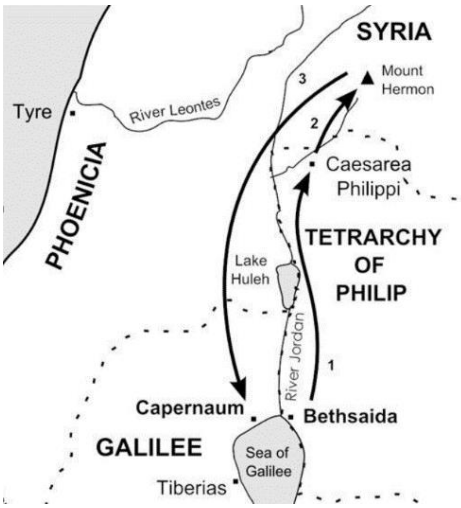
THOU ART THE CHRIST.

Matthew 16:13-18, Mark 8:27-29, John 6:68, 69

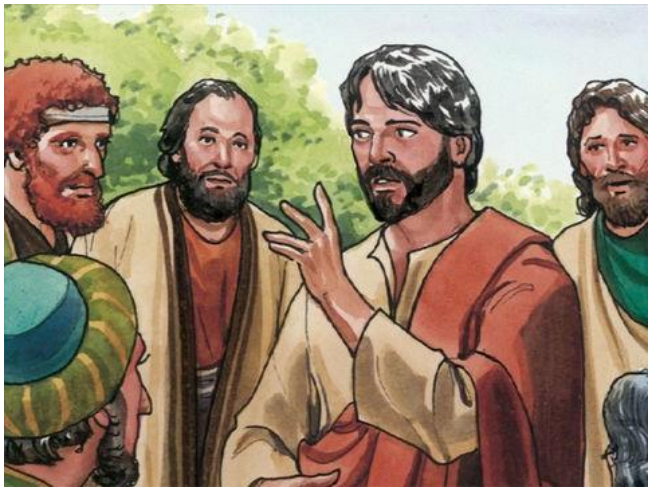


It was another hot day. We were walking with Jesus, following wherever he went, never knowing where, but always following his instincts. I glanced behind us, Lake Huleh was still visible, up ahead the magnificent Mount Horeb took the skyline. We were all together, twelve disciples chosen to witness and share his mission, looking forward as ever to meeting people in the next village we would come to, telling them of the Kingdom of Heaven at hand. We were now seasoned travellers with this man Jesus. We had been across the whole of Galilee, visited Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia! - our physical horizons extended way beyond the expectations of our previous lives, but it was our spiritual horizons constantly changing and enlarging that really took hold.

We were spread out along the way. Jesus was talking with John, I was with Andrew, the others in little groups behind us. I glanced at Andrew and suddenly thought back to when we were casting a net into the Galilean lake. A voice had called out "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men". I'm still so amazed that we did! Years of fishing insufficient to counter the sheer presence of this man, his authority, a love that reached forth, a calling to our inner consciousness. He knew we would follow. And we did.

It's been well over a year now. We seem to have been everywhere, witnessed so much, - from the first miracle of turning water in to wine in Cana, the healing of my wife's mother, - yes, - still so fresh in memory, - no asking how she felt, what seemed to be wrong, but a deep compassion, the outstretched hand just lifting her up as though nothing was ever wrong, and she carried on as though nothing ever had been wrong! But all the healings were like that!! He never asked what was wrong, what the symptoms were like, what problems needed addressing. He never needed to. Never side-tracked by the lies or temptations of the devil. He was ever at one with God, and either by simple command or touch of hand the sick were healed, lame people suddenly found they could walk, deaf, blind or dumb, - it didn't matter, they walked away hearing, seeing, speaking. Immediately! And this last week, he had fed yet another multitude. He had a knowledge of a law of good overriding any other law. He *knew* deep within himself what we were trying hard to understand. He was knowing and proving the power of God continually and so naturally. So here we were following him, wanting so much to understand, to share what he was so effortlessly doing.

