

Peter – His Life and Letters #4

Who Is Jesus?

Matt. 16:13-18

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 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. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 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 in heaven.” Then Jesus strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem & suffer many things from the elders & chief priests & scribes, & be killed, & on the third day be raised. Peter took Jesus aside & began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But Jesus turned & said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matt. 16:13-23)

I The location: Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13)

- A **Caesarea Philippi**, some 25 miles (40 km) north of the Sea of Galilee, had been a center of the worship of (1) Baal, then of (2) the Greek god Pan, & then of (3) Caesar. At this time it was an important Greco-Roman city, with a primarily pagan Syrian and Greek population. In fact, its name had recently been changed from Paneas to Caesarea Philippi by Philip the Tetrarch (one of Herod the Great’s sons), in honor of himself and Augustus Caesar. Excavations at the site have revealed coins minted to depict a temple built to honor Augustus Caesar, and a pagan cave dedicated to Pan, with shrines and cult niches that are still visible today. ESV
- B Located at the base of Mount Hermon (in southern Syria)
- C Formerly called Panias after the god Pan (god of the wild, of shepherds, mountains, & fertility)
- D At this place Jesus asked two questions:
 - 1 Who to people say that I am?
 - 2 Who do you (the disciples) say that I am?
- E In the midst of this environment of many gods, Peter speaks for the disciples and says: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

II The question everyone must answer – Jesus asks: “Who do you say I am?”

- A Our understanding of Jesus determines our worldview & the course of our life.
 - 1 Today there are many views of who Jesus is.
 - 2 You encounter them at school, work, with your neighbours & friends, maybe even family.
- B We live in a changing world. The 20th century was dominated by 2 world wars plus the cold war [the USA vs. USSR]. The 21st century is dominated by terrorism (some religiously motivated).
 - 1 Sept 11, 2001 – 911 changed the world.
 - 2 Sept 21, 2013 Al-Shabab, an Islamist terrorist group attacked a shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya. News reports say they freed hostages who were Muslim & killed those who were not.

- 3 Sept 22, 2013 84 people killed in Pakistan as they were leaving a church service. They were targeted because they were Christians. Since then two more terrorist attacks have occurred in Pakistan. More than 140 have died in these 3 attacks
- 4 In January of this year two young men originally from London, ON after joining a radical Muslim group launched a terrorist attack on a gas plant in Algeria. They blew themselves up in the process. One was a Muslim convert; the other raised a Muslim.

III Muslim Beliefs concerning Jesus

- A Muslim's believe that Jesus was merely one of God's prophets or messengers. They strongly reject the idea that Jesus is the Son of God.
- B The Koran says: "It is not for God to take a son unto Him." "Jesus was no more than a mortal whom [Allah] favored and made an example to the Israelites."
- C Muslim's do not believe that Jesus was crucified. They teach that God substituted someone else in his place.
- D Finally, they believe Muhammad was a superior prophet to Jesus.

IV Muslim beliefs concerning God

- A What about their teaching concerning God? Muslims call their God, "Allah." Is Allah, the God of Islam, the same as the God of Christianity?
- B Islam teaches that God is One and only one. Christianity shows that God is Triune; He is one God but in three persons. This is not just a matter of numbers. God being Triune has very strong implications regarding what He is like. Muslims would say that we, Christians believe in three Gods. This is not true. We believe in one God who has revealed Himself in three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Spirit.
- C Apparently there are 99 names for Allah which Muslims memorize and use in their worship. Not one of these 99 names is love. The Koran says God only loves those who do good. To them God is a God of power. To us God is a God of love. "God so loved the world..." Jn. 3:16. "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" Rom. 5:8
- D In "What Is Allah Like?" George Housney explains Muslims' view: "We humans can never know Allah, because he is so far from us & so different from us. The only knowledge Muslims may admit to is knowledge about Allah, not a personal, experiential knowledge of him. People cannot know Allah & should not even try to know him. Allah is not involved in the affairs of humans." Thus, Housney points out the contrast between Muslim and Christian concepts concerning humanity's relationship to God: "The Christian claim that humans can have a relationship with God is considered by Muslims to be a metaphysical impossibility. To Muslims Allah has not revealed himself, but rather he has revealed his will. His will, according to Islamic teaching, is limited to Islamic law. A person performs the will of Allah when he follows the dictates of the Islamic legal system." Finally, Housney further illustrates the distinction between Muslim and Christian concepts of God at this point: "Allah has no personality and is indescribable by any characteristic attributable to man. Most of his attributes are absolute qualities which are unique to himself... According to the Islamic doctrine of Allah, he is non-relational." (*The Facts on Islam*, by John Ankerberg & John Weldon)

V **Peter's Response to Jesus' question:** "But you, who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15)

- A Note the emphatic “you” -- “But **you**, who do you say I am?” [A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures...*]
- B “You are **the** Christ, **the** Son of **the** God, **the** living *One*” (Matt. 16:16, Lit.) “Peter plainly calls Jesus the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Son of God the living one (note the 4 Greek articles)” [A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the NT*, vol. 1, p. 130]
- C What do people say? What do you say?
- D The Christ
- E The Son of the Living God – implies a relationship [Jesus calls God “My Father” (Matt. 16:17)]
- F He is God the Son. This implies that God is Triune.

