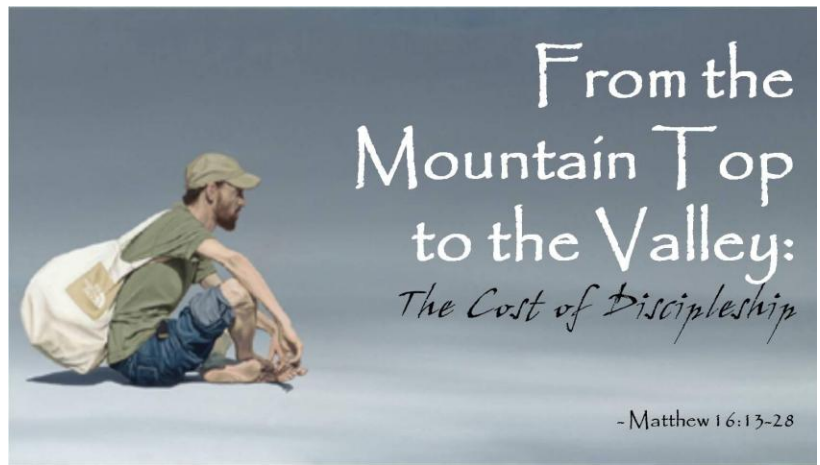


“FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP TO THE VALLEY”:

...*the Cost of Discipleship*
Matthew 16:13-28

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at **JF Believers Church**
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Matthew 16:13-28 *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. 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. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "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." Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

“Who do you say I am?”

Our text seems to present this question of Jesus as an almost off-hand passing remark. Yet the irony is, that this is quite possibly the most important question and thus *answer*, in all of scripture and perhaps all of one’s life! This did *not* come as a passing remark or mere campfire chatter. But rather it stands in the shadow of all the recently past events and scripture discussions: the testing of the apostles faith and understanding with the feeding of the 5000...the fearsome storms and the walking upon the water...the humility of the gentile woman and her grasp of who she was in the light of Jesus. It was in the shadow of the ‘retest’ when Jesus fed the 4000, and it followed the strict warning concerning the leaven of the Pharisees.

All the events that had passed up until then...right from His word’s “*follow me and I will make you fishers of men,*” up until **that** moment, had all been to bring them to this...to this question...to this “pause” in the march of time. All that you have experienced...all that you have endured...all that you have seen and known and felt in this life has or will culminate in this question, in this moment of time: “**Who do you say that I am?**”

The answer to that question will be the match to burn a thousand acres. It will be the precipice of the rest of your life and the rest of your eternity. To answer it incorrectly will propel one off in a direction of which there is no peace, nor purpose, nor reason. To answer correctly sets in motion a series of events that are often truly

amazing, inexplicable and even crazy...especially to those outside. Eyes are opened to truth, and they can never really be closed again despite how one might try. The world as you know it ceases at that crossroads.

Jesus told Peter...upon HIS answer to the question...that it was upon *that rock* that he would build his church. It would be upon that confession, and the same confession emanating from the lips and lives of all the ‘Peters’ that have followed, that Jesus would build his church. It was upon the confessions of every martyr, every missionary, every faithful parent, every servant, every true disciple, All of them would bring us to this place, this moment, this community, this day...this breath. It all *is* and *was*, poetry in motion. It is the key to the rest of our lives...

We know that the world has countless ‘opinions’ as to just who Jesus was and is. Generally each fitting the prerequisites of our choice of lifestyle...each encompassing the spiritual level that which wish to play in. Because again, the answer to that question has such a profound reach and effect upon our lives and our living. Can we all simply make Jesus fit into our ideas and our lifestyles? How can we all then possess the truth? The reality is that Jesus can only be accepted as He presented himself or He cannot be accepted at all.

Many today have altered the truth to fit their beliefs instead of altering their beliefs to fit into the truth.

