

Lesson 3

Proper 16

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 16:13–20

Caesarea Philippi, twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Mount Hermon, was a resort city. It had been enlarged and beautified by Philip, a son of Herod the Great, who ruled the area by Rome's permission. He renamed the city "Caesarea of Philip" in honor of Tiberias Caesar. Jesus took His disciples there to get away, to focus on what lay ahead and prepare them for their calling as His apostles.

Jesus asked about the opinion of others as a way of focusing the disciples' minds on their own convictions. They said some thought of Him as John the Baptist. John was dead, beheaded by Herod Antipas. But because of Jesus' miracles, a superstitious notion held that John had returned from the dead and was working through Jesus. (See Mark 6:14–16.) Elijah—Malachi's prophecy about the Way-Preparer ends our Old Testament Scriptures and was well known. (See Malachi 4:5–6.) In the New Testament, John is identified as that Elijah, first by the angel announcing his coming and then by Jesus Himself. (See Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:11–14.) Jeremiah or one of the prophets—Jeremiah was considered one of the greatest prophets. Moses' words about God raising up a prophet like him may also have been behind this idea. (See Deuteronomy 18:15.)

In the Greek, *humeis*, "you," is the first word and makes Jesus' question very pointed: "You, what about you?" Peter spoke for the group, expressing the faith given to them by the Holy Spirit, and this truth which was revealed "by My Father in heaven" (v. 17). The Greek *Christ* and the Hebrew *Messiah* both mean "the anointed one." Anointing with perfumed olive oil set a person apart for a special task, like the anointing of young David, who later became king of Israel.

30. When did Jesus receive His anointing? (See Acts 10:37–38; Matthew 3:16.)

Jesus generally referred to Himself as "the Son of Man," a less commonly used messianic title. Peter went beyond titles to confess Jesus to be "the Son of the living God." He and the others evidently had absorbed Jesus' teaching about Himself and had accepted the testimony of His miracles. (See John 5:16–27; 14:11.)

In response, Jesus used the formal "Simon Bar-Jonah" ("son of Jonah"), marking the deep importance of the occasion.

31. Why did Jesus say that Peter was blessed to be able to answer as he had?

Jesus then used the nickname He had given Simon in a play on words by which the importance of Peter and his confession of Jesus would be seen in the scheme of things in the Lord's kingdom (and that of his fellow disciples). *Petros* means "rock." Roman Catholics cite this verse to contend

that the pope (“the successor of Peter”) is the vicar of Christ and the foundational authority of the Church. In the Greek text, however, *petra*, in the phrase “on this rock,” is feminine and cannot refer directly back to the masculine *Petros*.

32. On what was Jesus saying He would build His Church, if not the person of Peter?

33. Why will all the forces of hell never be able to overcome Christ’s Church?

Jesus then gave to Peter the Keys of the kingdom of heaven. This was a bestowal of formal authority to represent Jesus in pointed expressions of the Gospel. The same authority was later given to the Twelve and, on Easter Sunday, to all to whom Jesus appeared in the Upper Room. (See Matthew 18:18; John 20:22–23.)

34. What is suggested by Jesus speaking of Keys of the kingdom of heaven?

Freeing the repentant from their sins—“loosing,” “forgiving”—is the happy, primary function of the Church. “Binding” sins to the unrepentant is a necessary counterpart. This unhappy function underscores accountability to Christ, whose way is being rejected, and pointedly calls the unrepentant to repentance. It is not to be used arbitrarily but only as a needed judgment of evident sins of commission or omission on the part of church members—never in judgment of motives or attitudes.

35. How are the Keys of the Kingdom formally used in the life of the Church? How may they be used in private, personal interaction with those around us?

The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 51:1–6

Four “songs” in Isaiah are identified as Servant Songs since they point to the messianic Servant who will fulfill God’s plan of salvation for His people: 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; and 52:13–53:12. The first two describe the Lord’s equipping of the Servant for His task; the third and fourth point to the Messiah as the Suffering Servant who gives Himself for the people. This lesson follows the third Servant Song.

36. History. Who is the “rock” from whom those who “pursue righteousness” and “seek the LORD” were cut and hewn? What did the prophet’s pointing to the fact that Abraham was only one when the Lord called him, but was made many, say to the exiles in Babylon and the remnant who returned to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple?