

The Supreme Confession

Scripture: Matthew 16:13-17

Code: 2317

Let's take our Bibles together and look at the sixteenth chapter of Matthew ... Matthew chapter 16. And this has to be one of my very favorite texts in all of the Word of God, and I have waited for months and years to get to this point. Sometimes wondering if it would ever happen, but here we are with great, great joy and anticipation. And I want us, for this morning, to consider the truths that are in verses 13 to 17. I'm going to read this text so that you'll have it in your heart and then we'll discuss it in detail.

Matthew 16, beginning at verse 13:

"When Jesus came into the borders of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that Thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father who is in heaven."

Now, in this passage of holy Scripture we come to the climax, the apex, the high point of Jesus' endeavor to teach the disciples. It is final examination moment. And the final examination the Lord gives them really only has one question, and you either pass or fail. When Jesus said to them in verse 15, "Who say ye that I am?" He really asks the ultimate question, a question that every human being on the face of the earth must face - Who is Jesus Christ? And on the answer to that question hinges eternal destiny.

Now, because of the monumental importance of the question and the monumental importance of the answer we say, then, that this is the apex of the gospel, this is the apex of Matthew's effort, this is the apex or the thesis of the New Testament, it is the thesis even of the Old Testament, - Who is Jesus Christ? He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That great supreme confession is the basic reality of Christianity. For two years plus our Lord has been moving to this moment, teaching, reteaching, affirming, reaffirming, establishing, reestablishing, building and rebuilding their confidence, their commitment until ultimately Peter, on behalf of all of them, can say -"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is a monumental moment ... in the ministry of our Lord and the life of His disciples.

And I pray that this moment somehow can seize our hearts as it must have seized the hearts of those who were on that dusty road between the villages surrounding Caesarea Philippi the day Jesus asked

the question. You'll remember that for some weeks and even months, Jesus has sought seclusion, away from the misguided multi-tudes who wanted to make Him a political ruler, away from the hatred and animosity, the jealous ambition of Herod who wanted to do away with Him, away from the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes who saw Him as a threat to their religious security, He has sought to be away from that. But not only because of the negative pressure, also because of the positive need to teach and to instruct and build up His disciples for that which was to come in a matter of a few months ... the cross and all the surrounding events.

And so, as we see Him here He is moving into a ministry of devoted time given to the twelve. He has for some months primarily spent His time in the Gentile areas, surrounding the northern and eastern part of the Sea of Galilee and F-els had much fruit there and some time to be with them. And as we approach this text we find Him withdrawing even further away to a more obscure place in order that He might focus in a greater way on their needs and the lessons for them.

And so, let's look first of all at the setting in which this examination period takes place. Verse 13 says - "Jesus came to the region, or the area, the borders, it's called, of Caesarea Philippi." Now, when you hear the word Caesarea you can just simply note that it means of Caesar. It is a town named for Caesar. There is a Caesarea down on the coast at this particular time in history, it is down almost directly west of the city of Jerusalem, this is another Caesarea, also named for Caesar ... and called Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from the Caesarea down in the southern and western part of the land of Palestine. A little background will help you to understand the setting.

The northernmost point in the land of Palestine, historically, was identified by the term Dan. The southernmost point was identified by the term Beersheba. And so, when wanting to encompass the whole land we say the land extended from Dan to Beersheba, you've heard that. The very northeastern corner was Dan. Two and a half miles west of Dan was a town known as Panias. Now, Panias was named for Pan. Pan was a Greek god, supposedly born in a cave in that area. That also was the area where the headwaters of the Jordan started. But to give you a little geography, if you were at the north end of the Sea of Galilee and you proceeded 25 miles north and east, you would go up above sea level about 1700 feet to a plateau. And that plateau stretches out along the foot of Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon ascends into the sky about nine thousand two-hundred and thirty-two feet, it's snow covered most all of the year and is in full view of the villages of the northern part of Galilee including Cana, Nazareth and the others.

But, up on that plateau was a town of Panias named for the Greek god Pan, who believed ... who was believed to be born in one of the caves or grottos in the area. And, of course, it had become a center for this cult, it was one of the more modern of the cults in that area at that time, and had some great growth. Now the town of Panias was occupied predominantly by Gentiles, rather than Jews. Because it was on the very frontier of heathendom, and the very last outpost of Judaism, it tended to be dominated by the Greek influences. Today that part of the world would be in the southwestern corner

of what we know as Syria, but I think at this juncture in history is under the control of Israel.

