

On This Rock

[Mark 8:27-30](#)

In our last study we saw Jesus heal the blind man in Bethsaida. What was different about this healing? It was done in two stages. This is the only miracle that our Lord does in two stages. This two stage healing is a parallel to the spiritual work that Jesus is going to do in the lives of the disciples. They were seeing, but not clearly. In our text this morning we will see their vision healed completely. This healing is followed immediately by the account of the questions our Lord put to His disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi, and their answer shows that they are now seeing clearly:

Mark 8:27 (NASB) *And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?"*

Matthew says this:

Matthew 16:13 (NASB) *Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"*

Jesus and the disciples leave Bethsaida and head toward Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi is about 25 miles due north from Bethsaida (and seventeen hundred feet uphill), and they probably followed closely the course of the Jordan river, one of whose origins began at a cave here. The town stood 1150 feet above sea level near the foot of the towering, snow-capped Mount Hermon.

A little history on Caesarea Philippi: In Old Testament times, the Northeastern area of Israel became a center for Baal worship. In the nearby city of Dan, Israelite king Jeroboam built the high place that angered God and eventually led the Israelites to worship false gods. Eventually, worship of the baals was replaced with worship of Greek fertility gods.

A little east of the city of Dan there is a cave at the foot of Mt. Hermon. In the religion of the Ancient world, they served fertility gods. The view was that the fertility gods, male and female, had sex, rain was the sperm. The crops and lambs and the babies were the fruit. Then the gods went away to the underworld and it stopped raining, and there was the dry season. The underworld in Greek is called Hades; in Hebrew it is called Sheol. This was a dark watery place under the earth. So wherever there was a body of water or water coming out of the earth, they viewed it as a gate to the underworld. And every year in the spring the gods go into the cave and down to the underworld, and if the people worship them right, they will come back from the underworld copulate, and they will have fertility.

The Canaanite gods were Baal and Aschera. They were worshiped here and in Dan, because the river Jordan comes out of the ground at this mountain. Alexander the Great came through this area in about 330 B.C. and established a Greek city right in front of this cave, and turned it into the center of the Greek fertility god Pan. Pan copulates with his mistresses called nymphs, they have babies, then he goes down to the underworld and disappears for the dry season, and then he comes back. This was done here because the river Jordan ran out of that cave. They called the town Paneas.

Years later, when Romans conquered the territory, Herod Philip rebuilt the city and renamed it Caesarea in honor of the emperor. The name Philippi was added to distinguish it from the main Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast from where Pilate governed Judea. It was built at what was said to be the main source of the Jordan on the slopes of Mount Hermon. Caesarea Philippi continued to

focus on worship of Greek gods. In the cliff that stood above the city, local people built shrines and temples to Pan.

Caesarea Philippi was a town of about 20,000. Nearby was a Temple of Augustus, built by Herod the Great, and an ancient shrine dedicated earlier to Baal and then to Pan. Next to the Temple of Augustus was the open air shrine to Pan. Pan is the shepherds fertility god so they worshiped him outdoors. Augustus' temple was right in front of the cave and next to the cave was the shrine of Pan cut into the rock. In front of it was the open air platform where Pan was worshiped. This was the world center of Pan worship. In a cleft cut out of the rock was the statue of Pan. Pan was depicted as a man with the horns, ears, and legs of a goat. During the religious ceremony the priest and priestess of the Pan cult would copulate in front of the crowd of worshipers. Then came pandemonium where all the worshipers would have sex. So there would be thousands of people having sex; male to female, male to male, female to female, and with goats. This was an evil area, and the Jews who loved God wouldn't go anywhere near this place. They called this place the "gates of Hades" and the "rock of the gods," because all these pagan gods were on the face of the cliff.

How do you think Jesus' disciples reacted when Jesus took them to this place? These disciples were probably about 15 years old. How close did Jesus get to this shrine of Pan?