VI What is the significance of God being Triune?

- A God said “let **Us** make man” (Gen. 1:26) – We in the Trinity are having such a good time, let’s enlarge our community (a colloquial restatement).
- B Through God the Son, redemption was accomplished to open the way for humanity to enter this relationship. This was a demonstration of his love. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8 cf. Heb. 9:14; Jn. 3:16
- C God is known through the Son – Jn. 1:18

VII Practical Implications of the Trinity

- The doctrine of the Trinity makes definitive revelation of God possible as he is known in Christ: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (John 1:18). No man can see God and live (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16), but God the Son provided an actual manifestation of God in the flesh.
 - The Trinity makes the atonement possible. Redemption of sinful man is accomplished through the distinct and unified activity of each person of the Godhead: “how much more will the blood of *Christ*, who through the eternal *Spirit* offered himself without blemish to *God*, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14).
 - Because God is triune, he has eternally been personal and relational in his own being, in full independence from his creation. God has never had any unmet needs, “nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” (Acts 17:25). Personhood becomes real only within realized relationships, and the reality of relationship can only exist where one has something or someone that is not oneself to relate to; if, then, God had not been plural in himself he could not have been a personal, relational God till he had begun creating, and thus would have been dependent on creation for his own personhood, which is a notion as nonsensical as it is unscriptural. Between the persons of the Trinity, there has always existed total relational harmony and expression; God is, from this standpoint, a perfect society in himself. Apart from the plurality in the Trinity, either God’s eternal independence of the created order or his eternally relational personal existence would have to be denied. (ESV Study Bible)
- A He is one God in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Spirit.
 - B This shows that God is personal and relational.
 - C The Father loves the Son, the Son is in the bosom of the Father, the Spirit glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son. There is this intimacy, love, glorifying, and joy within the Trinity.
 - D John describes the Son as living from all eternity in the “bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), an ancient metaphor for love and intimacy. Later in John’s gospel, Jesus, the Son, describes the Spirit as living to “glorify” him (John 16:14). In turn the Son glorifies the Father (Jn. 17:4) and

the Father, the Son (Jn. 17:5). This has been going on for all eternity (17:5b). (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 214)

- E The life of the Trinity is characterized not by self-centeredness but by mutually self-giving love. ..Each of the divine persons centers upon the others. None demands that the others revolve around him. Each voluntarily circles the other two, pouring love, delight, and adoration into them. Each person of the Trinity loves, adores, defers to, and rejoices in the others. That creates a dynamic, pulsating dance of joy and love. The early leaders of the Greek church had a word for this – *perichoresis*. It means literally to “dance or flow around.” (Tim. Keller, p. 215)
- F Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), in reflecting on the interior life of the triune God, concluded that God is infinitely happy. Within God is a community of persons pouring glorying, joyful love into one another. (T. Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 217)
- G Historian George Marsden of the University of Notre Dame, sums up Jonathan Edwards’s view, saying, “The ultimate reason that God creates, says Edwards, is not to remedy some lack in God, but to extend that perfect internal communication [fellowship] of the triune God...” Mankind’s creation was motivated not by any lack or unmet need in God, but to share in the rich surplus, the super-abundance of the fellowship that has been enjoyed eternally within the divine Trinity. Or, as best-selling author, Timothy Keller of Redeemer Church, NYC, says, “God did not create us to get the cosmic, infinite joy of love and glorification [He already has that], but to share it. We were made to join in the dance. If we center our lives on Him... we will enter the dance and share in the joy and love He lives in.” [Tim. Keller, *The Reason for God*, p.219]

VIII Revelation not from men but from “My Father.”

- A Peter’s earthly father is Jonah (Bar-Jonah means son of Jonah) or John. But you did not get this from him. My Father – Jesus strengthens his relationship with God the Father, He revealed this to you. As Peter spent time with Jesus, gradually he saw who Jesus really was.

IX You are Peter – you have changed, you have advanced. The time spent with Jesus changed Simon to Peter. Previously Jesus said you shall be called Peter. Now Jesus says: “You are Peter.” (Matt. 16:17-18) “Jesus calls Peter here (16:18) by the name that He said he would have (Jn. 1:41)...Then it was a prophecy, now it is fact.” [A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the NT*, vol. 1, p. 131]

- A I will build my church – just as the Triune God is a community, a relationship, the church is also a relationship, a community. This church is “my church.” God wants to bring us into a relationship, a community. Note: Jesus did not expound on “the ‘church’ at this time, but the use of Greek *ekklēsia* [‘church’] to refer to God’s “called out” people has substantial background in the [Greek OT] Septuagint (e.g., Deut. 9:10; 31:30; 1 Sam. 17:47; 1 Kings 8:14). Jesus is predicting that he will build a community of believers who follow him. This “called out” community--*ekklēsia*--would soon become known as ‘the church,’ a separate community of believers, as described in the book of Acts.” ESV
- B The church is built on people with a revelation of the Son of the Living God.
- C The basis of this community is seeing Jesus as the Son of the living God. You see God is love, God is relational, and God is living. Now we are invited to live in this same realm. The church--*ekklēsia*--is where Jesus is the centre and focus.