

Right About The Christ, Wrong About The Cross

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[0 : 0 0] Well good evening everybody and it's great to be here with you here in Carloway. It's a real joy, thank you for the opportunity to come up and I bring with me the greetings of our congregation in Kilmally and Arden and Merkin Free Church. This is actually only my second time on the Isle of Lewis. I was here a few years ago just in the airport really and then I went down to Harris for a service. But on this occasion I thought it'd be great to bring the children and they're going to bed just now but you might see them over the course of the weekend and we managed to persuade the school to let them have the Friday and the Monday off. They're in Gallic medium education and I said I hope they're going to be speaking lots of Gallic and they gave us a couple of days authorised absence which was great and they thoroughly enjoyed the journey here and it's just great they're able to come in and to make friends in your fellowship as well. Thank you Thomas for leading and for reading and if you have your Bible it would be great to keep it open to

Matthew chapter 16 as we consider together these words. I don't know what books you read as a younger Christian but in the 20th century there was a book that proved very influential written by a man called Howard Guinness. Howard Guinness was instrumental in setting up student Christian groups around the English speaking world and he wrote a book called Sacrifice and he was encouraging young men and young women to live radical lives of discipleship and in the book he has these words. Where are the men who say notice yourself, who take up Christ's cross to bear it after him, who are willing to be nailed to it in college or office, home or mission field, who are willing if need be to bleed to suffer and to die on it. So Howard Guinness pulled no punches as he challenged people in their Christian commitment and these words are very appropriate for our study today. In this passage Jesus speaks first of all of his own death but then he speaks of the requirement for each of his followers to die to self and to live for him. We're going to look at his words in just a moment but just to give you a little bit of context before we dive in the middle of Matthew's Gospel. The Gospel of Matthew is divided into these five distinct units. We have a narrative unit and then a teaching unit where Jesus draws his disciples aside and teaches them often in the form of parables. And in this particular section of Matthew's Gospel this central question seems to be who is Jesus Christ? What is the identity of this man? We find earlier King Herod discussing it with his royal companions.

We find the people of Jesus hometown debating it. Is this not the son of the Carpenter? And here we listen to the Lord himself as he confirms his true identity as the Messiah, the Christ of God. And more than that in these verses we find him explaining his mission, why he was sent into the world and also his call, what he requires of each one of us who confess his name. Maybe you've done a Christianity Explored course in the church and or online perhaps during the pandemic. The Christianity Explored course looks not at Matthew's Gospel but at Mark's Gospel. And all the way through that course we're encouraged to ask these questions. What is the identity of Jesus? What is his mission? What did he come to do?

And what is his call upon our lives? What does it mean to follow him? And we find all three of these questions addressed in this chapter in Mark 16. And so it's vital for each one of us to look at these words, to listen to these words. Excuse me a minute.

While I just adjust my earpiece here. Maybe you have been a Christian for a very long time and the Lord wants to remind us what it means to follow him wholeheartedly. Or maybe you're here tonight because you're interested in Christian things. You're seeking the truth and you want to understand what it will cost you to follow the Lord Jesus Christ for yourself. So we're going to think of it. We're going to think of these words and we're going to do so under two headings. Firstly verses 13 to 20. We'll see that Simon Peter gets it right about the Christ. But then in verses 21 to 28 we'll see that he gets it wrong about the cross. Gets it right about the Christ. Gets it wrong about the cross. And we

see at the beginning when he is asked by Jesus who he is that he says you are the Christ. And there was enormous expectation in Jesus' state that the Messiah but the [6 : 01] Christ would come. We're acquainted with that expectation aren't we? Whenever somebody new bursts onto the scene we have such high hopes. Maybe there's an election and we have a new political leader. Maybe your football team appoints a new manager. Maybe the national team appoints a new manager. And we have this sense of great things are going to happen.

We have this expectation that things are going to turn out well. And that's what the people of Jesus' day had. They were waiting for the Messiah, waiting for the Christ. Great expectation.

