

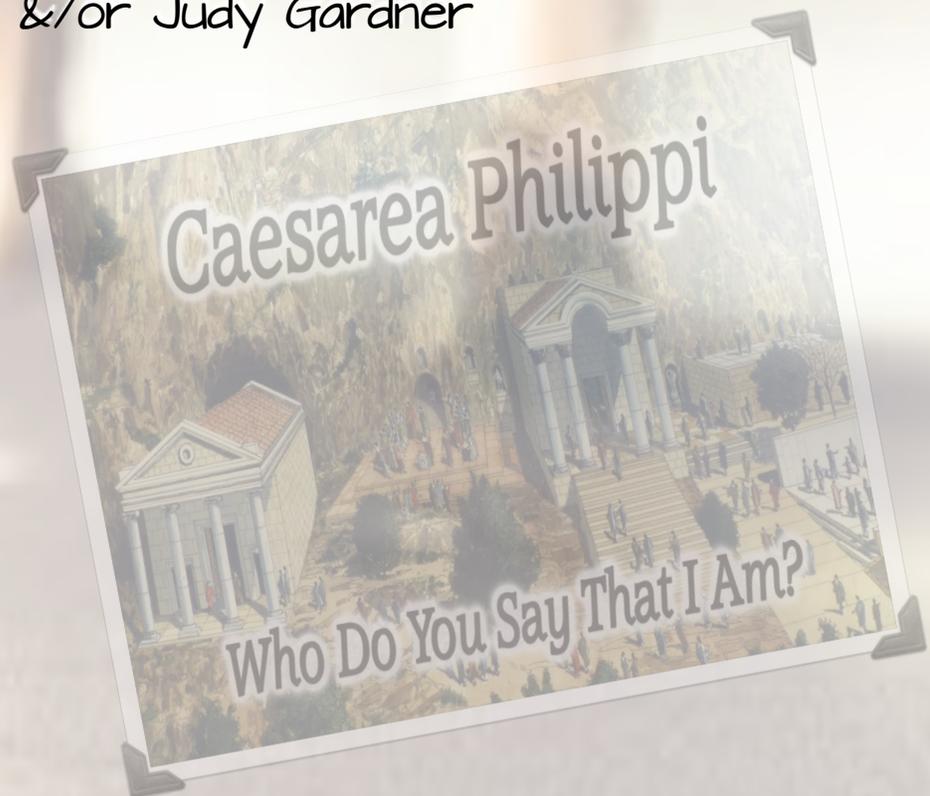
April 4-8, 2022 Edition

Following  
The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 14

Jesus Storms The Gates Of Hell

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner

April 2/3, 2022



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other

**Monday Reflection:** This week we'll be learning how to storm the Gates-Of-Hell. Well, we'll be learning how Jesus did it. Over the course of the next 4 days we're going to look at the last 4 months of Jesus' life on this earth before His crucifixion but His mission to storm the Gates-Of-Hell goes back much further than just 4 months before His death.

We could go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and the fall of humanity when Max Lucado says it's as though a cross-shaped-shadow appeared on the horizon after Adam & Eve rejected God's way and brought sin into this world for the first time (but I won't go back that far today). Instead let's go back to the beginning of His ministry when He said this:

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Mark 1:14-15 (NIV)

There's a lot to unpack in just that short passage of scripture but what is important for the purposes of this lesson (you know on storming the Gates-Of-Hell) is where Jesus says the Kingdom of God has "come near". How does a kingdom draw near to anything? Well, it can't. Unless it's not a kingdom with geographic borders but is rather a separate dimension that was ripped apart by the sin of us humans. When Adam & Eve brought sin into this world for the first time they unleashed hell and allowed it free rein on this planet. God immediately set about a plan to reunite the two kingdoms (heaven and earth) but it would take time to make that a reality.

When Jesus comes to this earth He brings God's kingdom with Him. And everywhere He goes becomes a little bit of heaven and everywhere He goes hell is pushed back a little (sometimes a lot). Eventually when He returns and sets everything right the two dimensions (or kingdoms) of heaven and earth will once again be reunited perfectly and hell will be banished from this planet for good (pun intended ;o)

I don't talk a lot about hell for a few reasons. Number one I'm not sure exactly what I think about it. Let's face it- some preachers and some churches have used the threat of hell as a club to force, guilt and manipulate people into doing what they want them to do. I grew up in one of those churches. It has taken me years to get over the spiritual abuse of hell being used as a club to keep people in line.

