

Matthew 16: 13-28 – sermon - TREGEAR 10.10.2021 – The Rock and The cross

Leaving v.1-12 – just one comment – sign of Jonah – Jesus’ resurrection – 3 days in the belly of the whale – Jesus was three days in the tomb and then rose.

1. v. 13-20

The question of v.13 where Jesus says “Who do people say the Son of man is?” We’ve come across that title a lot haven’t we. Jesus uses it for himself, and in Matthew’s gospel it’s used 29 times, and every time it’s Jesus referring to himself. When Peter gives his answer in v.16 notice what he says, “ You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” “He uses the expression the Son of God”. Now this is also in all the gospels quite a bit. But you know Jesus never used this term for himself – it’s always other people, the disciples or other people, even sometimes demons call him Son of God. Satan, himself, when he’s tempting Jesus says to Jesus, “**IF** you are the Son of God, do this.....”

So who is Jesus? Is he the Son of Man or the Son of God? ...Or Both. Well, he was a son of a woman, a human like us. He was fully human. But at the same time he was and is the Son of God. He always has been there, he wasn’t created. He is fully God, the second person of the Trinity. He is both divine and he is human—two natures, one person.

You might notice where are Jesus and the disciples? They’re in Caesarea Philippi, way up north in Gentile territory. It’s safer up here. So Jesus can ask the question, “Who do people say that I am?” He uses the term Son of Man as a term to communicate that he is human. It’s a bit strange isn’t it? If I introduce myself I say, “I’m David and this is my wife Georgina.” But Jesus doesn’t do that – he uses this kind of title – “Son of Man’. There’s a reason. Yes I am an ordinary human being. But for those who have ears to hear and eyes to see they would recognise that this term comes from Daniel 7. There is a prophecy there about a person who is “like the Son of Man”. Daniel writes, ⁷¹³ *“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (that’s God the Father) and was led into his presence. ¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”* Wow! This Son of Man in Daniel’s vision is no ordinary man – it is someone who is like God.

Jesus was very subtle in that he was always opening his identity to those with eyes to see, but he wasn't opening it so blatantly that everybody would come and make him king. He had to steer a very narrow course in disclosing his identity, not just openly saying, "I'm the Messiah, I'm the King of the World. Come and acknowledge me as King." He didn't talk like that.

He was quiet. He was subtle. And he would make claims that were explicit in certain settings and implicit in others. And only when the time was right—mainly when he was on trial for his life, and they said, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the living God?"—did he say, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man coming with great power and glory." (Mark 14:62) So he confessed his open deity right at the point where he knew he would be crucified for it.

"Son of Man" has the double meaning of human being and, according to Daniel 7, exalted heavenly one. And Jesus means to communicate both of those.

When Peter then says you are the son of God he is saying something quite revolutionary. He still didn't understand exactly what this title the Son of God meant. He'd heard other people use it, even demons. Later, after Jesus' resurrection he would understand more, but for now he knew that Jesus was someone extraordinary, even more than a prophet like Moses or Elijah or Jeremiah or John the Baptist. He was a king who stood in a very close relationship to God. In fact he'd been adopted by God to be his special representative. He understood that Jesus was the true king, one like King David. The one that Israel had been waiting for. He understood Jesus as being God's adopted Son, the one of whom the Psalms and prophets had spoken.

What Peter was saying was risky. If Jesus was the Messiah then he was a threat, a challenge to Herod, even Caesar, and also the religious authorities. Remember when the Magi, the Wise Men, come to Jerusalem and they're looking for the new King. Was everyone excited? NO. Read the story. In Matthew 2 Herod and ALL of Jerusalem were deeply troubled. They weren't excited. They were very disturbed and troubled. And Herod tries to wipe out Jesus and he has to flee to Egypt and live there as a refugee for 5 years.

Why does Jesus hardly ever go to Jerusalem in these three years of his ministry? It's dangerous. But when the time comes as it is approaching here in Matthew 16 Jesus tells them in v.21 that he MUST go to Jerusalem.

Notice in v.17 that it is God the Father who is at work in Simon revealing the truth about Jesus. If you know the truth about Jesus and have believed on him, it's only because God has opened your eyes. Be thankful. Jesus is right. Blessed are you, Simon – God has revealed this truth to you. Blessed are you Ross Goswell because God has revealed this truth to you. Blessed are you Stew, and Deb, and Daph, and Noela, and Di and Jenny, and Chris, and Graham and Eppie, and all of you – because God has revealed the truth about Jesus to you.

And so now Jesus gives Simon another name – Rocky – Petros – the Rock -Peter. In Aramaic Cephas means 'rock' or 'stone'. And Jesus says some very important and strange words.

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.”

