

Matthew 16:21-28 **Don't Leave Jesus Behind**

The warship had just returned from a tour overseas and the young ensign shown himself to be responsible and efficient. Because of that he was given the opportunity to take command of the ship as it made its out to sea again. The ensign gave a series of crisp commands, and before long he had the decks buzzing with men. The ship left port and began steaming out of the channel. The ensign's efficiency had been remarkable. In fact, the deckhands began to proudly acknowledge that he had set a new record for getting a destroyer under way. The ensign glowed with pride and was not all that surprised when another seaman approached him with a message from the captain, which read as follows:

"My personal congratulations upon completing this exercise according to the book and with amazing speed. In your haste, however, you have overlooked one of the unwritten rules of seafaring – make sure the captain is on board before leaving the dock."

Had that ensign meant to leave the captain at the dock? No! He had been so preoccupied with his own agenda and what had to be done, that he just didn't give the captain a second thought.

The story told in Matthew 16 tells of a time toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. His last journey to Jerusalem is at hand, and he will soon face the horrors of the cross. Over the past 3 1/2 years, His disciples they have observed Jesus as He: ... taught and preached: healed the lame the sick and the blind: cast out demons: and raised the dead

But – in spite of all this – the disciples weren't quite sure WHO exactly this Jesus was. They knew He was a great teacher, a healer, a prophet equal to any in the Old Testament... but they had never really talked about who Jesus was before this.

So when Jesus asked His disciples to tell him who OTHER people said He was, I think He was giving them a chance to safely air their own opinions.

So, when they admitted that others had said that Jesus might be: John the Baptist; Or Elijah; Or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. I believe that even they had thought that at one time or another.

So Jesus gives them this chance... but then, He brings it home by asking: "Who do YOU say that I am?"

I don't know if you looked at this passage during the week or read my piece on the church website but I can imagine things getting very quiet. Kind of like in a classroom where no one knows the answer to the question and everyone is afraid the teacher will call on them.

But, as always, Peter didn't like a vacuum, he is after all the disciples DL - designated loudmouth. He raises his hand and spouts off the first thing that comes to him mind: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"

THAT WAS THE RIGHT ANSWER.

That was the answer Jesus was looking for. And Jesus drives that fact home by patting Peter on the back saying: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven". Matthew 16:17

If there was any question of who Jesus was before this, it was now long gone. All doubt had been removed.

This is the Son of God...

This is the Captain of your ship

Do not leave Him behind!

I. How could anyone possibly leave Jesus behind?

Well, since the confession (Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God) is essentially a theological statement, the most

obvious way to “leave Him behind” would be to be wrong about what we believe about Jesus.

Say it now: I believe (I believe) Jesus is the Christ (Jesus is the Christ) the Son of the living God (the Son of the living God).

There is no mistaking the importance and the meaning of that confession.

Charles Colson said that after he made his conversion to Christianity (previously he had been known as Pres Nixon's hatchet man and was imprisoned for his part in the Watergate scandal) he discovered that one major U.S. daily newspaper, as a matter of policy, would not print the two words Jesus and Christ together; for the editor said - when combined - that “represented an editorial judgment.”

And that newspaper was right! To say Jesus Christ is to acknowledge, even tacitly, that Jesus was who He said He was. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

In case there was any question about what the confession meant, Peter put it to rest when he preached: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12
In other words, there is NO assurance of salvation to anyone who doesn't accept that. Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God.

Now, that doesn't mean that there haven't been people who've claimed to be Christians who have denied the essential truth of that confession. Over 50 years ago Redbook magazine (August, 1961) did a survey of those in Bible Seminaries in the US, and they found that (at that time) 56 %rejected the virgin birth of Jesus Christ

71 % rejected the idea of there being a life after death.
54 % rejected the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
And 98 % rejected the doctrine that Jesus Christ would physically return to earth.

Theologically - these people had left Jesus way behind. So, it is possible to leave Jesus at the dock because of bad theology...

2. But it's possible to be theologically correct about who Jesus is, and still leave Him behind. Jesus said "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven..." Matthew 7:21. In other words: You can have your doctrine down pat and still leave Jesus behind. But, how's that possible??? Well, Peter did it.

