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# Follow Me: The Gospel of Matthew

## Victory Life Church

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Sunday, March 22, 2020 — Part 4, Confession, Cross, and Cost

### Introduction

**Matthew 16:13-28 (ESV)** '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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

There are incredibly deep and important questions we have in life: Who am I? Why am I here? What gives life meaning and purpose? Am I safe in this world? Here in this text we are at a major crossroads of Christian theology, the meaning of discipleship, and how we understand Christ's identity and purpose, and what that means for our identity and purpose in this life. Matthew has been building to this moment, and it delivers more than we can take in with only a few readings and sermons.

## Confession of Discipleship

**Matthew 16:15-18 (ESV)** 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.

Who do people say that Jesus is? There are many opinions and beliefs about Jesus. Jesus remains still a central figure in our world. But in an age of relativism, there is a great variety as to who people think Jesus is. For about the last 130 years or so, the Western world realized it couldn't get rid of Jesus, so many scholars decided to remake Jesus in a more digestible image — as a great teacher of spiritual truths, as a failed zealot of cultural reformation, as a justice advocate cut down in His prime by the big, bad empire, as a philosopher of timeless wisdom. But Jesus cuts to the heart of it with a far more important question directed straight at us, "Who do YOU say that I am?"

Before we can understand who we really are, we must first be asked a more important question, "Who do you say Jesus is?" Who you confess Jesus to be is the most important thing about you. It frames everything about your identity and purpose.

The answer to this question frames the confession that our community of faith is built upon. Peter gets it right, "You are the Christ, Son of the living God." This confession defines us. Jesus is King, the Son of God.

"Messiah" (Hebrew for the Greek word "Christ", meaning "Anointed One") carries with it a long history of hopes and dreams. The Messiah would be the King from the line of David, whom God made a covenant with long before, who would liberate God's people from slavery and oppression, reconcile them to God, and restore them as the people of God in the world (2 Samuel 7, Psalm 2, Isaiah 9, 42, 49). In short, the Messiah was the answer we have waited for to heal human existence. Jesus as King is to say that we are not; that He is final authority on everything, and we live under His authority completely.

To confess Jesus as the King, fully human from the line of David, and fully God as the Father's Son is to see Him as the One who reveals both the character of God and human life as God intended it to be. But this confession of the gospel requires Divine illumination. "My Father in heaven has revealed this to you." We cannot make people believe in Jesus. Our evangelism that compels us to bring people into the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of us "convincing" people of Jesus. It is a matter of us "witnessing" of Jesus and allowing the Father to reveal Jesus to the ones we are witnessing to.

The confession of who Jesus is as Lord and our surrender to that revelation is the most important decision and confession we will ever make. This Divine revelation and surrendered confession is what Jesus blesses. Jesus blesses those, who like Peter, make this confession, and it is within that blessing that our new identity in Christ is

shaped. Jesus told Peter, “I say you are...” When we surrender our life to Jesus, confessing Him as Lord, He then tells us who we are.

This statement then reveals what Jesus sees as His vocation: build His church. “Church” (Greek word, “ecclesia”) means “called out ones.” Jesus is calling the world out of sin and death. He is building His people to become the ones whom “the gates of Hades” cannot prevail. Death does not have dominion over those who confess Jesus as Lord. It does not mean that there will be no pain or suffering for the Church, it means that death does not have the final word for those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Here is where we get to the really hard stuff: our assumptions about what we think this should mean for us.

### Cross of Discipleship

**Matthew 16:22-23 (ESV)** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. **For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.**"

Was it bad that Peter wanted to protect Jesus? Peter had major assumptions about what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah. In his mind (and in the mind of everyone else), Jesus being the Messiah meant that he was supposed to defeat the Romans. But Jesus sees that His mindset and perspective is not rooted in the kingdom of heaven, but of man.

Jesus knows exactly what it means for Him to be the Messiah: He is fighting the real enemy who has enslaved mankind — the satan, sin, and death. To fulfill His vocation and purpose, it will require Him to suffer and die, giving His life in sacrificial love for us. It is a cross-shaped vocation. To be Christ-centered also means we must be cross-centered.

Our world is perfectly designed to keep ourselves at the center of our universe. We tend to make our hopes and happiness what we build our lives on. What we can get from this life is often how we define meaning for our lives. We tend to make security and control our highest priorities and use money, or power, or relationships to get it. This is where we often make Jesus in our own image. We often expect Jesus to make our lives better on our terms by doing everything we want, making me happy by giving me all that I want. This is us interpreting Jesus through the lens of culture rather than looking critically at culture through the lens of scripture.

### Cost of Discipleship

**Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV)** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself** and **take up his cross** and **follow me**. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses his life for my sake will find it**.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

When in the gospels do you see a Jesus who's purpose is to give anyone all that they want when they want it? Virtue and character are shaped in the furnace of trial. Avoiding it will cost you your character. Jesus is not primarily interested in your happiness, but in your transformation and holiness. He is interested in your preparation for eternity — the new heavens and the new earth. And Jesus knows that self-centeredness is demonically inspired.

Jesus invites us to image life in the kingdom of heaven as different than what the world considers meaning and purpose in life to be. Jesus recognizes that it is self-centeredness that has made a mess of our lives and world and that we must learn how to deny our selfish desires and follow Him in a life shaped by the cross, not shaped by the world. As long as we are grasping at what we can get out of life, Jesus says our life will be lost. But if we lose our life in open-handed sacrifice in self-giving love, we will find the truest and deepest meaning in life.

"Our society is not a community radiant with the love of Christ, but a dangerous network of domination and manipulation in which we can easily get entangled and lose our soul."<sup>1</sup> ~ Henri Nouwen

This is our confession — that Jesus is Lord and to say that He is Lord is to say that we are not. It means that we are not in control and that we will follow Jesus wherever He leads us, that our life is not our own, to follow Jesus is to live like Him in the way of self-giving love. My self is no longer central in my life, Christ is.

"All [the Church] needs to fulfill Christ's purposes on earth is the quality of life he makes real in the life of His disciples."<sup>2</sup> ~ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*

Our behavior and love is dictated by the covenantal relationship with Jesus who lives in and through us.

## Conclusion

**Galatians 2:20 (NLT)** My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Galatians 2:20 (AMP)** I have been crucified with Christ [that is, in Him I have shared His crucifixion]; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, pg. 11

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, Introduction, pg. xiv

the body I live by faith [by adhering to, relying on, and completely trusting] in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Jesus gave His life in self-giving, sacrificial love for us, now we, for the sake of Christ, give our lives in sacrificial love for others. It is neath easy nor convenient, it is costly to live for Christ, but it is the path to meaning and purpose, not just in this life, but also in the life to come. It is what living in the kingdom of heaven and following Jesus is truly about.