Jesus never did that.

Never.

But Jesus did talk about hell. A lot. In fact Jesus talks about hell more than anyone else in the Bible. But His words have been hijacked and pulled out of context and warped when it comes to this concept more than any other concept we humans have warped (and that's saying something). As we go through the rest of the story of the Jesus' life we will see Him come back to this imagery over and over again. So never fear- we will talk about hell over the course of the coming months but this week's lesson is not so much about the concept of hell as what Jesus does about it. He comes to this earth in attack mode. And He storms the gates of hell in a way you and I will never have to. But He also invites you and me to join Him in His campaign against the impacts of hell on this earth and in the lives of

the people God loves so much. So let me just leave you with this- hell exists. But I do not believe anyone will end up there on accident.

Calvin Miller wrote an allegory of Jesus' life called The Singer. In it there's a quote that I've never forgotten since I first read it almost 40 years ago:

"Father, how could you send me to hell?"

"Oh child, I would never send you there. But if you choose it there is no way for me to stop you either."

Just chewing on that ought to keep you busy for today, don't you think?

**Tuesday Reflection:** (warning today's reflection is pretty long but there was no good place to break it) Today we'll start looking at the last 4 months of Jesus' time on this earth and watch as He storms the Gates-Of-Hell. What does that mean? Where does the concept of the Gates-Of-Hell come from? Well just a few months before His crucifixion Jesus took His apostles WAY up north to a place called Caesarea Philippi. It was as far north as you could get and still be in Israel. It was the pet project of Herod Philip (the son of Herod the Great) who wanted to build a shrine to his own name- thus Caesarea Philippi). While they were there this happened:

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets." Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:13-16 (NLT)*

So why does Matthew make sure and point out that they were in Caesarea Philippi? Because there was a famous temple complex in Caesarea Philippi that most certainly played a role in understanding what Jesus is doing/getting at- the temple of Pan. Pan was the god of spring time. The people of the ancient world believed that when summer ended and winter was coming it meant that Pan had descended to the underworld and that's why everything died during the winter. But in spring time Pan would return from the underworld and new life was the result.

It was also believed that by performing certain rituals Pan could be coaxed out of the underworld earlier and thus begin spring earlier. These rituals would disturb you if I explained them (you can google "Pan worship Caesarea Philippi" and read all about it if you've got a strong stomach but I wouldn't recommend it) and the reason I mention them is because Caesarea Philippi is the center of Pan worship in that part of the world. There were massive temple complexes and stages where these rituals were performed for all to watch. People sometimes say about our current situation in the world that things are worse than they've ever been.

No. They aren't. Things have been MUCH worse.

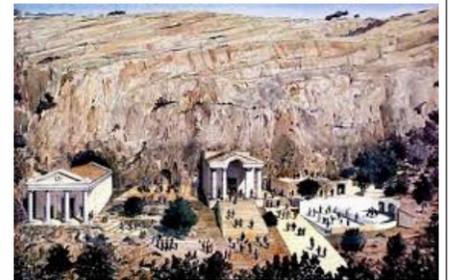
Now you might be wondering why Caesarea Philippi was the center of Pan worship in the ancient world and that leads us to the next part of our story:

Jesus replied, "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, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. Matthew 16:17-18 (NLT)

Peter gets an attaboy from Jesus for his response to the question, who do you say that I am? Then He tells Peter that He would build His church on "this rock" and that the Gates-Of-Hell would not overcome it.

Huh?

Usually we get hung up on what the "rock" Jesus was referring to is. Catholics believe the rock was Peter himself (the name Peter means "rock" in Greek). Protestants would disagree with that and say the "rock" Jesus is referring to here is the confession that Peter made (You are the Christ). We're not settling that debate here today but I want to give you a third possibility. The Temple complex of Pan in Caesarea Philippi was built around a giant spring that poured out of a giant cave in a giant rock in Caesarea Philippi. In fact the rock that all this was built around was called the rock of Caesarea Philippi.



These pictures show the before and after of Caesarea Philippi. The far right shows what this place would have looked like in Jesus' day as He stood with the apostles and asked them, "who do people say that I am?" The other two are what it looks like today. The large cave that you can see in the picture on the far left doesn't go back very far but it is deep. The geography has changed somewhat over 2,000 years but in the first century the spring that fed the Panias river (which eventually feeds the Jordan River) came straight out of that large cave. Since the people couldn't find the bottom of that hole that the spring gushed out of a legend arose that this spring was the entrance to the underworld and so they called it (wait for it...) the Gates-Of-Hell.