Now, it was to that place that Jesus retreated. It would be a welcome retreat from the heat of the Galilean low-lands, it would be a welcome retreat from the pressure of the very Jewish society there with all of the things that were going on. It would also be a retreat from the influence of Herod who was after Jesus Christ without doubt, into the territory controlled by Philip the Tetrarch. Now, Philip the Tetrarch was a more just man, a more kind man, a more patient man imposing no threat to Christ and His disciples. He was, however, committed to Caesar as indicated by the fact that he himself changed the name of Pnias to Caesarea. He enlarged it. He sort of rebuilt much of it and he turned it into a very nice place, named it after the Caesar it was designated Caesarea Philippi because he was the one who enlarged it and to distinguish it from the other one.

And so, the Lord went there with His disciples. Now this particular incident is recorded in Matthew, in Mark and in Luke because of its utter importance. And Mark and Luke fill in some interesting details. Mark tells us that this particular conversation here, this examination time, came as Jesus was walking along the road between some of the suburban villages of Caesarea Philippi. It also tells us that the Lord had also come out of a prayer meeting. The other gospels indicate that Jesus had been with the Father, and that coming with presence with the Father He entered upon a walk with the disciples and in the midst of, the walk He confronted them with this question. So, there they were, as it were, at the very crossroads of Judaism and heathendom, and He asked them the all encompassing question that every religion in the world must answer - Who do you say I am? Who do you say I am?

Now, later on in Matthew there is a secondary question asked by Pilate that should come as a corollary to that first question - Pilate said - What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? The first question is Who is Jesus Christ? The second question in Matthew 27:22, is What am I going to do with Him? For us, for now, the first question. Let's look at the examination ... verse 13.

"He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" He uses the term Son of man to refer to Himself...it by the way is used 80 plus times in the New Testament and so it is the Lord's most common designation of Himself and although it is definitely a prophetic title of Messiah taken from Daniel 7:13 and 14, He uses it more as a sign of His humiliation, as a sign of His identification with humanity. And so, He calls Himself by the name that He commonly called Himself, Son of man, and He says - Who do men say that I am? Now, I've been around for two plus years, and I've been preaching and teaching and healing and doing signs and wonders and mighty deeds, and what is the result of all of this? Who do people say I am? What a crucial question. Jesus came into the world to reveal Himself and now it's time to find out what they were reading, in terms of that revelation. Who is this? Was His effort being rewarded? Could they carry on the Kingdom? Do they really know who He is? Nothing is as important for Him and the extension of His Kingdom as that question, frankly, nothing is as important for the people as that question either.

Now in this light I don't...I want you to know that I don't think Jesus is really looking for an answer, I think this is a leading question. This is a set-up question. I don't think He's asking for information. He knew basically what they thought about Him but He wanted out of the disciples' mouth a clear statement of the wrong answer and then He wanted to hit for the right answer and therefore make it stand out by contrast. He wants the general opinions of men as they fall short of reality as a backdrop for the truth which the disciples will give. And what He's really seeking is the confession that they ought to make with their lips from their heart after nearly two and a half years of being with Him. He's after a verdict. He's after a confidence statement, a supreme confession of who He is. It's time for that now, the lessons are over, the course has reached its climax, now is the test.

And they respond, verse 14: "Some say, they said, that You're John the Baptist." Now, we'll stop there for a minute. It's interesting to me what they didn't say. They didn't say - Some say You're Beezlebub, the prince of demons, they had said that back in 10:25, but they knew the Lord wasn't looking for what His enemy said, they were...they knew He was looking for what..what is the positive response to Me. He knew what His enemies thought, but what do the rest of the people, what is the general opinion about Me? What is the consensus of the populace? And some of them said, - "Well, He's John the Baptist," and the disciples reported this to Him here. This was indicated to us in the fourteenth chapter, you remember verses 1 and 2? At that time, it says: "Herod the Tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus," of course, he had beheaded John. "And he said to his servants, this is John the Baptist, he's risen from the dead and therefore mighty works to show forth themselves in him."

Herod said - It's John the Baptist back from the dead. Now why did he say that? Well, because John the Baptist was a prophet, John the Baptist was declaring the coming of Messiah, and John the Baptist ... or rather, Jesus, at this point, did works that were inexplicable if try ... if defined humanly. So, what he is saying, really, by saying this is John the Baptist back from the dead, he is saying this is the one who's announcing the coming of the Messiah, the one who does these mighty deeds must be one whose come back from heaven. He saw the parallel in the ministries and then he equated the fact that this must be John risen from the dead.

