

Prayer:

Slide # 1

Theme: *Christ the King*

Outline:

- Chps. 1-2 The Advent of the King. (Proving His LEGAL right to the throne by His genealogy.)
- Chp. 3 The Forerunner of the King and the King’s baptism.
- Chp. 4 The Test of the King. (Proving His MORAL right to the throne by not yielding to temptation; and exhibiting His kingdom resume.)
- Chps. 5-7 The Pronouncements of the King. (Proving His JUDICIAL right to the throne as seen in the wisdom of His kingdom teaching.)
- Chps. 8-10 The Power of the King. (Proving His PROPHETICAL right to the throne by fulfilling prophecy.)
- Chps. 11-12 The Rejection of the King.
- Chp. 13 The Parables of the King.
- Chps. 14-16 The Revelations of the King.**
- Chps. 17-20 The Instructions of the King.
- Chps. 21-23 Formal Rejection of the King.
- Chps. 24-25 The Predictions of the King.
- Chps. 26-27 The Passion of the King.
- Chp. 28 The Resurrection of the King.

Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience presenting all manner of evidence from the ministry of Christ showing that indeed Jesus is the promised Messianic King in perfect accord with the OT Scriptures. The nation’s religious leadership essentially rejected the claims of Christ, and the nation was at best generally confused.

From this point on in Christ’s ministry, “*Israel’s folly in refusing to acknowledge the Messiah looms over private discussions, public disputes, and prophetic discourse.*” (John Phillips).

At this point in Matthew, namely the text we are studying this morning, starting with Matthew 16:13, denotes the “**great divide**” in Matthew’s gospel. Here we see the “**great confession**” of Peter and the introduction of the “**great new truth**” called the Church.

And as we study it through we see the **great new truth** of the Church is founded on the **great confession** of Peter.

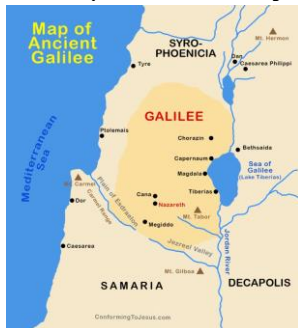
From this point on the shadow of the cross more and more falls over Christ's ministry. At this point we are coming down the stretch of Christ's earthly ministry – dealing with perhaps about the last 6 month or so. So the focus more and more becomes the cross and what will follow after that.

Matthew 16:13–17 (NKJV)

13 When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

Following the narrative through we see Jesus and His disciples had left the region of Magdala in Galilee (Mt. 15:39) and made their way across the Sea of Galilee to the area by Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22) and from there go about 25 miles north up to the region of Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16:13).

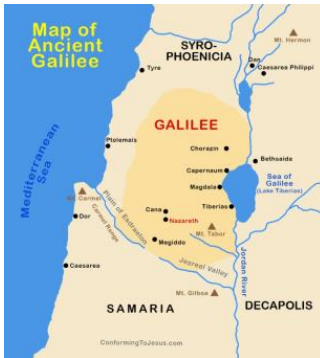
Slide # 2 (Christ's trajectory going to Caesarea Philippi)



Caesarea Philippi was originally called **Paneas** and was a thoroughly pagan place that had a shrine to the false Greek god Pan who supposedly was born in a nearby cave. Caesarea Philippi was way up north on the very northern border of Israel at the base of the snowcapped Mount Hermon. Because of its location as essentially the last outpost of Israel, this city was historically greatly influenced by a pagan Gentile presence.

This city in 20 BC was given by Caesar Augustus to Herod the Great. Herod then built a temple here in honor of Caesar Augustus. Subsequently it passed from Herod to his son Philip the tetrarch who renamed it "*Caesarea Philippi*" in honor of Tiberius Caesar (who reigned from 14 AD to 37 BC). But not only did Philip name the city after Caesar but also after himself – hence the name **Caesarea Philippi**. This also served to distinguish Caesarea Philippi up north from Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast.