Now let's read Jesus' words again, shall we?

Jesus replied, "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, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. Matthew 16:17-18 (NLT)

What's going on here? Well, I think Jesus is pointing at the rock of Caesarea Philippi when tells His apostles that He will build His church upon "this rock" and that the Gates-Of-Hell will not overcome it.

What does that mean? I think it means that Jesus' church has a mission on this earth that is similar to His- to storm the Gates-Of-Hell. His church will be built upon and in the midst of hell itself. And hell itself will not be able to stop His church.

I'm not sure what you picture when you hear the the Gates-Of-Hell will never overcome Jesus' church but I always thought it meant that as hell attacked the church the church would stand strong and defend itself. But I don't think that anymore. I mean, yes, even though the devil attacks Jesus' church he will never overcome it but that's not what Jesus is saying here- or at least that's not all Jesus is saying. I mean, think about it. The Gates-Of-Hell won't overcome the church. Since when are gates a means of attack? They're not-gates either keep people out or they keep people in. Gates never attack anyone.

That means Jesus is telling us here that when we as Jesus' church storm the Gates-Of-Hell (notice it's us that are on the offensive here not hell as I always thought) those gates don't stand a chance. Even should all the forces of hell conspire against us, hell is doomed. Hell has no chance against followers of Jesus. As impressive as that temple complex dedicated to the pagan god Pan might be and as unassailable as the rock of Caesarea Philippi and the Gates-Of-Hell might seem they are nothing compared to what we as devoted followers of Jesus have at our disposal.

So fear not. The very Gates-Of-Hell tremble at the idea of you realizing the kind of raw spiritual power at your disposal.

So to quote one of my favorite movies of all time, have fun storming the Gates-Of-Hell.

**Wednesday Reflection:** This week we're looking at the last 4 months of Jesus' life where He intentionally and resolutely walks straight towards the Gates-Of-Hell without flinching. Luke puts it this way:

*As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus resolutely turned His face toward Jerusalem. Luke 9:51 (ESV)*

What does "resolutely turned His face toward Jerusalem" mean? It means he marched towards His death with purpose, courage and strength. Did it impact Him. You bet. You can see the stress in Him much clearer in the next 4 months than in the previous 3 years. Why does He do it then? He's storming the Gates-Of-Hell so we won't have to- at least not in the same way. It's at this point that Jesus begins to tell His disciples over and over that the end of the beginning (or the beginning of the end) is coming:

*But Peter took him aside and began to reprimand him... "Heaven forbid, Lord," he said. "This will never happen to you!" Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's." Matthew 16:22-23 (NLT)*

Wow. What must Peter have thought about all of that? Why did Jesus respond so harshly? Because this was a temptation that He really felt. It's the same temptation the devil used on Jesus in the wilderness and Jesus' response is almost exactly the same:

*Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me." "Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.'" Matthew 4:8-10 (NLT)*

What was the temptation? To avoid the cross. To avoid storming the Gates-Of-Hell. To avoid the one thing that would redeem me and you. If you don't think this was a very real

temptation to Jesus then you haven't read the gospels closely. And that's why Jesus responds the way He does- which must have seemed so surreal, don't you think? I mean in one breath Jesus is changing Simon's name to Peter and telling Him that his words were straight from the Father in heaven and with the next breath Jesus is calling Peter, Satan and telling him he's not speaking the words of God but the words of the devil.

Ouch.

But it's not a huge break in rapport. I know it seems extremely harsh but one way to know how harsh something that Jesus says is or isn't is by looking at how the people react to His words. It was a different culture, time and language (and we're a couple of steps away from this story because Jesus would have been speaking Aramaic and that was translated into Greek which then was translated into English) so it's understandable that we'd have some issues trying to figure out what Jesus' meaning was.