I certainly can't prove that Jesus and the disciples were at the shrine of Pan when these words were uttered, but I think there are strong indications that they were. It adds a fitting backdrop to the scene if we place Jesus and the disciples standing by the fresh waters of the spring and gazing at the numerous idols that were placed in the niches in the rock, considering the "gods" of the nations being worshiped there, and so paralleling Jesus' request to know what men made of Him:

Mark 8:27 (NASB) *And Jesus went out, along with His disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way He questioned His disciples, saying to them, "Who do people say that I am?"*

The word "questioned" here is the Greek word *eperotao*, which is in the imperfect tense indicating that this questioning went on and on as they traveled.

Jesus' first question was, "**Who do people say that I am?**" That is a very important question. If you ask people this question today, you will get a great variety of answers. Try it some time. C.S. Lewis answered this question as he taught his students at Cambridge University. He said: "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people so often say about Jesus: that is I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I do not accept his claim to be God. That is one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. Either Jesus was the Son of God or else a madman or something worse."

Jesus proclaimed the truth about Himself. He did not claim to be anything that ancient or modern man attempts to thrust upon Him. His claim was that He was God:

John 10:30-31 (NASB) *"I and the Father are one." 31 The Jews took up stones again to stone Him.*

The Jews certainly understood what He meant; He was making Himself equal with God.

John 8:58 (NASB) *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."*

A literal translation would read: "Before Abraham was brought into being, I existed." The statement, therefore, is not that Christ came into existence before Abraham did, but that He already existed before Abraham was brought into being. In other words, Christ existed before creation, or eternally. In that sense, the Jews plainly understood Him, for they wanted to stone Him for blasphemy.

Jesus, in claiming to be "I Am," was asserting equality with God Himself, who was revealed as the "I Am That I Am" the self-existent, eternal God. The choice is very clear, Jesus is either Lord, or He is a liar, or lunatic.

They answered Jesus:

Mark 8:28 (NASB) *And they told Him, saying, "John the Baptist; and others say Elijah; but others, one of the prophets."*

The Gospel writers do not identify who said what thing, but evidently they were in agreement that there was great disagreement about the identity of Christ!

"Saying, 'John the Baptist'"; that had been Herod's take on Christ:

Mark 6:16 (NASB) *But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!"*

Many shared Herod's view since John was held in high honor with the people.

That Jesus' origins were hazy in the minds of the inhabitants of the land seems fairly certain if Herod's view was widely accepted. If so His initial miracles must have been performed when John was either arrested or when he was presumed to have been killed. It's easy to see how men and women who had not followed the events closely could have associated Jesus with a resurrected John the Baptist, for they would have heard of the execution of the Baptist while, at the same time, have come to recognize that Jesus was beginning where the other had left off.

"And others, Elijah"; people were affected by the teaching of Christ, as well as by the profound way that He demonstrated true holiness. His words, like Elijah's, cut to the quick and exposed the idolatries of the heart.

Elijah would have been the belief of many, because He was one of two people who never tasted death in the Old Testament (2 Kings 2:11-12), the other being Enoch (Gen 5:24). It would have seemed natural for the crowds to assume that Elijah should return to continue his ministry to Israel, and, besides, Malachi 4:5-6 seems to expect his return shortly before the end of the age. This appears to be the reason for Jesus' declaration that John is none other than the fulfillment of the promise that Elijah would come (Matthew 11:13-15, 17:10-13).

Elijah also moved in miraculous power including the multiplication of food (I Kings 17:8-16) and the raising of the dead (I Kings 17:17-24), both of which Jesus had performed (Matthew 9:23-26, 14:13-21). Perhaps Elijah's confrontation with the secular and religious leaders of the nation (I Kings 18:1,17-19,40, 21:17-24) could be seen to be paralleled in His attacks on the Pharisees (Matthew 12:24-32, 15:1-20, 16:1-4).

I think it is interesting that they viewed Christ like Elijah. When I think of Elijah, I think of a fire and brimstone prophet:

2 Kings 1:10 (NASB) *And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.*

But even though these similarities were what might have caused some of the people to associate Jesus with Elijah, it necessarily meant that they either didn't know or chose to ignore the natural birth, which could have been confirmed by Mary and all His brothers.

