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Sermon

Matthew 16:13-20 (NKJV)

Matthew 16:13-20 ¹³ When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" ¹⁴ So they said, "Some *say* John the Baptist, some 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 answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ Jesus answered and said to 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 also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed...

One of my favorite games growing up was a board game called "Jenga". During the game, players take turns removing one block at a time from a tower constructed of 54 blocks. Each block removed is then balanced on top of the tower, creating a progressively taller but less stable structure. You would learn very early in the game that stability and a solid foundation is very important. If you didn't have that, you're structure would fall over with a loud crash, and you would have to pick up the pieces. If you didn't have a good foundation, you wouldn't last long.

A good foundation is important. I'm sure that any builder or architect would tell you the same thing. If your foundation is off or incorrect even in the slightest, it could mess up your whole project. Even a relationship expert would tell you the same. If you share the core beliefs that someone else has as well as you do, then that relationship probably has a much greater success rate than other relationships. When you have a common foundation to build your relationship on, the sky's the limit.

We find Jesus here in our text in the region of Caesarea Philippi, leaving the area of the north and going back to Jerusalem. His ministry is now about to focus on the teaching and training of the disciples. He poses a question to the men He will hand over His church to in the near future. He asks **"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"**

Did Jesus really care what other men's opinion of Him was? Of course not, He was not sent to look good, or to have a good reputation, or to please mankind, but rather He was sent to be our Savior first and foremost. Men will say all kinds of things, but Jesus came to serve and to save.

So why then does He ask the disciples this question? Well, Jesus is using a teaching method here. He isn't asking the question to satisfy His curiosity (He is omniscient, so that wasn't it), but rather He is asking to see how the disciples respond. His main interest is their response.

The response? Well it was mixed to say the least. **"Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."** Turns out there were a lot of different takes on Jesus at that time and a lot of different ideas about what He would do. Jesus was a name that many people at the time stumbled over. Everyone had a different idea. Where did all these different ideas come from? The Bible has a couple different answers for us.

Matthew 14:1-2 ^{NKJ} **Matthew 14:1** At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about

Jesus² and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Herod thought that Jesus was the new John the Baptist. He was paranoid that John had come back from the grave to execute some kind of punishment on him, because he had killed John on his wife's whim. Some thought that Jesus was Elijah or the fore runner. **Malachi 4:5-6⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ⁶ And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.** We know that John was the forerunner, but some weren't sure. Others thought that He was Jeremiah or one of the prophets. This guess was the closest of all of them, for Jesus is a prophet. But it was obvious for anyone who was around Jesus that He had to be some kind of prophet, just look at all the miracles He did. But this was not just "one of the prophets..." but rather this was the ONE that all the prophets were talking about!

So who did men say that Jesus was? From the opinions of the Disciples, it sounded like men were confused about Jesus' identity and His mission. Even though they could go and physically see and hear Him, they didn't know who or what this Jesus was.

Nothing is different today though, is it? Even though we can't physically see and hear Jesus, we still have the Word of God. And yet, people today are just as confused and disagreeing about who and what Jesus was, as they were thousands of years ago. No one thinks he is John, Jeremiah, or Elijah anymore, but people have their own new idea's about Jesus now. Almost everyone agrees that Jesus was in fact a man who taught and was crucified, but that's about all people agree on. Some people say that Jesus was simply just a good teacher. Some people (like the Muslims) say that He was a prophet, but He wasn't the Messiah.

What is Jesus today to men? To a lot of people, Jesus is a punchline. He is something to be made fun of. How often have you been watching TV and the name of Jesus or the idea of Christianity was being made fun of? Too often to count.

Making fun of Jesus and blaspheming Him is nothing new. When Jesus was being scourged (which He allowed to happen to pay for all of our sins), He was also being mocked by pilot's soldiers. They thought it would be hilarious to dress Jesus up like a king. **Matthew 27:28-30²⁸ And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. ²⁹ When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put *it* on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ Then they spat on Him, and took the reed and struck Him on the head.** Not only did they ridicule, spit, and strike Jesus, they also mockingly knelt down and bowed to Him. This action of kneeling shall be repeated again on Judgment day, and this time no one will be laughing. **Philippians 2:10-11¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Jesus is a Rock, He is the great stumbling block. He is what the book of First Peter describes as **"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense."** Just as people at the time tripped over who and what Jesus was, people today trip over the name and person of Jesus as well. They have no foundation of faith, so when they hear about Jesus, they fall. This results in false idea's about Christ and people mocking the Savior. But when these people trip and fall on the name of Christ, they end up on their knees. Every knee, believer and unbeliever alike will bow down to Jesus on Judgment day, and every, single human tongue ever created will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Then He will say to those on His right who believed **"Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"** and then He will say to those on His left who did not believe **"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels".**

People being wrong about Jesus wasn't uncommon. But He wasn't interested in that answer. That question was simply a test question, designed to get His followers to the next natural question. **"But who do you say that I am?"**

Have you ever been in a class where the teacher asked a question that seemed to just hang in the air? Maybe a really tricky, challenging question. A question that all you can do is look down somewhere, hoping that you don't make any eye contact with your teacher, because if you did you might inspire the teacher to suddenly remember your name and ask you the question that no one wanted.