Slide # 3 – (2 different Caesarea’s)



Slide # 4

Temple of Pan



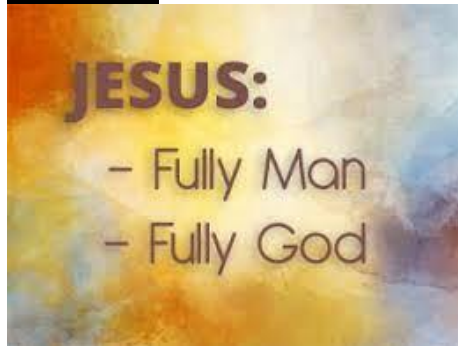
As they came into this region of Caesarea Philippi Luke 9:18 says Jesus was ALONE praying and then His disciples joined Him. In that context Christ proceeded to ask these questions. He first asked them, “**Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?**”

This was the all-important issue in Christ’s pre-cross earthly ministry. The title “Son of Man” was clearly a Messianic title going back to Daniel 7:13-14. It was Christ’s favorite designation of Himself used of Him about 80 times in the gospels.

It emphasizes His identity as a human being. It emphasized His Messianic role as being one of humiliation and submission which characterized the nature of His first coming. And yet at the same time it carried with it the idea of divine authority. So the title “Son of Man” emphasizes the Messianic idea of divine authority in combination with Christ’s humanity -which is totally unique to the Messiah.

“Son of Man” emphasizes that Christ is of the order of man – sharing in the very nature of humanity. “Son of God” emphasizes that Christ is of the order of God -sharing in the very nature of God. As the God-Man Christ is the most unique person in the universe being fully God and fully Man in One Person.

Slide # 5



As God, Jesus was always eternally God. As a member of the Triune Godhead He is eternally the Son of God. But add to that reality, that in history He also became a Man. As John says, “It the beginning was Word (Jesus)...and the Word was God.” (Jn. 1:1) And then he says in John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh” (humanity). Jesus was always God – but in the incarnation He also took on humanity.

When Jesus asks the question, “***Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?***” it inherently calls for the answer to be something more than a mere man. Imagine, if they said, “Well, that’s easy, you are just a man like the title “Son of Man” indicates. That would have been the wrong answer because it was woefully incomplete.

As I say, this title “Son of Man” was a Messianic title rooted in the OT Scriptures. Sometimes in the OT this title “Son of man” did simply emphasize the person being addressed was human such as when God addressed Ezekiel as “Son of man” (cf. Ezek. 2:1, 3...). However, when used in Messianic contexts such as Dan. 7:13-14, the Messianic Person addressed with the title “Son of Man” is clearly more than merely a man.

So, here in Matt. 16:13 Jesus is clearly indicating that He is Messiah/Man but clearly there is more. And so Jesus asks the question: “Who do people really think I the Messiah/Man really am?”

Jesus’ priority ministry in the world was to reveal Himself, to teach and to demonstrate who He was. – ***John MacArthur***

Note it is clear that Jesus is not asking what the religious leaders (per se) thought as they had already made it clear that they thought He was a false teacher doing miracles by the power of Satan (cf. Matt. 12).

Rather, here Jesus is asking what the Jewish people in general, the crowds in general thought about WHO He was.

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

Note that in each one of these answers they connect Christ’s ministry back to previous prophets that were highly regarded. They clearly have a high regard for Christ’s ministry and see a supernatural character to it.

And the thing about each of these prophets is that they were now dead. Luke 9:19 specifically says, “***others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.***” So the people generally seem to be thinking that Jesus is one of these dead prophets who has risen from the dead and is now ministering among them. Clearly, they did not see Christ’s ministry as ordinary. They clearly saw He was someone special and yet they missed the central point of WHO He really was. They clearly saw the supernatural character of His ministry but failed to see Him as Messiah/Lord.

In connecting Jesus with the prophets they clearly connected His ministry with Messianic prophecy in the sense that the prophets all had a prophetic ministry tied to the Messiah, and yet they failed to see Him as the Messiah.

Some thought Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life. Herod Antipas as seen in Matthew 14:2 thought this. However, John the Baptist was merely the forerunner as prophesied in Isaiah 40:3 and Mal. 3:1. He went before the LORD preparing the way before Him by calling the people to repentance but as John 10:41 says John did no miracle. Thus, the ministry of John the Baptist and that of Jesus were very different.

Others thought Jesus was Elijah come back to life. Elijah did perform some amazing miracles in his lifetime (cf. 1 Kg. 17). And the Jews did know of the prophecy that Elijah must come before the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Slide # 6

Malachi 4:5 (NKJV)

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

John the Baptist did come in “the spirit and power of Elijah” but was not successful in turning the hearts of Israel back to the Lord (cf. Lk. 1:17). However, Elijah himself will yet come in the Tribulation Period and as Jesus said in Matt. 17:11 he will “**restore all things**” – meaning he will be used of God to bring Israel to repentance.

