

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Today, July 4th, is known as “Independence Day” here in America, as we remember and celebrate the founding of our country as an independent nation, no longer under the rule of others. Nevertheless, it behooves us to always keep in mind that nobody is independent from the Lord; rather, everyone is actually quite dependent on the Lord since Lamentations 3:22 clearly states, “It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” Realize that if the Lord would stop working for even a moment, the entire world would cease to exist, “For in him we live, and move, and have our being,” reports Acts 17:28.

Furthermore, if not for the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ every naturally conceived human being would be headed for hell, for Holy Writ declares in no uncertain terms, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [and] the soul that sinneth, it shall die. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Romans 3:23; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23; John 3:16)

Therefore, our Scripture selection in effect encourages us:

“KNOW AND FOLLOW JESUS”

With that as our theme may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) Who is the Jesus we need to know and follow
- 2) How it is that we come to know and follow Jesus
- 3) Why we should indeed know and follow Jesus
- 4) How we are to show we truly know and follow Jesus

Verses 13 & 14, -----. (Matthew 16:13-14)

At the time the events recorded in our Scripture selection took place, Jesus’ popularity was high; consequently, His enemies’ bitter opposition to Him was also quite high. So, it happened that, *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

Caesarea Philippi was a region north of the Sea of Galilee, and it was when Jesus came into that area that He asked His disciples what people were saying concerning His identity. Jesus is the Son of man because He is a true human being, a real man. Nevertheless, Jesus is much more than a perfect man, “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,” declares Colossians 2:9. But, Jesus desired to know if the folks at large were stating the truth concerning who He is.

Now, since the disciples had been hearing what the people were saying regarding Jesus’ identity, they answered Jesus’ question by reporting to Him: *Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

Hence, the common people for the most part held that Jesus was simply an outstanding preacher, possibly a reincarnation of one who had gone before. Oh, it’s pretty sad that despite the numerous mighty miracles Jesus had done and His absolutely perfect preaching, He was viewed by the majority of the common people as nothing more than a great prophet.

Sadly, many people today think the exact same way about Jesus, as they hold that He was merely a great preacher who rebelled against the establishment in His day, and thereby gained a following.

Verse 15, -----. (Matthew 16:15)

After hearing what the disciples reported

concerning the common people's opinions regarding His identity, Jesus turned His attention directly to His disciples and asked them: *But whom say ye that I am?* That question was and is directed to ALL who say they are Jesus' followers, for Jesus used the plural pronoun "ye" in His question.

My friends, it is a fact that every human being needs to know who Jesus Christ really is, for Acts 4:12 pointedly declares concerning Jesus Christ, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Thus, the Jesus we need to know and follow is the only Savior of sinners.

Verse 16, ----- (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus asked His disciples, "whom say ye that I am?" *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Simon Peter answered correctly! JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD!

Jesus is not only true man, sinless man; Jesus is also TRUE GOD, "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," as John 1:14 relates.

Jesus is NOT John the Baptist reincarnated, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets of old, for all of those preachers – great as they were – were still sinful human beings who themselves needed the Savior, Jesus Christ. All of the great prophets of times past pointed people to the Messiah, the Christ, who was to come; and that Christ did come— His name is JESUS CHRIST.

Jesus had to be true man in order to take our place under God's Law and in order to be able to suffer and die in our place. Jesus also had to be true God in order that His perfect fulfilling of the Law might be sufficient for all people, and that His life and death might be a sufficient ransom for the redemption of all people, and that He might be able to overcome death and the devil for us. It's as we read in Hebrews 2:9 & 14, "we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the

suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 adds, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

Accordingly, the Jesus we need to know and follow is the REAL Jesus, the Jesus who is true God and true man but one Christ— the Jesus who is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) God grant that each and every one of us treasures and believes the Gospel of Christ, the word of reconciliation, for then we know and follow the real Jesus Christ.

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As we ponder the next few verses of our text, let us see how it is that we come to know and follow Jesus.

Verse 17, ----- (Matthew 16:17)

Simon Peter's confession of Jesus Christ was right on; but, Simon Peter's confession was made because GOD enabled him, GOD gave Peter right knowledge of Jesus Christ, for we just read: *Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

My friends, let us never forget that 1 Corinthians 12:3 reports, "that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost."

And, Ephesians 2:8-10 declares, “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Thus, we come to know and follow Jesus by God’s grace, mercy, and power working in us as He gifts us with faith, keeps us in the faith, and makes us fruitful in the faith.

