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Years ago, back in 1998-99 I studied for and took one of the hardest tests of my life. I was working at Ithaca Industries where I was striving to become the Assistant Treasurer of the company. In order to attain that position, I had to become a “Certified Cash Manager” as acknowledged by passing a national test offered by the Treasury Management Association. I was told it was harder than passing the CPA to become an accountant, in that only 20% of the people who take it, pass it. I studied for a year and a half. I had to go to Chicago to take a class on how to even study for the test. I’ll say it again, it was the hardest test I’ve ever taken in my life.

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“Well?” you say. “What happened?” Well, I passed! It was strictly a pass/fail test. You had to score a 70 or better to pass. You were never told your score. It was mailed to you and the notification simply said: Pass or Fail. Well, the letter arrived at my office at Ithaca in the company mail that came to me. I remember taking the letter and walking outside. I was so nervous. My hands were literally shaking.

I remember exactly where I was standing in the parking lot when I opened the envelope that had in the left corner, return address: Treasury Management Association Testing Center. I opened it and slowly open the single page. In large, bold letters, it said: “**PASSED**,” and below that word it said: “**Congratulations Mr. D. Kevin Brown, you are now a Certified Cash Manager and are a member of the Treasury Management Association of Professionals...the nation’s highest ranking association for treasury professionals!**” That certificate still hangs on my wall in my office. Not that it means much anymore. The certification lapsed years ago...but, it’s a reminder of the hard work I put in and the Lord helping me to pass that test.

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Oh...I remember that day so well! To say I was “overjoyed” would have been an understatement! I remember almost crying! All of those months of studying had paid off! And about a month later, I was named the “Assistant Treasurer” for the company! I had passed the hardest test of my life!

Now I tell you that story this morning because in our study of Matthew’s Gospel, the disciples of Jesus Christ are getting ready to face the hardest test of their life and the test would be just one simple question. That’s it! And the question was asked by Jesus, and the question was this: “Who do you say that I am?”

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**Matthew 16:13-20**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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Church family, this passage represents the climax, the apex, the Mount Everest of Jesus' ministry in teaching His disciples about the truth of who He was. This was the final examination...it was only one question...and it, too, was PASS or FAIL... And at this point in Jesus' ministry, the pass rate was a lot worse than the 20% of those who passed the Treasury Management Association test in 1999. People were walking away from Jesus in droves.

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Church family, what Jesus asked those disciples was not only the apex of His ministry on earth...it was the apex of the Gospel. It would be the apex of everything else that happened, as would be recorded in the New Testament. In fact, the answer to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" was the apex of the entire Old Testament and was literally who the OT pointed to.

The question: "Who is Jesus Christ?" remains today...THE most important question a human being will ever answer. Because the answer to that question isn't summed up by a piece of paper that says: PASS/FAIL, it's summed up by the words that will be said to you and to me when Jesus either says: "Well done good and faithful servant," or "Depart from me...I don't know who you are?" Literally the answer you and I give to the question of "Who is Jesus" will determine our eternal destiny. I want you to contemplate your answer to that question as we move through the rest of the message this morning.

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**Now think about this with me**... as we come to Matthew 16, Jesus had been teaching and ministering NOW for close to 2½ years. He's literally within months from His death on the cross. He's been building up to this moment for months. See it in verse 13.

**Matthew 16:13**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

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Jesus had, once again, made His way north, into Gentile territory. This time He's gone to a place called Caesarea Philippi. Take a look at the map...



See Caesarea Philippi at the top? It's about 25 miles

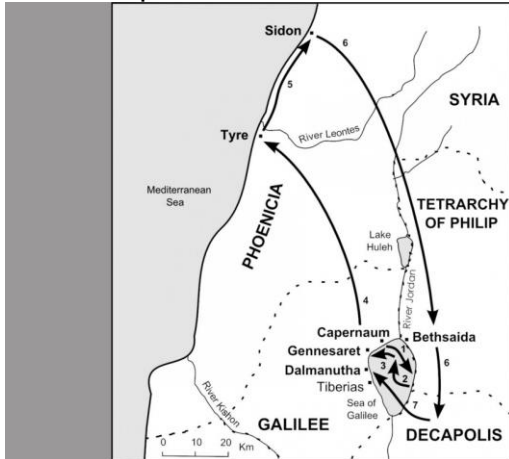
from Capernaum.

