



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Jesus is Lord in Sin City

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Rev. Stephen G. Bringardner

Matthew 16:13 – 20

INTRODUCTION. . .CONTEXT. . .SCRIPTURE

Back in March & April (2009) we did a series of sermons based on the questions Jesus asked (not the other way around). There was one we didn't get to that's actually a pretty fundamental question (really "the" fundamental question). It's found in Matthew 16 (Monday's chapter).

It's called *Peter's Great Confession*.

Before we read the passage, I'd like to put it in context.

We're at the end of Jesus' public ministry. . .about to start the trek to Jerusalem. . .which will lead to the Cross. Jesus withdraws from the crowds once again (4th time). . .takes his disciples to a really horrific, dreadful place. . .wanted to get something nailed down in his disciples' heads.

So he took them north—out of their way (in completely the opposite direction)—to Caesarea Philippi == the *sin city* of its day. Caesarea Philippi was located at the base of Mt. Hermon, the tallest mountain in Israel (9100 ft.), which is snow-capped most of the year. It was the northern boundary of the Promised Land.

Without question, this was the most pagan region in all of Israel. A temple had been built for the worship of Caesar. There were also shrines to PAN (a Greek god whose name means "ALL") and to BAAL. It was a place of unspeakable evil. . .what we might call today "Devil worship".

Fix in your mind a huge rock cliff towering over the city. It was commonly believed that every winter, Beelzebub (the lord of the dead, the god of the underworld) went down thru the rock-like structure where Jesus was standing—making this place literally "*the gate of hell*".

Now, let's read the passage. It's found in **Matthew 16:13-18**—

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴They 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?"

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ (or Messiah), the Son of the living God."

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter (which means "rock"), and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it."

Now, this almost sounds like Peter has reached the pinnacle of spiritual understanding and maturity. Not so! Later on in this very chapter, when Jesus starts to unfold what was about to happen to him (i.e.: he would suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders...be killed...raised on the 3rd day), Peter said: “No way!” Jesus rebukes him, saying: “*Get behind me, Satan. You are a stumbling block to me*” (v. 23).

Then in the next chapter (17), Jesus is transfigured on another mountain. They are visited by Moses & Elijah. Peter in his eagerness wants to build three shines. Jesus just ignores him. Obviously, Peter had some more growing to do!

WHO IS JESUS?

Now, I said a moment ago there was something Jesus wanted to get nailed down in the disciples’ heads. What was that? It had to do with Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. They had been together for 3 years now. It was important that they have a clear understanding of exactly who Jesus was:

- Because they faced a future in which that truth would be severely tested;
- Because they were the ones to carry the message into all the world.

Right there in the epi-center of evil, the core, the heart of everything adversarial to the Messiah-ship of Jesus, he asks them a question. Now you know, when Jesus asks a question, it is never because He is looking for information. He’s after something much more than that.

- He starts with a general question: “*Who do people say I am? What’s the common opinion?*”
- Then he burrows a little deeper: “*What about you? Who do you say I am?*”
 - Of course, Peter makes his historic confession.

Church, that question is no less relevant to us today. WHO IS JESUS?

Pollster George Gallup once asked a random sample of Americans that question:

- Most everyone described Him in positive terms, using such words as “*loving*” / “*forgiv-ing*” / “*kind*” / “*compassionate*”.
- A relatively large number (42%) did hold the Biblical view: “*God among people*”.
- But most said Jesus was “*a great leader*” / “*a teacher of morals*” / “*a prophet*”.

In another poll (this one among churched kids):

- 63% don’t believe Jesus is the Son of the one true God;
- 51% don’t believe Jesus rose from the dead.

What makes this so important? Josh McDowell points out: “It’s not that the majority of young adults aren’t interested in spiritual things and don’t want a relationship with God. They do.” That’s why movies like The DaVinci Code and Angels and Demons are wildly popular. The problem is there are so many “distorted views about God, truth, the Bible, Jesus and what it actually means to be a true follower of His”. Who knows what to believe?

There are as many contemporary views of Jesus out there as there are heresies that have been fought over the centuries. There are those (even within the church) who would say JESUS IS:

- A historical figure alright, but most of the teachings (contained in the New Testament) were words put in Jesus’ mouth by the early Christians; the miracles, et.al. (recorded in the New Testament) were fairytales that got attributed to a figure named Jesus. It’s all myth, because modern man doesn’t have the capacity to believe in something supernatural. ☹
- Apocalyptic Prophet. Just one of many proclaiming the end of the world.
- Revolutionary / Social Reformer...the leader of a Jewish resistance movement to free Israel from Roman domination.
- A preacher of the “social gospel” which taught that mankind could get rid of social evils (e.g.: inequality / unemployment / crime / homelessness / et.al.) and society be made better by human effort.

- Deceiver...a false prophet who foisted a great deception on ignorant people.
- Mystical spirit-person...a demi-god...not fully human...only looked like a man.

The Apostle John sets the record straight in **1 John 4:2-3 (NLT)**—

“If a person acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (a real body), that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of Antichrist.”

When I interviewed for the pastoral position I now hold here at DUMC, I was asked this very question: WHO IS JESUS? It was the single most important question I fielded that evening.

Brothers and sisters, if we are to live as His witnesses in this world. . .if we are to be disciplers of people God puts in our path, then we’ve got to be clear on this question. I would ask you this morning: WHO DO YOU SAY JESUS IS? WHO IS HE TO YOU THIS MORNING?

Go ahead, write it down on your bulletin. Maybe he’s your savior...the love of your life...your friend...your Lord...your God...your everything...the One who pleads for you at the heavenly Father’s right hand...your King...your Redeemer...the Rock on which you stand.

