

Sermon Title: “**Upon This Rock**”

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Matthew 16:13-19

Introduction



As we approach the Christian tradition of observing *the Easter weekend*, we can at times get lost in the motions. Traditions can be helpful when they spur us to continue to keep our hand in His, and they can also be damaging when we allow them to become empty or the means to an end in and of themselves. *This final week of Jesus' earthly ministry begins with **Palm Sunday**, which is rich with Biblical prophecy finding fulfillment in Jesus.* God makes it clear as the stage has been set, that this is indeed His Son and the chosen heir to the Throne of His Kingdom that will know no end. Yet, how Jesus would conquer, and reign were not clearly understood by those celebrating Him in the moment.

This message is an invitation to trust Jesus, even when things do not make sense, face our fears, and continue to stand upon this rock He alone is! Confusion touches everyone as God's Kingdom continues to come into the world, and people must face and answer the question- just who is Jesus Christ? *As we trust His **leading into** the conversation, we must trust His **work through** it as well.*

I. **Ground Zero- Facing Our Fears (Deuteronomy 3:1-6)**

*“Next we turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan with his whole army marched out to meet us in battle at Edrei. The Lord said to me, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.” So the Lord our God also gave into our hands Og king of Bashan and all his army. We struck them down, leaving no survivors. At that time we took all his cities. There was not one of the sixty cities that we did not take from them—the whole region of Argob, Og's kingdom in Bashan. All these cities were fortified with high walls and with gates and bars, and there were also a great many unwallled villages. We completely destroyed them, as we had done with Sihon king of Heshbon, destroying every city—men, women and children.” -**Deuteronomy 3:1-6 NIV***

Having recently been delivered from Egyptian bondage and the wrath of Pharaoh by the Lord's Mighty Hand, the Nation of Israel stood upon the borders of a land God had promised to their forefather Abraham. Now, more than a promise, their faith was about to become sight. However, it was also here that the Nation could not see past their fears, allowing the giants of

the land to overshadow the power of God in their lives. Moses records their response when they sent twelve spies in to bring back word of the obstacles between them and God's promises.

"But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

-Numbers 13:31-33 NIV

What I want us to note is that the *perception* the people had on themselves was then *projected* upon those who were against them. They felt small, inferior, and insignificant before the giants of the land and then projected this as the reality they lived and made life decisions by. *When we take our eyes off of God and look at ourselves, there will always be giants between us and what He promises to us.*

Seemed like comes from the Hebrew ***ayin***, which conveys of sense of *perception affecting reality*. Another text where this is used comes from Genesis, where the lies of the enemy changed the *perception* of what God said to Adam and Eve, and they then made life decisions that *affected* their life and relationship with God.

"When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves." **-Genesis 3:6-7 NIV**

Yet we serve a God who is our Father- patient, kind, full of mercy and faithful to lead and mature us. Though this present Nation forgot their God, there was hope for the next generation to rise and place their hand in His. The lesson God wanted them to realize is that in Him there is victory- outside of Him there is only defeat. They trusted Him at the beginning of the journey, they would need to continue to trust Him all the way through the Journey to lead them home.

This brings us to our text in *Deuteronomy 3*. Here God has pulled them back and is leading them in baby steps toward bigger promises. They must learn to trust God first with the smaller things, then the larger will fall in place. They must face their fears in His strength.

The road to Bashan was not an easy road trip for Israel. While the name ***Bashan*** means ***fruitful***, the potential would lie buried beneath the presence of the wicked King Og and his army filled with giants. Again, *promise* and *potential* would be in front of Israel. To own it would require them to keep placing their faith in Him and allow Him to flow His victory in and through them.

Bashan historically was known as *the place of the serpent*. Two of their cities called *Ashtaroth* and *Edrei* were considered gateways to the realm of the dead. God had literally led the Nation of Israel to the gates of Hell to face the power of sin and death head on; to face their fears in His

strength. This place of Bashan was also the place where traditionally the greatest atrocity between God and man had occurred. *Bashan* is **ground zero** for the defeat and ultimate victory humanity would experience.