Verses 18 & 19, -----. (Matthew 16:18-19)

These verses of our text are often taken out of context by those who falsely claim Peter as the first pope. Nevertheless, consider the words carefully and remember that they follow Peter’s right confession of Jesus, when Peter said: *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Jesus subsequently declared Peter as *blessed* because God had given Peter faith and empowered him to make his right confession concerning Jesus. Then, Jesus said to Peter: *thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Observe that Jesus did NOT say to Peter, “upon YOU I will build my Church.” No, the name “Peter” means “rock” and is fitting because Peter made a rock-solid confession of JESUS CHRIST WHO IS THE ROCK upon which the Holy Christian Church is built, for 1 Corinthians 3:11 clearly states, “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Hence, the church was NOT and is NOT built upon Peter, but is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, for 1 Peter 2:5-6 declares, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” So, we note that Peter himself was fully aware that Jesus

Christ is the ROCK – the chief corner stone – upon whom the Holy Christian Church is built. Accordingly, we come to know and follow Jesus by God’s grace, mercy, and power working in us.

Notice in verse 19 of our text that the office of the keys, the power to forgive and retain sins on earth, is a power GIVEN by JESUS CHRIST to Peter as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. But, the power to remit and retain sins was not only given to Peter, but is given to all Christians — the Christian Church on earth — for we read in John 20:23 that after Jesus’ bodily resurrection He said to His disciples, His followers, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” That’s “ye” plural, for to all Christians 1 Peter 2:9 says, “ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” Thus, the keys, the ability to forgive and retain sins on the earth, is a gift of the Lord to His Church on earth.

Fellow Christians, let us never forget that we come to know and follow Jesus only by God’s grace, mercy, and power.

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As we ponder the next couple of verses of our text, let us see why we should indeed know and follow Jesus.

Verses 20 & 21, -----. (Matthew 16:20-21)

At first glance it may seem odd that at that time the Lord commanded *his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.* But actually, it’s not odd at all when we remember WHAT Jesus came to earth to accomplish. Jesus did NOT come to earth for worldly fame and fortune; Jesus came to earth save sinners! Jesus did NOT wish anything to deter Him from His saving work! In John 12:46-47 we read that Jesus once said, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And

if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Hence, Jesus did NOT come to earth to play the big-shot bragging ruler, but rather to save sinners from the darkness of sin and the punishment which sin earns men: never-ending death in hell, "Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." (Mark 9:44)

Therefore, Jesus did not desire that His disciples spread His true identity far and wide before He completed His mission of mercy, our redemption, for *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

Just think of it: Jesus knew exactly what He was about to endure – the pain, the suffering, the agonizing death on the cross, and His bodily resurrection after three days in the grave – and He willingly and lovingly went forward to accomplish His saving work for us miserable sinners. Jesus Christ is truly amazing! Thus, we should indeed know and follow Jesus, for He is the only Way to God and heaven, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:17-18) So, I repeat, we should indeed know and follow Jesus. Yes, now and always we need to know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord.

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As we ponder our text to its conclusion, let us see how we are to show we truly know and follow Jesus.

Verses 22 & 23, -----. (Matthew 16:22-23)

Peter had made a wonderful confession when he said to Jesus: "thou art the Christ, the Son of the

living God." But subsequently, after Jesus told His disciples about His then upcoming bitter sufferings, death, and resurrection, *Peter took Jesus, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.* Oh, Peter called Jesus his Lord, and yet Peter attempted to dissuade Jesus from completing His saving work of redeeming the world.

Peter dared to rebuke his Lord! However, are we not sometimes just like Peter in that we question our Lord's way of dealing with things? We say that we trust in the Lord, and yet when things do not go the way we want them to go, we question if our Lord is really hearing our prayers. May God forgive our sinfulness! Let us remember the words of Proverbs 3:5-7 which instructs, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil." Take it to heart that we show we truly know and follow Jesus when we do not question His will and His ways which are past finding out.

After Peter dared to rebuke his own Lord, the Lord Jesus *turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* Yeah, it's sad but true that Peter in weakness was Satan's mouthpiece because he attempted to prevent Jesus from accomplishing our redemption. God the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world to redeem the world. Peter was valuing temporal life more than the eternal life which Jesus came to provide us. Fellow Christians, let us never forget that 1 John 4:9-10 declares, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Let us show we truly know and follow Jesus by taking ALL of His Word – all Scripture – to heart.

Verses 24-26, -----. (Matthew 16:24-26)

If we would show we truly know and follow Jesus, we must take the closing words of our sermon text to heart, for Jesus says: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

My friends, there is temporal life and there is eternal life, and we had better value eternal life far more than temporal life since temporal life is quite temporary, for Psalm 90:10 plainly states, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Accordingly, we had better keep the things of God first and foremost in our heart and mind! We had better deny ourselves, take up our own cross of suffering in this world, and follow Jesus because He is our ONLY SAVIOR! Yes, in John 14:6 Jesus clearly declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Let us realize that even if it were possible to gain the entire world and its wealth it would be nothing if it would cost us our soul, for where we will spend eternity is on the line, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." (1 Timothy 6:7) Oh beloved, let us never forget the words of Mark 16:16, which informs us in no uncertain terms, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Therefore, let us show we truly know and follow Jesus by daily and sincerely repenting of our sins, by clinging to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord, valuing Him and His Word above all else, and by striving to live in full accord with His will as revealed in His Holy Word. Amen.

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