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“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 1”

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Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, Luke 9:18-21

Jesus and His disciples left there and went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. During the trip [Jesus] was praying by Himself. The disciples were with Him, and He asked them, “Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

“Some say John the Baptist,” they answered. “Others say Elijah, and still others say Jeremiah, or that some ancient prophet has reappeared.”

“But you,” [Jesus] said to them—“Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!” Jesus said. “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church. All the gates of hell will not overcome it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.”

At that time [Jesus] strictly warned His disciples to tell no one that He was the Messiah.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin this our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

A few weeks ago, Brother Lee’s son Cedric asked me for a reference book on the end of the life of Christ. I thought that I should take some sermonic time to equip us with the information that he requested.

A reference that I find most interesting is “The Life of Christ in Stereo”, written by Johnston M. Cheney. Johnston Cheney’s father was a pastor and Johnston was preparing to follow in his father’s footsteps, but while in college, Johnston lost his faith in God and discarded Christianity. After doing so, he joined the military and served during World War I. After returning from the service, he was reconverted to belief in Christ, joined a church, and became, once again, devotedly interested in the Gospels. At fifty-three years of age, Johnston developed trouble breathing, was diagnosed with an incurable case of double tuberculosis, and given only weeks to live. With severely limited capacity in both lungs because of his tuberculosis, he could not get out of bed for any length of time, and was confined to his home, waiting to die.

Johnston decided to analyze the gospels word by word in the original Greek and put them together into one account, using every word of the four gospels. Having double tuberculosis and

only a few weeks to live, Johnston did not expect to complete his effort, but he decided that he would work on it as long as he could. The Lord arrested Johnston's malady, and he completed his manuscript after living with double tuberculosis for twenty-two years. At seventy-six years of age, he began learning how to operate a typesetting machine so that he could publish his work. As he was typesetting the book for publication, Johnston had a stroke and died.

Johnston Cheney's analysis was that the last year of the life of Christ began with the episode that forms the first part of our text for today, the combination of **Matthew 16:13-20**, **Mark 8:27-30**, **Luke 9:18-21**, which says:

Jesus and His disciples left there and went to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. During the trip [Jesus] was praying by Himself. The disciples were with Him, and He asked them, "Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

"Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, and still others say Jeremiah, or that some ancient prophet has reappeared."

"But you," [Jesus] said to them—"Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

This is the Biblical episode in which Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the Messiah to His disciples. In His previous three years of ministry, Jesus has proven to be an extraordinary man of God. Jesus healed so many sick people across Palestine that when He entered a town, people would bring all their sick relatives to the place in which Jesus was so that He might touch them, because it was known that one touch from Jesus would make a sick person whole.

Matthew 4:23-25 records:

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.

25 Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

As Jesus entered the town of Nain, He and his followers crossed paths with the funeral procession of a young man who was the only son of his widowed mother. Jesus stopped both his procession and the funeral procession and then caused some extraordinary events to occur. **Luke 7:11-17** records:

11 Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd.

12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And [Jesus] presented him to his mother.

16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up

among us”; and, “God has visited His people.”

17 And this report about [Jesus] went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

Jesus had an extraordinary ministry. A preacher that can, with a word or touch, heal the sick and raise the dead would certainly attract many followers. This group of followers is part of the proof of the truth of the gospels.

If the events recorded in the New Testament had not actually happened, the contemporaries of the newly formed Church would certainly have challenged the truth of the record when the Church produced it. As a matter of fact, this challenge actually happened, and is recorded in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul defended his Christian position before the local King, Agrippa, and the Roman governor, Felix. Felix’s reaction to Paul’s testimony about the supernatural events connected with the church is recorded in **Acts 26:24-32**:

24 Now as [Paul] thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!”

25 But [Paul] said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.

26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”

29 And Paul said, “I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.”

30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;

31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.”

32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

The belief in the supernatural power of God is an integral part of our belief in Christianity. In our text, when Jesus asked the disciples what they thought His true identity was, Peter confessed that Jesus was beyond just being a man with an extraordinary relationship with God, but was in fact the Messiah, the Son of God, Himself.

The word “Messiah” in Hebrew actually means “the Anointed One”, meaning the one ceremonially set apart by God to do a special work for Him. The term “Messiah” has its’ origins in the book of Daniel, in the passage of Scripture in which Daniel receives the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah from the Angel Gabriel. Daniel speaks, in **Daniel 9:20-27**:

20 Now while I was speaking, praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God,

21 yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering.

22 And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, “O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand.

23 At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision:

24 “Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.

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.

26 “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.

27 Then He shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate.”

In **Daniel 9:24-25**, the word translated “weeks” is actually the Hebrew word for “sevens”, so the weeks are not literal seven day weeks, but rather, seven periods of time. The general view is that the periods of time to which the Scripture refers are actually periods of seven years rather than seven days, so each one of Daniel’s “weeks” is actually seven years.

