

“Guilt, Shame and the Death of Jesus”
 Pastor Sam Richards
 7 April 2024—Eastertide Sunday 2
 Texts: Matthew 16:13 - 17:19

Matt. 16:13-14: There are two occasions in Peter’s life that are particularly embarrassing—productive of guilt and shame!—that I would have us consider: first there is the matter of his faulty doctrine of the messianic plan (this occurs in Matthew 16). The second is his self-assured bravado (**I am ready to go to prison and to death with you**—when he does neither and ends up denying Jesus three times). We being with Jesus on break, near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks the disciples what the buzz is on His identity: **Who do men say that the Son of Man is?** Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, a title lifted out of Daniel 7:13. The responses are either John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Of course that is inaccurate. And odd given the family relationship between the two (they are cousins) and the historical interactions recorded between the two (with John baptizing Jesus). And John was beheaded as a party favor to Salome, leaving Jesus as the survivor. But Jesus follows up with: **But who do you say that I am?**

16:16 And Simon Peter answers, **You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.** And for this response Peter is promoted to the head of the classes and he receives lots of glowing affirmation—probably not the best thing for a man prone to boldness, and even boasting. **Blessed are you, Simon Peter, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but the Father who is in heaven.** The implication is that the Son of God and the Holy Spirit were not the revealers of this truth, but God the Father! And that Peter had the capacity of spiritual perception and this capability resulted in his class promotion. Here’s the affirmation: **You shall be known as Peter, the rock, and on this rock (the confession that Jesus is the Son of God) I will build my church** (it is an error to posit that Peter as a person is the foundation—rather faith in Jesus as God’s beloved Son is!). And the faith implied here is not an abstract faith, rather it is a personal faith in Jesus. Furthermore:

- The gates of Hades/hell shall not prevail against the church—rather the church will press against hell’s gates until they are eliminated in the final judgment.
- Peter will receive **the keys of the kingdom of Heaven** which means all the realms of creation over which God rules supremely—the church will have authority.
- **What’s bound on earth shall be bound in heaven**—throughout all the realms of creation—**and whatever you loose shall be loosed everywhere!**

This, in brief, is the church’s mandate and refers to spiritual matters such as sin debt, transgressions, bondage and soul liberty (or true freedom)—and all this aimed at the full restoration of all things. Now these things are specifically related to Peter’s promotion which, in turn, extends to all who believe in the Lord Jesus as the Son of the living God. However, we see that Jesus commands all the disciples to secrecy, saying, **Tell no-one that He is the Christ.**

Evidently this restriction, or gag order, is time-sensitive because the day would come when this truth was to be shouted from the rooftops, and roadways as at the triumphal entry. Something similar occurs in Mark’s gospel; and is called the “Markan secret,” but both gospels share this strategic posture of time sensitive release—just as some things were not going to be clear until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. For, as we move forward, we are impressed with the disciples’ lack of understanding with regard to Jesus’ “kingship” and this in a setting where the Romans were extra sensitive about claims to kingship—given that they were politically promoting Caesar as a divine/supreme king over the entire world.

Not only is this important as background information, the promotion of Peter is critical in our assessments of Peter's manifest limitations (imaginatively speaking); he simply could not wrap his brain around a Jewish messiah who suffers, dies and rises again, on the third day. Royal King David did no such thing! And given Peter's rapid fall from grace over this doctrinal matter (the suffering servant), his demotion so to speak, which is precipitated by this precise misconception! *Redemptive suffering is this Messiah's path to spiritual victory and return to glory! It is just what He came to do.* So when Peter asserts, **This shall not happen to you**—the anointed One, the King, the Son of the living God—he was entirely wrong. He thought the path to the throne lay through power, the conquest of one's enemies, through military prowess and the elevation of Israel to her former glory. *He was utterly unaware of how earthly, or worldly this expectation actually was—it was secular, had earthy roots in carnal thinking and with this Peter presumes to rebuke the Lord!?* It is well that Peter offered this rebuke privately (v. 22), still the Lord turns and says, **Get thee behind me, Satan.** Ouch. Peter is dramatically put in his place for relying on worldly wisdom—all about politics and worldly power plays and nothing from heaven, not revelation.

