

1-12-24, COTR

Text: Matthew 16:13-19 (ESV)

Identity Crisis:

- I. Can we make some noise for the Lord?
 - a) If I was Pastor John, I would say “He is worthy of our praise!”
 - b) Pastor John has been sick the past week, he’s been out with the flu.
 - c) He’s still not feeling his best. So make sure to keep him in your prayers for healing.
 - d) Lord willing, he will be back in the pulpit next weekend.
 - e) Also, be praying for Mrs. LaNell, her and a team from our church are in Mexico ministering.
 - f) We have some amazing pastors, don’t we?
 - g) So thankful for them, and also for our entire staff and congregation.
 - h) God has been moving here, and He has been so gracious to us.
 - i) I am thankful to be a part of this church, and I’m excited to continue seeking the Lord together and making Jesus Christ known in our City.
- II. So, if you don’t know me, my name is Cole, and I am the youth pastor here in Power House.
 - a) I am the pinch hitter this weekend.
 - b) You are stuck with me, so you might as well pretend to be happy about it.
 - c) I just have to say a big thank you to Pastor John and to type A flu, for giving me this opportunity.
 - d) Pastor John called me later in the week and asked me to fill in for him, because he kept thinking he was going to start feeling better and get to preach.
 - e) When he called, he told me to preach my message from Wednesday night in youth.
 - f) What he didn’t know is that we just started a series on dating and relationships called, **Swipe Righteous**... so that’s probably not going to work.
 - g) Then, I realized that it’s super bowl Sunday and maybe there was something there I could speak about.
 - h) I thought about preaching a message titled “**The Super Bowls.**”
 - i) An encouraging message diving into Revelation 16 discussing 7 bowls of God’s wrath.
 - j) **Graphic: The Swiftie Bowl**, Revelation 22:20 “Come quickly, lord.” Message Version.
 - k) As good as those may sound, we’re going to go in a different direction.
- III. Have you ever had a life-changing, life-marking experience with God?
 - l) Afterwards, it changed your relationship with Christ and your faith.
 - m) I hope you’ve had that kind of God encounter at the altar, or in your room seeking the Lord, or in a time of study.
 - n) I’ve had several moments like this throughout my life, and about 4 or 5 years ago I had one of those kind of moments.
- IV. It was when my wife, Brittney and I had the privilege to go tour the land of Israel.
 - a) Getting to experience so many Biblically significant locations changed my life, and it especially changed the way that I read through Scripture.
 - **Picture 1: En Gedi** (where David sought refuge from King Saul)
 - **Picture 2: Garden of Gethsemane** (Prayer times and the betrayal)

- **Picture 3: The High Priest Caiphas's House** (Jesus was held the night of his betrayal)
 - **Picture 4 & 5: Temple Mount and Western Wailing Wall**
 - **Picture 6: Took a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee** (Jesus walked on the waters)
 - **Picture 7: Two possible tombs of Christ** (they are still empty)
 - **Picture 8: Camel Ride** (In ancient Jericho)
- V. There was one stop at a place called Caesarea Philippi that I didn't know a ton about at that point, but it would forever change the way I look at Matthew 16.
- a) The passage of Peter's famous profession of faith that deals largely with the identity of Christ.
 - b) I think it will be impactful for us, because it's pretty obvious that the American Church at large is having an Identity Crisis.
 - c) There are a lot of churches and believers that are confused about who they are and who Jesus is.
 - d) I want to propose 3 solutions that I think will help.
 - e) That's where we are going to focus today, so turn with me to Matthew 16.

Matthew 16:13 (ESV)

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?"

- I. Verse 13 begins with Jesus taking the disciples on a little field trip, and they come into this region of Caesarea Philippi.
 - a) As soon as you study a little about this location, you immediately realize that Caesarea Philippi is famous for one thing.
 - b) It's really famous for more of a specific location within the region called, Banias.

Picture 9: Banias

- II. It's a beautiful area, there is a spring that comes from this cliff that forms the Banias River.
 - a) The reason this location is significant, is because it was an infamous hub and epicenter for paganism for this entire area of the world.
 - b) This massive cliff is lined with shrines of nearly every false god and idol that you can imagine.
 - c) The gods of greek mythology.
 - d) Shrines to Caesar.
 - e) Idols to Baal, the pagan god of the OT that the Israelites repeatedly fall to idolatry.
 - f) The cliff was not only shrines and idols, but there was once a series of large temples that lined the cliffs as well.
 - g) You could only see the left over foundations and rubble of these temples during our visit.
 - h) People would come from all over to worship the hundreds of idols and false gods.
- III. Perhaps, the most prominent part of Banias is the cave located in face of the cliff.
 - a) This cave was devoted to the greek god, Pan.

