

“Lord God, you have appointed me as Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

MATTHEW 16

¹³When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus replied, “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. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” ²⁰Then he commanded the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.



It has been said that everyone must have an opinion about Jesus. Jesus forces you to have an opinion about him. Jesus undoubtedly didn't ask the question, “Who do men say that I am?” because He lacks the information. He requires an opinion from His disciples. He requires an opinion from everyone.

Most people know Jesus had a big influence on religion. There are 17,000 books about Jesus in the Library of Congress—the most about any historical figure, nearly twice as many as the runner-up, William Shakespeare. There is no competition to the literary influence of Jesus Christ in art; whether in songs or paintings.

But is He merely a great figure of religious history? Is He essentially a great philosopher and teacher? Is He primarily a great victim, a progressive revolutionary misunderstood by the people of His times? It has been said that everyone must have an opinion about Jesus, because Jesus forces you to have an opinion about him. He forces you to either accept or deny the statement that He is true God.

Yet in order to answer that, we should also be aware of what Jesus says about other great men and gods. If we do, we will find that Jesus is who He says He is and who Peter says He is, the ...

Christ, Our Solid Rock

1. No other man

Jesus had worked hard in the past year. People were circulating different theories about Jesus. No doubt the disciples picked up on some of them. Some, most notably King Herod himself, thought Jesus was John the Baptist. Others thought Jesus was Elijah 2.0, predicted by the Old Testament prophet Malachi, as a forerunner to a different Christ. Others thought that Jesus was a different famous prophet brought back to life. Could any of these be true? What would the Twelve apostles say? So Jesus gave them an opportunity to express their findings.

One disciple expressed something unreasonable yet spiritual. "*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Peter did not think that Jesus was just a good teacher or prophet. Peter didn't buy it that Jesus was just a misunderstood man. Peter knew that Jesus was not on some upper level of human being. He knew Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. This was Peter's solid confession.

It has been noted that, if Jesus were not true God, He would have immediately said so. He would have quickly corrected Peter and pointed it out. If not, He would be either one of two other things: a liar or a lunatic. However, you should not say Jesus is a good teacher if He were a liar or a lunatic. You should also not say Jesus is just a good teacher if He were true God.

Was Jesus a great teacher? That is a reasonable, flesh-and-blood claim. The trouble is, Jesus said bigger things. Jesus made assertions that he is true God. You could say that makes Him a liar. You could say that means He is crazy. But

you cannot say Jesus is just a great teacher or philosopher. That would be the conclusion of flesh and blood.

C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, wrote, "Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up as a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

Because of this confession, however, some have decided to put Peter on the level of God, almost as if Peter was given a new role in the Church, to take the place of Jesus. Now, Jesus calls Simon Peter blessed. He calls Simon Peter by a nickname, "Peter," which means, "Rock-man" or "Rocky." Jesus says that "*on this rock*" He "*will build His Church.*" Well, what are we supposed to think now? Are we supposed to believe that Peter was on the level of Jesus?

There are a number of problems with making Peter into the rock on which the Church is built.

- 1) Grammatical – Peter is a different gender in the original Greek than "rock."
- 2) Again, Jesus should have said, "On YOU I will build my Church." Saying "on this rock" causes us to ask what rock?
- 3) Peter wasn't the first disciple to confess Jesus as the Messiah. (His brother Andrew had told him that Jesus was the Messiah early on.)
- 4) Peter is a sorry foundation for the Church. In the next verses Jesus calls Him Satan. He sank in the water. Later Peter denies Jesus. Peter needs the Rock.
- 5) St. Paul says, "In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ."
- 6) Jesus gives the keys of binding and loosing to the Twelve in Matthew 18 and to the Church in the Lord's Prayer.
- 7) Peter had just confessed that Jesus was in a different class than other men. How silly would it be for Peter to confess Jesus as the Son of the living God, and then for Jesus to put the Church on the shoulders of a man! That would be to make Peter out to be a god.

Peter was solid, but only when he was standing on this Rock.

2. No other god

Jesus and the Twelve were in the northernmost parts of Canaan. Caesarea Philippi is above the headwaters of the Jordan. It was the inheritance of the tribe of Dan and the foothills of Mt. Hermon. Here there were other gods. If you and I visited this city, we couldn't miss the enormous rock cave. At this enormous cave, the people worshiped Pan. And it was understood that the rocky grotto was a portal to the underworld, the door to the dead, and the gates of Hades.

This was an imposing gateway. It was a dangerous place. The Pan worshipers wanted to mimic the myth of a woman named Echo, whom Pan chased into a cave. So they would sweep women away and offer them on their altars in unspeakable ways for rape and torment to the god Pan. Caesarea Philippi was truly a city of the damned.

So Jesus drew battle lines. Peter called Him the Son of the LIVING God. Notice the difference between the idolatry in that city and the worship of a LIVING God. Also, Jesus says that the Gates of Hell will not withstand it. By this, Jesus placed us as warriors on the line. He equipped us with weapons, but not a sword this time, nor a shield. He equips us with the keys of forgiveness. But these keys don't just lock or unlock, they remind of us keys to the ropes and chains of slavery, because they bind or loose. The assault on hell is done with a God of forgiveness. For this forgiveness wins eternal life and freedom for all prisoners. Stand on this solid Rock! Draw up your lines! Understand that when you Christians forgive one another, you are taking up arms against the enemy.

The issue of Liar, Lunatic or Lord is compounded more recently by the fourth option: Legend. This "legend" solution asserts that Jesus never meant to be called "God." But the gospels don't read like legends. A main contention of saying this is that only the gospel of John reads as if Jesus called Himself God. But the legend solution is easily disproved with Matthew 11:27, Matthew 28:18, and of course this passage, Matthew 16:17. Finally, in Matthew 26:63,64—"The high priest said to Him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied." So Jesus not only called Himself God, but died for that claim. Thank the Lord that He did. Of all the other leaders and influential people who have ever lived, Jesus alone is the One. Jesus is the One whom the Father approved and the Spirit anointed as the Prophet to bring His message, the Priest to sacrifice once for all sin, and the King to rule all heaven and earth for our good. Jesus is the eternally begotten Son of the one, true, living and everlasting God who gives life, sustains life, and restores life. What a solid Rock! Amen.