Peter, who had moments before been basking in the glow of the Lord's praise, is dumbstruck ("How could I be so right, and now so wrong?" I would simply observe that his ignorance was on display in both.) *He would have been, humanly speaking both shamed and embarrassed.* He didn't admit his error. Nor did he wisely follow up with, "Thank you, Lord, for correcting my error. Is there anything else that you would wish to share with your servant on this score?" Or, "I see that your approach to messiahship is rather different from what we have been thinking it ought to look like. Please tell us more—helps understand the differences so that we might better explain it to others." This strategy is called "disarming your critic" and it is very effective because you both honor the person in authority and, with some humility, present yourself as teachable. It's a good skill to utilize at work and not just when you are talking things over with God. By failing to acknowledge Christ's authority, Peter set himself up for embarrassment—it would not be the last time. He could have simply said, "Lord, Thou knowest" and not lost face. Such an attitude will always serve us well.

16:24-27:....Follow-ship is addressed here: **If anyone would come after Me, let him first deny himself . . . take up his cross** (that is embrace suffering at redemptive, purposeful and significant in follow-ship—treating suffering with drugs, or as something to arbitrarily rejected as bad—is spiritually problematic). First, follow-ship never questions the leadership of Christ (**He goes before, He leads His sheep forth**) And it is massively counterintuitive (especially in a therapeutic culture which treats first and thinks later—about adverse effects, unintended consequences and unanticipated outcomes). We are coached to lose our lives to find them . . . especially we are to consider losing our lives for His sake. That's alarming. Yes, it may cost you your life, so, count the cost, and do it anyway. That's what Jesus says! Jesus urges us to protect and protect our souls above our lives, our physical existence. Why, because the life you may lose, this physical existence is nothing compared to the life you may gain through dying! Exchange for heaven, choose heaven, or up as the greatest and do not choose what is less, or least, or little. IN other words, strive to maintain the right sense of proportion *because the whole world is not worth even a single soul, your soul.* **Do not trade your soul lightly as if it were nothing.** Is not Manhattan worth more than a chest of glass beads?! All that glitters is not gold, friends. Make no bargains with the devil! Be more wise and shrewd—not naive, foolish and stupid. I think this is what we mean by declaring that Christ has become wisdom for us. Love most what matters most. Note those things which pass away, which turn to ashes, and, turning from them, seek rather solid gains, eternal rewards—things stored for us in heaven!—where things do not corrode, rust, perish . . . or even get stolen. If you are by faith a member of the

kingdom then live as a kingdom person. There are no plebes in heaven, all royal sons and daughters—at least that is what our King declares.

16:21 and 17:1: Back in verse 21 we read how Jesus began **to show them that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things, be killed and rise again.** This approach, demonstration, I think carries both the atonement doctrine and, as it appears to be carried on for nearly a week (**after six days**), also frames the transfiguration. Jesus goes there for prayer, with fasting and with a purpose to “demonstrate” something to the three disciples of their future, glorious state; He is going to show them resurrection reality (in Himself transfigured and in Moses and Elijah) who show up. In their glorified bodies—fully alive and really present—in a heavenly vision. Call it foreshadowing, or a foretaste of what’s to come, the three are introduced to the realms of glory on the top of Mount Hermon (most likely) so that when Jesus appears in His glorified body they would have some idea of what they were encountering. They had seen Lazarus, the widow of Nain’s son and Jairus’ daughter—all raised from the dead—but those were only current personages. Now they are witnesses personages from other ages and times—now that’s instructive. I found it very striking that neither Moses nor Elijah needed any introduction—that’s how it will be. Jesus transfigured was also new to them; he showed them the Son of Man!

17:5 **And God spoke from a bright cloud, saying, This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well-pleased, Heed Him.** Now they saw why Moses was there (this was the One of whom he prophesied) and Elijah was there also (so they would see the differences between the two of them). Perhaps it was more about that disclosure as to the real identity of Jesus than it was about the Law and the Prophets, although it was about the fulfillment of that as well! After they saw such things, Jesus brings them gently back to everyday reality on the mountain tops—the demonstration was over. They had seen what Jesus was talking about! **Arise, do not be afraid.** And they were commanded to keep the things they had seen to themselves on the way down the mountain. Now I submit to you that all of this perfectly fits with “the test” which waited them at the foot of the mountain where a demon-possessed boy, a rare, difficult (and probably some felt untreatable case) awaited exorcism. This circumstance was so dire and so extreme (many times the demons had tried to kill the boy by water and by fire) that those who concocted the encounter felt certain that this would defeat the disciples and prove Jesus a charlatan—probably Jewish exorcists had attempted deliverance before this confrontation. Jesus says, **This kind only comes out by fasting and prayer**—so it is above wonderful that Jesus had been fasting and praying on the mountain (by implication) with His disciples so that they were combat ready when they arrived on the scene! It cannot be mere coincidence that the following portion of scripture is another prophecy of His death and resurrection—another even surrounded by fasting and prayer (as the grieving disciples were doing for Jesus’ three days in the tomb!). Still, if we stay in the moment, we see that the opposition to Jesus is stiffening (the scribes confronting His disciples openly in power encounters) and the cases brought forward are exceedingly difficult.