Matthew's account adds Jeremiah:

Matthew 16:14 (NASB) *And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."*

The identification with Jeremiah implied both the seriousness of Christ's warnings of judgment and the tenderness that He demonstrated toward the masses. Jeremiah was truly a prophet of steel and velvet; he could deliver the oracles of God but weep out of concern for the waywardness of Judah and their certain doom. Christ seemed to reflect that kind of ministry and personality in the eyes of many. Some could not decide who Jesus was, so they just said that He was like "one of the prophets."

All that we can say is that there appears to have been no one single and consistent opinion amongst the general people as to who Jesus was, even though they associate Him with God and as His messenger by their identification of Him consistently as being one of the dead prophets. This indicates that they held Him in very high regard, for these were the great names of Israel. But never once is it recorded that the populace had even the slightest inkling that this is the Messiah.

Being compared to John the Baptist or Elijah or Jeremiah would be a compliment for anyone that is, anyone except Jesus Christ. While our Lord certainly identified with these men, He also towered above them! The focus of their prophetic ministries pointed to Jesus Christ!

Some have claimed that a passage such as this supports the doctrine of reincarnation. It doesn't! There is absolutely nothing at all in Scripture that ever supports the notion of reincarnation. In this case, it was not a matter of the people's thinking the old prophets had appeared in a new form. They thought it was the same old prophets back again not a reincarnation, but the reappearance they were expecting of the same individuals who had lived hundreds of years before. This account, therefore, lends no support to the idea of reincarnation.

Several years ago the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, did a documentary on Jesus. The presenter in that documentary, Jeremy Bowen, said this: "The important thing is not what He was or what He wasn't. The important thing is what people believe Him to have been." I could not disagree more! Who Jesus is of utmost importance. Our eternal destiny rides on the importance of Jesus.

I think we would agree; if we had a problem with our car, and we took it to our mechanic, it wouldn't be enough to say to the mechanic, "You know, whether or not you are really an experienced mechanic doesn't matter. Just as long as I think you are a mechanic, it will be okay." Or if we were to get sick, and the doctor is standing before us, we wouldn't say, "Hey, whether or not you've got medical training really doesn't matter, as long as I think you are a doctor." If we are that concerned about the care of our car or the care of our physical health, how much more should we be concerned about the care of our soul? We need to know the Man who is standing in the gap--the Man who is dying for our sins--qualifies. It is not enough to *think* He is.

Mark 8:29 (NASB) *And He continued by questioning them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "Thou art the Christ."*

Jesus now asks his disciples a second question. The striking question asked by Christ goes to the heart of what each of us must consider this day, "**But who do you say that I am?**" How you answer that question determines where you will spend eternity.

The question has enormous stress placed on the word "you," which is difficult to bring out in English, though; it should probably be rendered with italics for emphasis. Something like "What about *you*, who do *you* say I am?" The "you" is a plural pronoun. He asks this to the entire group of twelve disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

We must link this with the account in Chapter 4 of the stilling of the storm. On that occasion, some eight months before this, Jesus stood in the boat in the midst of the storm and spoke to the wind and the waves. He said, "Peace, be still!" (Mark 4:39). And there came an immediate great calm over the whole lake. It wasn't a gradual subsidence of the wind and waves. It was immediate. It was as though a huge hand had pressed down upon the water, and a great calm, from the North to the South and the East to the West, came upon the lake. And the disciples said to themselves:

Mark 4:41 (NASB) *And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"*

That question needed to be answered. And all the intervening events which followed were used by our Lord as teaching situations that He might instruct these disciples as to whom He was. Now the test has come: He asks them the question, "Who do you say that I am?"

"Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.'" Many commentators at this point think Peter speaks for the disciples. Peter was married and probably the oldest of the group being around 20-25.