Again, Jesus is only months away from His crucifixion and He's only got a short time to complete the teaching and training of His disciples before He leaves the earth and returns to heaven. He's got to have devoted, concerted time to be away from the crowds and the plots of

the Pharisees to prematurely kill Him, and so He goes north to teach and to train in this town called Caesarea Philippi.

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Something you should know is that CP was named by Philip, who was a puppet King of Rome. In fact, all Kings placed on thrones by the Roman Empire were puppets of Rome. They bowed to one person...the Caesar...the Emperor of Rome. Rome controlled the world in the first century and the Caesar...the King of Rome appointed Kings to keep peace in his conquered and occupied territories. Take a look at the map we've seen over the last several weeks...



See the right side of the map that says: "Tetrarchy of Philip?" Rome had divided power in the area of Israel, Syria, Phoenicia and the Decapolis into four divisions of power called a "Tetrarchy." A man named Philip was the puppet king in the area of Syria and to stay in the good graces of the Caesar (the Emperor King of Rome), he named a city after Caesar AND himself...hence, the name Caesarea Philippi.

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The town was totally pagan. They worshipped the Greek god Pan and had shrines of Pan everywhere...on every street corner. Even today people still worship this man-made idol-god.



Pan was part man, part beast. Again, please understand Pan was a "god" and idol that was fashioned by man's hands. He doesn't exist. Romans 1 says...

### **Romans 1:22**

<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

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And so, Jesus is in this pagan place and He asks, "Who do the PEOPLE say that I am?" And they gave him their answers...

### **Matthew 16:14**

<sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

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Now, let's continue to think this through... I believe Jesus is offering a leading question...a set-up question. Remember...He's training His disciples and they're going to need to know with total confidence who He is...because without question...they're going to be in the minority among any people they're around when Jesus leaves the earth. I mean even at this moment, they are in a totally pagan city and they are being ruled by one of the most pagan, lascivious governments of all time: the Romans.

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The disciples tell Jesus in answer to His question: some think you are John the Baptist...resurrected. Remember, King Herod...the Tetrarch of Judea, he thought Jesus was John the Baptist, who had come back to haunt him for beheading John. Others, who had a religious background, thought He was one of the prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah. It's true that the people were very confused about who Jesus was and you know what...so are people today.

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There are so many different "Jesus's" out there today. In the 60's and 70's Jesus was called: "Superstar." In the 80's and 90's He became the one who would make you prosperous, just send the TV preacher \$50. Today, we're told to follow Jesus so we can have our "Best life now." You deserve to be happy...that's your destiny...we're today. Church, I'll tell you...tt makes me want to ask like they used to ask in the old game show: "Would the real Jesus please stand up!"

Who is Jesus? Is He just someone that people compartmentalize in their lives as **their little get out of Hell card**? Almost like a postage stamp on an envelope? They hope Jesus will get them to their final destination because they prayed some little prayer and walked an aisle and put the little "Jesus postage stamp" on their lives.

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Well, folks, that's not the real Jesus! Jesus demands that He has all of you and me! He is the envelope! Do you understand? You see, when Jesus is your Lord, He covers every facet of your life like an envelope covering a letter. But, you want to know the truth...many Christians have a Jesus side and a worldly side. They post a Bible verse on social media, and then 2 hours later they are posting explicit stuff or sensual stuff and we're left scratching our heads? How can a person talk about Jesus in one breath and the next they are talking about things that are totally contrary to everything He ever taught?

I'll tell you why! Because just like the people in the first century...we've misidentified the real Jesus! The real Jesus of the Bible...not the Jesus that we've concocted in our minds... Think about it...WHAT have we SEEN about Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew in our study? BTW...Did you know this is our 90<sup>th</sup> message from Matthew's Gospel? That's right...I'm preaching the 90<sup>th</sup> message from Matthew! I've been preaching through Matthew since April 2015 and we've just a little over half-way in this Gospel. But, oh...we've learned a lot.

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So, who is Jesus? What have we learned in 2 years of study about Jesus?

- He's the one who preached from the Sermon on the Mount... "Blessed are the merciful and pure in heart and the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...who walks the second mile and turns the other cheek."
- He's the one who said to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven...don't live for the stuff of this earth...because if you seek Jesus and His kingdom first, He'll add to you everything you need.

