

Madness: The King's Challenge

The King's Challenge

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Bible Text: Matthew 16:13-18

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Matthew chapter 16 beginning with verse 13.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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.¹

Now this is a controversial passage and there is so much here that we are going to unpack today and so I thought we would do it in a simple one, two, three step. The first thing we are going to look at is the one place that this occurs. Then we are going to look at the two possible views that you can have of Jesus and the three promises that the Word of God gives us when we believe on Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

So let's begin with that one very specific, strategic point. This passage begins when Jesus is communicating with his disciples in a place known as Caesarea Philippi. Now I know that today is not the day that you came to church or you are listening on the radio or the internet that you wanted to hear a geographical, topographical map lesson; but just work with me for a moment, because it is absolutely critical to understanding this passage in relationship to our world to see where they were. Most of the ministry of Jesus comprised around the Sea of Galilee, down into what we know as Jerusalem and Bethlehem, Jericho and that area. In our contemporary culture it would be much like an interstate corridor. In fact, let me give you a parallel. In our terminology, because we have access to cars and trains and planes and such, I am going to broaden the distance just a little bit. Imagine the ministry of Jesus taking place with the northern part being what we know as the Atlanta metro area and the southern part being Orlando, Florida. It is a pretty simple route. And in all the places along that route you see the life and the ministry of Jesus taking place.

If you were to look at Caesarea Philippi in relationship to the ministry of Jesus, notice it says he went to the coast. He went to the borders. He went to the marginal areas. It is as if he went to Orlando from Atlanta by way of Nashville. Does that communicate to you? Caesarea Philippi is 30 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

¹ Matthew 16:13-18.

And you may be thinking, well, what is the big deal about that? Why is that so significant? Because the message that is communicated in this passage could not have been communicated more clearly in any other location. This is not just a random, hey, we are hungry. Let's stop off, get something to eat and have a conversation. This is not on the boat on the Sea of Galilee. This is not off the side of Jerusalem. He takes them to Caesarea Philippi which was the epicenter for religious pluralism. What that means is this is the place that every faith known to man would come and exercise what they believed. This is where they sacrificed. This is where they prayed. This is where they chanted in a contemporary culture. This is the student center of a major university. I mean, everything is right there.

For those of you who listen to us electronically and over the internet and such, forgive us for showing an image that you cannot see online. I want to show you a picture of modern day Caesarea Philippi where Jesus and his disciples would have been. The image that you see in front of you is really no wider than the platform or the stage at this church and yet do you see all the inlays or the cutouts that are there? Every one of those represented a different place of "worship," where sacrifices were made and where prayers were prayed.

Can you imagine just in the simple size of our stage or our platform here at this church, imagine every faith known to man having a representative here, all at one time - all different religions, all different faiths, all different things happening. You may be thinking, why is this so critical? Because when Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" he wasn't between lunch and supper. He wasn't just pulling off because they needed to refuel. He purposely and strategically went to the place in that known world that had every belief system represented. And what was the answer that was given? The answer was: You are not like any of these. You don't compare to any of these. You are unique and absolutely different.

This is the one place that Jesus took them where this could not have been communicated any more clearly. But it leads to two possibilities. There are two frames of mind, two responses that we can have, that you can have when it comes to Jesus. Notice Jesus says, "Who do they say that I am? Who do you say that I am?"

And I want to categorize these two questions and these two responses with these simple answers. Jesus is either simply another or he stands alone. Let me repeat myself. He is just simply another or he stands alone.

Let's unpack or peel back that he is simply another. It is not by accident that we have in the Word of God the four personalities that are given to supposedly represent who the world says Jesus is. They say some think you are John the Baptist. Some think you are Elijah. Some think you are Jeremiah or just one of the prophets. And I want to share with you as we begin to go through this list of being simply another, every one we go through gets closer and closer to the truth and yet is distinctly far from it.

John the Baptist. What the disciples were saying is there are people in our world who simply think you are another religious leader. You think about the ministry of John the

Baptist and we think about, you know, the camel skin and eating the honey, coming out of the wilderness. I don't know about you, but when he says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," I kind of get this, you know, gravel in your throat kind of voice. That is kind of how he would have said it, real rough guy."

But what did he do? He took individuals who for their entire life had been following the tenets of Judaism and the Torah and the Jewish law and he took them down to the Jordan River. He placed them under the water and brought them up. In the gospel of John, he pointed to Jesus and said, "There is the Lamb of God. Follow him." He simply took them out of what they were believing and pointed them to a new faith. Our world believes that Jesus is just another religious leader. If you don't believe me, there is a very popular bumper sticker that you will see in our community and others. It simply says COEXIST. It has got the symbols of various major world religions, of various philosophical ideologies, everything from Islam to Judaism to Wicca, and then 'T' on that word COEXIST in the shape of a cross that simply states that Jesus is just another religious figure.