And undoubtedly this was more popular than just with Herod. There were a lot of people who thought Jesus was John come back from the dead. Now mark this in your mind, two things stick out about that. One, that he was the forerunner of the Messiah and not the Messiah. And two, that he was risen from the dead. They picked John the Baptist for their opinion because he was a forerunner to the Messiah and because having been risen from the dead it explained how He could do the super-natural things He did, at least to them.

There's another opinion, look at verse 14, "Some said You're Elijah." Elijah, of course, was the summit of the prophetic office. And the Old Testament in Malachi's prophecy, chapter 4 verse 5, said, "Behold, I send you Elijah before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes." In other words, the

Jews believed then that Elijah would come back from heaven, that Elijah would be resurrected, if we can use that term related to him. He would come back from heaven prior to the coming of Messiah. And so some said this is Elijah. And again, please note, they say this based on the same thinking. One, he is a fore-runner of the Messiah. Two, he is come back from the dead, or come back from heaven.

By the way, if you were to go to a Jewish Passover today in 1982, you would see at the Jewish Passover table, an empty chair, and if you were to ask the host why there is an empty chair during the Passover in which no one sits, he would tell you it is the chair for Elijah, and they are waiting for Elijah to show up because when he takes his seat the Messiah is not far behind. And that's based on Malachi 4.

Now you'll notice again in verse 14 that others said He is Jeremiah. Now where did this come from? Well, if you have ever had occasion to read what's known as the Apocrypha, you know that's the non-biblical writings that sometimes appear between the Old and the New Testament in a Roman Catholic Bible. That Apocrypha has a series of books in it called the Maccabees, I Maccabees, II Maccabees, III Maccabees, basically named for Judas Maccabeus who was a great leader during that period of time after the end of the Old Testament before the start of the New. And in there there are many interesting stories and legends and so forth. One of them is fascinating. It is that Jeremiah, prior to the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C., took the ark of the covenant and took the altar of incense out of the temple in order that the Gentiles wouldn't take it and desecrate it, and he hid it in Mount Nebo. And the legend and superstition says, and the Jews held onto this, that before the Messiah comes back to establish His Kingdom Jeremiah will return and Jeremiah will go get the ark of the covenant and he will go get the altar of incense and restore them to their place and then the Messiah will come. In fact, during the Maccabean period you can read in II Maccabees a supposed account of where Jeremiah did appear. It pictures him as a man with a great white beard, gray hair, glorious appearance, and he comes down and he takes a golden sword and he gives it to Judas Maccabeus and Judas Maccabeus uses that sword to lead the Maccabean revolution and overthrow the Greeks. And so Jeremiah had become a hero to them. It's interesting, isn't it? Because when he was a prophet they threw him in a pit to get rid of him but all of a sudden he's a hero. And so many of the Jews were looking for Jeremiah to come back so that he could restore the ark and the altar to its rightful place. And again, you have the same two factors. One is that they were looking for one who was a forerunner of the Messiah. Two, that he would be one who came back from the grave, or back from heaven, back from life with God, which was the only way they could explain his ability to do miraculous works.

So, some said He's John the Baptist. Some said He's Elijah. Some said He's Jeremiah. Now how come they had those variations? I don't know. Maybe some saw in Him the character and the quality of John the Baptist. Maybe some saw in Him the fire and the intensity and the fervency of an Elijah. Maybe some saw in Him the lamenting grieving broken-heartedness of Jeremiah. But they had these

varying opinions, all having in common the same two factors: a forerunner of the Messiah, and one come back from the dead.

Lastly, there was a more general opinion among some that He was one of the prophets. In Luke's parallel account he adds these very important words: "Risen again." So, there were others who thought He was another one of the ... of the prophets risen again. You see, the resurrection sort of has to be in there or they can't explain the supernatural character. They never deny Jesus' miracles. They never deny that they had to come supernaturally. And so, perhaps, there were some who thought it was Zephaniah. Zephaniah, that gentle, warm spirit of love, they may have seen that in Jesus and thought it was perhaps Zephaniah.