The Jewish religious calendar was made up of years of three hundred sixty days rather than three hundred sixty-five and one-quarter days as is our solar calendar, so if we were to do the math, the sixty-nine weeks would actually be one hundred seventy-three thousand eight hundred eighty days, or just over four hundred seventy-six years.

The command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem referenced in **Daniel 9:25** refers to the decree from Artaxerxes to Nehemiah in 444 BC. **Nehemiah 2:1-6** records:

1 And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, that I took the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had never been sad in his presence before.

2 Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing but sorrow of heart.” So I became dreadfully afraid,

3 and said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?”

4 Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven.

5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, that I may rebuild it.”

6 Then the king said to me (the queen also sitting beside him), “How long will your journey be? And when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

The twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes was 444BC, and the first day of Nisan would correspond to March 5th on our calendar. Four hundred and seventy-six years after this decree would be the year 33 AD, which is the year that it is thought that Jesus Christ made His Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem.

There are theories that pinpoint the exact date of the exact year that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The dates that I have seen in my review of other people's research is April 6, 33 AD. My calculations indicate that there are one hundred seventy-three thousand four hundred ninety-three days between March 5, 444 BC and April 6, 33 AD, which puts me off by two hundred twenty-seven days. According to my calculations, the prophecy is off by less than a year out of four hundred seventy-six years, and there are probably other factors involved of which I am not aware to take those two hundred twenty-seven days into account.

The prophecy of Daniel, which was written during the life of Daniel in the sixth century BC, contains remarkably accurate chronological details about events happening six hundred years in the future, events about which Daniel could not possibly have known on his own. The first pivotal event in his prophecy, the rebuilding of the temple, happened over one hundred years after Daniel's death. The prophesied coming of the Messiah happened six hundred years after Daniel's death. This is why we call Daniel a prophet, as no person that lived in the sixth century BC, or anytime before the time of the death of Jesus, could have given us the timeline that Daniel does, and it is not likely that Daniel simply made a lucky guess.

Daniel tells us that the source for this timeline was an angel sent from God, and, based upon the apparent accuracy of the information, that is probably the only reasonable explanation. After all, how could you accurately tell me today what events are going to happen in the years 2108 and 2608?

The prophecy of Daniel was well known among the Jews of Jesus' day, which is one of the reasons that many in the land lived in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. Others, especially those in positions of authority, were concerned as to how their own personal situations would be affected by the fulfillment of God's prophecy. For example, when the wise men came to inquire of Herod about the birth of the King of the Jews, Herod was extremely concerned.

Matthew 2:1-8 records:

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

7 Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

In **Matthew 2:4**, Matthew records that Herod asked about the prophecy of the birth of the Christ. Christ is the Greek word for "the Anointed One", and is equivalent to Messiah, which is the Hebrew word for "the Anointed One". Although Herod said that he wanted to worship the

Christ, Herod actually wanted to kill the Christ so that the Christ would not come to power and remove him or his sons after him from the throne. When the wise men did not come back to tell Herod the location and identity of the Christ, Herod acted, as **Matthew 2:16-18** records:

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, Refusing to be comforted, Because they are no more.”

When God sends someone to the human race to change the order of things, the people who are in authority almost always rebel against God. We talked last week about Moses and the Pharaoh, we could go back in the Scripture and read about Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, David and Saul, and then all of the struggles of all of the Kings as various individuals came into power in Israel.

One of the most ingenious things about the United States of America is that we have established a political system in which the leadership of the country can change from one person to another, from one administration to another, and from one political party to another, without bloodshed. Of course, this system has not always worked; there was a great Civil war fought from 1860 to 1865 because of a change in political leadership, but for the most part, our leadership changes have been peaceful.

We may have figured out how to do politics, but in religion, the situation is somewhat different. One of the reasons that there are as many churches as there are is because of church splits, and the church usually splits over the issue of leadership; of whom the pastor is going to be. I once heard a story about a fellow who was a circuit preacher in Mississippi. He was the pastor of four churches in a certain geographic area, with each church meeting once a month. Each of the churches was small, and so the pastor came up with a plan to change the situation. He called a meeting of all of the churches, and the people from all four churches came together.

The pastor started by saying, “You know that we have four churches represented here, and I am the pastor of all four of them. Most of you follow me from church to church every Sunday, and so I had the idea that we should combine all four of the churches into one church. We could pick a central site, sell our existing buildings, pool all of our resources, and build one larger church with more facilities that all of us could enjoy.

The people seemed to like the plan, and conversation about it started. Now, it so happened that there were four brothers in the meeting, and each of them was the Chairman of the Deacon Board of one of the four churches. As the discussion continued, the oldest of the four brothers stood up to be recognized. “Brother Pastor”, he said, “Your plan sounds like a good one and we may be able to improve our situation if we take you up on it. But, I have a question. Who is going to be the Chairman of the Deacon Board?”

