

## PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

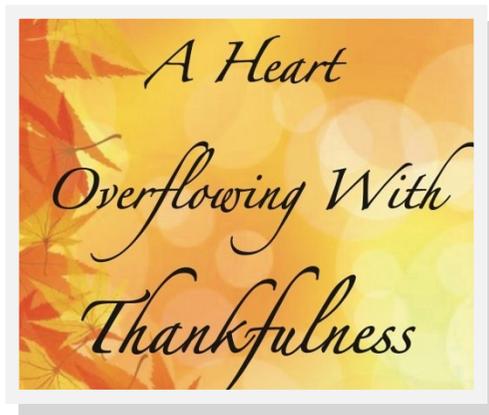
### Psalm 137 (138)

Psalm 137 (138) is an individual hymn of thanksgiving. A single voice praises God directly. In the first two stanzas, we find the pronoun 'you' six times.

The Hebrew word 'Hesed', often translated by 'steadfast love', here appears as 'faithfulness and love'. It indicates a love that knows no bounds. It is found many times in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. Conceptually, it is connected to the Covenant relationship between God and his people: 'I will adopt you as my own people and I will be your God' (Exodus 6:7).

We do not know the reasons for the Psalmist giving thanks; although he says 'on the day I called', the Hebrew word used could also mean 'whenever I called', so it may refer to a number of occasions. What matters is that God was faithful and always answered his call.

Jesus will have prayed this psalm many times, and phrases like '*not [a sparrow] falls to the ground without your Father knowing*' (Matthew 10: 19) echo the meaning of verses 6 of this psalm: '*The Lord is high yet he looks on the lowly*'.



### Gospel Matthew 16: 13–20 'Who do you say I am?'

This is the first part of a longer story which will be concluded next week. The question of Jesus's identity is at the centre of the Gospels. It seems to be particularly important for Matthew who begins his Gospel with a Genealogy of Jesus. People at that time defined themselves in relation to the group they belonged to; where they came from; the opinions others had of them. There was little psychological perception of the self.

#### Caesarea Philippi

This small town is situated about 25 miles North East of the Lake of Galilee, at the base of Mount Hermon in what is now the Golan Heights. The ancient town of Paneas (named after the Greek God of music, Pan) was given to Herod the Great in 20 BC by Caesar and rebuilt by Philip, Herod's son, in 4 BC, who renamed it after Caesar and himself.

#### Who do people say the Son of man is?

The term 'Son of Man', first used in the book of Daniel (7: 13), is thought to simply mean a human being. Jesus is given four answers:

**John the Baptist:** Jesus was continuing John's teaching: repentance and the coming of the Kingdom. Some of his own followers may have been John's disciples.

**Elijah:** The Jews believed that Elijah would return as he had been taken up to heaven in the whirlwind of a chariot of fire, drawn by horses of fire.

**Jeremiah:** Although Mark and Luke recount this episode, Jeremiah is only mentioned in Matthew's Gospel.

**Prophets:** Jesus's message echoed Old Testament prophetic tradition.

#### Who do you say I am?

'You' is in the plural form: Jesus is addressing all the disciples. Peter answers for them. His reply is variously translated as the Christ or the Messiah. The word means the 'anointed one'. A Messiah, who would establish God's reign and be a royal figure, had long been expected by the people.

#### You are Peter and on this rock I shall build my Church

'Petros' was not a personal name at the time. Previously, only God has been instrumental in changing names (Abram to Abraham and Jacob to Israel).

#### The gates of the underworld – I will give you the keys of the Kingdom

To control the gates of a place was to conquer it. Clearly Peter's authority is spiritual, not political.

#### Binding and Loosing

These were legal rabbinical terms, meaning to forbid and to permit. Matthew is addressing a mainly Jewish audience.

