



gracefellowship

Series: In His Steps
Date: April 2, 2023

Title: The King, a Cave and a Cross
Passage: Mark 8:27-38

Scripture: Matthew 21:1-11

When you think of pivotal events in your life, what comes to mind?

- An important birthday
- First job
- Getting married
- Having children
- Following Jesus

Hopefully you can identify events that have played an important part in shaping your life. As Mark writes his gospel account, in the dead center of his book he included the events we are going to look at today. Mark didn't write his gospel with chapters and verses, but there are 16 chapters in Mark and in the middle of chapter 8- the midway point of his account of the life of Jesus- we find an event that becomes pivotal in the story. Jesus has left Galilee and traveled to the northern most part of Israel to a place called Caesarea Philippi.

When the Greeks controlled this part of the world they established a temple to Zeus and to the god Pan. Later, when Rome occupied this territory, Herod the Great built a temple for the worship of Caesar Augustus. Following the reign of Herod the Great, his son, Philip, made this area his capital city and renamed it Caesarea and it became known as Caesarea Philippi. The cave that is in this location was thought to be a bottomless pit. In fact, it became known as the gates of hell! People thought this was the entrance to the underworld. They would bring sacrifices here and throw them into the cave in worship of the god, Pan (half man, half goat; god of fertility for crops). The people would throw live children into the cave as a sacrifice to Pan asking for fertile crops.

The area of Caesarea Philippi was a stronghold of idol worship and the worship of the Greek rulers. It was a tragic place that crossed the Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures. With that as the backdrop, Jesus intentionally and strategically brings His disciples to this location to have a very specific conversation with them. Jesus knows this is a turning point moment in His ministry. Everything that

happens after this is a movement toward Jerusalem and toward the cross. Mark's gospel has been written in a way that speeds us toward this moment. The first 8 chapters of Mark cover 3 years in the life of Jesus. The final 8 chapters cover about a month of his life with priority on the last week when He is in Jerusalem prior to His death.

Now that Jesus is with the disciples in Caesarea Philippi where there are many gods being worshiped, He asks them two questions. Let's look at it together.

:: Mark 8:27-30

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

The first question Jesus asks is: "Who do people say I am?"

Jesus didn't have the ability to Google Himself and get the Yelp reviews from His feeding of the 5,000, so He looks to the disciples and says, "You guys hang out around the crowds; when you hear them talk, what are they saying about me? Who do they think I am?"

- John the Baptist
- Elijah
- One of the Prophets

The people put Jesus in prestigious company! And a lot of people in our world do the same thing today. Jesus is seen as...

- A moral, historical figure
- Miracle worker
- Prophetic Voice
- Social justice warrior

We have lots of categories for Jesus, just like the crowds of Jesus' day. But none of them go far enough!

So, that prompts Jesus to ask the disciples a follow up question. They have been around Jesus for 3 years now and have seen Him do incredible things. They know His story and His life so Jesus turns the question from the crowds to them personally: "But what about you? Who do you say I am?"

Jesus makes the conversation personal. He puts the question in a place that the disciples have to wrestle with this in their own lives. And Peter, of course, is the first one to speak up: "You are the Messiah." Matthew's gospel records a little more of Peter's confession: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter has learned that Jesus is more than anyone ever thought. He isn't just a moral teacher or a worker of miracles or a prophetic voice. Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Messiah they have been waiting on!

What we believe about Jesus is the most important belief we hold.

Not your economic beliefs, or your political beliefs, or your educational beliefs or your social beliefs...what you believe about Jesus is the most important belief you hold. Why?

Your belief about Jesus will guide all your other beliefs.

That's why this next part of the conversation is so important as we read the gospels. We are going to see two aspects of the same conversation, one from Matthew's perspective and one from Mark's perspective as we move forward in the story.

Matthew says that Peter makes this bold declaration: "You're the Messiah, the Son of God!" and then Jesus gives him a huge confirmation:

:: Matthew 16:17-18

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Some people believe that Jesus was telling Peter the church would be built on Peter's leadership. Peter's name means "rock," and Jesus says, "...on this rock I will build my church..."

But in the Greek it reads like this: "You are [petros] and on this [petra] I will build my church."

Petros means detached, but large fragment.

Petra means the massive living rock.

Jesus isn't talking about Peter being what the Church will be built on. He is talking about Peter's confession! When Peter says that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus responds by saying, "On that confession that people will make through the ages, I will build my Church!"

Those of us who hold to the belief that Jesus is God in the flesh and the Messiah of the world belong in His Kingdom. Then Jesus tells Peter that the gates of Hades will not overcome His Church. Now, remember where Jesus is

standing. He's brought them to the mouth of a cave believed to be a bottomless pit that is known as the gates of Hell.

[Pictures of Caesarea Philippi]

When the Church of Jesus stands on the confession that Jesus alone is the Messiah of the world and when we point people to Jesus and call them to embrace Him as their Messiah the Kingdom of God grows and Satan and all the demons of hell have no power to do anything to stop it! There is power in the confession that Jesus is the Messiah. The temples to Pan and Zeus and Caesar are gone today, no one worships them any more. But the Kingdom of Jesus is still growing to this very day! And it's all built around our confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Question: Do you believe that today? All your other beliefs hinge on your beliefs about Jesus?