It is because of this prophecy in Malachi 4:5-6 that the Jews to this day set a chair at the table at Passover in the hope that one day he will show up and announce that the Messiah is coming. During their Passover celebrations the Jews will commonly have a child go to the door and see if Elijah is there. They are still expecting him to come.

So, it is easy to understand why some in Jesus’ time thought Christ was really Elijah. Elijah did power miracles. Jesus did powerful miracles. They were expecting Elijah to come and here was Jesus with a most unusual ministry causing many to speculate that this person was indeed Elijah.

Others thought perhaps Jesus was Jeremiah come back from the dead. It seems they may have gotten this idea from the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees which claimed that Jeremiah had hidden the Ark of the Covenant on Mount Nebo (cf. 2 Mac. 2:1-8). The legend then developed that prior to the Messiah coming Jeremiah would return and restore the Ark back to its rightful place in the temple. Some thought Jesus was Jeremiah.

And still others conjectured that Jesus was one of the former prophets, but were not sure about which one.

They clearly saw in Jesus a “prophetic ministry”. They saw Him as a prophet but not THE Messianic prophet spoken of in Deut. 18 (cf. Deut. 18:15, 18-19).

To the average person He was one among many. Good but not the Best. Great but not the Greatest. A prophet but not the Prophet. This view would never do. – **William MacDonald**

This is comparable to many today who want to see Jesus as “a good teacher” but fail to see Him as Lord-God Almighty.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.

That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for 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.” – **C.S. Lewis**

And this is where the people in Christ’s day generally were. They saw Him as a great prophet, but that was it. But that is woefully insufficient. Even Muslims think Jesus was a prophet but that is not saving faith.

One thing is clear: We can never make a true decision about Jesus Christ by taking a poll of the people. – **Warren Wiersbe**

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

It now became very personal! Christ now called on these disciples to answer for themselves. This was like the final test. Did even they get it? This is the ultimate issue.

For two and a half years they had been with Christ. They had heard Him teach, they had seen His character day in and day out. They had seen His mind-blowing miracles on an up close and personal basis as a way of life. Now came the ultimate question: “What say you?” Jesus said, “But who do you say that I am?” This was the all important question because WHO He was defined Christ’s entire ministry. What would their “**final answer**” be?

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

Peter is commonly the spokesman for the disciples and answers the question saying, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**”

Wow! That was a powerful answer! That was the right answer! That was an absolutely profound answer!

Both “Christ” and “Son of the living God” have the definite article- “**the** Christ” – “**the** Son of the living God”. The definite article THE denotes a definite object of reference.

The word “Christ” is the Greek word equivalent to the Hebrew word “Messiah”. It means “Anointed One”. It is not a proper name but rather a title.

In the OT priests (Ex. 28:41), kings (1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13), and prophets (1 Kg. 19:16; 1 Chron. 16:22; Ps. 105:15) were anointed with oil signifying their special calling and appointment by God.

All of these were anointed ones but Jesus alone was THE ANOINTED ONE. The role of prophet, priest, and king were all wrapped up into ONE in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the end all of anointed ones with Him being THE ANOINTED ONE – the most special One with the most special of all callings.

Slide # 7

Daniel 9:25 (NKJV)

25 “Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until **Messiah** the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.

Psalm 2:2 (NKJV)

2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against **His Anointed**, saying,

Code for the Messiah (the Christ) Who was to come was “the Coming One”. John the Baptist sent word to Jesus asking, “Are You the Coming One” (Mt. 11:3). From Genesis 3:15 on there are MANY OT references to this special coming One Who be both a par-excellent deliverer and a par excellent ruler.

In fact 60 major messianic prophecies with 270 ramifications (Jewish rabbis saw up to 456 messianic allusions!) were inspired by the Spirit so that there would be absolutely no doubt to OT readers that the Man Jesus was truly the long expected Messiah. – **Bruce Hurt**

THE CHRIST is the long expected most special ONE with a most special calling as prophesied and promised in the OT Scriptures. He is THE Chosen One that would fulfill all the covenant promises to Israel.

Jesus from the very onset of His ministry as THE ANOINTED ONE was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit showing that He was this special chosen One predicted in the OT Scriptures.

Slide # 8

Isaiah 61:1 (NKJV)

1 “The **Spirit** of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has **anointed Me** To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Acts 10:38 (NKJV)

38 how **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit** and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Oil in the Scriptures is often symbolic of the Spirit. In the OT men were anointed with oil but Jesus as THE ANOINTED ONE was uniquely anointed with the fullness of the Spirit without measure (cf. Jn. 3:34).

