disciples and at first the disciples don't believe. And then Peter and John run. We'll see that in a moment.

It's in John chapter 20, but here the men on the road to Emmaus. Now why this is a little bit off topic. I didn't get to this in a Easter week, resurrection passion week, but it's interesting to me in this chapter of 24.

You ask yourself all through the ministry of Jesus, the unlikely targets of divine revelation. It is the shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks to whom the angels announced the birth of the Lord. It's not announced in Jerusalem.

It's not even announced to Simeon or Anna or some of these others who are waiting. There's no record that there was any announcement made at that time. They're going to find out, uh, you know, a week later, uh, when, when the baby is brought and dedicated.

Right. But the announcement is made to the shepherds. Why is that in the same way at the end of Jesus earthly presence at the resurrection? The first appearance of the Lord Jesus is to Mary in the garden and to these men on the road to Emmaus who are not part of the 12 Cleopas and another guy, a nameless other guy.

Why there is a clue to this in the text itself. I've just happened to note it when I was running through my references, but when Jesus joins them in verse 17 of Luke 24 and says, what kind of conversation is this, that you're having with one another, uh, as you walk. And, uh, the earlier text says, and they stopped and looked sad.

So the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to him, are you the only stranger in Jerusalem? And have you not known the things which happened there in these days? And he said to them, what things? So they said to him, the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty indeed and word before God and all the people. What is our great confession context? Tell us a lot of the people thought that Jesus was a great prophet. And so you'd say, well, if these are one of the ones who didn't even get that he was the Christ, why is Jesus appearing to them on the road to a mass? Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty indeed and word before God and all the people, but look at verse 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death and crucified him.

But we were hoping that it was he who was going to do what? Redeem Israel. We, this guy and Cleopas, we were hoping he was the one who would redeem. Isn't it interesting? Redeem Israel.

This is a salvation concept, not a political concept, not a prophetic concept. None of the old Testament prophets preached a message of immediate redemption, hoping for a redeemer. This goes all the way back to Job, doesn't it? I know that my redeemer lives.

And though the worms eat my flesh, someday I will stand on my feet and see him with my own eyes. Joe believed in resurrection. Joe believed in redemption, and he believed in a personal redeemer, my redeemer.

I know he lives. So these men, why did Jesus appear to them? They were further along evidently than some of the 12, as was Mary. And it is to them that Jesus makes this appearance.

We were hoping he was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Certain women of our company who arrived at the tomb early astonished us.

When they did not find his body, they came saying that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. Certain of those who were with us, if Peter is the Pope, how is it that they don't say, and the Pope went and found the tomb empty? They don't even name Peter and John.

Certain of those who were with us went and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him. They did not see him. Then he said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken.

Ought not the Christ, you are the Christ, ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory. And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself. So then they drew near a day as far spent, they sat at the table in verse 30.

He took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew him. And he vanished from their sight.

Their belief is based on the word. He teaches them. He reminds them.

He says, you're slow to believe that these are the ones whose hearts burn within him as he speaks to them on the way, because it is the word that convinces them. And as soon as they recognize him, he doesn't need to be there anymore because the application of the word is what does it. It is revealed to them from heaven through the scriptures.

Contrast that with Jesus appearing to his disciples immediately following this. He says, peace to you. They were terrified and frightened and supposed they had seen a spirit.

He says in verse 38, why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?

Notice the difference in what he says to Cleopas and the other guy, that poor guy. Wouldn't you wish that your name would be in there and you're just not the friend of Cleopas? Why are you troubled and why do doubts arise in your heart? This is a different question than, oh, you who are slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. You're sluggish in believing, but you'll get there.

And when Jesus opens the scriptures, their hearts burn because it is the scriptures that convince. It's the scriptures that create the reality for them to believe. When Jesus gets to the upper room where his own disciples are, he doesn't say, oh, slow of heart to believe.

He says, why are you troubled and why are there doubts in your heart? So here's my flesh. Behold my hands and my feet. See that it is I myself handle me.