And with that yearning to understand, I remembered being next to him as he gave his Sermon on the Mount, - all the blessings given, the surety of God's love, - the need to pray daily to "Our Father", and the recognition this was a mutual prayer, for we knew how hard and often he also prayed to God, and urged us to do the same, not just on the Sabbath, but *all* the time. His understanding of God was so special and alive.



He has stopped and turned around. As the others caught up, I looked at his face, realising just how much he meant to me. His love was unconditional, it embraced us all. He was unique, chosen by God, and I was humbled that he in turn had chosen me, - indeed all of us.

He looked at each of us. I was wondering what parable or wisdom he would now share, but it was a simple question:

"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

The answers came at random, no one insisting on their answer, but sharing what was being said and shared with us as we went along, - confusion with John the Baptist was common, but all the old prophets were mentioned, - Elias, Jeremias, - anyone one of several. But he wanted to dig deeper, and I waited for the next question. It came!

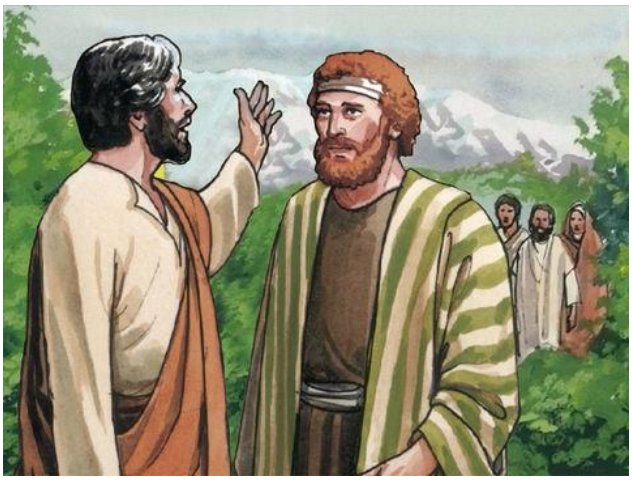
"But whom say ye that I am?"

Had he been reading my thoughts, - knowing it was just that question that I had been asking myself a moment or two ago? – searching that special standing he had with God? Was I prepared to state out loud what I had deep down come to conclude, and here he was drawing out from me the fundamental fact of his mission, the very reason that we knew why he was not just another prophet. My words in response were as if by inspiration, - a fulfilment of what I had been thinking, the realisation of a wonderful truth:

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God"

His response was immediate, and I felt he had a joy in his answer, as if I had taken a step, nay a stride, forward, as one he knew I was able to take, and he had been waiting for the moment:

"Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."



I felt a unity with him, the recognition of God as our Father, a common purpose. As he listened to God, so too must I. The Christ is God's message to man, and Jesus personified it, the Son of the Living God.

He carried on:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Not Simon but Peter, a new calling, a confirmation that I had moved on and must move on further, not based on any personality but on the qualities that God had given me, the foundation of rock and steadfastness, the statement that upon that rock his church was to be built! I suddenly understood so much more of the full nature of the Christ, lifting us out of human ability into *God's* purpose and provision, fully protected even against the very gates of hell! I didn't feel alone but even more blessed.

Jesus spake on, looking at me with all the power and authority of the Christ:

"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."

His words went through my very being. I felt the presence of the kingdom of heaven, its holy outreach and invincibility, my part in sharing heaven on earth. The immense role of Jesus, and my role in support and love of him now so clear. He told us not to tell anyone he was Christ and I felt the wisdom of protecting the truth until the time was right.

We continued our journey. My thoughts were alive, I felt again the presence of the kingdom of heaven at hand, the power of the Christ within me.

He has made my mission clear, and as we walked on I looked again at Hebron, saw that mighty mountain of rock, and rejoiced in my heart. The need to be a spiritual rock, my calling that Jesus had now inspired, was so much mightier than even Hebron, and unlike Hebron, this rock could never be eroded. I had glimpsed the omnipotence of God. I was walking at one with the Christ.