And as Jesus spoke his words and as he performed his mighty works there was this sense that perhaps the Messiah has come. Verse 13, Jesus enters the district of Caesarea Philippi and he asked his disciples who do people say that the Son of Man is. This was the topic of conversation in the hairdressers, in the coffee shop over lunch at work. And different people were giving different answers. Verse 14, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. They thought perhaps he was John the Baptist, come back from the dead after his martyrdom. They thought perhaps he was returning from heaven after he had been taken into heaven. They thought he was Jeremiah who disappeared into Egypt at the time just before the exile. But Jesus wants to know verse 15 what they think as individuals. Who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter says you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. The penny has dropped. His eyes have been opened and he sees Jesus for who he is. The Old Testament looked forward to one who would come, a prophet like Moses, a king like David, a figure who would come who would purify

Israel, who would drive out the Gentiles and sort everything out. And Peter thinks, yes, this man before me is the Christ, the Son of God. And Jesus confirms what he said, blessed are you Simon. Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven.

So this is a turning point in the gospel. It's a turning point in the lives of the disciples when they recognize Jesus for who he is. It is an opportunity for great joy and celebration.

[9 : 10] And let me ask you just at the very beginning friends, how would you answer that question tonight? Who do you say that I am if the Lord came to you with those words? Maybe you've never thought about it. Maybe you just had time free this evening and you saw the lights on in the church and you thought I'll go and see what's happening. Maybe you believe that Jesus was an important historical figure, an influential leader in the world and in human history but his life has little relevance to your life and your day to day concerns.

Or maybe you like Peter think, yes, he is the Christ. He is the Son of the living God. Winston Churchill apparently would speak of the big seven which were the years between the ages of 18 and 25 and he said these are the most important years of your life because these are the years in which you will answer the big questions. What will I do with my life? Where will I work?

Will I marry? What kind of life will I live? But a bigger question than all these questions is the question Jesus asked his disciples and which he asks each of us tonight. Who do you say that I am? And we're given the answer in the following verse. And there then follows an interesting discussion between Jesus and Peter. It's not an easy passage in some respects and I can't touch on everything I'd maybe like to discuss but we want to look at three things. Firstly Jesus talks of revelation and then responsibility and then reassurance. Firstly verse 17, bless are you Simon, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven. Peter didn't figure this out himself. Jesus says that his eyes have been opened to see and understand who he is. That God has taken the initiative in Peter's life. And isn't that always the case? You think about your own life, you think about your own Christian testimony. The Lord bringing somebody into your life, the Lord putting some resource into your hands.

Maybe a parent or a grandparent, maybe a teacher, a Sunday school teacher, maybe a minister of the Gospel, an evangelist, maybe a Christian friend. The Lord taking the initiative in order that he might reveal his son to you through the preaching of the Gospel. The Lord opens eyes and minds that we might understand his Gospel and believe it. And that gives me and I trust that gives you great confidence that when we pray for others that the Lord would open their eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That as he's taken the initiative in our lives he might take the initiative in theirs as well. And he might reveal to them what he revealed to Peter on that day in Caesarea Philippi. So there is Revelation and then there is responsibility. Verse 18,

[12 : 59] I tell you you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against that I shall give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be loosed on earth, whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Simon Peter's name, it's Jewish name, we learn elsewhere in the Gospel is Simon Bar Jonah, Simon the son of Jonah. But throughout the Gospel he's referred to as Simon Peter and Jesus here and perhaps earlier had given him the name Peter. And in Greek the word Peter is very similar to the word for a rock. You are Petros and on this Petra I will build my church. The gates of hell shall not prevail against that I give you these keys to loose and to bind. And it seems that Peter is going to have a leading role in the building of and the growth of the Christian church. Now the Roman Catholic interpretation of these verses would say that this is early evidence that Peter, it was to become in a sense the first bishop, the first pope, that he was to be the foundation of the church, the Vatican city, the smallest country in the world has a flag and on the flag you have a triple crown and you have two keys, one of gold, one of silver, these are the keys for binding and for loosing. The pope himself wears a golden ring called the fisherman's ring, he is the successor to Peter. But as we read this account and as we read the Gospel we see that it's not Peter himself but something more than Peter which is the rock which is the foundation of the church. Writing in the fourth century John Chrysostom the great golden mouth preacher says this on this rock that is on the faith of his confession. He did not say upon

Peter for it was not upon man but upon his faith. So it's not Peter himself, the man, but it's upon Peter's confession as Jesus as the Christ that the church of Christ will be built.

