



MATTHEW

THE VICTORIOUS KING

Who is the King?
Matthew 16:18-28

Sunday, March 20, 2022

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I. Introduction

Welcome

Well good morning! Dan and Tory just read from Matthew 16:13-28 and that's where we're going to be camping out this morning. So if you haven't turned there, grab a bible or open up your device and get your eyes on the text. As you turn there, my name is Ethan Ezikian. I'm one of the pastors of Union Church and if we haven't met yet, I would love to meet you today! It's a deep privilege, that we get to worship Jesus together and place ourselves beneath the authority of his word together and before we get any further, I'd like to pray one more time.

Pray

Before I even open my mouth to pray, would you take a moment and pray? Pray in your own heart for the people next to you to behold the Lord in his word today... Now, would you take a moment to pray for yourself, that the Holy Spirit would do the necessary work in you today... *Oh Lord, we need you! Lord, as I preach from your word today please do what preaching can't. Bring repentance, and renewal, and revival into our midst for the sake of your renown. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.*

Intro the Series

So as a church we've been working through the book of Matthew on Sunday mornings and I don't know if you know this, but we've actually divided up our massive journey through the Gospel of Matthew into three parts. So last fall in October/November, we began with "Matthew: The Promised King" and in chapters 1-4 we saw again and again that Matthew is presenting Jesus Christ as the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promise of a king who will deliver God's people and establish God's kingdom. Then after Christmas, we came back to the second installment, which we called "Matthew: The Kingdom Come" and as we kind of hop-skipped through the sermon on the mount in chapters 5-7 and Jesus' teaching and healing in chapters 8-11, we saw Jesus (the long awaited King) manifesting, and teaching about, and giving foretastes of the kind of life and the kind of kingdom that he is bringing into the world. And you may not have realized it, but this week we are beginning the last leg of our journey through Matthew. "Matthew: The Victorious King" And in the next few weeks we won't get a chance to preach through every verse or even hit every single chapter, but our hope is to capture the arc of the narrative that Matthew has written as we examine the King on his journey toward the cross

and the resurrection, which we'll hit on Easter Sunday (Which is only four Sundays away! Are you kidding me!?)

Intro Today's Sermon

So today is the beginning of the end. And if you think about famous trilogies (like The Lord of the Rings or, like, the original Star Wars Trilogy... are there any other trilogies that even matter?) the third installment of the story always has an intensity to it that wasn't there before because everything in the story is coming to a head. The hero's been introduced, the quest of the story is already known. We already know Frodo has to bring the ring to be destroyed in Mount Doom and the last book in the trilogy is just all about getting there. And it's going to feel that way in this last leg of our journey through Matthew. The tone is going to shift. Everything is coming to a head. Jesus is steadfastly focussed on Jerusalem, on the cross.

Even in our passage today the text is going to come at us with an intensity and a weight. There are three serious questions that the text is going to ask you to answer about Jesus: (1) Who do you say He is? (2) How does Jesus bring salvation? (3) Will follow after him?

II. Who Do You Say He Is?

So let's look at the passage. Look at verse 13:

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?"

So this is the first verse of a pretty well known bible story. Like if you've sat in church for a while chances are you've heard the exchange that Jesus is about to have with the disciples, but one thing that really struck me as I was preparing this week was the flow of the book of Matthew; that this conversation between Jesus and his disciples has a theme to it that naturally arises from what's come before it. So let's get our bearings real quick.

Last week we were in Matthew 11 and if we were to skim through the chapters between 11 and 16 we would see that in response to Jesus' miracles and teaching, everybody is beginning to wonder, "who is this man?" So John the baptist sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "are you the one who is to come or should we look for another?" (11:2-4) After that the crowds begin to speculate, "could this be the Son of David?" (12:28). The disciples after seeing Jesus walk on water have been so amazed at him that they've said, "truly you the Son of God" (14:33), then in the beginning of chapter 16 Jesus' detractors, the Pharisees and Sadducees demand a sign because they've heard the speculation of the crowds - *Who is the man? Is he a prophet? Is he the Son of David? Is he the one we've been waiting for?*- and they're steeped in unbelief so they demand a sign from the man who's been doing nothing but giving signs! So all of this speculation has been a steady rumble buzzing the background through the last few chapters as we come to 16:13 when Jesus turns to his disciples and asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Who do people say I am?"

And the disciples respond to Jesus' question: Some say John the Baptist.

- John had been killed by Herod, the local ruler. John called him on his sin and Herod had cut off his head). And when Herod heard of this man Jesus, Herod's response was that this guy must be John the Baptist.

The disciples said that some people said Jesus was Elijah...

- The prophet Malachi had prophesied that before the Messiah came, Elijah, one of the great Old Testament prophets would return and announce the coming Messiah.