A spirit does not have flesh and bones, which is a greater blessing. I'm asking this sort of in the abstract here. Would you rather have the scriptures and the witness and testimony of the Lord Jesus burning in your heart? Or would you rather have him appear to you personally and say, touch my hands, touch my feet? Which would you choose? Which would well, let me put it this way.

Which would most Christians choose? Monty Hall is standing there. He's just got two doors and he says, look behind door number A, you've got a Bible behind door number B. You've got Jesus Christ in the flesh. Pick a door.

Which one would almost all of us pick? Well, I'll take door number two, Monty. There's the Lord Jesus in the flesh. The witness of scripture says the opposite.

Jesus tells Peter, you are blessed because even though I'm sitting here talking to you, you've got a revelation in your heart that came from my father in heaven. The men on the road to Emmaus become convinced their hearts are warmed by the witness of scripture. Jesus doesn't say, oh, well, let me tell you the denouement to the story.

It's me. Look, and he pulls his, his, uh, head covering back and shows them his face and behold, it is the Christ. How does Jesus reveal himself to these men who were waiting for redemption? Jesus gives them a Bible class, not the revelation of his physical self.

The men in the upper room who should have known, who should have remembered the great confession we are looking at are not convinced by any of the secondhand testimony, not convinced by the witness of the women, not even convinced by the appearance to Simon or these men who say we saw him. Jesus has to appear in the flesh and say, look, touch my hands, touch my feet. Look at the scars.

Behold, it is I that's second best. Jesus tells Peter, you are blessed because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you. Flesh and blood did not reveal it.

Flesh and bone is not the source of your belief. Remember the story of Thomas turn over to John chapter 20. Here is the story of Peter and John running to the tomb upon the testimony of the women.

So verse three, Peter went out and the other disciple, that's John and we're going to the tomb. They both ran together. John outruns Peter and came to the tomb.

First, he's stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there. He did not go in. Simon.

Peter came following him and went into the tomb and saw the linen cloths lying there and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, John, who came to the tomb first went in. Also, he saw and believed.

John saw and believed. What did he see? Did he see the Lord Jesus raised in the flesh? Handle me, touch me. John saw the empty tomb, the empty grave clothes.

John believes it is the absence of physical evidence that convinces John. He believes right at this point. This is why John is really probably the foremost of the disciples, certainly Peter and John, but John gets it more quickly.

For as yet, they did not know the scripture that he must rise again from the dead. Jesus told him this over and over and over again. They went away to their own homes and evidently it is at his own home that Jesus will then appear to Simon as we have noted in Luke.

But keep going here. Mary Magdalene sees the Lord. Then you have him appearing to them in the evening.

Peace to you as the Father has sent me. I also send you in verse 21, receive the Holy Spirit in verse 22, forgiving and retaining sins. The disciples tell Thomas, we have seen the Lord.

He says to them in verse 25, unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails and I put my hand into his side, I will not believe. I will not believe without the testimony of flesh and bone, flesh and blood. So after eight days, his disciples were again inside.

Remember there's eight days separating the birth of Jesus Christ and the witness of the shepherds and then the right of circumcision and dedication and so on. So Jesus is in the midst. Peace to you.

Then he says to Thomas, reach your finger here. Look at my hands, reach your hand here and put it into my side. Do not be faithless, but faithful.

Thomas, because you have seen me, verse 29, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. They say, quoting scripture, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

It is more blessed to believe based on the witness of the word of God and the spirit of God than it is to believe based on an experience. Touching the scars, handling Jesus' flesh, watching him eat a piece of broiled fish is not as blessed as flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father in heaven. Now that is so important and it's the reason I've emphasized it here because this is the basis for what Jesus is going to say about the church in general and about Peter in particular.

This is the basis, understanding that there is a distinction between believers who get it from the word of God and the spirit of God and those who get it only after experience. There is a difference. There is a distinction and notice this distinction is recorded in heaven.