So, all of these opinions about Jesus are floating around. But they all have this remarkable thing in common, they knew He had to be from out of this world and they believed He was the forerunner of the Messiah. They did not believe He was the Messiah. They couldn't deny that He was a prophet and they couldn't deny that He had marvelous supernatural power, but they would not accept that He was the Messiah, they got as close as they could without getting to the truth. And as somebody well said - Close only counts in horseshoes ... not in theology-

They are very much like our modern world that wants to go so far with Jesus and never any farther. Do you notice that? Napoleon said -"I know men and Jesus Christ is no mere man." Close Pilate said -"He's a man without fault." That's close. Diderot said: "He's the unsurpassed." Straus said: "He's the highest model of religion." John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, said: "He's the guide of humanity." Lecky said: "He's the highest pattern of virtue." Picaunt said: "He's the holy one before God." Martineau said: "He's the divine flower of humanity." Renan, the French atheist said: "He's the greatest among the sons of men." Theodore Parker called Him: "A youth with God in His heart." Francis Cobb said: "He's a regenerator of humanity." Robert Owens said: "He's the irreproachable one." And they tell us today that He's a "Superstar." Close...but close isn't good enough. Nice sentiments, but not sufficient to identify Jesus properly.

You see, there are no human categories. They're aren't any ... no human categories into which Jesus properly fits. And so He asks them the second question, verse 15, look at it.

"He saith unto them, But who say," and here's the emphatic use of the pronoun, "Who say ye that I am?" Now I want to hear from you. Who do you say? And here is the question of all questions. You will answer that question, my friend, you are answering that question right this very moment and your eternal destiny depends upon the answer you give. You can't avoid the question. You are pinned against the wall of eternity and you will be forced to answer that question.

What was their answer? One question final examination ... Who do you say that I am? And that's every persons final examination. "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son

of the living God." Simon Peter, the spokesman, wasn't he?

Chrysostom, the saint of old, called Him: "The director of the apostolic choir." He was always up front. He was the mouthpiece. Whenever there was some speaking to be done, He did it.

In chapter 15: "Then answered Peter and said to Him, Explain to us this parable." Peter said: "To whom shall we go? Thou and Thou alone hast the words of eternal life." In chapter 19, verse 27, Peter said: "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee, what shall we have therefore?" Peter was the spokesman. You see it in chapter 26. You see it in many places. It was just his role to speak and he articulated the consensus of the group. This isn't just Peter, this is Peter gathering up the consensus of the ... of the disciples ... speaking in their behalf. I like the fact that...that it calls him Simon Peter, it gives a very official character to the confession. This is a very official formal confession. Simon Peter ... his full name ... says: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It's a formal confession and it demands a formal designation, not an off-handed one. This is the consensus.

Now, let's look at the confession. We've seen the setting and the examination. Look at the confession as such, verse 16, it is decisive, it is emphatic, it is brief, it is unqualified. "Thou art the Christ." Tremendous statement. You're the Messiah! That's what it means. Christ being the Greek equivalent of Messiah You're the anointed one of God ... You're the promised Messiah ... You're the one we've been looking for...the anointed one ... the prophet that should come...the eternal King ... the eternal Savior...the eternal high priest...You are the one who is all the embodiment of all of our hopes and all of our dreams and all of our desires and all of the promises You're it! You're the one You say You are. You're the one God said You'd be.

Now you say - What's so important about this? Didn't they always believe that? Yes and no ... yes and no. You see, they came in and out, didn't they? You can go all the way back to John 1 when they first met Jesus, first day. Andrew runs to get Peter, he says - Peter, we have found the Messiah. Now that sounds pretty affirming, doesn't it?

We have found the Messiah. You say - If they knew that in the beginning why did He spend two and a half years trying to convince them? Because, from the time they made that initial assent they begin to fall. You know why? Because they were believing at that point, the testimony of John the Baptist who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." The testimony of John the Baptist who said: "I saw and bore witness that this is the Son of God," John 1:34. They were believing the testimony of John the Baptist and they were also believing what they saw when Jesus, for example, saw Nathaniel with His mind when He couldn't see him with His eye, knew everything about him before He ever met him. So, there were a few little things that made them believe. And then if Jesus had all of a sudden just knocked off the Romans and taken over and set up the Kingdom, they would have just gone right up from there. But then, all of a sudden started the humility and the rejection and the hatred and the bitterness and they begin to wonder whether what they thought at the beginning was in fact true at all. Why, John the Baptist who said - "I bear witness this is the Son of

God." John the Baptist who said: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." When he was a prisoner and he wasn't seeing Jesus do what he thought He would do, in Matthew chapter 11, sent a messenger to say to Jesus - "Are You the Messiah? Or are we looking for somebody else?" So, while there was an initial assent, that was ... that was muffled in their minds, that was confused because it didn't seem to be working the way they thought it should. Periodically, you know, they really said - Oh, You must be. I think of John 6:69 where ... where Peter says -We believe and we know that You're the holy one of God. There were those moments of great faith. And then there were those moments when Jesus said to them - Oh, ye of little ... what? ... little faith. And that does have something to say, doesn't it, for the blessing of the ... of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit? It's wonderful to have the Holy Spirit in us who keeps on telling us that we belong to God, Romans 8, and keeps on crying from within us - Abba Father. Well, they were sort of in and out on that one. They were strong in faith at one time and weak at another time.