1. **The Jehovah’s Witnesses** – **“Michael the Archangel is no other than the only begotten Son of God, now Jesus Christ.”** (*New Heavens and New Earth*, pp, 30-31)
2. **The Mormons** – **“...Jesus, our elder brother was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our father in Heaven.”** (*Journal of Discourses*; Vol. 1, pp. 50-51.) **“...that Lucifer the son of the morning is our elder brother, and the brother of Jesus.”** (*Apostle B. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine*, pp. 163-164.) **“Jesus was married at Cana of Galilee and had many wives, including Mary and Martha, he also had man children.”** (*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, pp. 345-346; Vol. 2, pp. 79-82; Vol. 4, pp. 259-260; *The Seer*, p. 172). Jesus was the first baby born to God in Heaven, when God, in a physical body, had sexual intercourse with Mary, His Own daughter. He is the spirit brother of Lucifer.
3. **Islam** – **“Jesus was no more than a mortal whom Allah favored and made an example to the Israelites. They are unbelievers who say God is Messiah, Mary’s son.”** (Sura 43:59) Jesus was a prophet, but He was not crucified on a cross. He will return, but He is not God.
4. **The Hindu** – Jesus is just one of millions of gods.
5. **The Jewish Talmud** – Jewish writings that detail how Jews are to live their lives, has the following things to say about Jesus. **“She who was the descendant of princes and governors played the harlot with carpenters.”** (*Sanhedrin*, 106a) **“Miriam (Mary) the hairdresser had sexual relations with many men.”**, (*Shabbeth* 104b) **“Jesus was executed because He practiced Sorcery”**, (*Sanhedrin* 43a) **“Jesus is in Hell being boiled in hot excrement.”** (*Giffin* 57a) The Jewish Encyclopedia pictures Jesus as **“blind in one eye and lame in one foot.”**
6. People living all around us have an opinion concerning Jesus Christ. Some think He was a good man. Others think He was a great teacher. People hold all types of ideas concerning who Jesus Christ is. What is sad is that nothing I have shared with you thus far is even close to the truth. All of these people and groups have ideas about Jesus, but none of them are biblical ideas. Since humanity cannot help us determine the identity of Jesus, then let’s ask Heaven.

God said this: “... *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*” The Bible calls Him *Lord*, which says that He is in control. He is called *Jesus*, his earthly name to remind us that He is human. He is called *Christ*, which means “*anointed*”, the One chosen by God to be the Messiah.

Jesus spoke also of Himself saying in John 10:30, “*I and my Father are one.*” In John 14:6, “... *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” He said He was “*the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the Son of God, the resurrection and the life, the true vine.*”

C.S. Lewis once said, “*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg - or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.*”

Rest assured that just who this Jesus is to you makes all the difference as to who you are, how you will live, and how you will spend eternity! The apostles were finally at that crossroad in which they had to start deciding just who HE was and thus deciding who *they* were in light of that acknowledgement. They were apostles...chosen, called and sent out by Christ Himself, but were they actually *disciples*? Were they actually *followers* of this “God-Man?”

Peter in this passage would travel the length and breadth of that question in record time. He traveled from the mountain top to the valley in just a few minutes. From receiving the public praise of Jesus, to Christ calling him Satan! Peter would travel in record time the gamut between understanding who Jesus was, to the need to accept it and live it, no matter how ‘uncomfortable’ it might be! Even now there are those here who are amongst us in the church who will honestly acknowledge the deity of Christ...that He is the Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer of mankind, but have yet to accept the truth of the journey that follows such a faith assertion.

Early on, it seemed that the apostles were of the mind that Jesus would move and act in certain ways which would free them and the nation of Israel from the tyranny of Rome and would establish an earthly kingdom and somehow everyone would frolic in fields of flowers and live happily ever after! They did not yet understand that while their salvation was free, the cost of being a disciple would cost them *everything*. They did not understand that blood and tears would be shed, and finances, families, friends, earthly futures and plans would be sacrificed right along with the very life of the Messiah which stood before them. The gospel was ‘good news’ but it was and is not always *easy* news. And those that would try to make it so would not be His disciples and would apparently be seriously penalized for such an “easy Jesus” attempt!

