**WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS, REALLY?**

 February 3, 2019

Matthew 16:13-28 / Key verse 16:15-16, “‘But what about you?’ he asked, ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’”

In today’s passage, there are two important questions. “Who do you say Jesus is?” “What did Jesus come to do?” Knowing Jesus personally is the matter of life and death. Knowing Jesus personally is the very key point of the entire message of the Bible which consists of 66 books. Just as important is to know who Jesus is, so it is very important to know what Jesus came to do. Including Jesus’ disciples, many Christians sometimes misunderstand about what Jesus came to do. Many people including us sometimes focus their life on their own achievement or success in the world rather than following Jesus and becoming more like Jesus. But in today’s passage, Jesus clarifies what he came to do really and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. May God bless us to know clearly who Jesus is and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

1. **Who is Jesus, really?**

This important discussion between Jesus and his disciples happened at Caesarea Philippi, a city far north of Galilee in Gentile territory. Jesus intentionally went there with his disciples to have alone time with them. There Jesus asked his disciples two questions. The first one was merely observational. “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Here, “the Son of Man” was Jesus’ most common humble way of referring to himself in the third person. This question was simply asking people’s general view of Jesus which was not hard. Their answer was, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Even though their view was not correct, the common view of people was that they regarded Jesus very highly who had prophetic connection to God and divine authority. Modern time is not so different. Modern people also still regard Jesus very highly in diverse aspects of human life because anyway it is an undeniable fact that Jesus has had the greatest influence throughout human history.

The next question Jesus asked his disciples was personal: “But what about you? he asked, “Who do you say I am?” This question required a personal opinion and stand. Jesus’ disciples could not hide behind the opinions of others. They had to take a stand with their own opinion. Peter spoke up, probably on the disciples’ behalf saying, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Unlike people’s general partial and incorrect view, Peter confessed the exactly correct view of Jesus which Jesus wanted to hear. As Peter correctly confessed who Jesus is, Jesus is the long-awaited promised Messiah, spoken of in Hebrew Scriptures, what we call now the Old Testament. Then what does the word “Messiah” mean?

“Messiah”: “Christ in Greek word” means, “the anointed one” In the time of Old Testament, there were three offices that could be anointed by God: priests, prophets, and kings. When we see God’s history in the time of Old Testament, all God’s work for people were done by these three specially chosen servants of God. But Messiah have all these three different roles in one person; himself. Messiah Jesus is the only mediator (priest) between holy God and sinful men. Jesus teaches all the words of God like a prophet. Jesus rules all things and all people on earth as the King of kings. Jesus himself became a perfect sacrifice offering for the atonement of our sins. “The Son of the living God” means that he is the One who is in the closest intimate relationship to God the Father who can be the exact representation of God’s very being. (Hebrews 1:3) Knowing correctly who Jesus is was the whole point of all his ministry until now. Until now Jesus had performed many miracles, healed the sick, cast out demons, proclaimed the kingdom of God and the message of forgiveness of sins. All these things had been pointing out who Jesus really is. This also applies to us. We have been studying the bible, attending the worship services, and participating in God’s work many years. Then what is the point of all of these? It is to grow in knowing who Jesus is. The bible says, knowing God the Father and his Son Jesus is eternal life (John 17:3). Apostle John wrote the purpose of his gospel book in John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Apostle Paul also said in Romans 10:9-10, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.’” Therefore, every person should make personal confession of who Jesus really is and grow in knowing him because it is the very eternal life.

When Peter confessed, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” Jesus was pleased at his confession and blessed him. Let’s look at verses 17-19. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give 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.” Here, Jesus says four things. First, Peter’s confession of faith didn’t come from flesh and blood but from heavenly Father’s revelation. Knowing Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God requires a revelation from God. If you sincerely confess Jesus as your Messiah and the Son of God, congratulation! It is already the work of the Holy Spirit allowed by heavenly Father. The bible says, “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (1Cor 12:3). God reveals Jesus to the humble while he hides himself to the proud (Matt 11:25). Second, on Peter’s confession of faith, Jesus will build his church. Jesus is the chief cornerstone; his Apostles including Peter is the foundation stones of the church; All believers are also stones being built to build Jesus’ church. Third, the power of Hades will not overcome Jesus’ church. Fourth, the commission of Jesus’ authority. The keys of the kingdom of heaven were given to Peter and believers. Here “keys” are basically the words of Jesus. In John 20:23, Jesus showed the example of how we believers use authority of Jesus. He said, “If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” As we share and preach the word of forgiveness of Jesus, we are releasing Jesus’ forgiveness and it works as we declares because we are obeying Jesus’ commission and promise.

1. **What did Jesus come to do, really?**

It was not yet the time to tell the world that Jesus was the Messiah. So, in verse 20, Jesus told them not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. At least, not yet. They first had to understand something very important, which they did not yet know. In fact, the disciples really didn’t understand what Jesus came to do. They didn’t know his primary mission or purpose of life.

