

The Echo in the Echo Chamber Matthew 16:13-20

Moving from borrowed faith to a personal, dangerous confession.

The Noise of the Crowd

Good morning, if you were to open your phone right now and scroll through social media, or flip through the news channels, you would notice one thing very quickly: we live in an absolute explosion of opinions. Everyone has a take. Everyone is an expert on who someone else is, what they meant, and what they should do. We live in a world of borrowed opinions. We repeat what we read; we retweet what sounds clever; we form our identities around the consensus of whatever crowd we hang out with.

It is incredibly easy to live a life entirely built on what other people say.

Two thousand years ago, walking dusty roads on the northern edges of Israel, Jesus turned to His closest friends and asked a question that cut straight through that exact kind of noise.

He asked them: Who do people say that the Son of Man is?

The disciples were ready for that one. It was a safe question. It was a survey. They started throwing out the data they'd gathered from the crowds: "Well, Jesus, some say John the Baptist. Others say Elijah. Others say Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Notice how comfortable they were answering that first question. It's easy to talk about what other people think about Jesus. It's safe to treat religion like a sociological study.

But then, the atmosphere shifts. Jesus stops walking. He looks them in the eyes. The survey is over. And He drops the question that changes everything:

But what about you? Who do you say that I am?

To truly understand the weight of this moment, we have to look at where they were standing. Matthew explicitly tells us they were in the region of Caesarea Philippi.

Jesus didn't ask this question in the holy temple of Jerusalem. He didn't ask it in a cozy synagogue in Galilee. He took them to the absolute pagan capital of the region. Caesarea Philippi was built at the base of a massive, towering limestone cliff. Carved directly into the face of that rock cliff were shrines to Pan, the Greek god of nature and panic. Right next to it stood a gleaming white marble temple built by Herod the Great to worship Caesar Augustus as a god.

At the base of that giant rock wall was a deep, dark cavern flooded with water, which the locals called "The Gates of Hades." They believed it was the literal underworld entrance where their gods retreated for the winter.

Stand in the sandals of the disciples for a moment. You are looking at a terrifying backdrop of worldly power, ancient paganism, and imperial might. You are looking at a literal mountain of rock dedicated to the rulers and gods of this age.

Standing in front of it is a penniless, homeless rabbi from Nazareth, flanked by a few fishermen. And this humble rabbi points to Himself and essentially asks: Against all of this giant cultural canvas... who do you say I am?

The Danger of a Borrowed Faith: A Witness Story

Simon Peter steps forward. Driven by a flash of divine insight, he speaks the words that echo through eternity: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus looks at him and says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

Jesus was pointing out that Peter had finally stopped quoting the crowd. He had moved from a borrowed faith to a personal revelation.

Let me share a story about what happens when we make that same leap. A few years ago, I met a man named David. David grew up in a beautifully religious home. He knew all the right answers. If you asked him what the church taught about salvation, he could quote it. If you asked him what his parents believed, he could summarize it flawlessly. He was a master of answering the first question: Who do people say that Jesus is? He had a wonderful, borrowed faith.

But in his late twenties, David's life completely unraveled. His marriage fell apart, a business venture collapsed, and he found himself sitting in a stark, empty apartment, staring at the floor, gripped by a profound, suffocating darkness.

He told me, "I realized that the God of my parents couldn't save me. The songs I sang because everyone else was singing them couldn't hold me up. I was surrounded by a massive cliff of failure and anxiety—my own personal Caesarea Philippi—and the spiritual vocabulary I had borrowed from others felt completely useless."

In his desperation, David fell to his knees. For the first time in his life, he didn't pray a polite, scripted prayer. He looked into the darkness of his situation and cried out, "Jesus, I don't need to know who the preacher says you are. I need to know if you are real for me. Who are you to me right now?"

David told me that in the silence of that room, he didn't hear an audible voice, but he experienced a profound, undeniable wave of peace that defied all human logic. He met the

Living God in the ruins of his life. He told me, "That was the day my faith stopped being a family heirloom and became my actual oxygen."

He moved from repeating what "flesh and blood" had taught him, to receiving a revelation from the Father.

The Rock and the Gates of Hades

When Peter makes this confession, Jesus does something beautiful. He changes his name. "You are Simon... but now I call you *Petros* (a rock), and on this *petra* (this massive bedrock of truth), I will build my church."

Think about the brilliant imagery here. Jesus is looking at that massive limestone cliff of Caesarea Philippi—that giant monument to pagan gods and human empires—and He says, "You see that giant rock wall? It looks permanent. It looks terrifying. But it's crumbling. On the confession Peter just made—the truth that I am the King of Kings—I am going to build a completely different kind of rock. A community of believers. And the Gates of Hades—that dark cavern of death and fear right behind us—will not overcome it."

For centuries, we have misunderstood this verse. We often picture the Church sitting inside a fortress, holding the doors shut, hoping the devil doesn't break in. We think the gates of Hades won't overcome us means the church will survive the enemy's attacks.

But think about it: Gates do not attack. Gates are a defensive structure. Gates sit still.

Jesus isn't picturing a defensive, frightened Church. He is picturing an offensive Church! He is saying that the Church will march right up to the darkest, most broken places in our world—up to the gates of despair, depression, injustice, and death—and smash those gates down. The forces of darkness cannot hold back the advance of the living God!

It all hinges on how we answer the second question.

We cannot storm the gates of darkness with a borrowed faith. We cannot change our communities based on what our parents believed, or what our favourite author says, or what our church tradition dictates. The world is too loud, and the cliffs of life are too intimidating for a second-hand religion.

Jesus is bypassing the crowds today. He is bypassing your neighbour, your spouse, your pastor, and your friends. He is looking directly at you, in the midst of whatever trial, career pressure, or personal uncertainty you are standing in front of.

He looks at you and asks: "But what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

Is He just a good moral teacher to you? Is He just a Sunday morning routine? Is He just a historical figure you respect?

Or is He the Messiah? The Christ? The anchor of your soul, the driver of your career, the master of your relationships, and the Saviour of your life?

When you can look Him in the eye and say, "You are my King, the Son of the Living God," everything changes. Your identity changes, just like Simon's did. Your purpose changes. And you become a piece of the bedrock that the enemy cannot shake.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, clear away the noise of the crowd today. Deliver us from the comfort of a borrowed faith. Give us the courage to look at Jesus, to see Him clearly against the backdrop of this world's power, and to confess Him as our Lord, our Saviour, and our God. Build your church in us, and use us to push back the darkness in Jesus' mighty name, Amen.