The Jews expected the Christ/Messiah to come but they had no idea He would be God come in the flesh. Thus, they highly underrated the coming Messiah thinking He would merely be a very special man.

But Peter here declares Jesus to be THE CHRIST Who is also “***the Son of the living God***”. Now that was radically new! Yes, it was clearly in OT prophecies, but they missed it. And yes, earlier the disciples on some level had seen Jesus as “the Christ” (Jn. 1:41) and yes, earlier on some level they had recognized Him as “***the Son of God***” (Mt. 14:33). But this is the first time on record that we definitively have them putting it all together in one package. Places like John 6:69 where Peter seems to make a similar confession, the older manuscripts have “***Holy One***” instead of “***the Christ***” and so it was still a little fuzzy.

Thus, this served as a major clarifying moment! This was not the statement of spectacular enthusiasm as when Christ walked on the water but rather the product of studied reflection and solemn faith brought about by God in the heart.

Many of the Jews believed Jesus to be a prophetic precursor to the Messiah but Peter declared Him to be THE CHRIST Who is in fact Divine – very God of very God.

Slide # 9

By saying, “You are the Christ,” Peter put Him on the throne of Israel as the Lord’s anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. By saying, “You are...the Son of the Living God,” Peter put Him on the throne of the universe. – **John Phillips**

Note the parallel emphasis here. Jesus calls Himself the “**Son of Man**” (v. 13) – which He is; and Peter confesses Him to be “**the Son of God**” (v. 16) – which He is. He is both Man and God – He is the God-Man.

When Peter declares Him to be “the Son of the living God” that is rich with OT meaning. Living God is used of the true God in the OT in contrast to the false gods of idolatry. The true God is the living God. Living things MOVE and are ACTIVE. The living God moves in history in relation to Israel; He moved in history in relation to the Messiah, He moves in relation to the Church whom He lives in today. He is the living/moving God!

The living God inherently has LIFE within Himself. When speaking of the living God the Bible emphasizes His inherent power related to the power of LIFE (cf. Deut. 5:26; Josh. 3:10; 1 Sam. 17:26, 36; 2 Kg. 19:4, 16; Ps. 42:2; 84:2; Jer. 10:10; Dan. 6:20, 26; Hos. 1:10; 1 Thess. 1:9).

Slide # 10**Jeremiah 10:10 (NKJV)**

10 But the LORD is the **true God**; He is the **living God** and the **everlasting** King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 (NKJV)

9 For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the **living and true God**,

The idea of “Son” reflects the idea of ONENESS. Jesus as the Son of the living God shares in the very nature of God’s living essence (cf. Jn. 5:17-18; 10:30-33). How long has God been living? Forever. He is the everlasting God with everlasting life. As believers we now share in His eternal life. In order to GIVE eternal life you have to HAVE eternal life. For Jesus to give eternal life He must BE eternal life. In John 10:28 He said of His sheep, “And I give them eternal life...”.

Jesus has always shared in this divine life as He is the essence of this life. As He said in John 14:6, “I am the...life.” As God Jesus has existed forever, and as the Christ He took on humanity in time, space, and history to fulfill all the OT prophecies.

Here in Matthew 16:16 Peter connected Jesus’ divine nature with the fact that He was the promised coming Messiah. Peter here verbalized that these two facts are connected in the One Person of Jesus Christ. Yes, He was of the line of David as the promised Messiah, but He was also fully God – all in One Person (cf. Ps. 2:3, 7; Matt. 3:17, 17:5).

Romans, which has as its theme the GOSPEL OF GOD begins with this dual premise.

Slide # 11

Romans 1:3–4 (NKJV)

3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was **born of the seed of David according to the flesh,**

4 and **declared to be the Son of God** with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the **resurrection** from the dead.

Now with hindsight, everywhere you look in the Scriptures we find this dual nature of the Lord Jesus Christ being fully God and fully man in one person. We see it in Isaiah 9:6-7, “For unto us a Child is born...And His name will be called...Mighty God.” We see it in the angelic announcement to Joseph in Matt. 1:23 where he said, “the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son [that’s humanity] and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, “God with us” [that’s divinity].

This confession of Peter that **Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God,** became known as the cardinal creed of the Church. Jesus goes on to tell Peter that on this **Rock Truth** He will build His Church as seen in verse 18.

