

The Son of Man Shall Rise Again!

Matthew 16:13–28

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Introduction: Where We Are in Matthew

In our passage today, Matthew 16:13–28, we find Jesus making his first prophetic pronouncement of his death and resurrection — a fitting text for Resurrection Sunday. We are here also because this is simply where we are in our study of the Gospel of Matthew. For the past four years, during the seasons between Christmas and Easter, we have been working through Matthew together, and today’s passage brings this year’s study to a close.

We began the year in Chapter 13, a chapter of parables, and at its end we watched Jesus be rejected by the people of Nazareth — his own hometown. That rejection was not an isolated incident. It became one of the recurring themes threading through the entire Gospel. We saw it again in Matthew 15, when Pharisees came down from Jerusalem to interrogate Jesus over the washing of hands. We saw it again in Matthew 16, when the Pharisees and other religious leaders demanded a sign from him — this, after Jesus had just fed four thousand people, including Gentiles who were openly praising the God of Israel. That theme of rejection will continue and finally culminate at the cross, when the crowds in Jerusalem will shout, “Crucify him.”

But running alongside these stories of rejection is a parallel current: stories of non-Jews — Gentiles — believing in and worshiping Jesus. We saw this in Matthew 15, when Jesus traveled to Tyre and Sidon, ancient Canaanite territory, and healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman, calling her faith *great*. We saw it again when Jesus went to the Decapolis, the region of ten ancient Greek cities that faithful Jews despised because of three centuries of forced cultural assimilation — a place no self-respecting Jewish teacher would go. But Jesus went. He healed everyone brought to him. And at the end of three days, he fed four thousand people, and they glorified the God of Israel.

And then, after the religious leaders respond to all of this extraordinary grace poured out on Gentiles by demanding a sign, Jesus goes to the most overtly pagan place he could possibly go: Caesarea Philippi.

The Setting: At the Gates of Hell

That is where our passage opens. Matthew 16:13 begins simply: “*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi.*” The name itself is strange — a city named after two rulers from two very different kingdoms, iron and clay pressed together. *Caesarea* means Caesar: a temple to the Roman Emperor had been built here so that he could be worshiped as a god. *Philippi* carries the name of Philip, the last son of Herod the Great to hold rule in this region — the final remnant of the Jewish Hasmonean dynasty that had become the kingdom of Herod.

But before it was renamed Caesarea Philippi, this place was known as Pnias — named after the Greek god Pan, the god of chaos, fear, and uncontrolled frenzy, from whose name we get our word *panic*. At the time of Christ, many gods were worshiped here, all crowded together at this single site. There was an altar to Zeus. There were niches and holes carved into the cliff face, each holding its own idol. But at the center of everything stood a temple built into a cave, and before that cave lay a pool with no visible bottom — most likely fed by an underground river whose current was strong enough to pull beneath the surface anything thrown into it. The people of that day believed this pool was a gate to Hades, an opening into the realm of the dead. Animals were cast in as sacrifices and sucked under by the current, believed to be carried down into the world of the dead.

This is the place Jesus comes to. The most pagan, idolatrous, god-saturated location in the entire region. A place of panic and chaos, of emperor worship and sacrificial pools. A place where every surface, every altar, every carved niche announced the same claim: *These are the gods of the world. This is where power lives.* And here, surrounded by all of that, Jesus turns to his disciples and asks a question that must have stopped them cold.

The Question: Who Is the Son of Man?

“*Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*” (v. 13).

The title itself matters enormously. When Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, he is reaching back to Daniel 7 — and that connection is crucial. In Daniel’s vision, four great beasts rise up out of the sea, out of the waters of chaos. These beasts represent the great empires and powers of the world — kingdoms that claw their way to dominance through violence, terror, and brute force. If there was any place on earth that visibly embodied those beasts rising from the water, it was Caesarea Philippi, with its bottomless pool and its crowded altars to the gods of chaos and empire.

