

How Do You Make Room in Your Heart for Christ?

Matthew 16: 13 - 20

One hymn that we typically sing during Christmas time makes a connection between Christ's coming into history, and Christ's coming into our hearts. It goes like this:

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown
When Thou camest to earth for me,
But in Bethlehem's home there was found no room
For Thy holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus:
There is room in my heart for Thee!

After reading these lyrics, some may ask the question ...

How do we make room in our hearts for Christ?

How is the heart prepared to receive Christ?

I think this is a very basic and important question – and I know that there are many who think that inviting Christ into our heart is nothing more than a figure of speech, not a real activity or event, but I assure you, it is real.

This question ... “How do we prepare our hearts to receive Christ?” is an extremely important one, especially for those of you who do not yet have Christ dwelling in your heart.

Romans 8:9 says, *"Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."* And not to belong to Christ is the greatest tragedy of this life and the next.

It's also important for those of us who do have Christ dwelling in our heart but do not yet have a full and clear understanding of how he came to be there.

When you read the letters of Paul - all written for professing Christians – it's amazing how he never tires of telling us how we became Christians.

In Romans he says, *"We know that our old self was crucified with him so that . . . we might no longer be enslaved to sin."*

In 1 Corinthians he writes, *"Consider your call, brothers; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards . . . but God chose what is foolish in the world."*

In 2 Corinthians . . . *"You are a letter . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."*

In Galatians: *"Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?"*

In Ephesians: *"You who were dead in trespasses and sins he made alive"*

And so on.

Paul never tires of telling us how we became Christians.

He reminds us time and again who we are by telling us how we got to be this way.

And so, it must be very important that we be reminded all over again how we came to have Christ dwelling in our hearts.

So, I want to ask the question this morning:

How do /did we make room in our hearts for Christ?

How is the heart prepared to receive Christ?

Part of the answer to today's question, how the heart is prepared to receive Christ comes from the text we read earlier and I would like to read it again from Matthew 16:13-20.

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But what about you?' he asked. 'Who do you say I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ."

In this text Jesus asks the all-important question to his disciples:
"Who do you say that I am?"

So, I observe first of all that we prepare our hearts to receive Christ by recognizing who he really is.

It's very important that we know what it means to receive Christ for who he really is.

Suppose your doorbell rings and you answer it and discover there a famous person, say Harrison Ford, and you swing the door wide and give him the best seat and serve him on your best china and generally make a big fuss over him—and then discover that it isn't Harrison Ford after all.

And suppose he asks you why you are making such a big affair out of his presence, and you answer, "Oh I thought you were Harrison Ford."

What have you done to your guest?

You've belittled him. He thought your honor was for him, but it was really for someone else because you didn't recognize who he really was.

This is the way it is if we try to receive Christ into our hearts not knowing who he really is.

God is not honored by our ignorance. You can't honor someone by bestowing favors on them when you mistake them for someone they really aren't.

So, in order to receive Christ in a way that honors him, in a way that saves, we must recognize who he really is.

We must see his glory and agree in our heart that he is indeed worthy of all our trust and obedience.

In this text, Jesus questions the disciples to see if they have arrived at this kind of knowledge of who he really is: Verse 15: *"Who do you say that I am?"*

Peter answers for the group in verse 16: *"You are the Christ [the long-awaited Messiah] the Son of the living God."*

Jesus continues with Peter saying he is blessed for giving this answer. So now the question becomes ...

How did Peter come to have this true insight into the identity of Jesus Christ?

How did Peter know who he really was?

This is our question this morning:

How is the heart prepared to recognize Jesus so that he can be received for who he really is?

Verse 17 gives the answer of Jesus:

Jesus answered him, *"Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my Father in heaven."*

So, the answer to our question is that to recognize Jesus for who he really is, you need something more than flesh and blood or what man has to offer.

Or to put it more positively, to recognize and receive Christ for who he really is ... Jesus' Father must reveal it to us.

To make this text and this message very personal this morning, every one of you should now be asking,

- "Has God done this for me?"
- Has the Father revealed His Son to me?
- "How did he do it?"
- "What was it like in my experience when God revealed to me that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God?"
- "What difference has it made in my life that God the Father has revealed to me the true glory of his Son, Jesus Christ?"

