

**West Valley Church**  
**Michael W. O'Neill**  
**04/19/20**

## **On This Rock:** **Part One: Between a Rock and a Hardhead**

Last week I started off talking about that auto accident I survived over 5 years ago, and about the “rocks” that served as ‘stones of remembrance’ for me of how God had worked in that situation. I should add that the state patrolman had personally said he was shocked that I survived at all, let alone without any broken bones, and the folks in the ER were amazed as well. It’s not that I got off scot-free; I have very little memory of the four months after, and I continue to deal with chronic headaches all the time. But when people ask me how I think I survived that accident, I tell them “three things: A great God, Toyota safety standards, and a hard head!”

I want to talk about someone else who had a hard head – someone from the Bible, and I want to revisit a story that I mentioned last week. It is a great story, and there is much more to be mined from it. It’s about Simon – the disciple that Jesus renamed “Peter” or “Petra” which means, “rock.”

Actually, this is the first in a series on Peter’s letters that we are calling “On This Rock.” I think there’s great value in our doing a series on this together, because Peter wrote his letters to Christians when they were going through a time of being separated from each other and the life that they were used to – although much worse than we are now. But it’s also good for us to see the transformation that took place in Peter’s life because he was a follower of Jesus and allowed the Holy Spirit to fill him and use him.

So let’s start with that pivotal moment when Peter made his great confession of faith, and we’re going to look at it from Mark chapter eight. So do me a favor: Get your Bible and open it to Mark 8. Go to verse 27, and I’m going to ask you to pause this video and read Mark 8:27-30, and then start this video again. Go ahead and read it now – Mark 8:27-30.

Great – thank you for doing that. Now first of all, let me give you a little context; the story right before this is about Jesus healing a blind man, and he has to do it in stages; at first the man isn’t totally healed, then he is. That story does a couple of things – one, it sets the stage for the passage you just read, because one of the key indicators that Jesus was the Messiah was that he would heal the blind. That was clear from Isaiah’s prophecies about the Messiah, like Isaiah 61:1-2. So right before the disciples get a chance to decide who they think Jesus is, Jesus gives them a huge hint by healing a blind man. But that story right before is intended to be juxtaposed, or laid alongside the story you read, because that first story parallels the disciples’ stories – they were blind, then their eyes were gradually opened, until finally being able to see clearly who Jesus was. Okay?

Next, at this point in the story, the shadow of the cross had fallen across Jesus’ path. Jesus was just six months away from his crucifixion, so it was imperative that the disciples knew

who Jesus was. Remember from the Palm Sunday message that the Jews' concept of the Messiah was mixed up; they believed the Messiah was going to be a supernatural political, nationalistic conqueror who would literally torture and destroy *everyone* – EXCEPT the Jews – until only the Jews were left to enjoy the revenge on their enemies. But Jesus was *nothing* like that, and time was short so Jesus needed to set them straight. By the way, the reason why in verse 30 Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ was to prevent people from trying to force him into being their idea of a king – or killing him before it was his time.

This short passage that you read has been called the key that unlocks the entire Gospel. It is the holy light bulb moment for Peter, at least, if not the others, and it was a BIG light bulb. There are three things I want us to see from this encounter, starting with...

## 1. The Place

If you are taking notes, you can write that down. This story is geographically and narratively the center of Mark's gospel. But we also need to understand the place *where* this story happens. They are in Caesarea Philippi, and it is not coincidental or accidental; Jesus chose *this place* to reveal for the *first time* in Mark's gospel that he is the Christ. Here's what's so significant about that: it was the place where gods were born and made. Let me explain:

First, this was the birthplace of Baal worship. Baal was the infamous idol of the Old Testament stories; the one that the Jews kept turning to instead of God. So for a long time, the city was called Balinas.

Second, Greek mythology said that this was the birthplace of Pan – the God of nature. So later its name was changed to Panias.

To this day, it is called "Banias" – a combination of the two names.

Third, in Jesus' time, a magnificent marble temple had been built as a worship center for the ruling "god," the emperor Caesar Augustus, which is why the area was called "Caesarea." Roman culture practiced emperor worship, and citizens were told to consider the Emperor a god, so they were required to worship him.

Fourth, even for the Jews, this place was jam-packed with religious significance and memories of God's miracles. It was considered the origin of the Jordan River, around which God did so much for the Jews.

So I think you can see why Jesus chose *this place*; he deliberately acknowledged that he is the Christ in the very presence of the world's gods. And you can bet that when he comes into your life, he will establish himself as Lord over every other thing you worship, too. Jesus will not allow any other gods before him in your life (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6).

