Apologetics ---

"The best offense is a good defense." This quote is often heard in Southeastern Conference football, where tough defenses have long been the key to success, especially against other conferences and in bowl games. Most SEC football fans almost treat it as Scripture!

But, it is actually probably a misquotation. An old military lesson says that, "the best DEFENSE is a good OFFENSE." The idea being that if you occupy your opponent with having to manage YOUR threat, your opponent is less able to defend against your onslaught. So, "attack, attack, attack" goes the theory.

Jesus said of the church, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18. That does not sound very defense oriented, does it? Gates don't march. Gates swing open and closed. Most of the time, a gate is just an extension of a barrier like a fence or a wall. It is designed to hold ground. Or, in other words, play defense.

There are different views on the significance of "hell" (Hades in Greek, the place of the dead or simply, the grave). In any event, Jesus meant that death has no power over the life that He gives to His called-out people ("ekklesia", translated in Mt. 16:18 as "church"). The church has and does and will survive death of all kinds. The church of Jesus is one that is on the attack and death does not overcome it.

What does that have to do with apologetics? Just this: *why* did Jesus say this at all in Matthew 16:18? Let's look at the entire passage.

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say
that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others
Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter
replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you,
Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.
18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock[b] I will build my church, and the gates of hell[c] shall not
prevail against it.

This whole passage centers on the answer to Jesus question – who do you say that I am? And, as His called out people, His church, we are also responsible to know and respond to this other question, "who do PEOPLE say that the Son of Man is?".

Jesus took the disciples 25 miles from Jerusalem and 1,700 feet up to the top of a mountain in Caesarea Philippi. This place was as pagan as you'd find. They worshipped Caesar and other pagan gods. And, it was there that Jesus asked His disciples, "who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

As His church today, we are in Caesarea Philippi. Our whole surrounding is pagan. Most of the churches in the USA are pagan, worshipping power, money, affluence, comfort, and worldly success instead of obeying the Gospel. They love the darkness of their own deeds and reject the light of the gospel of Jesus.

I'll share with you this very small but telling example. We talked about this Friday night in RU because it was in the news on Friday. You've heard the song "In Christ Alone", most of us. It sings like a hymn, but it is quite new. Beautiful song that truthfully expresses the gospel. There is a line in the hymn that says, ""Till on that cross as Jesus died/The wrath of God was satisfied." That may be the single most perfect, poetic way of describing the doctrine of "substitutionary atonement", the God poured out His wrath against sin upon Jesus, who, as Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 5:21, became sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. On the cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, says the hymn. Well, the PC USA was going to include that hymn in their new official hymn book. Except, they did not like that lyric. They did not like the idea of Jesus as being the object, the intended target of His Father's own wrath. They did not like the idea that God must judge sin, and that His wrath against sin is so severe that, for any body to have hope of avoiding that wrath, He had to pour that wrath on someone else other than themselves. They did not like the idea that Jesus, the Son of God, came to willingly have God's wrath against sin poured out on Himself so that we can be welcomed into God's kingdom by turning from sin, trusting Christ and obeying the Gospel.

They are saying that the Son of Man is someone OTHER than whom HE says He is. So, the PCUSA asked the writers of the song if they would approve a lyric change to this: "On that cross as Jesus died/the love of God was magnified." There's nothing wrong with that idea, because Romans 5:8 tells us that God commends His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. But, if it is not NECESSARY for God to pour out His wrath on a sinless victim, and

that is what the PCUSA is saying by rejecting the lyric, then the whole gospel message is unplugged and turned off like someone didn't pay the power bill.

THAT is what "people" are saying about the Son of Man, and that's coming from people who are supposed to love Him!! Those who reject Him outrightly are not nearly as kind as that.

BTW, the writers told the PCUSA, "no, thanks". That's the gospel and we're sticking to it. So, the committee for the whole denomination that's in charge of selecting hymns for their hymnals voted 9-6 against putting the song into their hymnal.

Let's look back at Matthew 16. "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" [14] And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

People were all over the place about Jesus. Most people at least acknowledged that He was a prophet, if nothing more. But, Israel had a long, painful history of ignoring their prophets, didn't they? Only one answer to one question would change that.

"Who do YOU say that I am"? Peter said, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."

[17] And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. [18] And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock[b] I will build my church, and the gates of hell[c] shall not prevail against it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed[d] in heaven."