"Christ" is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew, Messiah, meaning: "anointed one." Mark 8:29 is the first time the word has resurfaced since Mark 1:1 (and it will appear 5 more times in Mark after 8:29). In the Old Testament those who were set apart for God as either king, priest, or prophet were anointed with oil as an indication of their setting apart (Exodus 29:7, 21; 1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 19:16). They were looked on as 'the anointed of God' and, therefore, not to be harmed (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 2 Samuel 23:1; Psalm 105:15 compare Acts 23:5). Thus, the coming great prophet would be anointed by God:

Isaiah 61:1 (NASB) *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives, And freedom to prisoners;*

The term came to be applied par excellence to the "Coming One" who was expected to deliver Israel, as king or ruling priest, or both, who would thus be "the Anointed One," the Messiah. In popular thought, He would come and rouse the people by force of arms to bring political freedom to Israel. The essence of the idea was that He would come as the Deliverer.

Think for a moment about what Peter confessed. Even though his understanding would certainly increase in the days after the resurrection, Peter had come to terms with the whole of biblical revelation. Jesus Christ is the Promised One of God. He is the One that God promised Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David and Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the other prophets. All of the Scripture pointed to this one Person that stood before Simon Peter. All of the sacrificial system; the metaphors found in the holy days, and even the pictures represented by the temple, pointed to Christ. The focal point of human history centers on Him. All of the worship and adoration of God belongs to Him since He is God.

Please notice here when the disciples confer upon Jesus the title of the "Christ, the Messiah," He does not try and correct them saying, "No, no, no, you've got it all wrong." He accepts their designation as God's Anointed and God's Chosen.

As we have seen, Mark gives us very brief accounts. To get the full story of what Peter said and Jesus' response, we need to turn to Matthew:

Matthew 16:16 (NASB) *And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Matthew adds that Peter said, "**The Son of the living God.**" What is the purpose of saying "living God"? If we follow the phrase "Living God" through Scripture, we get the idea that this is a title that is in opposition to idols, or dead Gods.

Jeremiah 10:1-5 (NASB) *Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. 2 Thus says the LORD, "Do not learn the way of the nations, And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens Although the nations are terrified by them; 3 For the customs of the peoples are delusion; Because it is wood cut from the forest, The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool. 4 "They decorate it with silver and with gold; They fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it will not totter. 5 "Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot walk! Do not fear them, For they can do no harm, Nor can they do any good."*

Jeremiah 10:10 (NASB) *But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation.*

Acts 14:13-15 (NASB) *And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. 14 But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out 15 and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.*

Peter believed and confessed Christ to be the Son of the living God. As we see so many times in the Gospels, the Jews understood that to call Jesus "God's Son" was to call Jesus Christ "God."

Now notice Jesus' response to Peter's confession:

Matthew 16:17 (NASB) *And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."*

How did Peter come to such a clear, concise understanding of Jesus Christ? Our Lord declared that it came by revelation, a term that implies an unveiling or disclosing something that was before hidden.

What is being denied in verse 17 when Jesus says, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you flesh and blood has not revealed to you that I am the Messiah and the Son of God"? He did not get that on his own. That comes by divine revelation.

The phrase "flesh and blood" is used four other times in the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 15:50 (NASB) *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

The meaning seems to be that ordinary human nature will not be raised. There will be a change. Flesh and blood is man in his present limited, ordinary state.

Paul, speaking of his own conversion, said:

Galatians 1:16 (NASB) *to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,*

This is an amazing parallel to Matthew 16:17. God "reveals" the Son to Paul, and Paul does not confer with "flesh and blood," that is, he does not confer with man. He goes away to Arabia.

Ephesians 6:12 (NASB) *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

So flesh and blood is the merely human, non-supernatural forces in the world. These are not our real enemies: Their real enemies were supernatural.

Hebrews 2:14 (NASB) *Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

In other words, Christ took on human nature and became man. So my conclusion from all these uses of the phrase "flesh and blood" is that it is simply a way of referring to ordinary humanity, finite, limited, natural.

So when Jesus denies that "flesh and blood" has revealed His true identity to Peter, He is saying that mere human powers by themselves cannot recognize the true glory of Christ. Neither your humanity nor anyone else's has opened the eyes of your heart to recognize the truth and beauty of Christ.

This was the teaching of Jesus that Paul unfolded in:

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NASB) *But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.*

The "natural man" is basically the same as "flesh and blood" in Matthew 16:17. "Flesh and blood" cannot reveal the true spiritual reality of Christ, and the "natural man" cannot know the things of the Spirit of God.