Jesus was not present when Thomas said, I'm not going to believe unless I can put my finger into the scars, but Jesus quotes him eight days later. So our attitudes about what it takes to convince us, what it takes for us to believe are known in heaven. They are known by the Lord and confirmation is provided for Thomas and what does Thomas go on to do? How great a witness and a worker for God is Thomas in the new age of the church? Who is it that first introduces the Jewish world to the resurrected Christ? Who does it? Is it Thomas? It is Peter in Acts chapter two.

When Pentecost happens, it is Peter who preaches to the assembled Jews and says, this is what was spoken of in the prophets. This is the word of God manifest. Peter is the one who introduces that Jewish Pentecostal crowd to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Who introduces the Gentiles to the reality of the resurrected Christ? Be careful now, a little trivia question here. Who introduces the Gentiles? Turn to Acts chapter 10. This is our last passage before the break.

Acts chapter 10, certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, Caesarea, ring a bell. Certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, centurion of the Italian regiment, devout man who feared God with all his household, a Gentile who fears God. He saw an angel of God who says in verse four, your prayers have been answered.

Your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Send men to Joppa and find Simon who is surnamed Peter. He's lodging with Simon the Tanner.

He will tell you what you must do. It is Simon Peter who beginning with Cornelius and the vision of the clean and unclean animals, let down in the sheet, arise, Peter, kill and eat. But God is sanctified.

Let no man call common. So he goes to Caesarea. He meets Cornelius and beginning in

verse 34, he preaches the gospel of the resurrected Christ to the Gentiles.

This is Peter, Peter in Acts chapter two, Peter in Acts chapter 10, not Thomas. Why? Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. You are blessed because you have responded to the revelation from heaven, from my father.

The same thing is going to be true of the apostle Paul. He is going to be blinded by the glory of the Lord Jesus on the road, but the scales will fall from his eyes. And it is his old Testament knowledge that kicks in and convinces him that Jesus is the Christ.

And he is going to continue the ministry of the Gentiles. But the application for us, we sometimes think, well, I'm expecting answered prayer. I'm expecting movements of God.

I want to see healing. I want to see provision. I want to see resolution of problems.

I want to see God's eruption of power into circumstance and into situation and into the common world. I want God to get my favorite candidate elected. I want God to fix our nation.

I want God to resolve problems, large and small. And people who think that way are in danger of losing their faith. We've spent extended amounts of time looking at authors who lost their biblical faith because they demanded of God a sign.

And when he didn't bring it forth, they departed and started writing books like Misquoting Jesus and Jesus Interrupted and so on. It is a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks a sign, that wants flesh and blood confirmation. What is the rock on which our faith is built? Is it a physical Lord Jesus Christ that you can go and visit in Jerusalem? Or is it the revealed Christ of Scripture? Reality is spiritual.

The temporary ephemeral shadows are physical. This life is a shadow. The evidence of our senses is a mental construction that doesn't reflect reality.

But we forget that and we become disappointed. We become discouraged when, in my case, the plan of Sam does not seem to be coming to fruition. To me, it makes sense that this thing should happen, this obstacle should be removed, this provision should be made, this prayer should be answered that serves my goals and my purposes and my idea of what would be best.

Faith says, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, open the scriptures, understand who Jesus Christ is, why he came. It is not a purpose of deliverance from the Roman government. It is a purpose of redemption.

This is what Cleopas understood. And that's why Jesus appears to him and his companion in one of his first post-resurrection appearances, because they were waiting for redemption. What were Simeon and Anna waiting for? The deliverance of Israel, the

redemption of Israel.

They get one of the first revelations that Jesus is on the earth and on the scene. So as we look at our own hearts and we think about this great confession, we're going to see when we come back from the break what the consequences of this understanding are going to be for Peter specifically, and for those who follow in his example of faith, not based on what flesh and blood reveals, but on what God the Father reveals from heaven. Revelation from heaven is spiritual truth.

Let's pause here and take our break, and we'll resume our study when we return.