I want you to note that Peter’s confession is the exact same thing John says we must believe to have life. That is significant, because John wrote the entire book of John so that we might believe and have life. What did he say we have to believe? Well, the very confession of Peter – that Jesus is the Christ – the Son of God.

Slide #12

Matthew 16:16 (NKJV)

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

John 20:31 (NKJV)

31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is **the Christ**, the **Son of God**, and that believing you may have life in His name.

[A] right confession of who He is is basic to salvation (Rom. 10:9-10; 1 John 2:18-23; 4:1-3). His person and His work go together and must never be separated. – **Warren Wiersbe**

Footnote: It seems from verse 20 that the other disciples evidently concurred with Peter's confession. But what must have been going on in the mind of Judas who took it all in? Even though the others were believers as Jesus later indicated in John 13 yet one (namely Judas the betrayer) was not clean (cf. Jn. 13:10-11; 6:70-71).

17 Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Peter was blessed of God to be able to make this confession. It was truly a highlight in his earthly life.

But Jesus makes it very clear that Peter did not arrive at this conclusion on his own. Jesus here addressed Peter as "**Simon Bar-Jonah**". "**Bar-Jonah**" literally means "**son of Jonah**" emphasizing his human origin and thus his humanness. It emphasizes Peter's natural state.

Jesus as the "Son of God" was of the very nature of God, but Peter was merely the "son of a man" – namely his father Jonah. As such he had no divine insight on his own whatsoever.

And to make the point even stronger Jesus says, "**flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.**"

"Flesh and blood" in Jewish thought emphasized the reality of humanity (cf. Gal. 1:16; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14). Peter didn't get this understanding through human capabilities. Rather, God the Father showed it to him.

This is a very important truth here. People on their own never come to see the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. It wasn't Peter's brilliance of connecting the dots – of putting it all together and arriving at the right conclusion. It was NOT like Peter through deep unaided human evaluation of Christ's miracles, of His background credentials, of His fulfillment of prophecy, of His unparalleled teaching – its NOT like Peter in his human brilliance put this altogether to come to the right conclusion.

No, this was a TOTAL God-thing!

We need to realize that apart from God showing someone the truth they will NEVER get it. We are completely dependent on God. We need divine illumination to be able to see.

Slide # 13

Matthew 11:27 (NKJV)

27 All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and **the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**

Slide # 14

Luke 24:30–32 (NKJV)

30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.

31 Then **their eyes were opened** and **they knew Him**; and He vanished from their sight.

32 And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”

Slide # 15

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

14 But the natural man does **not receive** the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **foolishness to him**; **nor can he know them**, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Corinthians 12:3 (NKJV)

3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and **no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.**

Slide # 16

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NKJV)

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has **shone in our hearts** to **give the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now I want to open up to you a great mystery that no one fully understands. Theologians argue their fine points and yet in truth they dance around this great mystery and never truly solve it – no matter how much they claim otherwise. This is the great mystery of God’s sovereignty in combination with human responsibility. Both are true. I am certainly God-centered in my theology as everything begins and ends with Him, and all glory goes to Him. And yet in the middle of it all is the reality of human response and human responsibility in a way no one fully understands.

Let me show you what I mean. The Bible is clear that on our own “there is none who seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11). And in our unaided humanity the things of God are foolishness and don’t make sense to us, and the text in 1 Cor. 2:14 is very strong saying, “nor can he know them”. On our own we just can’t get there.

But here is the deal. God chases after us. The Holy Spirit convicts the world (cf. Jn. 16:7-11). There is what I call “the light of conviction” which brings the element of human responsibility into the equation. The foundation for this understanding is stated early in the Bible as found in Genesis 4. There God revealed TRUTH to Cain and then put the burden of personal responsibility on him saying....

Slide # 17

Genesis 4:7 (NKJV)

7 If **you** do well, will you not be accepted? And if **you** do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but **you** should rule over it.”

You know what that verse is all about? It’s all about human responsibility in view of the light of God’s revelation given to him. God did come to Cain. He did show him the truth. There was “the light of conviction” but now it was on him what he would do with it. It wasn’t like he was just a puppet with no will in the matter. He had a choice to make. And that sets the pattern for what we find in the rest of the Scriptures.

The Bible is clear that God desires all people to come to the knowledge of the truth and thereby be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). The knowledge of the truth is code for gospel truth in the NT. There is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:19-20); the knowledge of Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:3-6); the knowledge of Christ as Savior (1 Tim. 2:4-6); the knowledge of justification by faith alone (Rom. 10:1-4).