And as for the keys, the keys are the preaching of the Gospel that those who respond in faith will be admitted and those who persist in unbelief will be shut out from the kingdom.

The English writer John Stott says this, Peter uses the keys effectively, opening the kingdom to the Jews on the day of Pentecost and then he will use them again to open the kingdom to Gentiles by evangelising and baptising Cornelius the first Gentile convert. So Peter has revealed to him the identity of Christ. Peter has responsibility entrusted to him that the confession which he has made will be the rock, will be the bedrock of the Christian faith. And we know that Peter himself when he goes on to expound that faith in his letter doesn't speak so much of himself as the rock, but in 1 Peter 1 he speaks of Christ as the cornerstone, as a living stone upon whom other living stones will be built into a spiritual house. So Peter may be the rock, but we as Christians are living stones built upon the foundation of Christ himself, Christ being the cornerstone, the keystone, the most important stone in a structure. And having given him that enormous responsibility he gives to him a word of reassurance. Verse 18, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. There will always be opposition to the work of the gospel, to the growth of the kingdom of God. We have an enemy, we have an enemy from hell itself.

[17 : 51] But Jesus says the gates of hell will not overcome his church, the devil will not have the final victory, the church itself will never die out, Hades will not overwhelm it.

The church in our day seems small, the church might very often seem weak, insignificant, it might not seem very influential. And yet Jesus says I will build my church here in the north, and we're pretty far north here, aren't we? But in the north, that is Europe, here in the west, Europe and North America, we see so often the church in decline. And yet as we look around the world and to the south and to Africa, Latin America, to the east, to parts of Asia, we see great growth because Jesus is building his church as he has promised. And even here in the north and in the west there is growth, amidst that decline there is new life. There are those coming to faith, there are churches being revitalized and planted, and the Lord is building his church in some very unlikely and unexpected places. Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane, but the church of Jesus constant will remain. Gates of hell can never against that church prevail. We have Christ's own promise and that cannot fail. I will build my church, says the Lord. So he reveals, God reveals to Peter the identity of the Messiah. Jesus entrusts to Peter a great responsibility of preaching the gospel that Jesus Christ is Lord. And he gives to him the reassurance that the church will grow. Despite the opposition of hell, despite the threat of Hades, it will not be overwhelmed, it will not die, but he will build his church.

So he gets it right about Christ, but then he gets it wrong about the cross. And there's a misunderstanding. There can often be misunderstandings in life. Maybe you've experienced that in talking to people or working with colleagues or within a family. I read today of a lady, a Russian lady who was on holiday in Switzerland. And there was a misunderstanding in a kebab shop. She

bought a bit of cake and a coffee, I think. And they brought her the little credit card machine to put in her pin number to pay. It was something like 15 pounds for the meal.

And she didn't understand the instructions and she typed in her pin number twice. You can imagine if you type in your pin number, it's quite a large number, isn't it? It's something in the thousands. And instead of paying something like 15 pounds for a meal, she paid several thousand pounds because there was a misunderstanding. Well, Peter misunderstands what is going on. Jesus begins to explain something about his mission and his call upon their life. He's revealed to them his identity as the Messiah. And now he explains what he's going to do and what he expects them to do in response. Peter, in common with many people of his days, expected a great military, political, economic ruler. One who would purify Israel of its hypocrisy and backsliding. One who would drive out the Gentile Romans from their midst and Israel would be restored to its former glory.