- He's the one who said, "Enter by the narrow gate," and build your life on the rock and not the sand and whoever loses his life in me will find it.
- He's the one who said, "Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest."
- He's the one who said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- And as we saw last week...He's the one who called the people to depart with Him and get into the boat!

Do you know this Jesus? Because this is the Biblical Jesus! Oh don't be confused by all these "Jesus's" floating out there. You better be following the Jesus of the Bible.

**Well, Jesus was ready to find out after 2 ½ years of teaching**, who the disciples REALLY believed He was...

### **Matthew 16:15-16**

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

As usual...the spokesman for the group, Peter, answered and he said, "You are the Christ..." that word "Christ" is the Greek word "Christos" and it means: "the Messiah, the Anointed one, the Son of God." Jesus said, "You're right!!" **Watch...**

### **Matthew 16:17**

<sup>17</sup> And 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."

Jesus' response to Peter is fascinating! Jesus reverts back to Peter's given name. Jesus with great excitement (see the exclamation point!) calls him "Simon Bar-Jonah," which means: "Simon, son of Jonah." Jesus here in speaking to Peter said, my Father revealed that to you. You don't come up with this on your own. And folks, whether you realize it or not, that's the way it is for you and for me? The Holy Spirit draws us to Jesus. Jesus said as much in...

### **John 6:44**

<sup>44</sup> No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Listen, in our sinful state...we don't desire for the things of God. Jeremiah the prophet says the heart of mankind is deceitfully wicked. On our own, we would never come to God unless He drew us to Himself. Oh yes...we've got to accept Him, but like fish being drawn to a boat in a dragnet, it's God who draws us to Himself and reveals the truth of Himself to us and then, we must make our proclamation. Do we believe or not? Will we accept Jesus as the Lord of our lives? Will we stay in the boat or jump out?

Peter delivered the consensus message of the disciples... The **consensus**: "We believe you're the Son of God...the one we've been waiting for and praying for!!"

And now we come to vs. 18...the verse that the Roman Catholics have misused for centuries. They use vs. 18 to make Peter the first Pope (the representative of God on earth). See it...

### **Matthew 16:18**

<sup>18</sup> 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.

Church, this is really simple and if anyone would take the time to study this verse in the original Greek, there wouldn't be any issue with what Jesus meant here and the Roman Catholics wouldn't remain confused. The Greek word Jesus used for Peter is: "Petros" and it means "little rock or stone." The word Jesus used for "rock..." in verse 18 when He said: "on this rock I will build my church," is the Greek word: "petra" and it means "large rock, or cliff." Yes, these are similar words (for sure), but they are distinctly different words (for sure). So, I ask you... was Jesus saying that He was going to build His church on Peter or on what Peter said?

Of course... what Peter said! What did Peter say? He said, "Jesus, you are the Christ, the Messiah...the Son of the Living God." And you see, church family, that's what we must believe and confess as well, in order to be saved.

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No, the Roman Catholics are wrong. Peter is not the Rock...Jesus is the Rock. In fact, Peter would say in 1 Peter 2...see these words...

### 1 Peter 2:6-8

<sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>7</sup> So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," <sup>8</sup> and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

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You see, Church family, Jesus is the cornerstone...Jesus is the Rock... As, the old song says, "On Christ the solid Rock I stand...all other ground is sinking sand!"

BTW...Did you notice Jesus said the word, "Church" in verse 18? He's not used that word till now. 2 ½ years of teaching and JUST now does He say the word, "Church." See it again...

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### Matthew 16:18

<sup>18</sup> 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.

That word: "church" in the Greek is "ecclesia," and it means: "Called out gathering." That's what we have here today...called at ones who have gathered together in Jesus' name. You see, Jesus is beginning the process of describing to the disciples what's going to happen after He dies, in that His church will be established and Hell itself won't be able stop it. And it gets better...verse 19...

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### Matthew 16:19

<sup>19</sup> 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."