Mark 9:26-27; Matt. 17:18 (parallels) Mark reports that after the exorcism that the boy became so like a corpse that people concluded he was dead. So Jesus took a dead person by the hand and raised him from the dead. That the boy died is indirectly supported by the thematic unity of the whole narrative beginning with Peter’s confession. There is a focus on resurrection such that raising him from the dead as in Mark is mostly a demonstration of divine power to raise the dead. This is the more difficult readings because the question then becomes how could Jesus with power over death actually be subject to death itself ***unless the incident were intended to foreshadow the final overthrow of death, with victory over the grave and a breaking of the power of sin—in Christ’s resurrection?!*** When the sinless One was put to death, the reign of death was absolutely ended.

Matt. 26:34; Luke 22:34 (parallel): This is where Matthew records Peter being told, **Before the cock crows** (Palestinian roosters crow at midnight!) **you will have denied me thrice**. This occurs just prior to the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane which Luke confirms. Peter is very sure of himself: **I am ready to go to prison and to death with you**—but he does neither. He denies, flees and hides instead. This is just as shameful as getting the whole messianic program wrong. The earlier doctrinal error is here compounded with personal betrayal and abandonment. Well, might Jesus question if Peter loved Him more than these, whether the “these” meant the fish, the other disciples, or at all in the last scene from the Gospel of John.

If Peter’s heart was to love and be loved by Jesus—and we have no basis to doubt that such was the case!—then how is he to get over the mountains of guilt and shame, embarrassment and remorse, that stand in his way? Because, in truth, our situations may be much like his. It is not simply that we sin, rather it’s that we keep sinning the same sin—how embarrassingly dumb, stupid and futile. We sin and stand by, hang our heads and sheepishly say, “I don’t seem to be able to stop doing this.” We coddle our pet sin, the one that we favor, and rationalize that it’s okay, normal, acceptable *when we know no sin is any of those things*. We carry on brashly as Peter, so self-assured that we’re doing fine, that judgment will tarry (God either doesn’t see, take notice or record anything—we say). And He sees, notices and records it all. Such behavior should make the Peters amongst us blush! *But it doesn’t, when it comes to our sin we have no shame*. We can relate to Paul’s anguished, **who can rescue me from this body of death** (Romans 7:24)? We are sometimes disposed to view ourselves as “helpless wretches” before the addictive power of sinning.

I close with the remedy, beloved; it is the Lord Jesus Christ. His presence, His appearing, His power and His grace are the remedy. They are sledge hammer blows to iniquity, to the shackles of our sin—struck against the anvil of His righteousness. Hear this, all that’s needed to be done has been done by Him, once for all. The blood of the atonement cleanses, purifies, straightened, untwists, underlies and sanctifies as surely today as ever! It still cancels, and abolishes wickedness such that none of the schemes of evil can prevail against us if we are with Him. That drawing near is how we escape; that is how the key is turned in the lock of our prison doors—we do not have to remain inmates of sin anymore! Christ sets us free, and sets us free again until we learn to master all that would enslave, degrade or destroy us. Peter had but to look to Jesus and say, **Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you**. I say, trust in what He knows of you. Believe in the power of the resurrection and forgiveness, acquittal and pardon come pouring forth from the fountains of eternal life. Guilt is dissolved, shame flees at the approach and at the name of Jesus—call out of Him it is never vain, or too late. We are like Joshua of old. Our filthy garments, sin stained and vile, have been taken from us. Do not put them back on! Rather don the robes of Chris’s righteousness, imbued with His redeeming love, and get yourself to the banquet. Christ is holding a place for you! Fill it. For this you have been made pure. For this you are looking good and you are beautiful to Him because you have washed in the blood of the Lamb. Rejoice.

Amen