God the Spirit makes this knowledge known through “the light of conviction” as the truth of the gospel is shared.

But here is what I want you to see (no pun intended). When God shows people the truth in “the light of conviction” that then brings human responsibility to the fore where people are accountable for how they then respond to the truth.

Slide # 18

Hebrews 10:26–27 (NKJV)

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

People can never arrive at the truth on their own but God in conviction does show people the truth and then they are especially responsible for it.

Slide # 19

2 Peter 2:20–21 (NKJV)

20 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

21 For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

This is a description of apostasy! The sin of apostasy is that these people knew the truth – they saw it, but then they rejected it. They never really entered into the good of it and they are accountable for this level of rejection.

The great example of conversion in the New Testament is that of the apostle Paul. His conversion experience was a miracle as is the case for all of us who are true believers. You see Paul himself said in 1 Tim. 1:16 that he is “a pattern for those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” But you say, “No one has an experience like Paul had on the road to Damascus, and if they did they would never reject it.” I beg to differ.

Paul in having the “conviction of light” responded positively to it calling on Jesus as Lord (cf. Acts 9:1-6). But I want you to know that another man in the OT had a similar experience and yet did not humble himself in saving faith. That man was named Balaam. God revealed Himself to Balaam in a most powerful way – speaking to him through his donkey and then the LORD Himself (probably in a theophany Who was the preincarnate Christ) appeared to him as the Angel of the LORD causing Balaam to fall down “flat on his face” (Num. 22:31).

Balaam experienced all kinds of God interactions even going so far as to make this kind of a confession.

Slide # 20

Numbers 24:16 (NKJV)

16 The utterance of him who **hears the words of God**, And **has the knowledge of the Most High**, Who **sees** the vision of the Almighty, Who falls down, with **eyes wide open**:

As the story goes on Balaam is clearly shown to be a wicked prophet. Peter compares false teachers to Balaam “who loved the wages of wickedness” (2 Pet. 2:15). Jude associates those who function naturally like brute beasts with those who “run greedily in the error of Balaam”.

Paul is an example of a man responding to “the light of conviction” with true saving faith and thus is a pattern for all true believers. In contrast Balaam is an example of a man responding “to the light of conviction” with an unyielded rebel heart – even though he had various emotional experiences.

Both men were shown the truth by God but they responded in different ways – one positively – one negatively.

Slide # 21

...he who ‘convicts’ another places the truth of the case in dispute in **a clear light before him**, so that it must be seen and acknowledged as truth. He who then **rejects the conclusion** which the exposition involves, **rejects it with his eyes open and at his peril**. Truth seen as truth carries with it condemnation to all who refuse to welcome it. (emphasis mine) - **B.F. Westcott**, The Gospel According to St. John

God showed Peter the truth and he responded positively to it resulting in this great confession. It was a total God-thing as God revealed it to Peter and yet Peter personally embraced the truth of it.

On the other hand Judas in effect sinned with his eyes wide open in rejecting the truth that was also right before his eyes and is eternally accountable for it.

In Matthew 16:15 we have what amounts to the climax of Jesus' teaching ministry. Here in effect, was the final exam put to the disciples which consisted of just ONE question: "Who do you say that I am?"

This is a question I like to ask people evangelistically: ***Who is Jesus to you?*** How a person responds tells the story on them and where they stand.

Only those who hold to Jesus as the Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures and as the Lord God Almighty Who rose again – only those believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God – only those truly believing in His name have eternal life.

So let me ask you: Who is Jesus to you?

The story is told about a certain pastor who was invited to pray at a large political event in Washington. It was intended to be a politically correct event and so when this pastor showed up they asked that he pray in the "spirit of correctness." In the spirit of "correctness" they had asked a Universalist, an Imam, a Rabbi, and then this Evangelical pastor to pray. The pastor said he would go last.

The Universalist prayed first to the god of many names and to the god of no name - to the god who is everything and to the god who is nothing....

Then the Imam prayed in the name of Allah, and then the Rabbi prayed.

Finally, the Christian pastor got up and said, "I pray in THE NAME that is above all the other names. I pray in the NAME of the One to whom every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess. I pray in the one NAME by which we must be saved. I pray in the NAME of my LORD and SAVIOR - the LORD JESUS CHRIST.". That puts things in perspective!

Who is Jesus to you?