And so the Lord has brought them through two and a half years, and I think when they come to this point, there is a confident affirming that they really do now believe this is the Messiah the Son of the living God. They have just seen a display of miracles. They have just heard profound teaching. They're convinced of this. Even though as He goes to the cross particularly, they begin to little to shake a little, you know. And I think about the John 14 passage where the Lord is telling them about He's going to die and He's going to leave them and He's going to go away and they're getting very nervous and they say - We don't know where You're going. And then Philip says - And we're not too sure who You are. And He says - "Have I been so long with you and you don't know who I am?"

But, I think at this point this is an affirmation of a supreme confession that they believe He's the Messiah. And they hung on to that. And the Spirit of God imbedded it in their hearts when He came and made them the men that changed the world. This is their confession. It took all of this time to get them to this place, through all of the struggles and hatred of the Pharisees, the rejection of the people and the confusion of their Messianic expectations and God's plan being different than the plan they thought, and yet they arrive at that point. You're the Messiah ... You're the fulfiller of our hopes ... You're the source of our salvation ... You're the heaven-sent, long-awaited King... You're the desire of the nations ... the one of whom the prophets spoke... the one to whom the sacrifice is pointed...the one the Psalms sang about ... the one pictures and symbols and types all prefigured ... You're the one!

By the way, they got the question right. He was the one. And then as if it wasn't enough to say - You're the Messiah ... Peter added, "The Son of the living God." Not only Son of man, but Son of God. Not only God, but the living God, as opposed to the dead idols ... Pan ... and all the rest of the dead idols. You are the Son, the Son not only of man but the Son of God, the Son not only of God but the Son of the living God ... the God the one who is living. Our God is a living God. He is opposite all the other dead gods. And when Jesus is called the Son of God, it is saying that He is one in essence with God.

Now, they said that and I believe they believed that He was God. I have no question they believed that. And people say - Well, why then did Philip say - Show us the Father? Because I don't think he understood the full implications of what it was that Jesus was God. I don't think he understood the trinity fully, and I don't think I do either. So, I'm somewhat understanding of him. But they believed that this was the Messiah, this was one with God. Son means equal with God. It's the Son of essence, not the son of servitude.

You remember the Jews took up stones to stone Him because He said - God was His Father - making Himself equal with God, John 5:17 and 18? And so they are saying - You are equal with God. You are the Messiah...the Savior.

Now, that's not extravagant language, folks, and it's not flowery speech, but it's right on target.

Now, look at the source, verse 17. The setting, the examination, the confession, the source ... I love this..."Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona, " son of John, son of Jonas, son of Jonah ... bar means son of. "For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee but My Father who is in heaven."

He says - Here's the source...you didn't get that information about who I am from your humanness, flesh and blood being a metonym for humanness. It's referring to his humanness. It wasn't your reason, it wasn't your superior intellect, it isn't your merit, your calculation, your analysis, your intuition, it isn't your religious tradition that showed you this, there's nothing in the human realm that could reveal this. No man calls Jesus Lord, said Paul, but by the Spirit of God revealing Him. It is God who discloses His Son to the human understanding. For we are just another group of blind people as we saw last week.

And by the way, I think it's wonderful that He calls him in this verse, Simon son of Jonah. He doesn't use the term Peter. He's calling him by his old human name, his name before his conversion so that he'll emphasize the inadequacy, the ineptitude and the blindness of his humanness. You, just Simon son of John, could never have understood who I am on your own.

In Matthew's marvelous insight into this in chapter 11, verse 27, he records the words of our Lord, "All things are delivered unto Me by My Father and no man knows the Son but the Father, neither knows any man the Father except the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." The Father reveals the Son, the Son reveals the Father, only by divine revelation can we know Christ.

Now, carefully watch. The question is - If..if you know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, because the Father has revealed it, how has the Father revealed it? How? What did the Father use? What technique? How did He do it? Did He just put it in Peter's head, just inject it with some kind of a supernatural hypodermic? How did he get the information?