My guess is that many of you, as you sit here, are saying, "I can't answer those questions. I've never even thought of my conversion in those terms."

Well, don't panic, because every person who has ever been converted to Christ was converted on the basis of a very limited understanding of what was happening.

One person might say, "I believed on Jesus."

Another might say, "I prayed to receive Christ."

Another might say, "I confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in my heart that God raised him from the dead."

Another might say, "I was born again."

Another, "I was crucified with Christ and now walk by faith."

Every person who has ever been converted to Christ was converted on the basis of a limited understanding of what was really happening.

So, don't be surprised that there may be biblical descriptions of what happened to you that you may not yet understand.

It takes a lifetime to grasp the depth and wonder of the miracle of conversion to Christ.

So, I pray that what you will do with the rest of this message is first, test yourself to see if this has really happened to you, and second ...,

if it has, let your trust in God blossom into a deeper affection and greater commitment to Him whose tremendous love for you is described in this passage.

Now, let's ask two questions that will help us understand the meaning of Matthew 16:17 where Jesus says ... *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*

1. What is being denied when Jesus says, *"This was not revealed to you by man"*?
2. What is being affirmed when Jesus says, *"My Father in heaven has revealed this to you"*?

In other words, how does God reveal the true identity of his Son to an individual person?

Let's take the first question:

1. What Is Being Denied?

What is being denied in verse 17 when Jesus says, *"This has not been revealed to you by man."* Can be translated more accurately to "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you" — flesh and blood have not revealed to you that I am the Messiah and the Son of God"

This phrase *"flesh and blood"* is used four other times in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 15:50 (speaking of the resurrection body) Paul writes ... *"I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."*

The meaning taken here seems to be that ordinary human nature cannot and will not come back to life. There must be a change. There will be a spiritual body, similar, yet different. Flesh and blood refer to man in his present limited, ordinary state.

Galatians 1:15-17 (Paul speaking of his own conversion), *"When he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem."*

This is a parallel to Matthew 16:17. God "reveals" the Son to Paul and Paul does not confer with "flesh and blood," that is ... he does not confer with man. He goes away to Arabia.

Ephesians 6:12, *"We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."*

So, the phrase flesh and blood here refers to human non-supernatural forces in the world. These are not our real enemies: our real enemies are supernatural.

Hebrews 2:14 (concerning Jesus taking on human form), *"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature."*

In other words, Christ took on human nature and became man.

So, our conclusion should be based on these uses of the phrase "flesh and blood" is that it is simply a way of referring to ordinary humanity, finite, limited, natural.

So, when Jesus denies that man or "*flesh and blood*" has revealed his true identity to Peter, he is saying that mere human powers by themselves cannot recognize the true glory of Christ.

Neither your humanity nor anyone else's has opened the eyes of your heart to recognize the truth and beauty of Christ.

This was the teaching of Jesus that Paul highlights in 1 Corinthians 2:14:

"The natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

The "*natural man*" in 1 Corinthians 2:14 is basically the same as "*flesh and blood*" in Matthew 16:17.

"Flesh and blood" cannot reveal the true spiritual reality of Christ and the "natural man" cannot know the gifts of the Spirit of God.

Why not?

Because, as Paul says, apart from the Spirit of God we inevitably conclude that heavenly things are "*foolishness*."

Apart from the work of God in our lives, we don't like the humiliating implications of Christian doctrine:

- that we are under a curse and need a Savior,
- that we are dirty and need a Purifier,
- that we are lost sheep and need a Shepherd,
- that we are sick and need a Physician,
- that we are rebels and need a Mediator and Reconciler

The inevitable reflex of our aversion toward the Gospel is blindness.

Why can't flesh and blood see the light of the glory of God in Jesus Christ?

Jesus said in *John 3:19*, "*Light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*"

We inevitably love darkness; that's why we can't see the light.

No one is blind against his will. The blindness of sinful mankind is simply this: fallen humanity hates the light.

And so, Peter did not own up to the truth of Jesus by means of his own powers.