- b) Fertility deity: a god of sex and reproduction; also, of the wild, flocks and harvests.
 - a) Pan is one of the oldest gods of greek mythology. He is half-man and half-goat.
 - b) For those of you thinking this, yes, he looks like **Mr. Tumnus** off of the Narnia movies.
- IV. This cave was a huge place of worship for this man-goat named, Pan.
- a) With pagan worship, we're not just talking about prayer to the false-gods.
 - b) Their worship was almost always tied to extremely unhealthy and demonic practices.
 - c) Blood oaths, sacrifices, sexual experiences, and prostitutes.
 - d) Even bestiality was commonly practiced due to Pan being both human and goat.
- V. Many would come to worship Pan desiring for him to bless their livestock and harvests, that would bring wealth and prosperity.
- a) You would have to make extreme sacrifices to incite this kind of blessing.
 - b) The darkest part of this worship is that couples desiring this blessing in their lives would come and sacrifice their babies, by throwing them into the spring within the cave of Pan to appease the gods.
 - c) They would murder their little babies for the hope of financial gain, prosperity, that their life may be more convenient, and easy.
 - d) I won't really go there today, but there is drastic correlation between the demonic worship I just described and the modern American abortion industry.
 - e) That's not what I came to talk about today, but it probably should make us think about it.
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- I. What I want you to see is that this story that we have all read and know, that Baniyas is the backdrop of what is unfolding here in Matthew 16.
- a) Jesus brings His disciples to this location on purpose.
 - b) There are probably in close proximity to Baniyas, Jesus starts this conversation with his disciples, with all of the shrines, pagan worship, and temples in view.
 - c) It's a representation of nearly every god and major worldview of their day.
 - d) That's when He asks this pointed question of identity.
 - e) "Who do people say that I am?"
 - f) It seems like Jesus came to this place to dethrone every false-god, shrine, and idol to ultimately reveal to the disciples and to all that would read this in the future.
 - g) That there is only one worthy to be seated upon the throne and it is Jesus Christ!
 - h) He is to be high and exalted above all things.
 - i) No-one and no-thing even comes close.
- II. So, this interaction in Matthew 16 between Christ and His disciples at Baniyas is all about identity.
- a) How important it was for the disciples to understand who He is.
 - b) This was an essential part in their development and spiritual maturity.
 - c) If it was this important for them, that Jesus took them on a little field trip to bring them to this understanding, I think it's also essential for us.
 - d) Identity Crisis within the American Church: We don't know who we are because we don't know who are God is.

SOLUTION #1: THE CHURCH TO GROW IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST.

Hebrews 6:1 (ESV)

Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity...

2 Peter 3:16-18 (ESV) (Speaking about Paul's letters)

...There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

III. Peter writes of people twisting Scripture to their own destruction.

- a) So many of their day were being deceived and led astray by it.
- b) It's sounds exactly like what is happening at such a gross scale within the American church.
- c) There is an ungodly and unhealthy twisting of Scripture.
- d) Pastors and leaders perverting the ways of God.
- e) Calling right, wrong and wrong, right.
- f) Entire denominations affirming sin and lifestyles that God clearly teaches against.
- g) I think a lot of this has happened due to pressures to tickle the ears of their people, to appease them, to grow organizations and churches so they are deemed successful.
- h) So, so-called spiritual leaders have sought after better marketing strategies, church branding, and striving to make the gospel and teachings of Christ more palatable.
- i) We have completely forgotten that we aren't the one's that build the church.
- j) Christ's promise is that He builds the church, not us.
- k) It's as if we are making our own caricatures of Jesus.

IV. Perhaps the scariest part of this to me, is not that some of these things are happening in our nation, but that so many are being led astray by it.

- a) Adults... Our kids...
- b) In verse 18, the solution Peter proposes to this issue was for the people grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, so they wouldn't be carried away by these false truths.
- c) We have to take it upon ourselves to grow, to learn, to mature.
- d) To study the word, and learn about our God and who He is.

V. It's easy to get to a place where we kind of feel like we know and understand, and you might not have a real hunger to learn and grow.

- a) The truth is that we have barely scratched the surface.
- b) We will learn about the depths of our God for all of eternity and never come to the end of Him.
- c) It's our duty learn and grow in our understanding of our savior, so we really know Him
- d) And that we aren't following some version of Jesus crafted by men and to instill that into our kids.

- e) How are you doing in the department?
 - f) Are you a student of the Bible?
 - g) When's the last time you pushed yourself to study and learn something new?
 - h) When's the last time you opened the word with your family?
 - i) Are you learning? Are you growing? God wants us to be.
 - j) The only true solution for the identity crisis that is happening within the American church, is for us, the Church to come to know Jesus for who He is, and who Scripture declares Him to be, and fully surrender to Him.
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- Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?"

Matthew 16:14-17 (ESV)

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.