Peter gave this great confession about who Jesus was “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”, Jesus pats him on the back and says “blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah...” And then Jesus informs His disciples of what is about to happen at Jerusalem

“Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Matthew 16:21

Then Peter... this great statesman for Christ... this theologian who's just declared that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God”... this Peter “took (Jesus) aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Matthew 16:22
And then Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’” Matthew 16:23

WHOA! In a Minute, Peter went from “blessed are you Simon, son of Jonah” to “Get thee behind me Satan”

What happened?

Well, what happened was that Peter had his theology right, but he wasn't prepared to put his theology into practice.

Peter was willing to say the right thing – that Jesus was the Son of God - but he wasn't willing to follow through and let Jesus **BE** the Son of God in his life. He wasn't willing to let Jesus be Jesus, and as a result he would have ended up standing in Jesus' way.

The confession – Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God – means nothing if we're not willing to ACT upon what we say.

That confession is the foundation of our faith

What do you do with a foundation?? Well, you build on it.

Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:11-15:

“... no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

Jesus is our foundation. That means we need to build on Him That means we need to DO something to further His kingdom.

When I was doing my degree, a group of us older students were talking about why we were there. A guy called Tim said this. " He was fairly faithful in attending church, gave his tithe every week, greeted people and prayed... but then one day he got a visit from his minister.

The minister sat down with Tim, talked with him a little while and then said:

“Tim are you going to wither on the vine?”

“What do you mean by that?” Tim asked.

“You're not doing anything. You're just coming and sitting in church. When are you going to DO something with your faith? When are you going to step up to the plate SERVE Jesus?” He went on to become a minister in the Baptist church.

Another way of asking that would have been “When are you going to start building on the foundation of Jesus?”

Now, going to church is important. In fact, if you weren't faithful in coming to church, Clive and I'd have no one to preach to.

Though in these pandemic times things are different and the idea of church is changing.

And praying is important. Praying is what we do because we're God's people.

And tithing is important. If you and I don't give our tithes, it's going to be hard to keep the doors open, and pay our way.

But building on the foundation of Jesus means doing more than that. It means being able to step back and say: “You know, I personally helped build the Kingdom. I helped put it together.”

Let me explain what I mean by that. Let's say, I bring a builder over to my house and have him build a shed out back. The foundation has been laid, and he starts to work.

Whenever he's there... I'm there

Whenever he wants to talk... I talk to him

When he gets done... I pay him

Did I help build the shed? No. I was there as it was being done... but I didn't really help do it. I didn't help build on the foundation.

Now, I'm not particularly skilled at building things. But, while I was out there talking to the builder, I could have asked if he

needed a tool or something, or help in carrying some of the materials. I could have told him that, when he left for the night, I'd be willing to put up the shelves inside. Every little bit I could have done would have lightened the load of his work and made it go quicker and smoother.

When the shed was finished, THEN I could have said, I'd helped build on the foundation, rather than sheepishly said, no, I just sat back and watched.

Saying: Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God means more than having the right theology
It means "doing something."
It means building on the foundation of what I SAY I believe about Jesus.

And it also means that this isn't so much an obligation, as an opportunity.
It's privilege not a punishment.
I get to help Jesus build His kingdom because I really believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and He wants to entrust me with a part in His plan.
So... saying Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God is part theological belief.
And it's part physical involvement – acting upon what we say we believe.

3. But it's one more thing... it is part Spiritual reality

When Peter declared "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" Jesus patted him on the back and said: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, BUT BY MY FATHER IN HEAVEN." Matthew 16:17
Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:3 "... no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."

Hmmm. What's that mean? It means that I can SAY I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God. And I can DO all kinds of things for the church because I believe that.

But that statement of faith and that act of faith receives its power and energy from the presence of God's Spirit in my life.

In Acts 2:38 Peter tells the crowd what they needed to do to be accepted by God: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

In other words... if you want to be saved... you must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God, and that means: Repenting of your sins And being baptized into Christ

BUT ONCE you've done that - once you've believed and then done something about that belief - THEN God will give you His Spirit. It's God's Spirit dwelling within you that will give your faith and actions power

"if you put a piece of iron in the presence of an electrified field, that piece of iron itself will become electrified. And in the presence of that electrical field, it is changed into a magnet. As long as it remains in contact with that field of power, it will continue to attract other pieces to itself.

By the power of the Spirit in our lives, we are changed, and electrified and now have the power to put our faith into action in our own lives, and in the lives of others. Jesus in our reading today says to each and every one of us: If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (v24,25).

SO ... Go to it be electrified for Christ. In His name AMEN