You see, one of the longest and greatest bridges we all must cross, is to understand that to be a disciple is to accept that Jesus has a plan and no other will be considered: a plan for this world, the form and nature of the church, and for each and every one of us as disciples. Yet like Peter before us, how often we try to rewrite the gospel...rewrite His instructions and plans, in order to be more palatable, socially acceptable, culturally relevant and frankly *easier to live out*. Few are able to deal with a Jesus who would call one of His followers “Satan!” “*Well, that’s just mean...*” We want a “nice Jesus” and a gentle church, and a pleasant Christian journey. *Can’t we all just get along?* Well, *no*. There were enemies of the cross both then and now. Those who want a ‘bloodless faith.’ Those who do not realize that discipleship would possess both mountain top moments and dark valley moments. Times when we will “*walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*”

Peter wanted a bloodless gospel. That's what a lot of us want. And while we are at it, let's have a gospel without sacrifice, sweat, or pain. But that is a faith which instead of exalting Jesus, the suffering Savior, invalidates his saving grace by replacing it with a humanistic self-atonement of nice-ness. Let's face it. While Jesus was gentle and loving, He was also the Jesus who turned over the tables in the temple and drove everybody out with a cat-of-nine-tails, called the Pharisees a bunch of snakes (to their face) and called Peter 'Satan.' Jesus was tough when He needed to be. Because this road He was traveling... *as well as the road of discipleship He is calling us to*, is often rough.

But, the Bible says in Hebrews 9:22 that, "**Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.**" In other words, there can be no salvation without a blood sacrifice! And there can be no discipleship without sharing that road with Jesus. "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" But we still want to 'white-knuckled' hold onto our lives and plans in an effort to have both. Peter wanted both. And Jesus essentially told him he couldn't. His 'smack-down' of Peter came with this explanation: "...*you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.*"

Because of this tendency to slide off into an easy faith, we have on such a massive degree lost our way as a greater church. "*Don't offend...don't upset anyone...don't preach the hard stuff...don't challenge sin and unbelief.*" And what we have left is a weak tea... a local social club of good works and nice music. But that was not the gospel Jesus came to bring, nor was it the atmosphere of the early church, *or have we forgotten Ananias and Sapphira?*

Please don't see this as a rejection of grace and mercy, patience in our fellow man, forgiveness of sin, and the joy of community and fellowship. Jesus said "he was faithful, even when we are not!" (2 Timothy 2:13) But to hold to these things while rejecting the hard and the 'down-and-dirty,' is attempt to rewrite the gospel and reject the Lordship of Christ! Being a disciple is hard! *It was hard*, and Peter was knee-jerking at the news of such. And Jesus didn't pat him on the head saying "...*oh Peter...Peter...*"

In fact He went on to lay it out as it really was: *If you want to follow me, you must deny yourself...pick up YOUR cross, and follow Me wherever I go and wherever I want to take you.* Do we understand the magnitude of what He was saying? We have to **deny ourselves!** Meaning it is not about what *we* want or the plans that *we* have made, but it is getting on *HIS* train and going with Him wherever it goes.

We have to "*pick up our cross*"...meaning we are to die and die daily to this world, and then *follow HIM*. Where He went, how He went, and where He wants to take us today. In Luke, Jesus went on in a manner that was far from gentle and passive, to say this: "*And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple... whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.*" Lu 14:27 & 33

So just who is then today? What's your answer? IS He LORD? Are you a disciple? Then saddle up...because the ride can be bumpy, and truthfully, a little crazy at times. Just as it was for Jesus. Just as it was for His apostle/disciples.

Who do YOU say He is?