

Matthew 16:13-28  
Peter's Rise and Fall at Caesarea Philippi  
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Today we will be partaking of the Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." We need the Lord's Supper because it serves as a sort of touchstone for our Sunday worship. The Lord's Supper is like that bright white line down the middle of a black asphalt road, especially on a dark and rainy night. It helps keep us on the road. It helps keep us out of the ditch. The Lord's Supper helps keep us on the straight and narrow way by reminding us that the cross of Christ is at the very heart of our religion. You cannot remove the bloody atoning work of Christ from Christianity without tearing out the very heart of Christianity and thereby turning it into something else. By partaking of the bread and wine, we are reminded that Jesus died. By doing so on the first day of the week, we are reminded that He rose from the grave. The Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day - that says it all! And it reminds us that we can't have Christianity without the cross. The cross is a "*sine qua non*" of Christianity, a "without which not" of Christianity. The cross is an absolutely necessary component of Christianity. And this is one of the lessons which our Lord teaches Peter in our Scripture reading for today.

The Apostle Peter is his typical self in today's passage. Peter is the apostle often associated with dramatic pendulum swings, with dramatic contrasts.

One moment he is walking on water. The next moment he is sinking beneath the waves.

One moment he says, “You shall never wash my feet.” The next moment he says, “Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!”

One moment he says, “I will never be made to stumble” and “I will not deny You.” A few hours later, he curses and swears and says, “I do not know this Man.”

Peter does nothing by halves. He goes all out. When he is good, he is very good. When he is bad, he is very bad. When he is right, he is very right. When he is wrong, he is very wrong. We find this typical dramatic contrast in today’s passage.

Contrast what Jesus says about Peter first in verse 17 of today’s passage and then in verse 23:

Matthew 16:17

17 ... “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 16:23

23 ... “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.”

What a contrast! First Peter is a mouthpiece of God, then he is a mouthpiece of Satan. First Peter is entrusted with a wisdom beyond flesh and blood, then he is one mindful not of the things of God but of the things of men. First Peter is one who is blessed, then he is an offense to Christ.

Let's now examine in more detail this experience in Peter's spiritual odyssey, and let's see what we can learn from it about the person and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We will do this by examining three points: Jesus' question, Peter's rise and Peter's fall.

First, we will look at the **Jesus' question**. Jesus asked His disciples a very significant question at Caesarea Philippi, a city which is a good bit north of the Sea of Galilee. It is near the northern tip of that well know piece of real estate in the modern state of Israel called today the Golan Heights. The main significance of this location is that it was far, far away from the city of Jerusalem with its temple priests and its Sanhedrin Council. Jesus was here far away from the religious authorities who were so hardened in their opposition to Him. Here, He decided, was the time and place to reveal Himself further to His innermost circle of followers, to His twelve disciples. Here He further revealed Himself to them and then exhorted them to keep this further revelation in strictest confidence for the time being. He gave this further revelation through a self-identification and two questions.

The self-identification is Jesus' referring to Himself as the Son of Man in the question, "Who do men say that I, the Son of

Man, am?” This title “Son of Man” was Jesus’ most common designation for Himself. This designation was purposely chosen because of its different possible meanings. The title “son of man” can refer to a mere human being, as in Psalm 8:4:

4     What is man that You are mindful of him, and the **son of man** that You visit him?

The title “son of man” is used repeatedly in the book of Ezekiel to refer to the prophet Ezekiel as a mere human being. None of Jesus’ enemies could complain that Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man.

And yet in one passage in the Old Testament, the title “Son of Man” is used to refer to the Messiah:

Daniel 7:13-14

13    I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the **Son of Man**, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.

14    Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man without clarifying if this referred to Him as a mere human being or to Him as the Messiah. Then He asked His disciples first an easy question and then a hard question.

Jesus first asked them an easy question as a sort of warm up exercise. He asked the disciples what others were saying about Him. “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” This question is like asking for the results of an opinion poll. It was merely a request for information which is readily enough available. The answer required no degree of personal commitment. There was nothing difficult about that. The disciples answered: The crowds think that You are the resurrected John the Baptist or the Elijah figure prophesied by the prophet Malachi, or that you are a resurrected Jeremiah or some other prophet.

That was the easy question. Then came the hard question: “But who do you say that I am?” This question was hard because it requested more than information. It requested an evaluation and a commitment. And the correct answer required spiritual discernment and obedience. This question was the Good Shepherd’s saying to the sheep of Israel, “Do you recognize My voice? And will you follow Me?” The question is ever so vital because only the true sheep of the flock will hear the Good Shepherd’s voice in the sense of recognizing Him for who He is. Only the true sheep of the flock will follow Him in obedience. As Jesus said in the Good Shepherd discourse:

John 10:27

27 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”

Let's now look at our second point, which is **Peter's rise**. By the grace of God, Peter answered the hard question correctly. This was by the grace of God because the blind do not see unless their eyes are opened. Peter, like all of us, was spiritually blind in his natural state as a son of fallen Adam. Jesus attributed Peter's answer to the grace of God. Jesus said to Peter, "... flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." That is to say, Peter's glorious insight was not the result of mere human calculation or intelligence or intuition. It came to Peter as a revelation from God, not as a vision or a whispering in the ear but as an opening up of Peter's heart to the scriptural significance of the words and works of Jesus. By the grace of God, Peter said, "You are **the Christ**." "The Christ" is based on the Greek for the Anointed One, the One anointed with the empowering Holy Spirit beyond measure. The Hebrew equivalent is the Messiah. Peter was saying that Jesus is the prophesied Messianic Prophet, Priest and King: the new covenant prophet like unto Moses, the new covenant priest like unto Melchizedeck, the new covenant king like unto David.

Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This is language rooted in the Davidic covenant. God had promised David that He would establish David's seed as the ruler of an eternal kingdom, and God had promised, "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son" (2 Samuel 7:14). This promise applied in a preliminary sense to David's descendants who ruled after him in Old Testament times, but it has a greater reference to the greater Seed of David, the Messiah. Jesus is the Messianic Son to whom God will give the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession (Psalm 2).

Yet I believe if we stop there in analyzing Peter's testimony, we will not have gone far enough. We see in Peter's testimony a growing realization that the new covenant reality found in the person of Jesus is oh so much more glorious than the old covenant shadow. Jesus is the Son of Man in a truly unique sense, in a sense applicable to no other mortal being. Jesus is the very brightness of God's glory, the express image of God's person. Jesus the Messianic Son is also Jesus the divine Son become flesh and dwelling among us. Peter was beginning to see that the self-identified Son of Man is also the Son of the living God in the most profound possible understanding of those words.

Jesus responded to Peter's answer by proclaiming Peter's happy condition and by honoring him with a new name. Jesus said, "Blessed are you ..." Jesus proclaimed that Peter was in a state of well being, in a happy and blessed state. He was the recipient of God's grace and mercy as evidenced by this profound insight into Jesus' true and basic identity.

Jesus then honored Simon Bar-Jonah with the name Peter, which means "rock." And Jesus said that He was going to build His kingdom upon this rock, and that He entrusted Peter with the keys of the kingdom.

We don't have time to examine this in great detail this morning, but let me say that the church's ultimate foundation is not found in the man Simon son of Jonah but in the One to whom Peter that day gave testimony. As the Apostle Paul said,

1 Corinthians 3:11

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The keys of the kingdom is a concept which refers basically to the preaching of the gospel which opens the door of the kingdom, and this was entrusted not only to Peter but to the other apostles and also to the church at large. That is another sermon for another day, but let me say briefly that when Jesus said these words, He did have plans to use Peter in a special way in unlocking the new covenant gospel door and in laying the foundation of the new covenant church. Peter would preach the sermon at Pentecost in Jerusalem which is recorded in Acts chapter two. This is when the Holy Spirit was first poured out in new covenant fullness. Peter would also be involved in initiating the new covenant age in Samaria as recorded in Acts chapter eight. And Peter would bring the gospel message to Cornelius, the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit in new covenant fullness as recorded in Acts chapter ten. God used Peter in a special way in opening the door of the new covenant age first to the Jews, then to the Samaritans, and finally to the Gentiles.

We have looked at Jesus' questions and at Peter's rise. Our third and last point is **Peter's fall**. Peter the rock soon became Peter the rock of offense and Peter the stumbling stone.

After Peter's testimony that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus began teaching His disciples the message of Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:5

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

We read in verse 21 of our passage for today:

Matthew 16:21

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

In response to this, Peter audaciously rebuked Jesus.

Matthew 16:22

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

The Apostle Paul would later say,

1 Corinthians 1:23

23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ...

And also,

Romans 9:32-33

32 ... For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.  
33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense ..."

The Jews of Peter's day were expecting the Messiah to come as a glorious conqueror and king. The idea of the Messiah's having to endure the shameful and painful death of the Roman cross was simply unthinkable. They were looking for a Messiah who would deliver them from the Romans, not for a Messiah who would suffer crucifixion at the hands of the Romans. Peter obviously shared this common Jewish mind set. Peter was too concerned about what his fellow Jews would think if the One he followed were to experience such humiliation.

Jesus responded to Peter's rebuke by calling him Satan. Jesus had heard a similar message before when Satan had tempted Him in the wilderness. Satan had there argued that Jesus could have the glory without the suffering, the crown without the cross. Satan had challenged Jesus to perform miracles of convenience - turn stones into bread. Satan had challenged Jesus to perform miracles as public spectacles - jump from the pinnacle of the temple so the angels will deliver you. Satan was implying, Give the people bread and circuses, and they will crown You king! Satan was saying, Submit to my counsel, and the kingdoms of the world will be Yours!

Jesus had heard that temptation in the wilderness. Now He heard something similar from the mouth of Peter. Satan was here speaking a word of temptation through Peter just as surely as Satan spoke through the serpent in tempting the first Adam.

Christ responded strongly to Peter's rebuke:

Matthew 16:23

23 ... “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.”

Jesus will not accept us unless we accept not only His person but also His work of atonement. Jesus came not merely to show the way to God but to be the Way to God. And in order to be the Way, Jesus had to die the painful and shameful death of the cross. Instead of being embarrassed by this, we must say with the Apostle Paul, “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (Galatians 6:14). We must not be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ crucified, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Today we are partaking of the Lord’s Supper. We partake frequently to keep us on message. Jesus is the Christ, and it was necessary for the Christ to suffer as the payment for our sins. “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”