Death's gates will not prevail over the church. The church of Jesus does not just hold ground, but moves forward. It stands at its own gates – it stands with the One who described Himself as "the Door" through whom people will go in and out and find shelter for their souls. But, it does more than that: with this divine revelation from God about who Jesus is, with this Holy Spirit understanding of who Jesus is and what He is doing, the church is given authority ("keys to the kingdom of heaven") to deliver this truth to the world. That is our responsibility!

"Binding and loosing" was a Hebrew expression for those who evaluated the ways that people lived according the law of the old covenant. The upshot of Jesus' statement to Peter in Matthew 16 is this: "God has shown you who I am. You see it because He showed you. I'm building my church on this truth that God has shown you – I'm building my church on your understanding of who I am. Death will not stop it. In fact (as Jesus says in another place), if anyone lives in Me, though he die, yet shall he live." He's saying, "My people, who I call for Myself, know Me. And, with this knowledge, I also authorize you and command you to stand at the gates of my kingdom with the keys of this truth and take it to the world."

We have the answer. We know that He is the Christ. But, we are not necessarily equipped to explain Him to a world that has all sorts of wrong ideas about Him. As we are commanded in Matthew 28:18-20 to "go into all the world" (again, not a very DEFENSIVE move, there) and "make disciples" by teaching them everything Jesus said and did, we have to know why we believe what we believe. We DO have to address this question: "who do people say that I am?". And, when we address it, we have to be prepared to explain that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and WHY this is true in the face of all sorts of ideas that oppose Him.

If we fail to equip ourselves and to obey Him in this, we fail, period. The only way we CAN fail is to neglect it. How can we escape His judgment, His wrath, if we neglect this great salvation? If we neglect telling the world who He is and why what we tell them about Him is true?

That is what we're going to start today. We are going to equip ourselves to tell the world who He is and why what we tell them about Him is true. We will be rejected. We will be openly mocked and ridiculed to our face to the point that we will feel ashamed, embarrassed, and stupid. That's what we sign up for when come to Him. Because the world hates Him and it is going to hate us, too. But, we cannot afford to push this off to another time or leave it up to anyone else.

And, with this equipment, we are going to skyrocket our confidence about who we are in Him. We are going to learn to rely on the Holy Spirit in a new way. We are going to commit ourselves to KNOWING THE REASONS for our faith. If we do

this right, we will drill into our minds these truths about Jesus so that we are no longer bound to fear when we are challenged or questioned. We will be free and ready to answer, and to hear the Holy Spirit of God guide our thoughts with His own Word. Then we can know that we are speaking the truth even if we are laughed and called uneducated and superstitious; we can stand in the confidence of God when all the fiery darts of Satan are aimed at us.

That's where we come to this word --- apologetics. We think apology means saying "I'm sorry". That's a perversion of the word, actually. It comes from the Greek word "apologia", meaning "to speak in defense" of something. To say "I apologize" does not mean "I was wrong" – it means "here's why what I'm telling you is right in spite of what you say."

(If you want to know how the word "apology" came to be connected with "I'm truly sorry", we can discuss it later.)

We have a New Testament example of this. In Acts chapters 25 and 26. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem; he made one defense or "apology" before the Sanhedrin; he was then sent to Caesarea (not Philippi!) by Claudius Lysias for safekeeping before his trial because the Sanhedrin was plotting to kill him; he made another defense there before the Roman governor Felix in Acts 24. There it says that Paul reasoned with him about the righteousness of God and the coming judgment, and it bothered Felix and he said "go away for now; I'll call you when I'm ready," and then he promptly let Paul languish in jail for 2 years hoping to get money from him, but that never happened, and then Festus replaced Felix and that's where we pick up in Acts 25.

Read Acts 25 and 26.

Three things to notice in Paul's apology before Agrippa.

1. The root question: **<u>"Who do men say that, Jesus, the Son of Man is?"</u>** The whole message that Paul spoke was centered on this question. Paul would never have been arrested had the Sanhedrin not said that Jesus was

not the Son of God and had Paul not been preaching that He is. The Sanhedrin said that obeying them and their application of the Old Covenant was the way to be in covenant with God. They called Jesus an impostor and blasphemer. Paul said that Jesus was God and that the only way to be in covenant with God was through Jesus' blood, which established a New Covenant, that Jesus had fulfilled all of the Old Covenant's demands but that because of that, all allegiance is owed to Jesus. This was the root question and the root reason for Paul even being in this situation. It is the root question that the world is clawing and raging and literally destroying its own self to force its own answer to. Yet, if we are going to obey the commandment of Jesus, we have speak the true answer to this question and we have to say why it is true.