After discussion of the deacon’s question, the churches decided not to combine. Many of the members that held church offices did not want to give up being in charge.

Back to our discussion of our text for today, in which Jesus says:

“But you,” [Jesus] said to them—“Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus responded:

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah!” Jesus said. “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church. All the gates of hell will not overcome it.

The rock upon which Jesus is building His Church is Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. The seat of the worship of God is no longer the Jewish Temple spoken of by Daniel, but is now the Christian Church established by Jesus. Jesus goes on to say:

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven.”

Peter is going to be the key man in Jesus’ new Church, with the responsibility to conforming the church to the things of heaven. Peter and the disciples healed just as Jesus healed, as **Acts 5:12-16** says:

12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.

13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly.

14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, 15 so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them.

16 Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The text goes on to say:

At that time [Jesus] strictly warned His disciples to tell no one that He was the Messiah.

Jesus told His disciples to keep their knowledge of His Messiahship secret because Jesus’ time to be crucified had not yet come. It was not yet April, 33 AD. Jesus’ confession of His Messiahship was the precipitating factor in His crucifixion, as **Matthew 26:62-66** tells us:

62 And the high priest arose and said to [Jesus], “Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?”

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

64 Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!

66 What do you think?” They answered and said, “He is deserving of death.”

After hearing Peter’s confession and speaking to the disciples, Jesus started building the church in earnest. Jesus has not only recruited and impressed the men who are going to be instrumental in building the church, but He has now convinced them of the fact that He really is the Messiah promised by Old Testament prophecy.

Although the disciples understood that Jesus was the Messiah and the reason for the power that Jesus had, they did not agree with Jesus' plan to go to the Cross to build the church. Cheney's combination of **Matthew 16:21-28**, **Mark 8:31-9:1** and **Luke 9:22-27** tells us:

From that time on Jesus began to tell His disciples that He must travel to Jerusalem. "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and teachers of the law. He must be killed and on the third day be raised again." He said all this publicly.

But Peter took Him aside and rebuked Him to His face. "No, Lord!" he said. "This will never happen to You."

Turning around, Jesus looked at all the disciples, then said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You're a stumbling block in My way. You don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Voltaire, the French skeptic, coined the phrase, "The good is the enemy of the best."

Peter had a good plan for the life and Messiahship of Jesus. Peter was ready to storm into Jerusalem, defeat the Jewish leadership militarily, and put Jesus in charge of the Temple. From there, they would rally the Jews, overthrow the Romans and reestablish the Kingdom of David. The Jews would be back in authority as they had been, and Jesus would be the King of Israel. This was a good plan.

Jesus, on the other hand, had the best plan. Jesus' plan did not end up with Him being the King of Israel, but rather, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Jesus told Peter that the political and religious hierarchies established by men have no eternal significance. Regardless of the title or position that we hold here on earth, we will one day have to give it up, because death is a reality with which we all have an appointment. It does not matter whether you are young and your appointment is far into the future, or you are old and your appointment is right around the corner; your appointment with death is certain. After death, there is a judgment, and the result of the judgment is our real problem.

Jesus did not come to solve the problem of the Jew's lack of political autonomy, or even the problem of the Jew's lack of relationship with God. Jesus came to solve a much greater problem, as **John 3:16** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Although Jesus came to the Jews and as a Jew, Jesus did not come for just the Jews. God sent Jesus because He so loved us that He does not want to condemn us, as the result of our being judged on our own merits would be that we would be condemned to hell. Jesus did not come to establish or participate in a temporary earthly kingdom, but to establish an everlasting heavenly kingdom by preparing a place in which we sinners can cleanse ourselves and prepare to come into contact with a Holy God. **Hebrews 9:27-28** tells us:

27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Some people want to live, in the next life, receiving the rewards that they earned according to their own good deeds. They don't recognize that although they have done good

deeds, that they are still sinners, that their good deeds don't cancel out their sins, and that God will condemn them for their sins.

We who are saved are trusting in Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty of our sins, as He died to pay the penalty for our sins, and then sent us the Holy Spirit to help us live for God. Paul says, in **Romans 10:8-13**:

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

9 that if you confess with your mouth [that Jesus is Lord] and [if you] believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

Jesus did not call for Peter to have blind faith in Him. Jesus wielded the power of God to prove to the disciples that He actually was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. We don't have to have blind faith to believe in Jesus Christ, because the evidence of prophecy and the evidence of history are available for any thinking person to examine, to inspect, to research and by which they can be convinced. This thing was not done in a corner, and there is no doubt that the conclusion of history and logic is the same as the conclusion of Peter, that is, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and that our only entrance in to the Kingdom of Heaven is as a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The exclusive claim of Jesus Christ is given to us, in **John 14:6**:

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

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