But in Daniel’s vision, after the beasts, something entirely different appears: not another beast, but *one like a Son of Man* — someone human, like us — who approaches the Ancient of Days and receives a kingdom. And this kingdom is unlike all the others. It is not seized through

panic, violence, and domination. It comes through incarnation, through submission, through atoning sacrifice. And unlike the beast-kingdoms, it will stand forever.

So picture the scene. Jesus is standing at the very place where beasts rise from the waters of Hades, surrounded by idols and altars and a temple to a god-emperor. And he asks: *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?*

The disciples answer: “*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets*” (v. 14). Then Jesus sharpens the question: “*But who do you say that I am?*” (v. 15).

Notice what Jesus has done. In asking the question, he is already answering it. He is the Son of Man — not Elijah, not Jeremiah, not one of the prophets, but the one Daniel saw receiving an eternal kingdom. And it is Peter who breaks the silence: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

Jesus responds:

“*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.*” (vv. 17–18)

Where is Jesus standing when he says this? He is standing at the gates of hell. The bottomless pool is right there. The beasts are all around. And he says: *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* He gives Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the authority to bind and to loose — keys that Peter himself will describe in 2 Peter 1 as faith, repentance, and the knowledge of Christ.

The Confession and the Cross

But here is where I think something important surfaces. I am not sure Peter actually understood the full weight of what he had just confessed. The reason I think so is what Jesus does immediately after. First, in verse 20, he strictly charges the disciples to tell no one that he is the Christ. Why? Because while the disciples may have the right confession — *Jesus is the Christ* — they do not yet know what kind of Messiah he is. And so Jesus proceeds to show them.

“*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.*” (v. 21)

This is the kind of King the Son of Man is. He receives his kingdom not through violence, fear, and force — the way of the beasts — but through suffering, death, and resurrection.

Peter will not hear it. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him: “*Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you*” (v. 22). And Jesus turns and says to him: “*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*” (v. 23).

The word *Satan* here is pointed and deliberate. Peter is doing exactly what the crowds once tried to do when they wanted to make Jesus king by force — and exactly what Satan himself tried to do in the wilderness. They all want the same thing: a king without a cross. A kingdom without suffering. Power without death. Glory without resurrection. But that is not the way of the Son of Man.

And then Jesus does something that must have silenced them completely. He tells his disciples — and by extension, all who would ever follow him — that this same path is the one they must walk.

“*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*” (v. 24)

The Call: Denying Self and Taking Up the Cross

To be precise about what Jesus means here: the death he is calling for is the death of self — or, to say it another way, the death of the beast in you.

Think back to Daniel’s vision. The beasts rise from the waters of chaos. They claw their way upward through violence, self-assertion, and domination. They consume. They demand. They will wound others rather than be wounded themselves. And that is exactly how sin works in us. It is the self that insists on its own way, the self that craves recognition, the self that wants a kingdom on its own terms. Peter wanted a king without suffering. The crowds wanted a revolution without a cross. Satan offered Jesus the kingdoms without his death. And if we are honest, we want the same — a Christian life that is comfortable, safe, and costs us nothing.

But Jesus is standing at the gates of hell, in the shadow of every beast that has ever risen from the waters of chaos, and he says: *This is how my kingdom comes. Through suffering. Through death. And through the resurrection.* And then he looks at each of us and says: Take up your cross and follow me.

Think about what that actually means. Pride and ego must die. Selfish dreams must be surrendered. The hunger to be recognized must be crucified. Long-held grudges and grievances

must be taken to the cross. Everything in you that claws and grasps and demands — that is what Jesus is asking you to nail down.

Two Promises for the Road

But Jesus does not issue the call and leave us with nothing. He gives two reasons — two promises — for why anyone would ever want to walk this road of dying to self.

The first promise is **life**. Verse 25: “*Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*” Notice the word: *will find it*. Which means that everything you have been straining toward, everything you have longed to become, every kind of life you have ever truly wanted — it is only found on the other side of surrendering to Christ and following him.

And the life you find when you lose it for Jesus’ sake is unlike anything the beasts of the world can offer. It is a life that does not need to hide. A life that can sit quietly in the lowest seat and feel no shame. A life that can be wronged and not be destroyed by it. A life that can give and give and give, and not run empty. A life that loves without keeping score. A life so rooted in Christ that the beasts of the world no longer have anything to grab onto. A life that is finally free, finally fully alive, and finally home.