[22 : 02] And yet while they have in their minds glory, Jesus speaks to them of shame, verse 21. And he shows them that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and be killed and on the third day be raised. They're thinking of triumph. Jesus is talking of defeat.

They're thinking of glory. He speaks to them of suffering. And verse 22, it's all too much for Peter. He takes him aside and rebukes saying, saying, Far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you. How could the Messiah die at the hands of the chief priests? Peter rebukes the Lord, but then the Lord rebukes Peter, verse 23, in the strongest possible terms. Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me. You have not the things of God, but the things of man. There will be satanic opposition to the church. Jesus has just spoken of that, but there is satanic opposition to the cross. And there is no way Christ can save the world without going through the cross. And Peter thought that the Christ could do that. He could bring salvation without suffering, without shame, without sacrifice.

But Jesus says it's not possible. That is worldly thinking. These are not the ways or the things of God. Elsewhere in the Gospel, as we'll think about over the next few days, he explains that he must give his life as a ransom for many, that the good shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep. That in a world corrupted by sin and death, the Messiah must die for the sins of his people before being raised to life again.

And as Christians, it is possible for us to lose sight of that with all the different causes, you know, competing for our attention with all the good and the worthy things churches can be involved with. We can lose sight of the centrality of the cross and the death and resurrection of Christ. JC Ryle, the writer of the devotional expositions on the Gospel says this, the truth is that our Lord would have us regard the crucifixion as the central truth of Christianity. Right views of his vicarious death and the benefits issuing from it lie at the very foundation of Christian religion. Let us never forget this. It is at the cross that the holy love of God is supremely revealed. This is love, writes the apostle John, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Jesus explained that he must go and must suffer many things in order to redeem, to save, to deliver his people from their sins. In verse 24 to 28, having spoken to us of his death, he speaks to them of the need to die to self. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, for whoever would save his life will lose it. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

[25 : 56] Jesus speaks to them about those who are willing to lose their lives for his sake will be the ones who find life. Those who try to save their lives will be those who lose them. The world talks about self-fulfillment, self-satisfaction, self-realization. And here, as Jesus speaks to his disciples, he talks of self-sacrifice, of self-denial and of self-control. As Christians, there may be things we have to lose in order to follow Christ, and yet he promises we will find and gain something far greater. We may lose friendships, we may lose our reputation in the community, we may have to say farewell to a cherished ambition or relationship, we may lose employment, some believers around the world lose their liberties, some pay with their lives.

And Jesus says there is a cost to discipleship, salvation is free, but it will cost you everything you have. What does it prophet Eranus says? If he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his soul, if he fails to answer correctly, the most important question, and fails to enter into the most important relationship. Psalm 49 has a picture of those who are prosperous. In the world, nothing wrong with prosperity, we thank God for it. But in their prosperity, they become proud. And yet the Psalm shows us their end, be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases, for when he dies, he will carry nothing away. His glory will not go down after him.

The world promises us glory in different forms, but it's fleeting. It is short-lived, and Jesus speaks to us here of suffering, but then do you notice he speaks to us also of glory?

And we can almost miss it as we read to these words. You notice in verse 21, after speaking at length of his cross, he talks about his resurrection on the third day, he will be raised. And having spelled out in detail the cost of discipleship, we have these words in verse 27, the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and he will repay each person according to what he has done. So he speaks of the cross, but there's a hint of the resurrection. He speaks of his suffering, but then he talks to them of his return in glory. And those who have suffered for Christ, those who have sacrificed for Christ will enjoy and share in the glory which is to come.

We may lose something now in the short term, but we will gain so much more in the long term, he will repay and reward those who have been faithful to him.

[29 : 24] One writer says this true Christianity begins with a daily cross in this life, while it offers us a crown of glory in the life to come. Christ is going to die for sins, that is the central truth of the gospel. He calls us to die to self, but he promises us resurrection life and reward in the life and the world to come. But there is a cost, and he's very open with his disciples, that there will be a cost to following him. Social exclusion perhaps, being denied opportunities, education and employment, verbal or physical abuse, and for many around the world, and perhaps we've been thinking about this with reference to Afghanistan, imprisonment, torture, martyrdom. And why would anybody be willing to count the cost and to pay that price? Because verse 25, whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Verse 27, the Son of man will repay each person according to what he has done. So the Christian life involves a death to self, it involves loss in this world, but we're given resurrection life and hope and a future.