But there is something else here, too: write this down if you are taking notes: Jesus comes to me, right where I am.

Jesus went to the place that represented peoples' misunderstandings of God, and he met them and revealed himself to them there. He will come to you right where you are – in all

your confusion, your pain, your misunderstandings and doubts, in the middle of all the times you've been let down by things or people that you put your hope in, or even in the midst of your mistaken ideas of who God is and what he should do for you. Jesus comes to you, right where you are.

Secondly, I want us to look at...

## **2. The Question**

Jesus began with a great method of teaching – by asking questions. Some call it the Socratic Method from the dialogues of Plato that Socrates wrote about – it was a method that had been around for several hundred years. Jesus also taught in parables, as you know. But here, Jesus begins the conversation by asking a question.

It wasn't that Jesus wanted to know what people thought of him; Jesus knew who he was. He wasn't insecure and worried about what people thought, nor was he experiencing any kind of identity crisis. He wasn't looking for affirmation from his friends. He wanted to know what the disciples thought, so he started by asking them about popular opinion. So they answered – a prophet, a great teacher, etc. Then, as he usually does, he got to the point by asking them personally; he went straight to the heart of the matter. He asked them, "Who do YOU say I am?" Jesus will always do this with us; he is very good at getting to the point in our hearts. So write this down too: "Jesus asks me this question." It doesn't matter how long you've been a Christian or if you even are one; you must decide who you say he is, and if you say he is the Christ, then your life must reflect the answer.

Now, if Jesus asked that question today, you might say, "Well, the theologians say you are the soteriological manifestation of the Kerygma in which we find our ultimate ecclesiological, eschatological, and interpersonal fulfillment." To which Jesus would probably say, "...What?" Truthfully, he would dismiss that and say: "What about YOU? Who do YOU say I am?"

Because third, I want us to see...

## **3. The Answer**

After Jesus asked the question, Simon spoke up for everyone – not an unusual thing. But he makes the courageous statement: "You are the Christ! The Son of the Living God!"

Matthew records this story in Matthew 16:13-20, which we read from last week, and if you remember, he says that Jesus' response was to point out that only God could've revealed this to Simon, and then Jesus renames Simon "The Rock," or "Petra" in Greek which is what we get the name "Peter" from. Simon – the hardhead – is now Peter, the Rock! But Jesus is still stuck between Simon the hardhead and Peter the Rock, because Peter turns right around, without so much as a commercial break, speaks up again and then is rebuked and accused by Jesus of working for Satan. This is what it says in verses 31-33:

"(Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he

must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. 'Get behind me, Satan!' he said. 'You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'" (Mark 8:31-33)

Wow! The ink isn't even dry on Peter's name change when he makes this gaffe. Jesus really is stuck between a Rock and a hardhead! But Jesus still accepted Peter where he was, and knew what Peter could become. What Peter could become depended upon Peter's answer to the question. You see, for Peter to say, "You are the Christ," was much more than intellectual ascent. That answer involved his mind – knowing the Scriptures and knowing Christ to be the meaning of life and purpose. The answer involved his heart or spirit, as God revealed it to him and he knew Jesus' love. But the answer also involved his hands and feet – Peter was determined to be changed by Christ and to obey Him. Even though Peter made mistakes along the way, he never gave up, he repented when he needed to, and he got back up.

Peter answered, and even though he still had to grow, he was on the road to who he could become. And you will be too, depending on *your* answer. You see, Christ awaits *your* answer. You can write that in: "Christ awaits my answer."

You cannot walk away from this video and walk away from that question. You must give an answer. After you've shut off this video, Christ will still be awaiting your answer. So I want you to write one more thing: "Today, with my life, (that's what it means to answer this question about Jesus), my answer is..." What will you write in? Don't just write it in because you know the answer in your head; answer from your mind, your spirit, and your body – your determination to be changed by him and obey him.

As Jesus confronted his disciples long ago, he questions you today: "Who do you say I am?" Keep in mind, your answer does not determine who he is – He is Christ regardless of what you say – your answer determines who YOU will be. His identity is not at stake; yours is. Name him Christ, in honest faith, and he will save you and begin the change in you toward the absolute best you could ever be – all that God created and intended you to be in the first place, with the kind of abundant life that Jesus promised you could have.

*Pray*

*Jesus comes to me, right where I am*

*Jesus asks me who I think he is*

*Jesus awaits my answer*