Paul put it like this:

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB) *For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Just as darkness brooded upon the face of the deep, and God said, "Let there be light," and there was light; even so in the darkness of our minds and hearts He has spoken with revealing light the truth and glory and beauty and excellency of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

And so Peter did not own up to the truth of Jesus by means of his own powers. Flesh and blood could never reveal such a wonderful thing as the true Messiahship and Sonship of Jesus. Something more than flesh and blood would be required in order to recognize Christ for what He really is:

Matthew 16:17 (NASB) *And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.*

Peter is "blessed" because he's received a revelation given to Him directly from the Father who has disclosed to him a hidden spiritual truth that had subsequently radically transformed his life.

Matthew 16:18 (NASB) *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.*

What is the rock upon which Christ will build His Church? Scholars have debated precisely what Jesus means by *rock*. Protestants, following Augustine and Luther, have sometimes contended that the rock in this passage is only Jesus himself. The Church is certainly built on Jesus.

The Catholics believe that Jesus was actually referring to Peter and saying that, upon him, He was going to build His Church. The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets according to Ephesians 2:20.

Ephesians 2:20 (NKJV) *having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,*

"Peter," in the Greek, is the word "Petros," which is masculine and would be roughly the English equivalent of "Rocky." A stone. But "Rock" is "Petra," which is feminine and has the meaning of "large outcrop of rock."

As was brought out earlier in this message, I believe that Jesus and the disciples are standing near the shrine of Pan. They are close enough to see the debauchery that is going on. I think this is why Peter said Jesus was the "Living God" as apposed to these dead pagan gods. Looking at the shrine of Pan, which was called the "rock of the gods," Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." Jesus could have been pointing to the "rock of the gods" when He made this statement. "**Rock**" is the Greek word *petra* in the feminine gender, referring to a large outcrop of rock, similar to what the disciples might have been viewing at the moment. He is telling the disciples their mission is going to be to leave their homes and godly communities and build His church in place of this paganism. He wants them to do something about this. They have the answer that people are looking for when they're down there with the goats. Take it to them. Take it to them.

That may sound like a stretch to you, but notice what else Jesus says:

Matthew 16:18 (NASB) *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.*

Gates of hades what do city gates do for a city? They defend it or protect it. The Greek word for "overpower" here is *katischuo*, which means: "to prevail against, to be superior in strength." If the gates of hades won't stand, who is attacking who?

The pagans of Jesus' day commonly believed that their fertility gods lived in the underworld during the winter and returned to earth each spring. They saw water as a symbol of the underworld and thought that their gods traveled to and from that world through caves.

To the pagan mind, then, the cave and spring water at Caesarea Philippi created a gate to the underworld. They believed that their city was literally at the gates of the underworld--the gates of Hades.

Jesus is telling His disciples: Your mission is to take the gospel to a dark and corrupt world. Jesus walked these kids 25 miles into the gutter to say: Look at it. Did Jesus take them that far and then talk about the gates of Hades in a place where they couldn't see it? I don't think so! Jesus is saying: Yes, I'm the Christ and you are my disciples, now clean this place up!

Why did Mark not include this important part of the story? One interesting speculation is that Peter, himself, wanted Mark not to include it. Mark, you recall, was not one of the twelve disciples. Mark came to Christ after the resurrection of Jesus and became one of Peter's traveling companions. The Gospel of Mark is, in reality, Peter's account of the life of Jesus. Mark's Gospel is really the Gospel according to Peter. And it may be that Peter did not want to include such a glowing testimony to himself in his account. While Peter was impulsive and headstrong, he had come to know his own fallibility. By the time Peter shared his gospel with Mark, he had come to realize that Peter was nothing, but Christ everything. I'm sure in his recollection, he remembered that right after this revelation he would be rebuked by the Lord. But he also remembered how he had denied Christ just before the crucifixion. For all you might want to say about Peter's impulsiveness, I believe he was a humble man. In Acts, we see Peter telling the men in the household of Cornelius, who had fallen at his feet to worship him, to "*Stand up! I too am just a man.*" So Peter did not want to put himself forward as someone special.

