

“Behind It All” – Pr Jim Sprenkle – Pentecost 13 August 27, 2023

- I. **Matthew 16:15-16; 18** – ¹⁵[Jesus] said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁸“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.”
- II. **The Christian Church is full of hypocrites!**
 - a. Maybe you’ve heard this from people who don’t want anything to do with going to church or religion in general... but do they have a point?
 - b. Everywhere we look, Christians fail to live up to the life Jesus calls us to.
 - i. The word hypocrite comes from the Greek word for actors who imitated or pretended to be someone else... sometimes using masks.
 - c. Christians often have different masks, depending on what they are doing.
 - i. When we come to church on Sunday, we usually put on our “good” mask...
 - ii. If we are out with friends at a social gathering or pub, we might act a certain way.
 - iii. If we spend time with old friends from college or our hometown, we might change the way we act.
 - iv. When we are at home with spouse or children, we might act differently than we do in public.
 - v. We may have a different mask when we are at work, at school, at home, as a parent, playing sports, or at church.
 - d. I was having a conversation about the Christian faith with someone who said it doesn’t make any sense that people who call themselves Christians would live without trying to be obedient to Christ.
 - i. This is a comment that even those outside the Christian faith make – “How can all these Christians say they believe in Jesus, but act in ways that are totally different than what He taught?”
 - ii. Good question, and each of us must consider whether our lives reflect Jesus... or something else.
- III. **However, it’s unfair to say that all Christians are evil and irrelevant.**
 - a. We are certainly hypocrites in the ways that we fail to love God and love our neighbors, but it doesn’t mean we don’t have faith or aren’t trying.
 - b. We may be very imperfect, and even sinful at times, but God is still able to work through our imperfection.
 - c. Critics of the Church point to scandals, pastors and leaders who get in trouble, and all the other negative things that come out in the media as the reason our faith has no substance and should be abandoned.
 - d. Yet, even with the brokenness that goes on... even in the Church... God is still able to work in believers for good.

- i. An author and former pastor named Earl Palmer once wrote, “When [my local high school] orchestra attempts Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, the result is appalling. I wouldn’t be surprised if the performance made old Ludwig roll over in his grave despite his deafness. You might ask: ‘Why bother? Why inflict on those poor kids the terrible burden of trying to [play] what...Beethoven had in mind? Not even the great Chicago Symphony Orchestra can attain that perfection.’ My answer is this: [My local high school] orchestra will give some people in that audience...their only encounter with Beethoven’s great Ninth Symphony. Far from perfection, [but it’s] the only way they will hear Beethoven’s message.”
- ii. The point he’s making is that our world desperately needs to hear the music of the Gospel... and they will never hear it without Christians... who are like the worst high school orchestra ever.
 - 1. If the Christian Church is based on performance and doing everything perfect, then we are all in big trouble!
 - 2. But God is willing to take His perfect performance on the cross and empty grave and allow us to repeat it with our screechy playing so that everyone can hear the message of salvation.¹

IV. **Peter and the disciples are good examples of imperfection.**

- a. Some might claim that they are hypocrites, unworthy of their high calling.
- b. Certainly, Peter has shown that he doesn’t always trust in the Lord fully – and later he will even deny his Lord three times after Jesus was arrested.
- c. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus constantly calls out the disciples for their lack of faith, lack of understanding, and lack of love.
- d. Yet, He still called them personally... to follow Him and be the group of chosen people to carry on and share the message of salvation.
- e. Now Jesus and His followers have traveled way up north, around 25 miles from the Sea of Galilee.
 - i. We visited this place when going to the Holy Land, and you can still see the place where they worshiped the god, *pan*.
 - ii. It’s hard to say whether Jesus traveled any farther than this area, but it was definitely not a place that was filled with Jewish tradition and belief... or Pharisees.
 - iii. It was in this place that Jesus wants them to confess their understanding of, and their faith in, Him.
- f. First, He asks what others think... and the answers come back as John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet...
- g. “But who do you say that I am?” (vs 15) – and Peter speaks up as the first person to clearly state that Jesus is the Savior, the Messiah.
 - i. Jesus responds that only God could make that confession happen – and by the way, Peter got it right, or Jesus would have corrected him.

- ii. Not only does Jesus commend him, but it seems that this is the place He gives him the name, Peter or Cephas... which means rock or stone.
- iii. “On this rock I will build My Church...” (vs 18)
 - 1. Many of you know that the Roman Catholic Church uses this text to claim that Peter is the first pope.
 - 2. However, Peter is the one who spoke up for the disciples as a group – “You are the Christ” – and it was on this confession and faith that Jesus would build His church.
 - 3. Peter and all the disciples together were the imperfect vessels that Jesus chose to carry the message of the Gospel to the world.
 - 4. The promise that should give us all confidence and peace is that Jesus is behind it all.
- h. We have no greater blessing than the absolute truth... the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6) our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- V. **We will never be perfect in this lifetime, but Jesus is still behind it all.**
 - a. Sometimes we carry around our various masks, and they may not reflect our love for God or others – but in our confession of faith – that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, He is behind the transformation and giving of a new name in Baptism.
 - b. We, like Simon, were given a different name when we came to faith, which is Child of God.
 - i. The old Adam was drowned, just as it is every single day as we remember our Baptism and confess our sins to God.
 - ii. The new Adam comes up out of that water – not with masks and hypocrisy, but with love and authenticity.
 - 1. In other words, we know we’re not perfect, but we also know that Jesus is behind our faith and life – just as we are connected to Him in Baptism.
 - c. The name that Jesus confirmed to His disciples on that fateful day in Caesarea Philippi was Christ – which points to His saving work... the one who would save us all by going to the cross.
 - i. Though the disciples were unaware of the journey to the cross at that point, it would become clear as they work their way back toward Jerusalem.
 - ii. The Savior would not be a great political leader, or a warrior leading armies, or even a religious leader at the temple.
 - 1. No, Jesus would die a horrible death to redeem us all.
 - 2. Jesus would die a horrible death to claim us all as His own.

- VI. **Each of us, in our own way, can share this message with the world.**

- a. Yes, it might be squeaky, cringy, or sound awful... but remember, Jesus is behind it all.
- b. Should we work on our obedience to Christ and His will in our lives?
 - i. Absolutely – I commend a higher standard of living for us all.
 - ii. Yet, I also commend you to Jesus, the one who forgives your sins and calls you a Child of God. Amen

¹ Source: Rick Lawrence, *Skin in the Game* (Kregel Publishers, 2015), pp. 135-136