They said some people think you are just John the Baptist. You are just another one of many guys who had ideas and tenets. And then they continue and they say, "But some say you are Elijah." Now you think about the ministry of Elijah. It was a ministry of miracle workings. And as we get a little bit closer to the truth here there are those who see Jesus as more than just a "religious" individual. They see him as one who is able to heal and deliver and do the miraculous. After all, leading up to this story Jesus had fed the 5000. We know that was just the head of households, and he had fed the 4000.

Do you remember the story in 1 Kings of Elijah who goes to the widow woman and her son and they have just enough bread to last one day and then they are going to die. Elijah the prophet says, "Give unto me to eat and you will be ok." They do so and they had enough food for two years. Elijah was the one who prayed and for three-and-a-half years it did not rain. And after defeating the Baal worshipers, 850 of them, including the female prophetesses who were there, he called and the rain came down again. And his very last act before being caught up into a chariot of fire, remember he takes his mantle. He throws it upon the water and it splits in two. You talk about a miracle worker. But yet in the midst of Jesus' culture, and as we even see today, during Passover season, they actually reserve a seat for Elijah.

When you say that Jesus is Elijah you may claim he is a miracle worker. You may claim he can heal. You may claim he can deliver, but you are saying that he is not the Savior, but the one who leads us to the Savior.

See, John the Baptist falls short. Elijah falls short. And then there is Jeremiah. And you study the person and the prophecy of Jeremiah, obviously a unique individual and character. He is actually commissioned by God not to marry. The book of Lamentations or the book of crying is exactly that. And as you read through the prophecies of Jeremiah, what you see him being pictured as is he is a revolutionary. You see this battle between Israel and Babylon, between God-sided and the world-sided. And you see all

this apocalyptic imagery and these final battles that are going to take place. And yet there are many people who say Jesus is Jeremiah. He has come to give us power. He has come to give us political deliverance. He has come so that we might be in charge and somebody else will not. Isn't this what people were so frustrated about with Jesus? Why? Because he went to the cross and he didn't take up a crown. He did not destroy the Romans. He actually died for their sins. And you see this character of Jeremiah, particularly in the Old Testament, as one who was a political revolutionary, one would take the world's system and literally turn it upside down. And yet Jesus in John 17:9 says, "I don't pray for the world, but those whom you have given to me."

Now I want you to think about this. He is just simply another religious leader. He is simply another miracle worker. He is simply another revolutionary. But it is that final phrase that is so subtle that maybe is so powerful. Or one of the prophets. Take your pick: Ezekiel, Amos or even Micaiah who did not write a book of the Bible but who is very prominent. When you look at the lives of the prophets if there is one distinctiveness about them it wasn't all about what is coming in the future. It wasn't so much all about foretelling as it was forth telling. In other words, thus saith the Lord. You have rebelled against God in this area. You need to change it. Your behavior is wrong in this area. You need to fix it. And yet when you say that Jesus is just another one of the prophets, what you are stating is not political revolution. It is not about a religious leader. What you are simply saying is that the life that he gave us as an example to live is simply the model that we are to follow. What I mean by that is Jesus isn't Savior. He is simply a model for, "ethics," behavior and decision-making processes. In other words, you are to give to those who are in need. You are to help those who are struggling. We know all those passages. We have talked about those passages and, yes, we should do all those things, but to do those and it only be about those things, is to say he is simply just another person with another mandate and another ethic.

He is not just simply another religious leader. He is not just simply another miracle worker. He is not just simply another revolutionary, one in whose day those of the female gender were demoralized. Yet when they tried to take a woman who washed his feet and kick her out of the room, he said, "No, no, let her stay. For her story will be told until my coming."

In the story of the woman who was caught in adultery when he sends the men out and he says, "Go and sin no more." The Zacchaeuses who were the powerful, greedy ones of the world, he brought a little bit lower. And the woman who gave two mites he raised to higher status. Revolutionary in all of his teaching, revolutionary in all of his actions. And dramatic in every one of his teachings. But if Jesus is just a simple religious leader, a miracle worker, a revolutionary or ethicist/prophet, then that doesn't answer the question. Because Jesus did not say, "Oh, those are pretty good answers." He said, "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter speaks up and for one of the very few times he actually says something worth listening to. He says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Now let me share with you what this means. If you attribute your life now and in the hereafter, if you

attribute your family, your job, everything about you, if you side with that statement versus the other, let me share with you what that does in your life. What I am about to share with you is absolutely, positively, completely politically incorrect, but if you get upset, take it up with the Bible. That means that Islam is not the answer. Buddhism is not the answer. Wicca is not the answer. And anybody else on that COEXIST bumper sticker is not the answer. It means that he is Savior alone.