2. To explain who Jesus is, it is not enough to simply say, **"Well, that's who I believe He is."**

He gave reasons. Yes, he talked of his personal experience. He talked of Scriptures and that the law of Moses and the prophets point to Jesus. He was talking to a man who was not only familiar with those things (Agrippa was well acquainted with the OT, it tells us), but Paul pressed Agrippa and said, "You BELIEVE the prophets, why don't you believe what I'm telling you about Jesus?" Agrippa was actually nice as far as opponents of Jesus go.

We live in an age of science. Men did not know in Jesus' day what we know today about biology, archaeology, geology, astronomy. But, those advances in knowledge have not happened in a vacuum where the goal is simply greater learning. The advances have happened with evil agendas. They come with a philosophy, or as some say, a "worldview". A worldview that rejects Jesus Christ is the son of God, that rejects the fact that we are sinners, that rejects the fact that God's wrath rests upon the disobedient, that rejects the fact that Jesus was crucified and died and who took God's wrath for us, and that He arose from the dead, and that our only hope before God is to repent of our sins and trust Jesus and obey the Gospel.

That worldview is called "antichrist". Remember from 1 John? The world denies that Jesus is the Christ. That is the philosophy of their science. For all the benefit that we have all enjoyed from science, there is a million times more evil in what is driving it -- and that is the assertion that man is his own god and that he needs no God and no Redeemer.

So, simply saying, "Well, you might not believe Jesus, but I do" is insufficient as we explain to an antichrist world who He is. We have to equip ourselves to provide answers. We will STILL be rejected, along with our answers, and with great ridicule and hatred. But, let me say this – even their rejection is for His glory. When every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord, all those who laugh and make fun of us and Him, who hate us and spitefully use us – they will glorify Him with confession. He will glorify Himself in judgment of them when His wrath is poured out on them. There is no denying who Jesus is – only a delay in confessing who He is.

3. The Holy Spirit is greater than worldview or philosophy. First, remember this: greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world. But, watch Him at work in Acts 26. What did Festus do when Paul, speaking to Agrippa, reached the most contentious point about Jesus – His crucifixion and resurrection? Festus interrupted in a burst of anger – "You're crazy! You can't possibly BELIEVE this." Paul says, "No, but ask Agrippa if I'm crazy." Agrippa doesn't refute Paul, and he doesn't take Festus' side. He simply says, "You think you're going to persuade me to become a Christian?" Some translations say, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." Then, he got up and left. Paul had put the question to him – who do YOU say the Son of Man is? He explained Jesus to Agrippa. And, Agrippa responded. The message was applied to the heart of Agrippa by the Holy Spirit. Agrippa did not come to faith in Christ. Most of the people we communicate with will not come to faith in Christ. The road to life is narrow, Jesus said, and few there be that find it. But, the Holy Spirit, who is greater than worldview or philosophy, is responsible for converting whomever He converts.

We are going to draw from lots of resources, but I want you to know the primary materials I'm using to guide us into this study, in addition to the Bible.

How To Know God Exists by Ray Comfort.

Meet the Skeptic by Bill Foster.

How Do We Know the Bible is True by Ken Ham.

Also, CARM.org, Christian and Apologetics Ministries.

Next week, I hope to have a general outline/syllabus/road map. We are going to take liberty with that. If the Spirit moves us into an area of discussion, and it is sort of out of order from our road map, we may very well just change the map. I'm asking you for some grace on that. We need to take things in an orderly way to help us make the most of our understanding. We're not going to overkill with information, either. None of us, except Greg, is a science scholar, for example. We're only going to be able to get our minds around a small amount of information on certain topics. And, that's okay. We're going to see WHY that's okay very soon. Don't be afraid that you're going to have to learn things that are beyond your ability to learn. Be encouraged that what you learn is going to help you answer hard questions – some that you may even have in your own mind – and at the very least provide answers about who Jesus is. Even if the world still rejects Him.