So how does Peter respond? Well we don't get the immediate response but this is the very next thing Matthew says:

*Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Matthew 17:1-3 (NLT)*

Peter's still Jesus' guy. Peter was Jesus' lead disciple. Every Rabbi had one. They were the students that would jump in enthusiastically and try whatever the Rabbi was suggesting his students try. That's why Peter always seems to be so dumb with his responses- it was part of the learning process. He may not always be right but Peter is always willing to walk with his Rabbi through whatever learning process Jesus decides to use. The get-away-from-me-Satan thing doesn't seem to faze Peter. Jesus takes Peter (along with James and John) to the transfiguration and then once again warns them of what's coming:

*After they gathered again in Galilee, Jesus said, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead." And the disciples were filled with grief. Matthew 17:22-23 (NLT)*

Jesus tells them once again of what storming the Gates-Of-Hell is going to mean but this time Peter doesn't reprimand Him. I guess old dogs can learn new tricks, huh? Jesus continues to warn the disciples of what's coming and we see that this last 4 months of His time on earth before His crucifixion isn't just a time of preparation but also a time of galvanizing. Galvanizing for whom, Jesus or His disciples? Yes. Both. Not only is Jesus preparing His disciples- He's being prepared Himself. I think that's what the transfiguration (where He meets with Moses and Elijah on the top of a mountain way up north in Israel) was all about- the pep rally before the big game. One last opportunity for Jesus to be encouraged and blessed before His resolute march toward His own death.

And He did it all for you and me.

Jesus is truly awesome.

**Thursday Reflection:** We've been looking at the final months of Jesus' life and the urgency He seemed to sense as His journey to the cross came to an end. Today I want to spend some time looking at the final days before He would literally storm the Gates-Of-Hell. Just a few days before He would die on the cross something happened that we still celebrate to this day- we call it Palm Sunday:

*When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!" The Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Luke 19:36-40 (NLT)*

What's happening here? We'll talk about it more in the next couple of weeks but this is what was known in Israel as preparation day- the day they selected their lamb for their Passover feasts. Without recognizing that they were doing it, on that day Israel selected the final Passover Lamb who would die to take away the sins of the world. What a day that must have been for Jesus and His disciples. I can't even imagine. He rode down from the Mount of Olives across the Kidron valley and up into the Temple where He would flip some tables- again. We looked at the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple from John chapter 2 a few weeks ago. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell a similar story but their table flipping moment is found at the end of Jesus' ministry on this earth rather than the beginning.

Why does He do it again? Why now? Well, His job is to storm the Gates-Of-Hell. He's been doing that by attacking the effects of sin on this earth. He invites all of us to join Him in His assault on the damaging impact of sin on this earth and its inhabitants (not just people either- all of earths inhabitants) by waging war on injustice, prejudice, hatred, hunger, sickness, loneliness and death to name just a few:

*I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. John 14:12 (NLT)*

I have to admit- that verse kind of freaks me out. I don't know about you but I wouldn't consider what I do to be "greater works" than what Jesus did.

But He would.

Now I'm not just tooting my own horn here- if you're a follower of Jesus and have accepted your mission to storm the Gates-Of-Hell alongside of Him and the rest of His devoted followers than you are doing "greater works" than Jesus too. How is that possible? I have no idea. I'm not sure I'd believe it except it was Jesus who said it so I know it must be true.

But I struggle to understand it.

Here's as close as I can come to wrapping my brain around it at this point in my life: Jesus came to this earth to storm the Gates-Of-Hell- that meant He waged war against the effects of hell on this earth in the here and now. He showed us what it would look like to join His assault on hunger, sickness, death and more. When we join His war on hell

somehow we are doing "greater works" than He did. I can't explain it- all I can do is report on it. But Jesus also came to literally storm the Gates-Of-Hell. That meant that He had to die which meant that He needed the Chief Priests of Israel to push for His death.

And so the cleansing of the Temple. This was the straw that broke the camels back so to speak. And after He's done in the Temple He tells His shocked disciples one more time what His life has been leading up to:

*When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, "As you know, Passover begins in two days, and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." At that same time the leading priests and elders were meeting at the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, plotting how to capture Jesus secretly and kill him. Matthew 26:1-5 (NLT)*

And just a few days later Jesus would hang on the cross and begin the end game that His entire time on earth was about. Jesus didn't end up on the cross on accident. It wasn't a demonstration of things getting off track or going out of control- it was His plan from the beginning. Four months before He would literally storm the Gates-Of-Hell Jesus was in Caesarea Philippi at the mouth of the Gates-Of-Hell (remember the temple complex of the god Pan that we talked about on Tuesday?) with His disciples telling them that soon He would storm the literal Gates-Of-Hell. Peter didn't like it one bit and let Him know it. Jesus corrected Peter and continued to tell him and the rest of the disciples that it was coming.