I believe the Father revealed Jesus Christ to be the Messiah through Christ Himself. I believe it was those years of following Jesus and listening to Jesus through the valleys and through the roads and across the mountains and on the water and between the villages and in the cities and at the table. And as the light began to dawn and the Spirit of God open their heart, the revelation came through the presence of Christ Himself until their consciousness was wide open to the fact that this was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And I think that's the way it is today. I think you will discover who Jesus Christ is only, not in a vacuum, when you look at Jesus Christ. When you listen to Jesus Christ. When you follow the path that He walked and you hear the words that He taught and you see the things that He did and the dawning of your consciousness comes when the Holy Spirit takes those realities and makes them live in your dead soul.

You see, Romans 10:17 says, "Saving faith," and I think that's what it's talking about there, "comes by hearing a word about Jesus Christ." And so as you gaze on His glory you are transformed into His image. I think God used Christ to reveal Himself. And we find the same as we look at Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God applies the truth to our hard and dark hearts.

Now, I want to show you another point. We looked at the setting, the examination, the confession, the source, now I want you to look at the evidence. In the life of Christ there was some monumental evidence. Now listen very carefully to what I'm going to say. When Jesus was revealing Himself there were basically two categories in which He revealed Himself, to Peter and to everybody else. To you and me for that matter. One, His words. Right? He made astounding claims. He said in Matthew 7, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord." Can you imagine Him saying that He is the Lord of the judgment? That's quite a claim.

He said, "I am come to fulfill the law," Matthew 5:17. People marvelled at Him because He spoke as one having authority. He taught divine truth, Matthew 5, Matthew 6, Matthew 10, Matthew 13...profound truth. His words were a dynamic revelation of who He was.

Secondly, His works ... His works. And I just run them by your thinking. His power over disease. His power over nature. His power over demons. His power over sins. His power over death.

But, listen now. The people had gone that far and they could have said - Well yes, we can explain His words, we can explain His words He's a prophet of God. He's a prophet of God. And we can explain His works, He's risen from the dead. He's risen from the dead, He's come back from God, He has divine power. But that still brings us up short of His Messiahship. Wasn't there something that pushed them over to the full understanding of His Messiahship?

Let me offer a thought. Look back at chapter 12 verse 8, and I think I missed this when I was going through ... that chapter. And I think I've seen it in a new light. Verse 8, "For the Son of man is Lord

even of the Sabbath day." Now just hang in there, folks, and I want to open up something for you. I don't think I really ever understood the utter devastation of that statement. I think this put Jesus out of the possibility of the category of Jeremiah, Elijah, John the Baptist or one of the prophets. When He said - I am the Lord of the Sabbath - what was He saying? What an utterly earth-shaking devastating statement that is. Let me tell you why. The Sabbath was the center of all life in Israel. I mean, everything revolved around the Sabbath. Everything in their calendar was in cycles of seventh, and the Sabbath was the center of everything...all their days of worship ... all their greatfeasts and festivals and all of the celebrations were tied around the Sabbath concept. Sabbath, by the way, means rest or cessation. And the Sabbath was a day of rest or a time of rest with two things in mind, one - cessation from work ... two, holy convocation. In other words, there was worship and there was rest. You stop your work and you worship God. And there were all kinds of Sabbaths.

In fact, God gave them a catalogue of Sabbaths. Now I want you to take your Bible and go to Leviticus 23 and very briefly I want to point these to you. Leviticus 23 ... and here you have the catalogue of Sabbaths and if you're going to understand what it means when He said He was Lord of the Sabbath you've got to understand this ... all right? The Lord speaks in chapter 23 verse 1 and He begins to list the Sabbaths. And in chapter 23 there are seven Sabbaths ... seven different ones. The first one is in the first three verses, and it's the one you know the best.

Verse 3: "Six days you work, the seventh day is a sabbath." It's a rest and a holy convocation. One, you rest from your work ... two, you worship God. It's a holy coming together. Now that was the one that was every week every week on Saturday, the seventh day they rested from their work and they had a holy worship of God, every week... every week...every week ... every week.

And then comes the next sabbath, in verses 4 to 8, this is the Passover. "The fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover." And it encompasses the feast of unleavened bread. It is a holy convocation, verse 7, and you do no work in it. It is a sabbath as well. So that you have the first sabbath being the weekly sabbath, the next sabbath the Passover.

Beginning in verse 9 you have the third sabbath which is the feast of firstfruits. This also is a sabbath. It is a rest. It is a cessation of work. It is a coming before the Lord.