To this promise, Jesus adds what I can only call a no-brainer question: “*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?*” (v. 26). Only a fool would cling to the things of this world if he truly understood what is being offered.

The second promise is **justice**. Verse 27: “*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.*” Jesus is promising that the cross is not the end of the story. He is promising that a judgment is coming — a judgment administered by the Son of Man himself, to whom all authority has been given.

Let that land for a moment. Many of us are carrying wounds that have never been acknowledged, wrongs that were never made right, things buried deep that cannot easily be named. Jesus is promising that he sees. He knows. And a day is coming when justice is administered by the only one fully qualified to administer it — perfectly, completely, without error.

Everything done in darkness will be brought into the light. Every cruelty that went unanswered will be answered. Every wrong that was never made right will be made right. Every person who used their power to harm the powerless will give a full account. Every life surrendered for

Jesus' sake that the world scorned will be vindicated. Every act of love that went unnoticed — he noticed. Every act of quiet obedience — seen.

The Proof: The Empty Tomb

Perhaps someone here is wondering: How do I know any of this is true? Jesus answers that too. Verse 28: *“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.”*

And six days later, he kept his word. Peter, James, and John went up a mountain, and they saw it with their own eyes — the Son of Man transfigured in glory, speaking with Moses and Elijah about his kingdom. But that transfiguration was only a foretaste. A glimpse. A down payment on something still to come.

The real proof arrived on a Sunday morning.

When Jesus was crucified, the disciples scattered and hid. I imagine they were convinced it was over. The beasts had won. The Son of Man was dead. The gates of hell had swallowed him. The empire had done what empires do, and the cross had done what crosses do.

Except it was not over.

Because on the third day, early that Sunday morning, the Son of Man — the one who receives his kingdom not through violence and force but through incarnation, submission, and atoning sacrifice — walked out of the tomb. Death could not hold him. The gates of hell could not prevail against him. Every beast that had snarled and gloated over that cross was silenced.

And here is what that empty tomb means for you today.

It means the promises he made are true. When Jesus says that whoever loses his life for his sake will find it, we know he means it — because he lost his life, and he rose again. He went into the tomb and came out the other side more alive than death could comprehend. And that resurrection is not only his story. It is the story for everyone who follows him. When you surrender your life into his hands, you are surrendering it to the hands of the one who has already defeated death.

The empty tomb also tells us that justice is coming. How do we know? Because the one who was unjustly tried, falsely condemned, and brutally executed — God vindicated him. The Father answered the cross with an empty tomb. What was wrong was made right. The resurrection was itself an act of divine justice, and therefore a guarantee of a justice still to come — a day when every beast will give account, and every life surrendered for Christ's sake will be vindicated before angels and all creation.

The Invitation

So today, on this Sunday morning, as we celebrate and remember the resurrection of our Lord, hear again what Jesus spoke when he stood at the gates of hell.

Take up your cross. And follow him.

Because the tomb is empty. Death has been defeated. The gates of hell did not hold him. The beasts did not win.

The Son of Man lives. And because he lives, everything he said is true.

Lose your life — and you will find it. Suffer with him — and you will rise with him. Trust him — and you will not be put to shame.

Christ has died for sinners. Christ is risen in victory. The kingdom is coming. And the invitation stands.

Take up your cross, and follow him — into life.

In a moment we will sing together, and then you will walk out of these doors and back into your life. But before you do, I want to ask you one question — the same question Jesus asked at the gates of hell.

Who do you say that he is?

Not who your parents said. Not who this church says. *Who do you say that he is?*

If today is the day that question becomes personal — if you have never surrendered your life to the risen Son of Man, or if you walked in here this morning carrying something that needs to go to the cross — I want to invite you to respond. Come and speak with me or one of our deacons before you leave. Make that decision quietly right where you sit. But do not leave here the same way you came in. The tomb is empty. The invitation is open. Today is a good day to follow him.