Testimony of Peter

Read Luke 9:18-27, Matthew 16:13-28, Mark 8:27-91.

Environmental factors contribute to how we observe the people and events of the world around us. We are all biased. Some call this tunnel vision. We see what we want to see, ignoring data that does not correspond to our worldview, the way we are programmed. We are hard-wired for community, so we look for people who think and act like us. Communities establish common thoughts and practices. Tunnel vision is the long-term result. It is easiest to identify tunnel vision in other people.

Talking Points

- About three months before the end of Jesus' life, He took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, a center of pagan idolatry.
- Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I am?" Various answers were offered. John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, another prophet.
- Jesus then asked, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.
- Peter's declaration of Jesus' identity is the confession all will one day make, either in this life or the next.

Background

Jesus' first disciples all had tunnel vision. They were programmed, much like a computer is programmed today. Jewish communities in 1st Century Israel experienced everyday realities that produced common beliefs, expectations, and practices. The people

- believed in the one God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
- had been slaves in Egypt, oppressed by neighboring nations, ruled by Asyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome,
- were exiled from the Promised Land for 70 years,
- and were anxious for God to fulfill His covenantal promises to Israel.

Messianic Expectations

Most Jewish people in Jesus' day knew the Tenak's (Old Testament) prophecies. They spoke of a great king who would reign on David's throne in Jerusalem, right all the wrongs they had experienced at the hands of pagan idolators, and raise them to rule over all the world's nations. They were looking for their long-promised Messiah, the Son of David, and nothing else. Jesus' first disciples had the same tunnel vision.

Having walked with Him for over three years, Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi, the site of a temple dedicated to Augustus Caesar. Augustus was worshipped

as a god. Previously, Caesarea Philippi was where Pan, the Greek god of shepherds, was worshipped.

As they moved north into unknown territory, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Their answers reflected the opinions offered by others, including "John the Baptist," "Elijah," and "Jeremiah.

Then came the all-important question. "Who do you say that I am?" Only Peter spoke up. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" There it was. Someone had finally said it.

More to The Story
From the day of Peter's confession, Jesus revealed more about why He had stepped out of eternity into their deeply broken world.

What Peter said and what the others were thinking was completely correct. God confirmed their belief that Jesus was the Son of God by illuminating what they knew about Him from their sophisticated knowledge of the Old Testament. At the same time, what Peter said was incomplete.

Like Peter, I have tunnel vision rooted in my coming of age during the turbulent 1960s. In December 1971, I became convinced of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. An internal supernatural transformation began. Evidentiary external changes became apparent to family and friends.

The entire Bible fascinated me. I read it cover to cover in a few weeks. God spoke to me directly! I was pretty prideful of that fact. But I didn't know what I didn't know. I still don't; that is where we will pick up in the next lesson.

Bible Conversations
- What are some possible reasons why Jesus took His disciples into pagan territory?
- There is a danger to being the first person to respond to a difficult question. Is this something you struggle with? Why?
- There is no middle ground with Jesus. The other disciples always knew where Peter stood on an issue. Identify the benefits of Peter's willingness to speak out first. What were some negatives?