Then the disciples said some people thought he was Jeremiah or one of the prophets, which I kind of take to mean that they didn't know who he was, but they had a sense that this Jesus guy was important like the prophets of the Old Testament were - an important religious teacher who speaks on behalf of God.

Now, the disciples answer Jesus' question, but they know that at least two of these guesses are wrong. They know he's not John the Baptist because they've been with Jesus for some time. They know he's not Elijah because Jesus has taught them that, actually, John the Baptist is the new Elijah who is heralding the coming Messiah. Then Jesus asks the important question in verse 15: **"But who do you say that I am?"** Jesus is so good at taking us to the heart of the matter. Who do you say he is? I'm sure you could make a little list for yourself of what the crowds in our world today think about Jesus. They might think of him as a good moral teacher. Or maybe they think of him as a backwards religious fanatic. Or maybe they have an image of him as an aloof, haughty holy man. Maybe they see him as God, but as far away God with high expectations. Maybe they see him as a mythical, non-historical figure. Maybe they don't think of him at all. Whatever the people say that Jesus is, that's beside the point. The real question is **who do you say that Jesus is?** Who do you say that Jesus is? This is the question the Lord is asking you today through the scriptures.

Simon-Peter - always the disciple to speak first - answers the Lord in verse 16: **"You are the Christ [the Messiah, the Savior], the Son of the living God."**

And Jesus' response to Simon-Peter is exuberant and joyful! Look at the next couple of verses with me: **¹⁷ 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. 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."**

The Foundational Truth

Jesus is saying that Peter has put his finger on *the* foundational truth of the church: That he is the long-awaited Savior who God promised, God made flesh to reveal the glory of God to the world and to deliver his people from sin and into the kingdom of God. And on the foundation this truth, he is going to build a people. His church!

You know what this does for us? It shows us the priorities of the kingdom of God. In the economy of God's people, the thing that matters most foundationally about you is what you believe about Jesus. It is easy in the life of a disciple to become preoccupied with churchy activity, as if it is your attendance

and busy religious schedule that is the foundation of your salvation. Maybe your default view of the church is that it gives you a sense of community and your relational network becomes the primary reason for belonging to a church instead of a secondary benefit. Maybe you've begun to build your Christian identity around the things you don't partake in and the kind of people you aren't like. Maybe you get your spiritual satisfaction from how much your mind is engaged and your ears are tickled with deep teaching. All these things - belonging to community, living holy lives, engaging in rich teaching - all of them are byproducts of belonging to the church of Jesus Christ, but Jesus says the foundation that marks us out as his church, the thing on which everything else is built is **who he is and our belief in him as God, our Savior !**

This also reprioritizes our expectations for our unbelieving neighbors as you seek to engage them with the gospel. Let me tell you what I mean with a really specific example: As you pray for your unbelieving neighbor who lives with a different sexual ethic than you and you seek to share the gospel with them, your primary concern and your primary task is not to convince them to leave their sexual identity and actions behind! Your primary concern is to lay before them the person and work of Jesus Christ and ask, "Who do you say he is?" with the hope and goal that the Holy Spirit would work a miracle and wake up their dead hearts to recognize the glory and beauty and supremacy of Jesus so that they would confess alongside Peter, "he is the Christ the Son of the Living God!" Because what we believe about Jesus is the foundation of our salvation! Now, let me be clear, Christians are right to desire for their neighbor to embrace the sexual ethic of the scriptures, but I chose that example because within the evangelical subculture, we get so hot and bothered and distracted by the visibility of the sin that we can easily tend to reprioritize our hopes for our unbelieving neighbors in a way that comes out of step with the priorities of the gospel. The priority of the gospel is first and foremost, who do you say Jesus is? And matters of putting sin to death and transformation, and holy living have to flow from that confession. The same is true for your gossipy family member who needs the gospel. The same is true for your achievement, success-driven co-worker who needs the gospel. The same is true for your over-busy, entertainment drenched, ever distracted friend who has never put their phone down long enough to even consider the question. All of them need to consider, before anything else, who is Jesus?! And the same is true for you! As you navigate the thousands of responsibilities and desires and distractions and discouragements that vie for your attention as a human being, your anchor as a follower of Jesus is your answer to this question: Who do I say he is? That is your watershed, life-reorienting question!

A Foundational Person

Jesus celebrated Peter's answer because he put his finger on the truth that forms the foundation of the church. If we are good students of scripture we also have to see in the text that Jesus is attaching significance to Peter's confession and he's attaching significance to Peter. This is how Peter becomes Peter, because Jesus changes his name from Simon to "Peter" which means "Rock." Jesus says, "you are Peter [Rock], and on this rock I will build my church... 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." This binding and loosing language is language that the Old Testament uses about stewards over God's people. So Jesus is saying that Peter is going to be a foundational leader and steward of the Church and we see that play out in the book of Acts. But it's

important that we not to over-interpret this passage to give weight to Peter's leadership that isn't there because even as Jesus celebrates Peter's confession, almost immediately Peter shows us fallibility and foolishness. Let's look at the next part of the passage.