One of the curious parts of this passage to me is in verse 29. Peter has got it: Jesus is the Messiah. And in verse 30 of Mark 8 Jesus said, "Shh, don't tell anyone."

Mark 8:30 (NASB) *And He warned them to tell no one about Him.*

Why? After this startling revelation, why would you say, "Don't tell anyone"? I think it has to do with the popular concept of Messiah at the time. The Jews were looking for a militaristic Messiah to throw off the Roman Empire in a great military victory. Obviously, that concept of Messiah has huge political problems for Jesus.

Please, please understand that this verse is not directed to us. Jesus does not want us to remain silent about who He is. We are called to share the glorious gospel of the blessed God with all who are willing to listen.

Listen to me, people, the gospel is the power of God. We have it, what are we doing with it? Please take Jesus' words to heart, "The gates of Hades will not prevail against it." Think back to the demoniac in the Decapolis. He is living in the tombs, cutting himself, screaming out, unable to be bound. Then Jesus comes and sets him free, and then sends him out as a missionary to the Decapolis. Jesus is building His church on the rock that was once demonic and pagan. We are to do the same.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on August 13, 2006. [Media #348b](#).

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The following was written by [Elías Lira](#) & corroborates some of the vital points of the above sermon. This material is NOT part of the David's sermon, "On This Rock".

"And upon this rock I will build My church..."

It was in Capernaum where Jesus spent the greater part of his earthly ministry. To Jesus it was a small matter to enter the Decapolis to preach and to teach, a very difficult thing during this time considering the ruling Greco-Roman political atmosphere in that area.

To the north, not very far from Capernaum, was the settlement of Caesarea Phillipi. Wonderfully located in the foothills of Mount Hermon, Caesarea Phillipi was a cultural and religious center where homage was paid to the old Greek divinity Pan, the Greek god of fertility. Leafy forests and ample brooks abounded in the region that is also known as Panias or Banias. This was the site of a temple constructed at the base of a rocky mountain and which lay annexed to a cave. It is in this environment surrounded by many pagan sites of adoration where Jesus holds a crucial conversation with his disciples. Jesus asks the question about whom do men think He is and His disciples reply with what they have been hearing all about, but Jesus insists: *"But who do you say that I am?"* Peter accurately responds: *"You are the Christ (the Messiah), the Son of the living God."* (Mathew 16:16 NASB)

Immediately, Jesus recognizes the divine manifestation given to Peter and declares: *"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it"* (Matthew 16:18 NASB). This statement contains a clear game of words frequently used in Hebraic education. There has been much debate on the theological meaning of the controversial conversation. In my opinion it is critically important that this discussion of great magnitude is performed by Jesus at a site of great pagan influence like Caesarea Phillipi.

Matthew 16:18 has a tremendous symbolism. In the writing the Greek koine term *"Petra"* means rock, a cliff or projection. It also means a rock that projects, a rocky crag or rocky land. The term always implies not a simple rock, but one that is large and notable. On the other hand, when speaking of the gates it is commonly known that in biblical and old world cities, doors represented defensive structures of power. When Jesus was affirming that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the Church, He made it very clear that the enemy would be definitely attacked.

King Herod ordered the construction of niches in honor to the god Pan and his court of nymphs. Today these niches are still visible inlaid in the slope of the rocky mountains of Caesarea Phillipi, altars which were characteristic of the aberrant sensuality of the Roman Empire belief system. The disciples of Jesus, who had sat for years at the feet of their rabbi to receive their education, now were lead to this place with the aim of being commissioned in an great task: to dominate the malignant forces and to take authority over His church. Jesus took them to Caesarea Phillipi, so that they could be witnesses of the moral reality of their times.

"King Herod ordered the construction of niches in honor to the god Pan and his court of nymphs. Today these niches are still visible inlaid in the slope of the rocky mountains of Caesarea Phillipi, altars which were characteristic of the aberrant sensuality of the Roman Empire belief system"

It is in this scenario, before that pagan rocky crag, that Messiah Jesus lays down a clear challenge: He wanted his disciples to attack the powers of hell.