Flesh and blood could never reveal such a wonderful thing as the true Messiahship and Sonship of Jesus.

Something more than flesh and blood would be required in order to recognize Christ for what he really is.

If any of us in this room has recognized in Jesus, the glory of the Son of God and acknowledged him as the fulfillment of all God's promises—the Messiah - then something more has been at work on us than mere human nature.

This leads us to the second question.

2. What Is Being Affirmed?

What does Jesus mean in Matthew 16:17 when he says, *"My Father in heaven has revealed this to you"*?

How does God reveal the true identity of his Son to an individual person?

I'll give you one illustration from many possibilities of how Jesus expected people to recognize him for who he really is:

In Matthew 11:2-6, John the Baptist is struggling with doubt about Jesus in the prison. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus, *"Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"*

In other words, are you really the Messiah? — the very question that Jesus says we cannot answer correctly unless God reveals it to us.

But how does Jesus answer John's question?

Does he say, "Pray for a special revelation, and God will tell you if I am the Christ"?

No! He says ...

"Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me."

Now if you can only recognize Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God by means of a divine revelation of God, why does Jesus answer John's desperate question with a human report of his power and his preaching?

I'm not completely sure, but I think the answer might be this:

The absolute and indispensable work of God in revealing the Son both to John The Baptist and Peter back then still works for us today, Namely that God uses His word, the Holy Scriptures to open the eyes of our hearts to see the true divine glory of Christ!

This is why Jesus answers John's disciples' question by telling them to report to him the miracles that were taking place like the lame walking, the blind seeing and lepers being healed, Jesus, for all intents and purposes, is reciting Old Testament scriptures!

Listen to Isaiah 29:18: *"In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see."*

And Isaiah 35: 5 -6: *"The will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf be unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy."*

In other words, don't ask God for mountains to move and lightning bolts to flash before you believe. Just see the glory of God as it is revealed through His Son Jesus in the scriptures!

When people have doubts about the truth of Jesus, don't send them away to seek special messages written in the sky from God, point them to Christ in the Scriptures!

Tell them what you have seen and heard in his life and teachings and in your life. In short, tell them your testimony!

Why?

Because this is where God breaks in with his revealing power. The Father loves to glorify his SON – and He loves to open the eyes of the blind when they are looking at his SON!

God did not reveal his Son to me by coming to me and saying, "Now, Bill, I know that you don't see anything magnificent in my Son.

You don't see him as all glorious and divine and attractive above all worldly goods.

You don't see him as your all-satisfying treasure,

and you don't see his holiness and wisdom and power and love as beautiful beyond measure. But take my word for it, he is all that. Just believe it."

NO! Such faith does not honor the Son of God. It cannot glorify the Son.

Saving faith is based on a spiritual view of Jesus as he is described in the Holy Scriptures – as the glorious Son of God.

And this spiritual view is given to us through his inspired Word.

And the eyes of our hearts are opened to recognize him and receive him not by the wisdom of flesh and blood of man, but by the revealing work of the heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul said,

"It is the God who said, 'Let light 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 Christ."

How shall you prepare your heart to receive Christ?

Fix your gaze on Him as revealed in his Word.

Look to Christ!

Consider Jesus.

And pray that God would give you eyes to see and ears to hear so that you might cry out with Peter ...

"You are the Christ the Son of the living God!"

Conclusion:

This past week as I have been sitting up in these front pews preparing to give my short devotion to the VBSers.

In doing so, I had a chance to read the scriptures that are written on the woodwork that adorn the sides of the platform. I'm sure you've noticed them a time or two, but have you ever given much thought to them? To be honest, I haven't.

There are two verses written in the King James version. The one on my right is Isaiah 55:6. It says ... *"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call ye upon Him while He is near."*

The verse on my left is Jeremiah 29:13 - 14. It says ... *"If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me, thus saith the Lord."*

These two verse are up here to remind us that God takes great pleasure in revealing his Son to us because He knows of the transformational and permanent effect that awaits us.

In seeking and finding God because He reveals himself to us through his Son ...we will walk taller, see clearer
be healed fully, love purely, and live forever in His presence.
Amen.