C. S. Lewis, a man who was infinitely more brilliant than me, made this statement, that when you look at the life of Jesus he is either Savior for all or he is Savior for none. So when we make the statement from the Word of God that there is a heaven and there is a hell and what one does with Jesus determines your destiny, that is not being narrow minded or bigoted. That is following the teaching of Jesus Christ. And to reject that is to reject the teachings of Jesus Christ. He either is simply another or he stands alone. You cannot put Jesus on a bumper sticker with other faiths. You cannot group him to a table of philosophers. He is not one of many. He is not the best of many. He is the only one.

He said, “I am the way and the truth.” The Bible says there is no other name whereby we may be saved and there is no other mediator but the one Christ Jesus. There are only two responses to Jesus. He is either another fill in the blank or he is the Savior. There is not a C option. There is not a third option. Those are the only two.

So what happens in our life? What happens in anybody’s life who is willing to take the stand that Jesus Christ is Savior alone? According to this passage in verse 17 and 18 there are three promises that are given.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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.²

Let me give you three promises from these two verses about what happens when you claim and you believe that it is Jesus Christ alone as Savior and Lord. The first promise is the promise of the facts. It said that flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father which is in heaven. Let me confess to you the mind of your pastor. There are individuals who come to me—some I know very well and some I don’t know well at all—who at times will ask me a very pertinent scary question. They will say, “Jeff, are there times when you look at what you believe? Are there times when you read the Bible and are there times when you think about Jesus and the cross and you wonder to yourself: Surely are we the only ones who are right?”

Do you know what I say to them? Yeah. Do you know why? It doesn’t make logical sense. It doesn’t sound good in the academic forum. In a philosophy session everybody gets equal weight. But notice what Jesus said, “Peter, you didn’t come to this because it sounds right. You didn’t come to this because it pleases people. You didn’t come to this

² Matthew 16:17-18.

because you will sell millions and millions of books. My Father in heaven revealed this to you.”

The fact of Jesus Christ and his only means of being our salvation doesn't make the flesh happy, but it saves the soul. That being said, that is the facts, whether we are able to postulate and prove it and logically explain it or not. He said, “You didn't derive this because you are smart. You derived this because you trust me.” That is the facts.

Now let's talk about the faith. If you do not know, this next passage of Scripture in verse 18 is one of the most “controversial,” even among Christianity. He said, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

Now there are two streams of thought. There are two major avenues of thought when it comes to addressing this passage of Scripture. There is a very historical, official Roman Catholic position which states that at this point Jesus Christ was telling Peter that he and those who would succeed him, those whom we now know as the popes, would be the official representative and be the person of which the Church would be built. On the other side of the coin—and I am going to pick on me, because I have got a Baptist heritage—the Baptist perspectives says, no, what Jesus was talking about was not that Peter would be the foundation, but the confession that Peter made would be the foundation.

Now today is an equal opportunity offensive day. I think they are both wrong. And let me share with you why. In this passage of Scripture he does take an individual known as Simon and he calls him Peter. Basically he says, “You are a rock.” And he says, “Upon this I will build my Church.” Remember that phraseology just a moment. You realize that in about 10 verses Peter is going to argue with Jesus and he is going to say, “Get behind me, Satan.” Do you realize that in a couple of chapters on the night of Jesus' crucifixion Peter is going to deny him three times, even start cursing and run away. And in the book of Galatians Peter comes to a group of people and he eats barbequed pork with a bunch of Gentiles and then lies about it when the Jews show up and Paul has to call him out.

Now let me ask you a question. Not only is what we know as the papacy unfounded for the first 500 years of Christianity, but do you want to build something on a man who lies, curses and runs away? I am not trying to upset somebody. I am just trying to speak clearly here. So for those of you who are upset, let me pick on you Baptists for a moment, because I am one. We make the statement and say, “Well what it really means is not that Peter would be the foundation, but that what he confessed, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” And we go into Romans 10:9-10 and it says, “If we believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead and confess that our confession is made unto salvation.” I absolutely completely agree with Romans 10:9-10, but often times the best way to read the Bible is as a third grader would read the Bible.

Notice what Jesus says. “And upon this rock I will build my church.” Now I want you to imagine the scene at Caesarea Philippi for a moment. Forgive me for this illustration.

