

THE PATH TO THE CROSS

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MESSAGE FROM SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2026

KEY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 16:13-18

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered 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 tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Opening Prayer

Begin by thanking God for His Word and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and reveal deeper truths about Jesus and His redemptive plan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. God's Redemptive Plan is All About You** - Everything Jesus did was motivated by love for humanity and the desire to restore us to our original position with God.
- 2. God Moves in Unexpected Places** - Jesus chose Capernaum over Jerusalem, fishermen over religious elite, and Gentiles alongside Jews – demonstrating that His kingdom isn't built on worldly power or influence.
- 3. The Hidden Wisdom of God** - Much of God's redemptive plan was hidden from the powers of darkness so they would unknowingly cooperate with His purposes.





4. **The Church on Offense, Not Defense** - Jesus declared the gates of hell would not withstand the church, positioning believers as advancing God's kingdom, not merely defending against evil.
5. **Jesus' Identity as the Foundation** - The church is built on the revelation of who Jesus truly is: the Christ, the Son of the living God and the power in His name.
6. **Who do you say I am?** After the main portion of Galilean ministry, Jesus takes the disciples to a remote pagan area to begin to reveal the fullness of his identity as the Messiah, Son of the living God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Understanding the Context

1. Geography and Ministry Strategy

- a. Why do you think Jesus avoided Tiberias (a city of power and influence) and instead made Capernaum His headquarters?
- b. What does this teach us about how God's kingdom operates differently from worldly kingdoms?

2. Prophecy Fulfilled

- a. Discuss the significance of Zebulun and Naphtali being the first tribes to fall to Assyria and also the first to receive the Messiah. What does this reveal about God's heart?

The Heart of the Gospel

3. Redemption for All

- b. The sermon emphasized that Jesus came for "the lost" — no requirements, no prerequisites. How does this challenge religious thinking or performance-based faith?
- c. Share an example from Scripture or your own life where God's grace reached someone "unexpected."

4. The Hidden Plan

- d. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-8. Why was it necessary for parts of God's redemptive plan to be hidden? How does this demonstrate God's wisdom?

Caesarea Philippi: Ground Zero

5. Confronting Darkness

- a. Jesus took His disciples to Caesarea Philippi – the "gates of hell" in their culture. Why would Jesus choose this specific location to ask, "Who do you say that I am?"
- b. What statement was Jesus making by declaring His church would be built in the presence of pagan worship and demonic strongholds?

6. Peter's Revelation

- a. What's the difference between the disciples calling Jesus "Son of God" during the storm (Matthew 14:33) versus Peter's declaration in Matthew 16:16?
- b. How do we receive revelation from God rather than just intellectual knowledge about Jesus?

The Church's Position

7. Gates That Cannot Withstand

- a. How does understanding "the gates of hell will not withstand the church" (rather than "prevail against it") change your perspective on spiritual warfare?
- b. What does it look like practically for the church to be on offense rather than defense?

8. Get Behind Me, Satan

- a. Why did Jesus respond so harshly to Peter's well-intentioned objection in Matthew 16:22-23?
- b. When have good intentions or human wisdom tried to derail you from God's purposes?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

- Where in my life have I been positioning myself defensively rather than advancing God's kingdom?
- Do I truly believe that Jesus' redemption is for me, regardless of my past or present circumstances?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Choose 1-2 of these to commit to this week:
- Study the "Least Expected" - Read through the Gospels this week and note every time Jesus ministers to someone unexpected or goes to an unexpected place. Journal what this reveals about His heart.
- Offensive Prayer - Instead of only praying defensively ("protect me from..."), pray offensively this week. Ask God where He wants you to advance His kingdom and push back darkness.
- Share Your Story - Like the woman caught in adultery, Matthew the tax collector, or Paul the persecutor – share with someone this week how Jesus redeemed your life and restored your dignity.
- Visit the Overlooked - Following Jesus' example of ministering in unexpected places, intentionally serve or minister to someone or someplace that others overlook this week.

CLOSING PRAYER

- Thank God for His redemptive plan that includes each of us
- Ask for revelation of who Jesus truly is, beyond intellectual knowledge
- Pray for boldness to advance God's kingdom and confront darkness
- Intercede for those who feel disqualified or "too far gone" to experience God's grace
- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal where your group can take offensive action for the kingdom

NEWS & EVENTS

Scan QR code for Upcoming Events, News, Giving and more!
<https://linktr.ee/cornerstonejc>

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- Pastor Andrew is starting a series today through Easter called "The Path To The Cross" These messages will follow the steps of Jesus through pivotal moments leading to the cross and beyond.
- Think of family, friends & co-workers that you can invite to our Easter services & events!
- Easter Communion, Easter Egg Hunt (Volunteers needed!) & Resurrection Sunday!
- If you've never been Water Baptized, sign up
- Intro to Cornerstone Life registration is open