Now it was almost here.

Tomorrow we'll look at what Jesus' literal storming of the Gates-Of-Hell looked like but for today maybe spend some time reflecting on what it means that we as followers of Jesus will do "greater works" than He ever did while He was on this earth.

**Friday Reflection:** This week we started looking at Jesus' mission to storm the Gates-Of-Hell. We started at Caesarea Philippi about 4 months before He would die on the cross. Then we looked at the final days of Jesus in Jerusalem and His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and then how He "cleansed the Temple". Today we'll look at the final hours of Jesus' mission to storm the Gates-Of-Hell.

On the night before He was killed Jesus gathered one last time with His disciples for one last Passover celebration with them. During that "Last Supper" Jesus instituted a ritual that we as His devoted followers have been celebrating for the last 2,000 years- today we call it "communion" or "the Lord's Supper". I would like to say it was one last moment to enjoy a quiet and meaningful moment with His most loyal followers.

I'd like to say that. But I can't. Because as we know not everyone there that night was a "loyal follower":

*While they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." Greatly distressed, each one asked in turn, "Am I the one, Lord?" Matthew 26:21-22 (NLT)*

Can you imagine how that must have felt to everyone? What a punch to the gut. But imagine how it must have felt to Jesus. He knew this had to happen but He was NOT looking forward to it. If it was me I think I would've kicked Judas out and refused to serve

him. But Jesus didn't do that. In fact we know that during the Last Supper Jesus washed the feet of all the disciples that were there.

Judas was there.

So Judas got his feet washed too. I've looked and looked for the version of the Bible that says "and lo it came to pass that Jesus did wash all the disciples feet that night... except the feet of Judas Iscariot who He skipped because Judas was a traitorous scumbag." I've searched for that version of the scriptures but I've never found it. Because it's not there. Jesus washed Judas' feet too. Hell is starting to close in on Jesus. Jesus is feeling it. So He takes everyone (except Judas who has now gone to find the Chief Priests so he can lead them to Jesus to be arrested) to Gethsemane- a place He liked to go to be alone and pray. I think He was expecting one last quiet and intimate moment alone with His Father but that is not what He found there:

*He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Mark 14:33-34 (NLT)*

What's going on? Jesus went to Gethsemane expecting to find one last experience of heaven but instead when He got there He found hell awaiting Him.

And it crushed Him. He started sweating drops like blood. He prayed three times that if there was any other way could they please do that instead of the way He knew was the only way to actually storm the Gates-Of-Hell. Three times He prayed that prayer. He knew there was no other way and yet He prayed three times for another way. Why? Because Jesus was fully God but He was also fully human. This is what we do. We beg God to step in and fix things. Even things we know that He can't just step in and fix.

Jesus is then arrested. He is tried. He is tortured. He is sentenced to die and He allows a puny human to stretch out His arms and nail Him to a cross. The Creator of the Universe stretched out His hands on that tree to answer the question, "how much does God love us?" And when it was over Jesus made a pronouncement:

*Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and... he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19:28-30 (NLT)*

It. Is. Finished.

In Greek, tetelestai.

What did He mean by that? What was "finished"? His mission. And what was His mission? To storm the Gates-Of-Hell. He came to "get the hell out of here"- literally. And as soon as He gave up His spirit that's exactly what He would do:

*Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. His body was killed, but he was made alive in the spirit. And in the spirit he went and preached to the spirits in prison who refused to obey God long ago in the time of Noah. 1 Peter 3:18-20 (NLT)*

What just happened? Jesus stormed the Gates-Of-Hell. Not some figurative Gates-Of-Hell- the real thing.

And because of that we will never have to experience the Gates-Of-Hell for ourselves. We still join Him on His mission to bring heaven down to this earth and to dispel the impacts of sin, death and hell on this world by loving the unloveable, forgiving the unforgivable and accepting the unacceptable. By living our lives as though the same three signs that Jesus lived His life are now the three signs we live our lives by: everybody's welcome, nobody's perfect and anything's possible.

Do that and you will join Jesus in His mission to storm the Gates-Of-Hell.

So what are you waiting for? Go love, accept and forgive like your life (and the lives of everyone God brings across your path) depends on it.

Jesus is awesome!