Trust me. I don't like doing it, but I am the only one on the platform. Imagine that we are in Caesarea Philippi and I am the person—oh, I don't even like saying it—of Jesus. I am really not, I promise you and I get nervous. But imagine that the disciples are sitting in front of me, all of this religious stuff is happening around us. And Jesus makes this statement. Who does the world... who do all these people say that I am? And we get all the options. And then he says, "Oh, guys, who do you say that I am?" And Peter speaks up and says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." What does Jesus say? "Upon this rock." You notice, he didn't point to Peter and say, "That rock." He said, "This rock." And people say, "Well, it is the confession that he made." No, no, no. See, understand how we speak.

I was in a conversation just this morning and this individual did not know how apropos this was for the message. I have shared with you in the past we used to had, you know, the Meyers' Friday night's movie nights. Well, as our boys have gotten a little bit older they kind of like mysteries and such and I will just go ahead and confess that on Friday night we as a family sit together and we watch the show *Monk*. Now do you know about the show *Monk*? It is a guy that has, you know, all these compulsive issues, but he is a brilliant detective. We as a family, if we haven't seen it before, try to see who can solve the case first. Every now and then, though, there is some content that we don't feel comfortable with our boys watching. All right? And so as parents you have got to pick another option, right? Well, what we typically do is we just randomly push numbers into the remote. And whatever comes up, assuming that it is ok, we will watch it until we feel it is comfortable to go back to *Monk*. It is Friday night, right?

Well, this week something interesting happened. We pushed the buttons on the remote and what we were not expecting was the Friday Night Smack Down, wrestling. My boys had never been introduced to the world of professional wrestling. Yes, they are enacting it on every piece of territory of our house as we speak, yes. And the reason I share that story with you is not to talk about wrestling. It is fake. I don't care what you think. But sorry if I upset you. As I shared with somebody this morning that my boys had been introduced to wrestling, do you know what the person said to me? That is what I am talking about. This was a wrestling fan. Now I want you to think about that for a moment. When I said my boys have been introduced to wrestling, when I made that statement, they didn't say, "This is what I am talking about." They said, "That is what I am talking about."

If this verse means that our faith is in the person of Peter, why didn't Jesus say, 'That guy'? If our foundation, if our faith is based on a simple statement uttered from our lips, why didn't Jesus say that statement? What did he say? This rock. This means possessive. It means personal. And in the midst of all the religions of the world could it be that Jesus is pointing to himself and saying, "This rock is what I will build my church on?"

The prophet Daniel said that Jesus would be a stumbling block or rock. Moses hit the rock and in 1 Corinthians 10 it says that rock was Christ Jesus. And for those of you who question and doubt my stream of thought, in the book of 1 Peter 2:8 Peter calls Jesus the rock. The rock, the faith of our foundation, isn't in a person. It isn't in a creed or

statement, although it may be an accurate one. It is in the person of Jesus Christ. The fact is this doesn't please our flesh. The faith is in Christ alone.

So what are the feelings? What are the feelings that can and should be derived from these truths? Notice what Jesus said. The gates of hell shall not prevail.

We live in a world today where if you haven't felt it, maybe you should, that everywhere you go you feel, or you should feel, as a believer that the world is growing ever darker, that the world is becoming more anti-Jesus than pro-Jesus. Guess what? The gates of hell shall not prevail. You may be verbally or physically persecuted because of standing up for Jesus. Guess what? The gates of hell will not prevail. You may feel like you are the only person in your office who is a Bible believing Christian. Guess what? The gates of hell shall not prevail. That means no other faith, no other religion, no other leader, no other church, no other entity, no other anything can defeat the faith of Christ Jesus in you. That is why in the first couple of centuries the martyrs gladly welcomed martyrdom, because they were alone. They were outnumbered. They were in the numerical minority. The gates of hell shall not prevail.

Do you know that in the book of Revelation chapter one the apostle John is on the island of Patmos and the Bible says he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and he was given a vision of what we know as the end times, the seven seals being opened and antichrist reigning, the mark of the beast and all of those things that are just horrendous and horrific to look at or even study. It says that when Jesus Christ physically appeared to him that John fell at his feet as if dead.

Let me reiterate what Jesus said to him. "Fear not." And then he communicated, "I have the keys to death and hell." Jesus Christ communicated very clearly that the gates of hell shall not prevail no matter what the media say, no matter what an opinion says, no matter what a bumper sticker says, the gates of hell shall not prevail which leads to this final conclusion. So what have you done with Jesus? Is he just another "fill in the blank" or does he stand alone as Savior alone? Because he has the keys and he is the only one who can open the door.