

Laying The First Stone ~ Mark 8: 27-38

Jesus takes the disciples twenty-five miles north into the mountains to Caesarea Philippi, near the old city of Dan (today the Golan Heights). And carved into the rock at the foot of Mount Hermon: the grotto of Pan, half man and half goat, god of the wild. Worshipers sacrificed their children here, throwing them into the rushing water below. Jews called it the gateway to Hades itself. It is here, at the literal gates of hell, that Jesus chose to have this conversation.

I. Who Do You Say That He Is? (Mark 8:27-29 · Matt 16:16-20)

Peter steps forward: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Matthew gives us the full exchange. Jesus replies: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter (Petros, a small stone), and on this rock (Petra, the massive rock face of Pan’s grotto) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Right there, standing at the literal gateway of hell, Jesus plants the flag and declares His victory before the battle is even visible (1 Peter 2:4-10).

This is still the first question. The confession that saves is the one Peter made, standing in the one place on earth that made it costly to make: Jesus is the Son of the living God. Until that is settled personally, nothing that follows makes sense, and everything that follows costs something to keep believing.

II. What Do You Say That It Means? (Mark 8:30-33)

In the very same breath, Jesus tells them He must suffer, be rejected, and die. Peter, still flush with having gotten the answer right, rebukes Him for it. **Here is the gap between confessing Jesus and understanding Him.** Peter had the identity right and the method completely wrong. The disciples kept looking for the enemy out there: in Rome, in Pan’s grotto, in the pagans on the road. But the enemy was never a people group or a place. **The enemy was sin, and it was in them.** Recognition alone saves no one.

Examine where you have been rebuking Jesus for not building the comfortable kingdom you had planned. If you have been waiting for Him to fix your circumstances, defeat your opponents, or vindicate your side, you have made Peter’s mistake.

III. Where Does He Call You? (Mark 8:34-36)

They came sharpening swords for a war. Jesus hands them a cross instead. But before we talk about the cross He hands us, we have to be clear about the cross He carried alone. He did not climb Calvary as a noble example of suffering to admire and imitate. **He climbed it as our substitute**, to pay a debt only He could pay.

Not a metaphor, not a moral lesson: a real death that paid for real sin, a real burial that proved the death was real, and a real resurrection that proved the payment was accepted. Sin and death themselves, defeated at the cost of His own blood. No sharpened sword could have won what He won. That is finished.

That victory does not leave us as spectators. “Our old self was crucified with Him” (Romans 6:6). “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). The old self, still dreaming of swords, still rebuking Jesus for the wrong kingdom, already died with Him. We are not waiting to do it. It was done.

And yet we still have to live like it is true. Every day we put off what already died and put on the new self being renewed in His image. “We are not yet what we shall be” (1 John 3:2). Until then, this is the work: deny yourself, take up your cross daily, follow Him (Mark 8:34-36).

Not once at conversion and then never again, but daily, as the old self keeps needing to be put to death.

And here is why this dying matters beyond you: this is how God builds the temple He started at Caesarea Philippi. Every stone set since Peter’s confession gets placed the same way: through suffering, not conquest. God does not grow His church by handing us swords. He grows it by shaping living stones through the same dying and rising Christ Himself walked.

Right there at the gates of hell, He planted the flag and declared that the gates would not hold. He was right. He is still building His church, one crucified and risen life at a time, through people who know who He is, understand what it costs, and take up their cross anyway.