Then in verse 15 you have the fourth which is the feast of Pentecost. It also talks about sabbath. "For unto the next day after, verse 16 says, the seventh sabbath shall you number 50 days and offer a new meal offering to the Lord." And again, it's all calculated by other sabbaths and it is itself a sabbath. And it is a time for cessation of work and a time for worship.

In verse 23 you have the fifth sabbath, the feast of trumpets. It is a sabbath, it occurs in the sabbath month, the seventh month, and you do no work and you bring an offering before the Lord again, a holy convocation.

In verse 26 you have the sixth sabbath which is the day of atone-ment ... Yom Kippur. The tenth day of the seventh month, a day of atonement is a holy convocation and again a time of rest. It is also a sabbath.

Then in verse 33 you come to the seventh, the feast of tabernacles which also is a sabbath occurring in the seventh month, a time of rest and holy convocation.

The Bible says meat offering.

Now, notice this, people, so all through the Jewish year every week was sabbath, every week was sabbath and then periodically you had these six other major sabbath events so that life for them was sabbath - sabbath ... time of rest from the work, time of worship of God.

Now, you come to chapter 25 ... chapter 25, and two more sabbaths are given here. The first is the seven-year sabbath so that they would work for six years and then in the seventh year, verse 1 ... verse 2 says rather, you keep a sabbath and you only sow your field and prune your vineyard and gather your fruit for six years, the seventh year is a sabbath rest unto the Lord. That was a whole year to concentrate on worship ... a whole year to slow down the activity of work and to have a holy convocation.

Then beginning in verse 8 you have the ninth sabbath listed in these two chapters. And here it is the jubilee. You have seven years and then a sabbath is the seventh year, and then you have seven times seven, or after the forty-ninth year comes the fiftieth year which is a sabbath. And during that fiftieth year you have the epitome, you have the ultimate of the cycling of the sabbaths. So that in the fiftieth year in the ultimate sabbath on a sabbath day on the sabbath on the day of atonement in the sabbath of jubilee a great trumpet blast comes forth and sabbath reaches its ultimate climax, and I'll show you how. Verse 9, "The trumpet of the jubilee sounds the tenth day of the seventh month, the day of atonement, you make the trumpet sound throughout all the land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, proclaim liberty through-out all the land to all the inhabitants." Everybody that's in a servileposition, everybody that's a slave, everybody that's a servant is set free immediately. It is a jubilee, you return every man his possessions, give him back his land. Some people had to pawn their land because they couldn't support themselves and so they pawned their land, it's given back to them. And those who were indentured servants, who sold themselves so to make a living were free and they were liberated and every man went back to his family. And this was the glorious rest, the jubilee. It is holy and it goes on to describe it.

Verse 13: "You shall return to every man his possession," and so forth. Now just imagine that you're in Israel. And for years somebody else has had the land that your family has owned, that your father possessed, you've had to pawn it to survive. Even you've sold yourself as an indentured servant into slavery and all of a sudden you come to that time when that trumpet's going to blast and you're going

to be liberated from your slavery and you're going to be given back your land with all of its crops and all of its potential.

Listen, you can believe the servants and the workers and the slaves and the captives and the poor were the first ones up, can't you? With their hand to their ear waiting to hear that trumpet blow. And on that day of atonement, on that sabbath day in the sabbath jubilee that trumpet would be blown and everything would happen in that moment, all the people would be turned loose, the captives would be liberated, there would be liberty, there would be freedom for all. There would be restoration.

Now all of that concept of sabbath, now listen, is a symbol...from the weekly sabbath to the jubilee and everything in between, it is a symbol, it is a picture, it is a type, it is not a reality. It is only a picture of a reality. And the reality is that someday there's coming a true rest for the people of God. Right? Someday there's coming a real holiness. Someday there's coming a genuine holy convocation. Someday there will be a true liberating of the land and a true liberating of the captives and a true setting free of the slaves. And every time a Jew celebrated the sabbath and everytime he celebrated a feast, and everytime he celebrated the sabbath year and everytime he celebrated a jubilee he would be reminded that someday there would be a real rest, someday there would be a real cessation of work because all those times in between he was working, working. And he was even carrying out a system of sacrifice that involved external ceremony and effort.

And I think that through that whole thing God was symbolizing. Now listen, nobody ever argues that the sacrifices of the Old Testament were symbols of the coming of Christ who was the ultimate Lamb, right? All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament simply pictured Christ. Now listen carefully. The whole sabbath system is identical to that. The whole sabbath system had no purpose except to point to the one who would bring true holiness and rest.

