

SERMON: “Words of Hope: *I Believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...*”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, March 12, 2017. St. Andrew’s, Brampton.

[Israel Trip/Videos/RM-Right Here] The second – and largest – statement of the Apostles’ Creed focuses on Jesus as the Son of God. And it does this for a reason. Essentially the Creed, having made its statement about God, is now defining the Christian belief that the promised Messiah and Lord came in the historical person of Jesus by proclaiming that God became incarnate – became flesh and bone – to be-with us as the prophets promised God would one day come. Defiantly this statement roots Jesus in time and place – as Emmanuel (God with us) born through divine intervention for the purpose of God’s saving plan for His children. While this statement has much to look at (we’ll deal with it again next week) it is the first line of this statement that we’re going to focus on today. To do this, first we will need a little geography lesson.

Caesarea Philippi is located about 30 miles North of the Sea of Galilee – well off the beaten path of Jesus’ ministry, deep into the heart of the area that the first king of Israel (Jeroboam) led the Northern Kingdom into idolatry – near the base of Mount Hebron. What made Caesarea Philippi a destination were its temples. It was there that the Greeks believed the Gates to Hades and the Cave of Pan were located. Over centuries it became a combination of Las Vegas and Niagara Falls – except with temples not casinos. Ancient historians and modern archeologists estimate that there were at least 10 major temples there to Caesar/Pan/Zeus and countless smaller alters and shrines to other gods: you name a god they were worshipped there. It is to this lost place that Jesus takes His disciples, and asks them two questions.

With the initial question Jesus asks who ‘people’ say He is? The disciples offer a couple of thought provoking answers; “*John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets.*” Not satisfied, Jesus follows up with the logical next, more personal, question; “*But who do **you** say that I am?*” For Peter, surrounded by all of the “just-in-case” insurance gods; the house gods, the injury, fertility, money, job, travel, you-name-it gods – standing in front of what was believed to be the Gates of Hades, this was a defining moment as he answered; “*You (Jesus) are the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God.*” Jesus blesses Peter and tells him, while standing surrounded by rock and stone temples, about how the Church that He would build would be founded on the ‘rock’ of his confession. And it’s true, the Christian faith – indeed the Body of Christ/the Church – is founded on this confession. This is why the Apostles’ Creed – long used as a baptismal catechism (a question/answer form of teaching) – implicitly asks us the same question; “*Who do you say/believe I am?*”

First let me be clear, they had no problem with the ‘historical Jesus’ like so many have today – He was One-with them, as real as they were. As John would later write, Jesus was someone they “*heard, [saw] with our eyes, [who they] looked at and touched with our hands... this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it.*” (1Jn 1:1-2) Jesus was real; they had seen Him. They were witnesses to His miracles, teaching,

compassion, companionship; they lived with Him, ate with Him, walked the dusty pathways with Him, and while it was Peter who answered they recognized Him as the Messiah. It is from this confessional foundation that the Church grew: as a good friend of mine is fond of saying; *“the Church is the gathering place of those who met with those who met with those who met with those who met with Jesus.”* But His historicity wasn’t what they confessed.

After naming Jesus, Peter added two titles so quickly and so familiar to our ears that we often don’t hear them – or have forgotten their true meaning, or truly don’t appreciate how profound and important they are; made even more so because of where they were spoken! Defiantly, standing in the shadow of a temple to Caesar built by Herod in the heart of Caesarea Philippi – the epicenter of paganism – Peter calls Jesus first *“Messiah”* proclaiming Him to be the *“anointed one”*/The *“Christ”*/King over all earthly powers, then the *“Son of the Living God”* – a none-too-subtle dig at the dead/absent gods. But that’s not all. To this list the Apostles’ Creed adds one more title – that of *“Lord”* – taking our profession one-step further.

To call Jesus *“Lord”* means that He is *“God”* – or equal to God/of God – and as such He is the Ruler/Owner of our lives with authority to rule over you/me. Historically, the simple statement *“Jesus is Lord”* was the first Christian confession – written almost 300 times in the New Testament. But the truth of this statement is that to confess that Jesus is Lord, we must submit everything of ourselves to Him; there can be no other ‘master’ in our lives. By standing and proclaiming our belief in Jesus as the *“Christ, the Son of the Living God,”* like Peter – and countless since – we both proclaim our rejection of the ways of this world and our belief in the incarnational, living God revealed to us through His only Son. But, by adding our profession that this Jesus is also *“our Lord”* we offer our submission to the will and power of the One True God, creator of heaven and earth who *“so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*

Thanks be to God for these words of hope. Amen.