II. How does Jesus Bring Salvation?

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

(Alright, we've gotta fly!) So the question of Who Jesus is has been answered. He is the Christ- he is the Messiah that God promised, who Israel has waited for. He is the deliverer! And Peter and the disciples follow him as the Son of the Living God, the Messiah. But oh how quick we are to step out from under God's authority and begin to talk to him like we are equals and rebuke him for bringing about his plans in ways we don't expect or approve of!

Jesus begins to reveal to his disciples just how God is going to bring about salvation: that the road to rescue and victory are going to come through suffering, and death. And this doesn't fit with Peter's vision for the Messiah. The Messiah was supposed to ride in on a white horse with an army and overthrow the Romans and free them from oppression. The Messiah isn't supposed to die, he's supposed to conquer! How could the Messiah be anything less than an immediate, public success? "No Jesus, you have to avoid this suffering and death! You have to escape it! This can never happen to you!" But Jesus comes back at Peter and you've just got imagine that Peter must've felt slapped across the face and punched in the gut by Jesus' rebuke: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Jesus isn't just trying to put Peter in his place by calling him a bad name like "Satan." He's rebuking Peter for making the same argument that the Devil himself would argue; that avoiding the suffering and death of the cross would be the plan of Satan, not the plan of God. That the plan of God is to win by losing, to conquer by letting himself be defeated, to get glory by getting low, to bring new life by dying in our place.

III. Will You Follow After Him?

Friends, the Christian life is like a vine that grows on a trellis where we are the vine and Christ is the trellis - we grow and take our shape as his people only as we conform to the shape and pattern that he sets for us. And here is the shape and pattern of the trellis of Christ: The glorious God who spoke the universe into being became flesh and dwelt among us like an author who wrote himself into the story. He emptied himself and took the form of a servant like a king who joyfully chose to clean the bathrooms. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (the shameful, torturous death of a criminal) and in his death he carried our sin and took our punishment and suffered what we deserve. Then, having given himself over to the lowest of low positions, he exploded forth in victory three days later. God our Savior who takes away the sting of

death by passing through it! These are the contours of the Kingdom: salvation through suffering, deliverance through death, glory by getting low.

And this is why the Lord can turn to his disciples and tell them, if you want to follow me, then embrace the contours of my kingdom! Follow me by picking up your cross! We follow after Jesus by patterning our life after the shape of his. And so as Jesus set his gaze on the glory of God and endured suffering and death, so we set our eyes on the glory of God in Jesus Christ and...

- Willingly embrace the suffering of confessing sin, enduring the embarrassment of exposing our darkness, walking through the pain of putting sin to death so that we might know the glory of walking in the light before God and others.
- We joyfully accepting the ridicule of the world, suffering its rejection as we walk in faithfulness, knowing that this trial will give way to a greater blessing one day with Christ.
- In today's world of followers and platforms, we are content with obscurity, putting to death our prideful desires for recognition.
- We Embrace inconvenience for the sake of those weaker than ourselves.
- We see the ways that the suffering comes to at us - no matter if its deserved or undeserved - as an opportunity to (like a much more sanctified Peter later wrote) rejoice insofar as we share Christ's suffering (1 Pt 4:12-13)

All of this and more is cross-shaped living, but oh how often we are like Peter who heard Jesus as he looked ahead to the cross and said surely not, Lord! And the only difference is that we look back on the cross and say, ok that happened, but surely you're not calling me into cross-shaped sacrifice, Lord? People of God, it is such a temptation for us to want to confess with our mouths that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior, the Son of the Living God, then reject the cross-shaped pattern of life that he has called us into. But this passage is lovingly rebuking us and calling us to remember that Jesus is the deliverer that our hearts have longed for and he has brought salvation and glory and exultation through getting low and he graciously invites us into a kingdom that is patterned after his victory! He graciously calls us to exultation and glory through getting low like he did.

IV. Conclusion

So the questions from the text today build on each other: Who do you say Jesus is? Do you understand how he brings Salvation? Will you follow after Him as a person whose life is shaped by the sufferings of Christ?

Friends, it is not enough to simply answer the first question correctly. Even the demons confess that he is Lord. Do you understand that salvation for sinners, salvation for you is only available because of a savior who embraced the suffering of the cross and the defeat of death on his way to the glorious victory of resurrection? Will you take up your cross and follow him?