So what's Jesus saying here. He's saying Peter would be the foundation for Jesus' new building, the church. Just as God gave Abram the name Abraham, indicating that he would be the Father of many nations, so now Jesus gives Simon the new name, Peter, the Rock. There's some clever wordplay here by Jesus. The rock is not just Peter, but the Peter that is right now confessing the truth about Jesus – “You are the Son of God”. Peter, full of trust in the Son of God, is the one who will become the rock-man for the early church. He did become that as we can see in the early chapters of Acts. It is Peter who preaches the first evangelistic sermon, but Peter is acting as the representative of the Twelve. Jesus had found a real believer and on that foundation he would build his church. There is nothing here about Jesus building his church around a succession of Peters. The tradition in the Roman Catholic church is that there should always be a Peter, called now a Pope, to be in charge of the church. But this is not what Jesus is saying here. As Paul says in his letters, Jesus is the head of the church.

Jesus, I believe now addresses the disciples and says, *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.”*

To Peter were given the “keys of the kingdom of heaven”; not of the church, but keys to open the door of the kingdom of salvation through preaching Christ, its Lord and Saviour. And this was a responsibility that Jesus gave to all the disciples. In John 20, after his resurrection, Jesus says to his disciples, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you....Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”* This is the same idea as Loosed and freed. As the disciples share the Good News those who reject the message will be bound in their guilt and rejection.; but those who receive and believe will be loosed or freed. So in a sense their preaching is binding and loosening people. It's a picture of what happens in a law court. The judge makes his pronouncement – you are guilty or you are innocent. Obviously, it's God who saves people; but God has given Peter, and us, this special task of sharing the Good News. Remember in Peter's sermon in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost Peter calls the people to repent, be loosed from the things that bind you on earth, sin and the Devil. Be bound to Jesus that he might free you, loosen you. And we have a part in sharing this good news.

But Jesus knows that at this stage the Jews won't understand what he is saying. I mean the disciples hardly understand either – they won't really understand until after the resurrection when Jesus has more teaching with them and they receive the Holy Spirit. So Jesus tells them

not to tell others that he is the Messiah. The time is not quite right, but we're getting close as Jesus tells his disciples now in v.21.

I can just imagine Peter's response. Ok Jesus, you've just told me that I'm to be the rock and you're talking about a kingdom. Ok, we need to plan our strategy. How do we get rid of the present rulers like Herod and the Romans and then take over the Temple, get rid of the priests and those unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees?

Ok Jesus give us the plan. What!! Suffering, killed and then raised to life. What kind of plan is that? Peter can't figure it out. So his response is pretty quick; and he's speaking for all the disciples here. No, no, no. This shall never happen to you. It can't happen like this. Bad plan Jesus.

One minute Peter is the Rock on which the church will be built. Next minute Jesus says Peter, you're a stumbling rock. It's a really sharp rebuke. Jesus uses the same words that he uses to Satan in Matthew chapter 4. Jesus told Satan, "Away from me, Satan". Now Jesus says to Peter, 'Get behind me Satan.'" You don't have God's concerns; you're thinking just like a human who's only concerned about this world and how they're going in this world. And so that's the intro to his very powerful message in v.24-27. Jesus insists that God thinks differently from how we mere mortals think. God sees everything inside out it seems; or, perhaps, we should say, God sees everything the right way round, whereas we see everything inside out, the wrong way round.

The painful lesson that Peter and all the apostles had to learn now was that to follow Jesus meant to follow a crucified Jesus. So Jesus turns to them in v.24 and explains to them what discipleship involves in their lives. It means saying "No" to our arrogant sinful ego, which not only puts self first, but makes 'safety first' its primary aim. It means being prepared to suffer in the company of Christ the indignities that a condemned man has to suffer. To take up their cross. It's hard for us to fully understand in our relatively comfortable Australia what taking up the cross meant for the disciples. They knew it meant extreme suffering and humiliation.

So what does it mean for us today to take up our cross. It sounds very noble and my instinctive reaction is to say "Yes, I'm going to do anything it takes to follow Jesus." And that's good but you know it's harder than that. Jesus says to us, "I want you to repent." And that's hard because it means admitting that I am proud and stubborn and think I know what's best. Admitting I am wrong and that I need to turn around 180°. Admitting that I can't do it myself and admitting that I need God's help and running to him. I think that's part of what it means to deny yourself and take up your cross.

CS Lewis' said, "[Repentance] means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into... It means killing part of yourself, under-going a kind of death." We get told in our world today, you've got to find yourself, be yourself. But do you remember our message last week. What comes out of the mouth, all those words, reveal what our hearts are like. Our hearts contain all kinds of things that need to be chucked out. CS Lewis, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become – because He made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be. . It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own."

The Pharisees that came to see Jesus and ask for a sign. They didn't really want to know Jesus or sign up to be a follower. They thought they had religion worked out, the ways to follow God.

Jesus says to us, "Just Follow me". "Yes, deny yourselves, give up your own systems of controlling things; give up your own ways of trying to meet your deepest longings. Take up your cross and FOLLOW ME.

Because when you follow me, you will lose your life, you won't be in control of it, but you will find real life, the real deep you; the you that I created you to be when I first made the earth. If you try to save your life, you may be a nice person, you may have material success, you may have family and friends, you may even be a nice church person, but what I've made you for is for relationship with me. Only I can give you that deepest of relationships.