If from your heart you can reply, “Jesus, You are my Lord, my God, my all”, then you have eternal life in Him.

We can’t afford to fudge on this one. It’s too important. More than anything, I want you to take away from this message a clear and concise understanding of who Jesus is. I want you to be strong in your faith. . .sure of your foundation—for it is the bedrock of your salvation.

- Paul in **Romans 10:9**—“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord [If you confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God] [If you put the = sign between Jesus and God, as Peter did], and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

WHAT IS THE ROCK?

The “ROCK” in v. 18¹: What is it?

- Is it Peter (the man)?
- Is it Peter’s Confession (the words)? The truth which the Apostle proclaimed?

The fact is, Jesus’ Messiahship (the reality, not the words) was to be the immovable bed-rock of our faith, the rock on which His church would stand secure.

But I want to suggest that the ROCK referred to here was the very mass of rock they were standing on—the place where the pagan gods were!

Where Jesus was standing was a wall of rock. And the pagans had set up portals where statues of their gods were displayed. This place (more than any other) represented the godless, pagan practices of Jesus’ times.

Jesus says: This is where I will build my church. Right on top of the most prominent center / symbol of evil. My church will replace all this immorality, all this destruction and devaluing of human life.

You tell me: WHO IS ATTACKING WHOM? Seems Jesus is saying that the church will storm the gates of hell. . .not the other way around.

GATES are for defense. These gates would not be able to prevail against the forward advances of the church. Isn’t he telling us that the church is to be on the offensive, attacking the strong-holds of evil?

¹ Recall that verse says: “. . .and on this **rock** I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”

Yet how often we retreat. . .we huddle & hide (even in the church). . .we cower in the face of evil. . .we pretend it's not so bad. . .we even allow it to coexist? WHY? Maybe to fit in. . .not make waves. . . keep the peace.

Yes, we are to “*flee temptation*” and “*shun all appearance of evil*”. But then we are to turn around and confront it with all our might. . .not run from it. . .not allow the voices of culture to drown us out.

We are told in **I John 4:3-4**—“Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. . . You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”

Our task is to take on the power of the Devil. . .to take on the best & worst he can throw at us.

- **ILLUSTRATION:** Todd Beamer who led the charge on Flight 93 back on 9/11. It cost him his life. He did what had to be done to fight a terrible evil that otherwise might have caused even more harm to our country.

Our calling is not to “be offensive” (obnoxious), but to be “on the offensive” when it comes to doing great things for God:

- Whether it's fighting injustice and evil (“*around us*” or “*within us*”);
- Or taking an unpopular stand on an ethical issue;
- Or doing the right thing in spite of the risk, the consequences;
- Or sharing your faith when the opportunity presents itself (even if it's scary);
- Or responding to something God calls you to that's beyond your human ability.

I'd like to offer you the testimony of one of our members who has been discovering what it's like to put yourself at God's disposal and see where that takes you. Please welcome **GREG BAZICK**:

~ Testimony of Greg Bazick ~

CONCLUSION

Greg has recently accepted the position of **Missions & Evangelism Cell Leader**. The plan is to build a team of people excited about seeing us become more of a sending church. . .a team who will motivate and mobilize us. . .who will direct us to all kinds of ways of serving and witnessing for Christ.

Upon this rock I will build my church, said Jesus. And the gates of hell will not be able to with-stand the shockwave of God's people working and witnessing for Him. There are 60 million evangelical Christians in the world. We ought to be making some kind of difference in our culture and its values, don't you think?

I love Joyce Meyers' line: “*When my feet hit the floor in the morning, I want all the powers of hell to tremble!*”

May it be so!

MATT'S SOLO: “*Upon This Rock*”

CLOSING

As I studied for this sermon, I found myself falling more in love with Jesus as He revealed Himself to me. I want that for you—to love Him for who He is and to attempt great things.

John Wesley said: “*Get on fire for God, and people will come from miles to watch you burn.*”

Study Guide for Matthew 21 – 25 **The Final Week of His Earthly Ministry**

Monday: Read Matthew 21. Triumphal Entry & Temple (1-17). Jesus enters Jerusalem. He could have gone off into the countryside, but instead set His face toward Jerusalem. Then He visits the Temple and gets

angry. What “tables” in your life would Jesus turn over? Against the Pharisees (18-46). Jesus curses a fig tree, gets challenged by the authorities, and tells a series of parables. At different times, how have you received Jesus?

Tuesday: Read Matthew 22. The Wedding Banquet (1-14). When did Jesus first call you to the feast? With whom do you identify with most? Why? Traps Set for Jesus (15-46) The leaders were desperate to trap Jesus and turn the crowds against Him. They ask about taxes, life after death, and the greatest commandment. In your life, what belongs to “Caesar?” What question would you like to ask Jesus? Ask Him now, in prayer.

Wednesday: Read Matthew 23. Judgment Against the Leaders (1-39). Jesus is pretty harsh (7 times!) on “teachers of the law and Pharisees.” How can you avoid what He preaches against in this passage? How can you avoid making it hard for others to grow spiritually?

Thursday: Read Matthew 24. Signs of the End of the Age (1-26). Here Jesus is talking about the temple being thrown down, the signs, and His coming. He is talking about the end times. The New Testament is closely tied to the Old Testament prophecies, tho’ the picture is incomplete. His main message is “Watch...because you don’t know on what day the Lord will come.” (v.24). If Jesus returned today, what would He find you in the middle of? Are you prepared?

Friday: Read Matthew 25. Kingdom Parables: 10 Virgins (1-13). How do you prepare yourself? The Talents (14-30). What prevents you from using your talents? Sheep & Goats (31-46). Have you reached out in hands-on service? What’s the extent of your comfort zone?