I. When Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

- a) They respond with flattering and honorable people.
- b) People say you're like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets of old.
- c) This list is of extraordinary and Godly men, a list that any of us would be proud to be a part of.
- d) I'm probably closer to being thrown into a list with Judas before these guys.
- e) This is what I want you to see.
- f) All of the responses were giving Jesus honor and respect, but not to the extent of what He deserves.
- g) Here's a quote from a pastor and Bible commentator named, David Guzik.

"The general tendency in all these answers was to *underestimate* Jesus; to give Him a measure of respect and honor, but to fall far short of honoring Him for who He really is."
- David Guzik

II. This is a scary trap that we can fall into without even realizing it.

- a) We can love Jesus and respect Him.
- b) We can honor Jesus to some degree.
- c) We can be thankful for His grace and mercy.
- d) Yet, we can fail to give Him the honor and respect that He truly deserves.

III. That looks like people professing Jesus as savior, but not surrendering to Him as Lord.

- a) It looks like partial devotion, where we no longer passionately run after Jesus.
- b) Partial obedience.
- c) Where we can claim Christ, but never really live for Him in our daily lives.
- d) Where church becomes a place that we go, rather than who we are.

- e) That we are the church of Jesus Christ, and we are to shine His glory in the darkest places of our culture.
- f) And if all we ever do is gather together on Sunday for an event, we are nothing more than fans.
- g) Fans show up at the event, but followers walk with Jesus every day.
- h) The 2nd Solution to the identity crisis the church is in today is this.

SOLUTION #2: TO STOP HONORING CHRIST IN PART, AND RIGHTFULLY EXALT HIM ABOVE ALL THINGS.

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)

⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- IV. You see, Jesus isn't one that deserves partial honor or partial respect.
 - a) He deserves to be lifted high and above all things!
- V. As elementary as that may sound, it's difficult thing for all of us that we must constantly work on. Otherwise, we will miss it.
 - a) Have you really exalted Christ above all things in your life, or have other things kind of gotten in the way?
 - b) Has your work taken precedence?
 - c) Has trying to provide for your family consumed you?
 - d) Has the busyness of life had you overwhelmed?
 - e) Is there a sin or struggle that has held you back from exalting Christ as you should?
 - f) Some of those things aren't necessarily evil, but all of it should bow their knee before Jesus.
- VI. For us that have grown up in the south, in the Bible Belt, and Christian culture.
 - a) The majority of us have probably been surrounded by Christ and the gospel message to some degree for most of our lives.
 - b) When we are so familiar with something, we often don't attribute to it its proper value.
 - c) This is what happened with the people in Christ's hometown of Nazareth (Mark 6:4).
 - d) They were so familiar with Him, that they didn't honor Him as they should.
 - e) We need to be careful of the same thing in our lives.
 - f) That when we have kind of known about Him and what He's done, we often don't appreciate it quite like we should.
- VII. Jesus didn't bring the disciples to Baniyas for partial respect and honor.
 - a) He wanted to bring them to a deeper understanding of who He is that would lead to full devotion to Him.
- VIII. That's where imperfect Peter famously declares the correct identity of Christ.
 - a) He looks at Jesus and says your not some god, idol crafted by hands, or shrine made of stone.
 - b) Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

- c) A statement pregnant with meaning.
 - d) A declaration of divinity.
 - e) A belief the He was the Messiah and came to fulfill the promises of God and the words of the prophets.
 - f) This didn't put Jesus on the same playing field as some good people or other gods, this exalted Jesus above everything.
 - g) That's what we are called to do, exalt Him above everything else, so everyone can see.
 - h) Not just with our words and with our songs at church, but that we would leave this room and go out and be the Church.
 - i) I think the deeper we know our Savior, and we become enamored with Him and what He has done, we can't help but to go live for Him.
- IX. There is an illusion in our modern world that we have progressed beyond many of the things that we see in history and read within Scripture, when in reality we are repeating them.
- a) Our culture may not visit a pagan temple and bow to man-made shrines.
 - b) But we still worship the same idols.
 - c) The idolatries of yesterday, have become the godless ideologies of today.
 - d) I have previously mentioned the similarities between Pan worship and the abortion industry.
 - e) We could draw parallels between these pagan practices within Pan and Baal worship and the sexual perversion that rules our culture.
 - f) We may not bow to Caesar, but we still deify mankind and are ruled by our wants, desires, dreams, and feelings.
 - g) We live in a time where it seems like everyone including churches are bowing their knees to the godless ideologies of our day.
 - h) My heart isn't just to step on our toes, or make us feel like we are really missing the mark.
 - i) My desire is to reveal it, so that we would be a church and a people that knows our God, knows the truth, and declares that everything must bow it's knee at the feet of Jesus.
 - j) That starts with us. In our personal lives, in our hearts, submitting fully to the Lordship of Christ.
 - k) Let's exalt Him above everything!
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- Here's how the passage ends after Peter's profession of faith, rightly identifying Jesus.

