

Handout

Session Seven: Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

Memory Verse: "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'" (Matthew 16:16).

People are talking about Jesus and his identity. He has performed miracles, healed the sick, and taught with authority. How could people not be talking about him? Jesus asks the question, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13) Jesus began with the assumption people knew he was the Son of Man, but he wanted to know what else was being said about him.

1. How do the disciples respond to the question of Jesus?
2. What might be additional answers to his question?
3. Do you think Jesus was primarily concerned with what "others" thought about him? Why or why not?

This dialogue among Jesus and the disciples seems to be a warm-up for the real question, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15) It is one thing to converse about the faith of others; it is something quite different to confess faith in Jesus Christ for oneself. Peter is the first to speak up as he confesses his faith. "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16) Messiah is Hebrew for the Greek word "Christ". It means "anointed one". Yet Peter recognizes that Jesus is not anointed by a human, but by God, one who is living and active in the world.

4. What do you think of the quick response of Peter?

5. What is your overall impression of Peter?

6. What do you make of the silence of the other disciples?

Jesus responds to Peter with a blessing, acknowledging God at work in Peter's life, stirring the right response at a time of testing. Just as Peter proclaimed, "You are the Messiah", so Jesus responds with a parallel phrase "You are Peter." To understand the weight of the statement made by Jesus, a person needs to realize "*Peter*" means "*rock*".

7. What does it mean to be called "Rock"?

Jesus intends to build his church based on these words uttered by Peter with the help of God. Biblical scholars have debated the meaning and implications of this well-known confession of Peter. The Roman Catholic Church believes Peter to be the first pope with the church being built upon him as a person. The reformers understood the church is built upon the faith of Peter. Thus congregations can grow wherever faith in Jesus is expressed. Surprisingly, Jesus gives to the church the privilege and responsibility to forgive and not to forgive sins.

8. When might the church not forgive sins?

9. How do you understand Jesus' reference to building the church on a rock?

10. What surprises you about this passage?