I laugh at the jokes that emanate from this verse where Peter is standing at the gates of heaven with a set of keys, letting people in. That's not what Jesus was teaching. You see, the keys that open the door of heaven is your faith. All Christians get the same keys when we trust

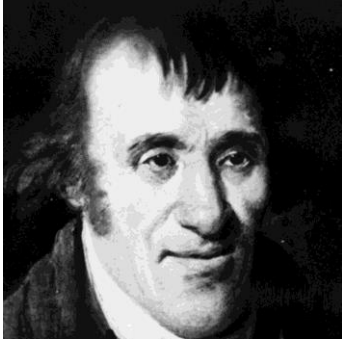
our lives to Jesus Christ by faith. You see, the keys are a symbol of authority...unlike the Scribes who kept the scrolls of the Old Testament under lock and key, we loose the Word of God so that others might know Jesus.

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Listen, when we share the Gospel, we are providing the keys for men's and women's souls to be loosed and when we don't share the Gospel...you can guarantee their hearts will stay bound. Ultimately, we're going to see when we get to Matthew, chapter 18 that Jesus will give power to the church in making "binding and loosing" decisions based on the Word of God...and we'll see that in a few weeks.

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I close this morning with a story. A true story about a man named Ethan Allen. Perhaps you've heard of him. No, I'm not talking about the furniture chain... I'm talking about this man...



Ethan Allen lived in the 1700's and was a friend of Benedict Arnold, the great turn-coat, the defector who would turn on his country and fight with the British Army against the 13 colonies of America in the Revolution. BTW...that ought to tell you something about Ethan Allen and the kind of company he kept. Because Ethan Allen was staunch **unbeliever**. He didn't believe Jesus was the Christ. In fact, Ethan Allen wrote a book, the whole intent of which was to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. He wrote the book in 1785 and it was titled: "**Reason: The Only Oracle of Man.**"

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Well, as I say often... Truth is stranger than fiction...Ethan Allen married a devout Christian. She was described as a cheerful, earnest and devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, she died at a young age, and the children were left to the care of Ethan Allen. Tragically, one of the daughter contracted Tuberculosis, which was very deadly in the 1700's. Allen's daughter began to waste away. A biographer of Allen's life wrote these words about that scene: "The sight of her would bring tears to the hardest heart."

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One day, Allen came into the room and he sat on the bed beside of his dying daughter. He took her thin hand into his; and his daughter looked up into her father's face and it was recorded that she said, "Father, I know I'm going to die." To which Ethan Allen said, "Oh, no, my child...no, the spring is coming and with the birds and breezes and blooms, your pale cheeks will blush again with health and you will recover my darling."

"No, father" she said, "the doctor was here today, and I feel I am nearing the grave, and I asked him to tell me plainly what I had to expect. I told him, father, that it was a great thing to exchange worlds, and that I did not wish to be deceived about it. I, if I was going to die, father, I needed to make the preparations; and he told me that my disease was beyond treatment."

And then she said to her father, "You will bury me beside of Mother, for that was her dying wish...but, father, you and Mother never agreed on Jesus. Mother often spoke to me of the

blessed Savior who died for us all; and she used to pray for both you and me and all the children, that the Savior might be our friend, and that we might all see Him as our Savior and eventually see Him seated on His throne in glory.”

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The biographer records that the girl’s eyes looked desperately into her father's eyes. She said, “Father, I don't feel that I can go into death alone. Tell me, Father, whom shall I follow? You or Mother? Shall I reject the Christ as you have taught me? Or shall I accept Him, like mother?” Heartbroken and in tears, Allen, almost choking on his words said, “My child, cling to your mother's Savior! Cling to Him!”

I wish I could tell you that Ethan Allen gave his life to Christ. Unfortunately, the biographer records that Ethan Allen never trusted Christ. He would go to his grave in 1789 and then President of Yale University (back then...a preacher’s college) said this about Allen: “I am grateful the world no longer has to deal with a man of his rudeness...one who sought to put Christians down without cause...a man who was coarse, dirty, brash, brazen and crude.”

Oh how sad! We can only hope that Ethan Allen’s daughter trusted Jesus, like her momma taught her...before she died of tuberculosis. Oh I hope she did not choose the path of her father.

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**Listen carefully and we’re done...Jesus Christ is asking you today: “Who do you say that I am?”**

Listen...your answer is much more important than simply nervously opening a letter hoping to see the word: PASSED as I did for my exam results in 1999. No! Your answer to that question **“Who do you say that I am,”** posed by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords will determine your eternal destiny... Your decision is much bigger and much weightier than: Pass/Fail, No your decision is about Heaven and Hell! Choose well dear people! Choose well!