

Matthew 16:13-20
Second Baptist Lincoln
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¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, 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.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

²⁰ Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

What's in a name? Our name tells us who we are. When you hear a particular name of a person, their image comes to your mind. Perhaps it is a memory of a time you spent with that person or maybe something funny they said. Words and names create pictures in our mind. Even place names conjure up images for us. When I think of Glacier National Park, beautiful images of mountain lakes and rustic chalets, or setting up my tent at Rising Sun Campground all comes rushing into my mind.

Names are more than a label or a tag we give to a person or a place. It actually gives value to that person or place. The name of Jesus gives a mental image. The Bible says that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow. The name of Jesus gives a mental image in the minds of over a billion people worldwide. To some, the name of Jesus is just another religious idol. The Bible even tells us that many people will be offended by the name of Jesus. This is certainly true even in our school classrooms where a student or teacher would be in more trouble uttering the name "Jesus" than they would if they said a swear word.

In the text that was read earlier, we see Peter as the hero of this story. When asked by Jesus, “Who do men say that I am?”, it was now time for the disciples to describe the images and impressions of Jesus as told by the masses of people who saw and heard him. How do others view Jesus? How had they interpreted his ministry? They had seen him heal the lame and the blind. There were those who had experienced his power firsthand when they had demons cast out of them. Others had the pain in their joints disappear and others suddenly saw light and images appear.

There were other impressions of Jesus. The religious leaders hated him and wanted to get rid of him. When the disciples were asked, “Who do men say that I am,” Their response was, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah and still others say Jeremiah.” Each were prophets well known by the people of that region.

We see a second question asked by Jesus, “**Then who do you say that I am?**” I think what we see here is that Jesus is more interested in first-hand relationships. He wanted to know the impressions of those with whom he was spending most of his time. Jesus was not there to win a popularity contest, he was there to form relationships with those he came to save.

It was Peter who spoke up and gave the heroic answer of the day. “You are the Christ, the son of the living God!” His identity could not be better articulated. Even today, those words are spoken from the pulpits of our churches and our Sunday school classes. There is no greater truth than those words spoken by Peter.

Faith Fails

You heard the readers portray verses 13-20 in Matthew Chapter 16. You are probably wondering about the title of my message: FAITH THAT FAILS. Had they continued reading the next few verses, you would see something remarkable happen. Peter goes from being the hero of the moment where Jesus commends him by saying, “**Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, 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.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Yet in the next three verses when Jesus begins to speak of his own suffering and death, Peter pours on the bravado. Let’s take a look at those verses:

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

We see Peter go from the man of great faith to the man whose faith momentarily faltered.

There was an officer in the navy who had always dreamed of commanding a battleship. He finally achieved that dream and was given commission of the newest and proudest ship in the fleet. One stormy night, as the ship plowed through the seas, the captain was on duty on the bridge when off to the port side he spotted a strange light rapidly closing with his own vessel. Immediately he ordered the signalman to flash the message to the unidentified craft, 'Alter your course ten degrees to the south.'

Only a moment had passed before the reply came: 'Alter your course ten degrees to the north.' Determined that his ship would take a backseat to no other, the captain snapped out the order to be sent: 'Alter course ten degrees--I am the CAPTAIN!' The response beamed back, 'Alter your course ten degrees--I am Seaman Third Class Jones.' Now infuriated, the captain grabbed the signal light with his own hands and fired off: 'Alter course, I am a battleship.' The reply came back. 'Alter your course, I am a lighthouse.' This is like Peter's conversation with Jesus. Jesus had one plan and Peter had another, however Jesus by nature of being the Son of God, trumped any plans that Peter had.

Shortly after Peter clearly and accurately identified the person of Christ as the "Christ and the son of the living God", he struggled and argued with the very mission of Christ. "What do you mean, suffer and die? What do you mean they are going to kill you? I'll never let that happen to you!" I could defend Peter because all he was really doing was showing his loyalty and his love for Christ. He was saying he was willing to defend Christ even to his own death. Jesus' response was, "Peter, you don't have in mind the things of God, but rather the things of men."

The problem is that we can look at a later passage where he denied he even knew Jesus, not once but three times! But the real issue here is that Jesus was laying out his mission and his plan, and Peter didn't understand that this was the path Christ's life was to take. He thought that he could somehow alter God's plan to suit his own need of having Jesus by his side.

Aren't you glad you're not like Peter? Aren't you glad that you can easily allow God's will to be unveiled and unfolded in your life and you never try to stand in the way? What? Yea, I know, I am kidding. I've stood in God's way plenty of times. I've argued with God about how his plan should be carried out. I bargained with God, "If you spare my Dad's life, I will follow you!"

I've even done the Moses thing. "Lord, certainly you don't want me. Pick someone else who is smarter and more articulate." Our faith wavers when we think we've got a better plan. I know plenty of people who are really mad at God because God didn't fit into their 1, 5 and 10 year plan. And those are good people who would easily make the same kind of profession that Peter makes, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" It is so easy to be a pillar of faith one day and 24 hours later, we are reduced to a weak, struggling, angry person shaking their fist at God. "God, I've got a plan that I think is a little better than this one I see unfolding before my eyes."

Conclusion...

What we see in the coming chapters as well as the book of Acts and the Epistles of Peter, is a man who grew and was transformed into a strong, faithful follower of Christ who became the head of that Jerusalem church. Church tradition records that when Peter was executed as a Christian martyr, he asked to be crucified upside down, because he didn't believe he was worthy to die like Christ.

When God takes and redeems a life, it takes a lifetime of learning that his will is not always our will. His plan has long-term fruit, while our plans have a short payoff but very little fruit. We look at the table this morning and like the images of names I spoke of in the beginning of my message, certain images come to our minds as we see this table.

- I see my mom with her head bowed with the most sincere look on her face holding the bread and the cup.
- I see an image of Jesus and his disciples.
- I see an image of betrayal.
- I see an image of the cross and his broken body and flowing blood
- I see the image of Peter and the others with a big question mark over their heads. They didn't fully know what was happening.

Yet we know the rest of the story. We know that it is through Christ's blood, we are redeemed and made whole. Let's go to the table and celebrate Christ's great act of love. Amen.