Let’s look at verse 21. “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” Until now, the disciples obviously had the rosy idea that Jesus would rise to a throne in Jerusalem and be crowned as King. Probably they thought the Roman Empire would be destroyed by Jesus’ divine power such as pouring down heavenly fire, or bringing terrifying natural disaster and they would reign with Jesus in a splendid palace in Jesus’ earthly messianic kingdom. But now Jesus’ words were like throwing water on the fire of their human desires and ambitions. It shocked them to the core. It sounded too dark and pessimistic to Peter. Jesus’ words made no sense in Peter’s plan and hope. Peter thought he had to speak some sense into Jesus. So, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said, “This shall never happen to you!” Wow, Peter really sounded like he loved Jesus. After all, who wants to see a loved one suffer? No one really.

Jesus was not impressed with Peter’s sympathetic words. Rather, Jesus felt a terrible temptation by Satan behind Peter. Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concern of God, but merely human concerns.” In one moment, Peter spoke words revealed by God and Jesus called Peter “blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah,” but in next moment, Jesus called Peter “Satan, a stumbling block!” Peter’s protective words for Jesus sounded loving, but they were from Satan the devil. But before we get too harsh with Peter, we have to ask ourselves: “Am I following a Jesus of my own making or imagination like Peter, or the Jesus revealed in the Bible really?

Including Peter, no one likes suffering and death. By our nature, we have allergic reaction to suffering and death. But unlike our human concern, God’s concern is that Messiah Jesus must suffer, die, and be raised to life because these are really what Jesus came to do as our true Messiah. The meaning of becoming of his disciples are also to accept this path that God wants. In verses 24-28, Jesus continually says this. Let’s read these verses. “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’” The way of Jesus’ disciple is to deny ourselves, take up Jesus-given cross daily, and follow Jesus; specially his suffering, death, and resurrection. So then naturally a question arises: Why Jesus as the Messiah must suffer, die, and be raised from the dead? Is this the only way for our salvation and eternal life and is accepting this the only way of Jesus’ disciple? From God’s point of view, the answer is “Yes.” It is the only way for our salvation, eternal life, and accepting this is the only way of Jesus’ disciple. It is because Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection is the true and only expression of God’s utmost love to give us eternal life and restoring the image of God in us.

Let me conclude with a real story to illustrate what Jesus came to do. There was a mother who had only one eye. Her son wondered why his mother had only one eye. He was not happy to see his mother have only one eye and many people mock his mother’s weird and ugly appearance because she was the one-eyed. As he grew up, he didn’t like his mother’s ugly face and poverty of his family and he had deep wound due to people’s mocking over his mother. So he determined to work hard to leave his home and live independently without seeing his mother. As he wanted, he made success and finally entered SNU and later he married and had his own home with 3 children. He married a woman by lying that his mother already passed away. However, one day, his mother visited his house. His children screamed because they were scared to see her since she looked weird and ugly. He also got angry at her saying why she made his children cry. His mother returned to her home without saying a word. Some time later, her son wanted to attend his elementary school re-union and being led by some strange feeling, he headed toward his mother’s house for the first time since he left his mother’s home long time ago. There he saw his mother lie down on the ground, not moving with no sign of breathing. Then there was a letter beside her. It began by saying, “Dear my son whom I love, I have lived enough time. Now I am too old and I can’t come and see you. My son, I miss you so much. Sometimes, can you come and see me? My son, I have been sorry to you that I didn’t have two eyes but only one. I know how much you had been embarrassed and hurt because of people’s mocking. But now I want to tell you what happened to you when you were a little boy. You had a car accident and you lost your one eye. As your mother, watching your blindness of one eye was too heart-breaking pain. So I wanted you to see the world more with my one eye. I was happy that you could see the world with two eyes. Dear my son, now I leave. But don’t cry. My son, I love you. I have never hated you.” For the first time, he came to know the real story behind his mother’s one lost eye. For the first time, he realized he was shedding tears toward his mother. The tears were coming from the eye that his mother gave him. For the first time, he confessed, “Mom, I love you. I love you.” “I am so sorry, mom, please forgive me. Please forgive me.” The mother loved his son and she willingly gave her one eye to him. This mother’s love reflects our heavenly Father’s love. Isaiah 53:4-5 testifies about this love of God. “Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

As a conclusion, today we learned that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of the living God. He came to suffer, die, and rise gain from the dead. Jesus’ suffering and death and resurrection is very tough story to digest since no one likes suffering and death in our nature. But it was the utmost expression of God’s perfect love for us to give us eternal life. It was the very answer of what Jesus came to do as the Messiah. The life of Jesus’ disciple is to participate in Jesus’ divine love manifested in his suffering, death, and resurrection. May God bless us to follow Jesus’ footstep so that our life can be powerful testimony of God’s love! Amen.