Well, if you had the apostle Peter in your class, this would've never happened. When Jesus asked this question, Peter was the first one to declare **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

Peter was never a timid person. Bold was His middle name. He was often the first disciple to do something. He was never scared or afraid of being wrong. It was Peter who said **"Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water"** and then he proceeded to walk on water. It was Peter who said **"Lord, it is good for us to be here"** at the Transfiguration. It was Peter who said **"Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble."**

Peter was confident he would not fall. It was good that Peter was confident, but he would often look very foolish because of his impulsiveness. When Peter boldly walked on water, he also faltered and fell. When he declared how good it was to be on the mount of Transfiguration, afterward a voice boomed out of the clouds **"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"** he was afraid and fell on his face. When Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus, Peter said **"I will never be made to stumble"**. Jesus told him that he would deny Him, in fact, he would deny Christ not only once but three times! The book of Mark says **"But he spoke more vehemently, 'If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!'"** But not even 24 hours would pass and the rooster would crow twice, Peter once again fell, and wept bitter tears.

Peter had this duality to him, and it's something that we share in common with him. While he was often bold and brash, he also possessed great faith. It seems like every time he had other disciples around him, he would be very bold, but when he didn't have other believers around him, that's when he got in trouble. When he was in the boat he knew he could walk to Jesus on the water, but when he was out there by himself, that's when he started sinking. He was vehement in declaring his never ending obedience to Jesus, but when he was in the courtyard, being accused of being a follower of Jesus, he was just as vehement in denying Jesus. Even after this great declaration of **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** We saw a few weeks ago and only a few verses later that Peter would take Jesus aside and rebuke Him for saying He would die. Jesus who just called Peter blessed, then said **"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."**

How often we look like Peter. One minute declaring the truth of the gospel, the next second being completely wrong. One minute we're swearing our loyalty to the Lord, the next second we're right back again to our pet sins.

After Peter declared his faith, Jesus said **"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"**. So what did Jesus mean here? Did He mean to say that Peter was a rock and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against His great servant Peter the Rock?

The name Peter means rock. But Jesus is not saying that He will build His church on the human Peter, nor does this mean that Peter was to be the head of Christ's church on earth or that Peter would later be the infallible spokesman of Jesus. In the Greek Peter's name is *petros*. Jesus said "you are

petros, and on this *petra* I will build my church”.

Peter's name means a loose rock or a stone while the *petra* (what Christ would build His Church on) means a rocky cliff, a shelf, solid rock, or rocky ground. It is the same word that is used to describe what the wise man built his house upon. What would Jesus build His Church on? Not Peter, but rather the confession of Peter. When he said **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** he was confessing that Jesus was the Lord, that He was the long awaited Messiah, true God and true Man, the Redeemer of the world, and the Savior from sins.

Jesus builds His Church from within. He is the one who lived a perfect life and died an innocent death. He creates faith in His followers. His followers, their confessions of Him, and spreading that message is what He builds His Church on. But before you can build you need a firm foundation. Jesus is the firm foundation which we are built upon. When we take the Lord's Supper, that is the process of us being built on His foundation. Jesus is the master builder and He and the word is the foundation, we are the bricks, and the mortar that keeps the Church together is the means of grace. Paul says in first Corinthians **For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building** and continues **For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** Jesus is a Rock, He is the firm foundation.

Peter was not the one who the church would be built on, but Peter would be part of the building. Just as he was, so are you. Christ has built His Church with imperfect and flawed stones, but those stones are made perfect on the perfect foundation. Peter understood this later when he wrote in **1 Peter 2:7-8** ⁷ **Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,"** ⁸ **and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense."**

Jesus is the Rock. He is the chief cornerstone and perfect foundation to those who believe in His Name. To those who do not believe He is the great stumbling block that everyone who do not believe will stumble over. After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple, and there, a man named Simeon prophesied about the Child **"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel"**. How great it is to us, His believers, that Jesus is not our Rock that we fall over, but rather He is our Rock that we are built in and rise out of! Praise be to God! In Jesus name, Amen.