Matthew 16:18b “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

I think I finally get it. I think I finally understand why so many seem to get so confused. Perhaps we should blame us Pastors. We want to help you grasp the wonder and joy of salvation. So we tell you what God’s Word says. We tell you “You are saved by grace! Your works don’t count for salvation! You are saved by what Jesus has done for you!”

Is this where we have gone wrong? We have emphasized the grace of God too much? Is this why you as God’s children go out and do what is godless and you seem to revel in this godlessness? Not only do you seem to not know the very basics of faith but you then, in a crooked take on being a good parent, go out and help your children do what is godless all with a smile on your face.

So let’s get this straight. It is true, you are saved by grace. God in grace and love sent Jesus to be your Savior from sin. God in grace punished Jesus with your hell and offers you eternal life. You, by believing that Jesus is your God and Lord, that what Jesus has done has been done for you, then you, by faith in Jesus, have been forgiven and called to be God’s child and heir of eternal life. Saved by grace. It is absolutely true, you don’t have a single thing in your life that will earn you eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of God. There is nothing you can do to earn eternal life, because even your faith is the gift of God!

So, do you think that since there is nothing you can do to earn eternal life that therefore there is nothing you can do to earn eternal damnation? Do you think that since your deeds and life can’t earn salvation that your deeds and life have no impact on damnation? Well, you need to rethink that position. God’s Word makes it clear that while we can’t earn eternal life, we can sure earn damnation. We can live in the darkness of sin. We can by our lives show contempt and rejection of Jesus as our Savior. We can do what is godless to the point that we are godless! In other words, your life and your choices can indeed lead to hell.

A great section of God’s Word to contemplate in this regard is 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Listen to verses 9-10 first. **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor males who have sex with males, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor the verbally abusive, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”**

I think those words clear. If you are the unrighteous, and then this passage goes on and lays out for us exactly what being unrighteous is all about, the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Says it twice. In other words, God says that here is a list of things, “unrighteous” things, and if you are involved, doing these things without a care and concern for what God says, you will not, cannot inherit the kingdom of God! Again, please take this passage home and study it to see that I am speaking only as the Lord himself speaks!

Now, I don’t want you to forget verse 11 here. It says, **“And some of you were those types of people. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”** This part of the passage tells you that you can be forgiven. First, you need to stop, that’s were the phrase **“some of you were”** comes in. The past tense of that verb and the other verbs, say you are no longer involved in these godless things. You recognize they are of this world and they are godless things to repent of. That means you work hard to stop this behavior. You repent because of the grace of God. You hear and heed the call of God to faith: that’s the power of each phrase found here: **“washed, sanctified, and justified.”** All of this **“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”** You have heard and have yielded to Jesus. You have believed the Word of Jesus, which is what the Spirit of God brings you.

I want to make sure you grasp this. Every sinner has the hope of eternal life and salvation. You have that hope because you go from unrighteous to righteous in Jesus. It is the only way. But if you persist in ignoring Jesus and God’s Word, persist in doing whatever you want, no matter what excuse you have, you will be declared the unrighteous and heaven is closed to you! So we need to be careful. It is true, your works count nothing for salvation but your evil works can and may cause you damnation!

The text before us is one to help us examine what Jesus is to us. Our theme will be: **WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS?**

In truth I think this text is quite familiar to everyone here. We are somewhere toward the end of the second year of ministry and the beginning of the third year. I want you to know this will be the second time the disciples acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ. The first time comes after Jesus walks on water and after the discourse on the bread of Life. Remember, many disciples stopped following Jesus then, but the 12 disciples confess he is the Christ. Jesus wants them to contemplate this. So, the first thing Jesus does is asks what people, the general population of Jews had to say of him. Their answers are interesting and a reflection of the fact that sometimes people don’t think things through.

The disciples report that some say “John the Baptist.” Seriously, what a foolish thought. Jesus and John were seen together. Jesus was baptized by John. John is in prison while Jesus is healing up the world. John only died a few weeks before this. How in the world do you ever conclude that Jesus is John the Baptist? The next one is perhaps a bit more understandable. “Some say “Elijah.” At least Elijah was an Old Testament prophet, a powerful prophet of the Lord. It is reported that Elijah had gone to heaven in a whirlwind, so I can understand how people might think Elijah had come back into the world. Yet seriously, how could Jesus be Elijah if he is called Jesus. If you are Elijah who has come back wouldn’t your name be Elijah? And yes, some decide Jesus is maybe Jeremiah or one of the other prophets. And again, if they had come back, then why aren’t they going by their own names? Here is what people do. They don’t think it through, they just go with something they heard because, well, other people believe it therefore it must be true. Please remember there are a whole bunch of religious leaders, yes, a whole world of godless men, who will do and say anything except believe that Jesus is the Christ! And they want you to be the same!