Matthew 16:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell 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 in heaven.”

- I. There's a lot of things we could discuss.
 - a) You could get into Catholicism and the papacy and the keys of the kingdom.

- b) We're not going to address all of that.
- c) But I want you to see the main truths that are being communicated here.
- d) This entire passage and encounter is about the disciples understanding the true identity of Christ.
- e) This knowledge, this faith, this understanding of Jesus would propel, uphold, and serve as the foundation of the church.
- f) It reveals how important it is for us to know His true identity.
- g) Because when you really know Jesus and you're a part of His Church.
- h) Then, He comes to build His church, and the gates of hell won't prevail against it.
- i) The third solution this identity crisis is this...

SOLUTION #3: A CHURCH THAT WALKS IN CHRIST'S VICTORY.

- II. Jesus is having this conversation with the cave of Pan in mind.
 - a) It's one of the darkest and most demonic places of their day.
 - b) It was so prominent for this darkness, that people for ages actually referred to the cave itself as the gates of hell.
 - c) They are probably standing in proximity to this evil and godless place.
 - d) There is no telling what the disciples are thinking.
 - e) They probably feel a little overwhelmed or discouraged by everything that's going on.
- III. Here's one thing I know, sometimes we look at the state of our world, the chaos that never stops, in light of all of the brokenness we see every day, and it's easy to lose all hope.
 - a) I know how bad it looks.
 - b) I want to put this proper perspective today, that Jesus is standing in one of the darkest places to ever exist.
 - c) He's not scared. He's not fearful or worried of what will come.
 - d) He's not caught off guard from the darkness.
 - e) He looks at His disciples, His people. He looks at His future church.
 - f) He is saying there is no darkness, there is no person, there is no evil practice, and there is no demonic activity that will overtake you.
 - g) NOTHING. Not even the gates of hell will prevail against you!
 - h) The Church of Jesus Christ is to walk in His victory.
 - i) It's not by our strength or might or ability, but it is by the Spirit of the Lord and through Christ's cross.

Romans 8:37 (ESV)

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than **conquerors through him** who loved us.

- IV. The solution to America's problems aren't going to be found in complaining about the way things are, it won't be found by just disengaging and abdicating our spiritual responsibilities, we all know that our problems aren't going to be solved in Washington.
 - a) Our only hope is in Jesus Christ, and for the Church in America to once again be the Church.

- b) That doesn't start by pointing our fingers somewhere else.
 - c) It starts here, with us, in our hearts, and in our lives.
 - d) That we, the people of God, would re-engage and know God in the deepest of ways.
 - e) That we would exalt Christ back to His rightful place, high and lifted up above all things.
 - f) We don't give Him partial honor, but He gets it all, and we submit every part of our lives to His authority.
 - g) When we do that, the Church will walk in His victory and nothing, not even the gates of hell will prevail against us
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- I. In a world where it seems like everyone is kind of confused about who Jesus is, we have to know who He truly is; **(1)** so we won't be deceived, and **(2)** so we can introduce others to the real Jesus.
 - a) With the topic of identity in mind, I want to end with a few reminders of who our God is.
 - b) To a culture engulfed in **darkness**, He is the **Light of the World (John 8:12)**.
 - a) To those that are **spiritually dry**, He is **Living Water (John 7:38)**.
 - b) To generations plagued with **sadness** and **depression**, in Him there is **fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11)**.
 - c) To people overcome with **worry** and **anxiety**, He is the **Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)**.
 - d) If you're **worn out** from the busyness of life or feel **spiritually dead**, He is the **Bread of Life (John 6:35)**.
 - e) If you're **lost** and far from God, He is **The Way (John 14:6)**.
 - f) When you're **confused** and **don't understand**, He is **The Truth (John 14:6)**.
 - g) If you're **scared** about the future, He is **The Beginning and The End (Rev 22:13)**.
- II. The list goes on and on and on.
 - a) What I am trying to remind us, is that our Savior, is the Great I Am **(John 8:56-59)**.
 - b) Jesus Christ is always what we need.
 - c) Let's be the Church, we all love Jesus, but let's engage and live for Jesus in a greater way.
 - d) Let's lead our families, our kids, our teenagers.
 - e) Let's show the people in our city who Jesus is, because that's what we are called to do.

Question: Holy Spirit what are you saying to me?

Prayer Points:

1. Those that desire to grow in their knowledge of Christ. (Pray for wisdom and understanding)
2. Need help to exalt Christ above all things. (Pray to cast down idols, reprioritize, live like Christ deserves)
3. We all need help to walk in Christ's victory (say no to sin, trust Jesus, live out His calling)

Salvation and Prayer Team