Maybe that's something you've experienced recently, you've been excluded from a circle, a friendship group, maybe people speak against you behind your back, maybe they say things to your face that you would prefer them not to say. Maybe you have been seeking to live a godly life, practicing self-control and you look around and see other people having a great time and you think you're missing out, maybe there's envy creeping in, maybe you've been made redundant or passed over for promotion because you're open about your Christian faith and you want to share that faith and see others enjoy all the benefits of the gospel. Why do it? Why suffer the loss? Why count the cost? Because the Lord says those who carry the cross will one day wear the crown.

Those who die to self will be raised to newness of life. Those who suffer for Christ's sake will share in his glory when he comes in the glory of his Father.

From the highest throne in glory to the cross of deepest woe, all to ransom guilty captives, flow my praise forever flow. Go return a mortal Saviour, yours the viltry, yours alone. Soon return and reign forever. Claim the kingdom, take your throne. Peter got it right about the Christ.

He understood that Jesus was the Messiah, promised and sent of God. And is that your confession? Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is Lord. Jesus is the Lord of my life and your life.

[33 : 01] But he got it wrong about the cross. Didn't realize the Son of Man was going to die for him. Didn't realize he had to die to self. He thought the Christian life was going to be victory and glory and reward all the way. And he had to learn there would be a cross to following Christ.

There would be the cross, but ultimately there would be the crown. Well Peter learned that lesson that day and when he composed his first letter, he highlighted these things to people who were suffering on account of their faith.

And as he closed his letter, he reminds the people of this pattern. Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's suffering that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

If you're insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. After you've suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Peter got it wrong about Christ. Got it right about Christ. Got it wrong about the cross. But he came to understand both who the Lord is and what the Lord requires of his followers.

[34 : 35] Might that be true of us confessing Christ as Lord taking up cheerfully our crosses day by day and waiting and working for his return in glory in order that we might share in that glory and receive an abundant inheritance and an abundant welcome into his kingdom.

Well, let's just close our time together with a word of prayer. Thank you. Gracious God, we thank you that we can draw near to you now in reverence and awe.

And that this Friday evening we can humble ourselves before you, the one true, the living God, the God who stills the raging of the sea, the God who has a mighty arm and a strong hand, the God to whom the battle belongs.

We thank you that in your greatness we find grace, that you incline your ear to us, we who are poor and needy. You do not treat us as our sins deserve, but as a father has compassion upon his children. So you have compassion upon us.

For you are abiding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. And so we call upon you now, we pray to you now in the Saviour's name.

[36 : 18] Many of us may be here with hearts full of anxiety, full of trouble, perhaps finding it difficult to concentrate, worries about our schooling, our health, our finances, our relationships.

Maybe you have drawn us here tonight, Lord, as prodigal sons and daughters. But wherever our circumstance, Lord, we come to you, we cast our cares upon you because we are told you care for us. That you are a father to those who have faith. You grant to us our daily bread. You know what we need before we even ask it. And you will undertake the future as you have the past. We thank you that such is your great love for us that we are now called children of God, adopted into your family through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification. We thank you that in him we have eternal life, a life in which we are conscious that our sins are forgiven, cast into the very depths of the sea, a life empowered by your Holy Spirit who animates us with a divine love and peace and joy, a life in which we can name one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord and supremely call on you as our heavenly

Father. And so as we consider these words before us, would you help us to rest in the truth of them and to rejoice in the confidence which is ours in Christ that he will one day return and take us home and that he will come for us. He will take us to be with himself. He will wipe the tears from our eyes and he will lead us into that life which is truly life. And so we thank you for the hope that is ours and we ask that you would help us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling for we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.