“When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.” **-Genesis 6:1-6 NIV**

I often hear, *Pastor, how come the Bible sounds like Greek and Roman mythology?* When, the question really is, *Why does Greek / Roman mythology sound like the Bible?* There is much which our western minds struggle to accept, and many argue this is not a supernatural occurrence here between angels, demons, and humanity. I, as your pastor, argue that the supernatural is the only thing that makes sense both in this context and the rest of Scripture. *There is so much more going on in the world around us than what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears, dear Saints.* Let us see and hear the voice of Scripture!

The victory here would be God’s victory *in* and *through* Israel, and the totality of its reach- men, women and children- would affirm the devastating affect and reach of sin. I share the full text here to not shy away from what the Bible is saying- ***sin is horrific and devastating.*** To embrace it is to lead our spouse, children, and communities into defeat and the wrath of God.

God is the only hope Israel had then. He is the only hope they always ever had. And further, He is the only hope anyone will ever have to know victory from sin and death. This victory has a Name, and it is ***Jesus***. Which now brings us to the heart of this message.

II. Upon This Rock (Matthew 16:13-19)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. ” But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” 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 Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” **-Matthew 16:13-19 NIV**

Around 1600 years later we find Jesus in our text leading His Disciples to a place called *Caesarea Philippi*. This may seem unrelated as we read, but let’s pause a moment and take a

look at this place Jesus has taken His team. Throughout the Old Testament this was a place of Baal worship, believing this to be his mountain. Centuries later Alexander the Great would build the city still present in Jesus' day, boasting of a shrine to the Greek god Pan, which was the god of nature, the wild, and of shepherds. He is often portrayed as a man from the torso up with horns and his bottom was that of a goat. Later renamed by Herod's son Philip, this city also had a rich pool of water whose source was so deep, the pit was viewed as bottomless.

This is also the place believed historically to be where the events of Genesis 6 take place- with the rebellious angelic realm demonically interact with humanity birthing forth giants that would wage war against God and His people. And yes, this city was in the heart of the region referred to as Bashan.

Together, we come to see *Jesus is like His Father*, leading others to face their fears in His strength. God led Israel to Bashan, Jesus leads His Disciples to Caesarea Philippi- both required to face the very gates of hell and the enemy of their God. But just as God was teaching a nation to trust in His strength, Jesus is teaching 12 to trust in His Name. ***Small steps of faith lead to giant leaps for the Kingdom!***

Understanding where geographically Jesus led his Disciples helps us understand the power behind what He is doing. Jesus is not only maturing these 12 men, He is declaring in all the spiritual / angelic realm that He is here and He is about to do what has not been done before. When Jesus asks who He is in other eyes, they answer. *Then Jesus makes it very personal, asking who they say and believe that Jesus is?*

Peter steps up and answers that Jesus is the ***Messiah, and the Son of the living God!*** *He is the God who came to **save** humanity, not the angelic who came to help **defile** humanity.* This was not the result of Peter's own strength or wisdom but was God *in and through Him by the work of The Holy Spirit*. The victory we experience in Christ is always brought forth ***from the inside out***. Jesus led these men to face their ultimate fear- the place where the only hope they have is in Jesus. And it is here that Jesus affirms He will build His church- upon Himself as our rock, in the very place of defeat and fear, His Kingdom will rise!

The gates of Hades will not overcome it. This is a picture of the victory He is about to bring. It's not an assault of Jesus against Hell from the outside, but a conquering and victory that happens from the inside. Jesus Himself and Scripture attest this blueprint for our redemption,

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." **-Matthew 12:40 NIV**

"But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." **-Acts 2:24 NIV**

"But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took (led) many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who

descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)” -[Ephesians 4:7-10 NIV](#)

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water; and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

-1 Peter

3:18-22 NIV

It is upon the rock that once stood as a beacon of defeat that Christ now transforms it into a platform for victory. In Christ, when we declare He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the keys of the Kingdom **bind** the efforts to the enemy and sin and **loosen** the blessed promises of God. For in Christ every promise toward us is **Yes and Amen!**

As we conclude this message, we are invited to recognize God will always lead us to face our fears. God will lead us to our own ground zero’s.

When we choose to listen to the enemy, those *fears* **become giants** that stand between us and God’s promises.

When we choose to stand in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, *fear flees*, retreating from God’s saints as we step *further up and furth in* to our inheritance- **the eternal Kingdom of God!**

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors (overwhelming victory) through him who loved us.” -[Romans 8:37 NIV](#)

It is **upon this rock** of Christ we stand- *all else is sinking sand!*