Now, with that in your mind, turn to Luke 4. Jesus is in Nazareth, verse 16: "And He came to Nazareth when He had been brought up ... where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stood up to read. And there was delivered to Him a book of the prophet Isaiah and when He had opened the book He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised and to preach the jubilee year of the Lord.'? You see the point? Jesus says then - This day, verse 21, is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. I am the jubilee, I am the sabbath rest. I am the source of true holiness. And listen to me carefully, people. That is exactly why He violated their sabbath ordinances. If He wanted to take a trip on the sabbath He took a trip. And if He wanted to pluck corn on the sabbath He plucked corn. And if He wanted to peel the corn and eat it on the sabbath He did it on the sabbath. And if He wanted to heal on the sabbath He healed on the sabbath. Because He was no longer interested in the shadows. You understand that? Because the reality was there. And I believe, and I don't think I've ever seen it

as clearly as I see it now, that the thing that was maybe so devastatingly convincing about Jesus was this Lordship over the whole sabbatical system which ruled and governed their lives. And that is why the New Testament repeats every one of the Ten Commandments except - Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy - it doesn't repeat that one.

Why? You don't need the picture if the reality is present. Right? As someone said, "Some people seem more content with a picture than they do with a reality."

Listen to what else He said. He reached out His arms one day in Matthew 11:28 and He said, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you...what? ... rest." Rest. In that synagogue in Nazareth He said - "I am the fulfillment of all of that to which Isaiah referred, I am the one who will set the captives free. I am the one who proclaims the real spiritual jubilee." And Jesus Himself went to the cross, died on the sixth day, was in the grave on the seventh day and burst ... He was resting too ... and He ended that sabbath, He finished His work on the cross, on the sixth day He said - It is finished rested on the sabbath and He began on the new dawning of the first day, that new covenant, that new era and we do not hold on to the sabbath picture any more. So don't think that you've got to be careful cause you can't walk too far on Sunday. God help us if we think that. Or you can't let your children play in the backyard. That isn't the point.

In Colossians 2, Paul comes to this very conclusion. "Let no man," verse 16, "therefore judge you in food or in drink or in respect of a feast day or of the new moon or of sabbaths." Don't let anybody judge you on that. Why? These are a shadow of things to come but the reality is Christ. Isn't that great? That's why it says in Hebrews 4, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." And he says, "Enter into that rest." It is the rest of salvation.

Listen, since I embraced Jesus Christ who is the sabbath, who is the jubilee, who is the fulfillment of all the pictures - I have a holiness within me that is valid every day. I have a holy convocation going on with God every conscious moment of my life. And I have a rest. I don't need one day a week to rest spiritually, that external imagery only portrayed a spiritual reality. I rest in God. Don't you?

And listen to me. That's why I think Paul uses the term redemption so much, there's a Jewish element there. Because God has set us free in Christ. He's given us the jubilee liberation. You break the sabbath, listen, you violate the sabbath not when you work on Sunday ... not when you have activity on Sunday. No, no, no. You violate the sabbath and violate the sabbath rest when you refuse Jesus Christ and you continue on in your own self-righteous works. Then you are not ceasing from your works and you are not entering into holy rest. That is the violation of the true sabbath.

Well, let's go back to Matthew, and I'm going to close right now. The result - what happens when you answer the question right? What happens when you know that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God? Look at verse 17, here's the result. "And Jesus answered and said unto him ... what? ...

Blessed art thou ... blessed art thou, Simon."

What does it mean to be blessed? Listen, to have Jesus pronounce a blessing on you ... check this one ... Ephesians 1, "And you are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." That's what it means to be blessed. All of the divine supernatural resources that God can pour out on the children of His love and the brothers of Jesus Christ are yours. And so our dear Lord acknowledges the supreme confession of the disciples. He stamps it with approval. And He promises to bless them. And that's the promise that He makes to you as well. That if you confess Jesus as the Savior, the Son of the living God, and you embrace Him as your own, that you shall enter into holy rest forever and ever and you shall cease from your own self-righteous works and you shall be blessed. Let's pray.

Father, what a great privilege to be at rest, to know our hearts are in peace with Thee, to know we are in a holy convocation with the living God who dwells within us so that that convocation occurs all the time. We don't go to a temple to meet You, You're here. We are Your temple. This is Your sabbath, for You are the sabbath and You live in us. O God, may no one leave this place who has not entered into rest.

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