Then Jesus asks the disciples what they think. It is really his question that I used to develop the theme for this sermon. Jesus says to them: **“But you, who do you say I am?”** It is Peter who answers for them all. What a wonderful answer. I don’t think they fully grasp the depth and truth of the answer that is given but what a fantastic answer: **Simon Peter answered,** **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Let’s just look at and consider what this confession says. First we hear, **“You are the Christ.”** Here is the term, the name that says they understand that Jesus is of and from the Lord God. The name or term Christ is the equivalent of the Hebrew name or term “Messiah.” This is the name of the promised Savior of God. This is the one that God had promised would come to redeem Israel. What I want you to know is that clearly they confess that Jesus is God but I am not sure they fully comprehend what they have said. I base that thought on how they are yet to act in the next year or so.

The confession goes on, **“You…are the Son of the Living God.”** I don’t know exactly what the disciples thought of as they confess this, but I am going to say that I think there are quite a few people today who confess that Jesus is the Son of the Living God without fully grasping what they have said. And again I have reason for saying that.

People, Jesus is God! Not almost God, not partially God, not God on every third Friday. He is God. He is the Creator of the universe with his Father and the Holy Spirit. He is the upholder of all that is, the sustainer, the preserver, the very foundation of life. He holds in his hand the power of all that is. He is the all-knowing and present everywhere God. I need you to let that sink in. He is God. He is everything of God. All authority in heaven and earth are His!

Now I want you to grasp that Jesus says that this confession is the heart and core of everything. Jesus tells us this: **“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.”**

First, as it was with Peter and the others so it is with you and me, this confession cannot come from our lips without the will and power of the Lord in heaven himself giving it to you. God is the one who grants this wisdom and God is the one who grants any and all faith that is. We need the Lord to reveal this to us or we don’t have it.

Then is that next statement of Jesus. “**And I tell you that you are Peter.”** I will tell you that Jesus speaks this way simply because he is reminding Peter of what he said when he first met Peter. Do you remember it? It is found in John 1:40-42. **“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his own brother Simon and say to him, “We have found the Messiah!” (which is translated “the Christ”). He brought him to Jesus. Looking at him, Jesus said, “You are Simon, son of Jonah.You will be called Cephas,” (which means the same thing as Peter).”** Do you get this? The man’s Hebrew name is Simon. Upon meeting him Jesus tells him his new name is going to be Peter! It may be true that the name is a play on the word “rock” because he will be Peter because of Jesus but that’s all there is here. Jesus simply emphasizes this Christian name given to him by the Christ that the man will now carry. That’s all that is behind this.

Jesus continues: “**and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it.”** The term “rock” here really has the meaning and force of “large boulder or ledge of rock.” Jesus is speaking of the confession of Peter as the thing that will be the foundation of the Christian church. Think about it. It is true. We today especially know that it is true. Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God is everything the Church is about. It is what He is, what He does, what He continues to do and be for us. Because of the victory of Jesus, which at the time of this confession has not happened, it is clear and true that hell has been overcome and defeated. Satan could not and will not win. Behind the Church, the Holy Christian Church is this Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Here is what I want to speak to you about. The disciples of Jesus are asked: “**But you, who do you say that I am?”** As your Pastor I want to ask you, “But you, who do you say Jesus is?

Now I would hope you are going to tell me that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I hope that when you confess that you mean everything that we have discussed here. That you grasp that Jesus is God and Lord of all. But people, he is not God and Lord just on Sunday. He is God and Lord on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday! He is God and Lord in the morning, afternoon and night. There is not a time when Jesus is not God and Lord.

I know, you think I am just be a smart aleck! That is not my intention. My intention is to make you clearly and deeply think about this confession. But as we talk about what your mouth says, I want you to know that I am not all that impressed. Words are cheap, well, they can be. I don’t want to just hear what you have to say, I want to see this confession in your life. I want to see you live that Jesus is the Christ, live that you know and understand that Jesus is God and Lord.

Don’t be out there living like the world. Don’t be out there doing and doing again and again what Jesus clearly tells you not to do. Don’t be out there ignoring the clear word of the Bible, any word of the Bible, for when you say that Jesus is God and Lord you do understand that you are also saying he is the Word, the Living Word, the Word of the Living God. You can’t confess he is God and then reject any part of his Word, the Holy Bible. Do you see what I am getting at?

Jesus says “Be in Church. Get the means of Grace, the gospel in Word and sacrament!” Jesus says, Love your neighbor, forgive those who trespass against you, be a light to this world, My Light!” Jesus says, “Make sure that my Word, the wonder of the Gospel is the focus of your life. Don’t live in darkness but dwell in the light of the wisdom and joy that is found in Jesus. And share that joy and wonder with others.” I could sum all of this up by saying, “You have been made an apple tree, go out there and bear apples to the glory of God’s name. Don’t just talk apples, bear apples!”

I don’t mean to sound frustrated, what I mean to sound is anxious. I am anxious for our souls, anxious that all of us hear and believe in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. He is our Savior. He is our everything, in every way! Without Jesus our lives will basically amount to nothing. Jesus gives eternal life. Jesus gives life, true life, forever life because of his victory which is our redemption. So hear and believe. Not just with your mouth, believe with your heart. Let the wonder of Jesus shine in your life. Let the name of Jesus flow in all that you do. Cling to this confession like it is everything, because it is. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and our Savior. Amen.