This is why we have to make sure we truly know who Jesus is. A false belief about Jesus can lead you to have all kinds of false beliefs in your life. The apostles had to fight false beliefs about Jesus all the time in the early church. Jews who became followers of Jesus were frustrated when Gentiles also started to follow Jesus. The Jewish Christians started requiring the Gentiles to adhere to the law of Moses- be circumcised, embrace our dietary restrictions, convert to Judaism. But Jesus came to liberate us from the Law being our way to God. He came to fulfill the Law so that we live under a new covenant of His grace. The Jews couldn't wrap their minds around that; their belief of Jesus was that He came to be the Jewish Messiah and no one else got to participate without becoming fully Jewish. The false beliefs about Jesus caused a lot of problems early on in the life of the Church.

That's why I think it's so important for us to see Jesus' reaction to Peter in Mark's gospel. After Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah here's what we read:

:: Mark 8:30

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

That sounds crazy, right? Shouldn't they at this point be able to tell everyone about Jesus being the Messiah? Jesus says no! And here's why: They still had an incomplete view of what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. They still think he's going to be king over Israel and drive out Rome. They think the Messiah is for the Jewish people alone.

So Jesus, from this moment on, changes the tone of His message to the disciples. Look at Mark 8:31.

:: Mark 8:31-32

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

Here's what I want you to see from this passage first and foremost- this is the first time Jesus has openly talked about dying. There are four things Jesus says must happen in His role as the Messiah:

1. He must suffer many things
2. He must be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law
3. He must be killed
4. After three days He must rise again

Mark tells us that Jesus spoke plainly about this. No parables; no hidden meanings; no veiled talk about who He is or what He's here to do- He tells it to them plainly. And Jesus is going to have this same conversation two more times as they make their way to Jerusalem for Passover. The main emphasis of His teaching from this point on is going to be His suffering, His rejection, His death and His resurrection.

But Peter doesn't like this kind of talk coming from Jesus! In fact, Peter pulls Jesus aside and rebukes him! Matthew tells us that Peter looked at Jesus and said, "This will never happen to you!"

It's like Peter takes the roll of being Jesus' chief of staff and is saying, "Jesus, this isn't the message we want to put out there in an election year! We're going to Jerusalem soon and you can't be talking like this when you get there. You have to rewrite your stump speech if you want to be the people's Messiah!"

But Jesus quickly puts an end to that kind of talk.

:: Mark 8:33

33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Has anyone ever looked at you and called you Satan to your face? It's not good when someone says, "You're the devil of hell!" Really what Jesus is getting at here is that this is not the language or beliefs of His kingdom, this is the talk of Satan. Peter doesn't have the concerns of God in mind- in other words, God's Kingdom isn't motivating this conversation, the concerns of the world are what Peter has in view. It's about empire and ruling over people in a worldly kingdom. That's the domain of Satan and Jesus wants to straighten that out immediately.

It's so easy for us to get in that same sphere of thinking.

- We want more money
- We want a bigger house or nicer car
- We want more power and control
- We want people to look at us and know how important we are

And Jesus says to that line of thought, "That's not what my Kingdom is about and it's not what the citizens of my Kingdom should be about."

We are about serving and generosity and self denial and even death for the sake of King Jesus and His Kingdom.

In fact, I want to read the next passage to you and then I'm going to tell you a story as we give a call to action today.

:: Mark 8:34-38

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Jesus tells the crowd and His disciples that the cross isn't just for Him- it's for all who want to follow Him. His Kingdom is upside down from the way the world thinks.

- You want to be my disciple? Deny yourself. Carry a cross. Follow me.
- You want to save your life? Lose it and in doing so, you'll save it.
- What good is it if you get everything the world offers but you lose your soul?

Will we be ashamed of Jesus, or will we make Him famous and take a public stand for Him?

[Worship Leader comes back on stage]

In 1904 there were revivals happening all over Europe. The gospel was spreading and Pastors were doing everything they could to get the good news of Jesus to the surrounding areas. In Wales in 1904 a Pastor had been praying for revival and preaching the gospel just hoping to have an impact and see a

movement of God, but nothing happened! Just over a month after those services attempting to spark revival, a 19 year old girl named Florrie Evans followed her Pastor home one night. After pacing around outside his house for about half an hour, she finally got the courage to knock on his door. She asked him for spiritual counsel and he said, "Go home, acknowledge the lordship of Christ and submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit."

Somewhere during that week at home, while praying, Florrie Evans placed her faith in Jesus. The following Sunday in church the pastor asked a small group of teenagers, "Who is Jesus to you?" One boy said, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The Pastor responded, "That's what the Bible says, but what about you- who is Jesus to you personally?" For a period of time no one spoke. Then Florrie Evans stood up and said, "If no one else will say it, Jesus is my Savior and I love Him with all my heart!" From that one declaration we are told that many of the teenagers in that church were converted and set on fire for the gospel and they had an electric effect all over Wales. The Welsh Revival of 1904 started, not because of great preaching, but because of one young woman's confession that Jesus was her Savior and she loved Him with all her heart.

Who here today is willing to stand up and make that same profession? In a room full of Christ followers, can we not be ashamed of Jesus? Can you stand up right where you are and just say out loud:

Jesus is my Savior! I love Him with all my heart!

Let's fill this room with that declaration this morning. There's no order to it and you can talk over other people, but right where you are, just stand up and make a public declaration that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus is my Savior! I love Him with all my heart!

Pray / Response

If you couldn't stand up today and make that declaration I want you to know that Jesus is patient with us to reveal Himself. What you know of Jesus right now is not what you will know of Him a year from now, or ten years from now. Keep seeking Him and know that He wants you to discover and understand who He really is so you will embrace Him and follow Him as your Lord.