

Part 29: A Clear and Costly Confession

Tyler Velin | Matthew 16:13-28

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One of the most iconic lines in comic book lore is the caution Uncle Ben gave Peter Parker in the Spider-man comics. Not knowing that his nephew was Spider-man, Uncle Ben warned Peter of something which is profoundly true: “With great power comes great responsibility.”

This is true in most areas of our life. Those in here who know CPR or are paramedics or medical doctors know that your knowledge brings a responsibility to act if you were to be in a situation where someone drastically needed care.

Parents who know potentially dangerous places in their house also know that it is their responsibility to make sure their kids are safe when around them. All that to say clear thinking is not a sterile affirmation of what is true, it is a commitment to live in the reality of that truth.

We understand the power of that statement for our superheroes. We protect our kids with that idea in our home. We provide emergency help for others in our community out of that realization. In fact in some cases a failure to act when prudence would call you to act is legal ground to be prosecuted for negligence. But for some reason the relationship between what we know and what we do because of what we know, often stops as soon as we enter into the realm of Christianity.

While we may not agree to it on an intellectual level, often our experience of Christianity is that we can clearly believe or confess something to be true while expecting it to have little to no influence on our actions. Certainly it might restrain us, but less often does it actually compel us.

But what we are going to look at today is a monumental moment in the gospel account of Matthew. For the past few weeks, since chapter 13 in the book, Matthew has been showing us who Jesus is. And today Jesus is actually going to turn the tables and focus on the response people ought to have when they clearly understand him.

In looking at Peter’s confession and Jesus’ call to discipleship what we are going to see is this: **Faith in Jesus is not a confession, faith is a commitment.**

And as we look at Peter's confession and Jesus' response to Peter there are three places of commitment we are going to see: right confession commits the church to the Kingdom, right confession commits believers to Christ, and right confession commits believers to a life of the cross. To confess faith in Christ is to commit oneself to the work of the church, the centrality of the cross, and the cost of discipleship.

To start today let us begin by looking at **Matthew 16:13-15.**

Let me provide some context for this scene. For the past few months Jesus has been bouncing all around in the Northern part of Galilee. His tour now takes him north to Caesarea Philippi. This location was revered for its shrines to divinity and royalty. Legend had it as birthplace of the fertility god Pan, so there were places of worship not only for Pan, but for a myriad of pagan gods. Additionally city’s namesake

was that of double royalty. It was named as tribute to Tiberius Caesar and Herod Philip. Up on a hill stood a great white marble temple to pay worship to Emperor Augustus. And it is amongst the trappings of human royalty and the temples of pagan gods that Jesus wishes to ask his disciples these important questions.

Who do people say the Son of Man is? This was Jesus' favorite title for himself, but was also an Old Testament title synonymous with God's messiah. The disciples reply with a number of possibilities, but this was never the goal of Jesus' questioning. Jesus wants to know who they think he is.

There comes a point in all of our lives where you must answer the same question Jesus now asks the disciples. Often we can hide behind who our pastor says Jesus is, or who our favorite author says Jesus is, or even our parents or our culture. But for the individual you must answer this question. And the truth is that everyone already has an answer for this question. The question is: is it the right answer?

Peter now is going to answer this question as a representative of the disciples, let's continue: **Matthew 16:16-20**.

Jesus is obviously incredibly pleased with Peter's confession. But if we had to boil down what it was Peter confessed what would we say he is confessing? We should want this confession of Peter.

For the first time in the book of Matthew we have a clear and accurate confession regarding who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus is the long awaited deliverer of God. He is the Son of the living God. In a city known for its kings and its gods, Jesus is here confessed to be both the great King and only God. Peter is confessing two key truths which must be confessed by anyone who claims to be a believer. Truth #1: Jesus is God's means of salvation. He is the messiah who will save God's people. Truth #2: Jesus is the son of God. He is the God-man Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.

Now even in the scope of this text, Peter's faith is going to grow. It is not going to stay at this level, but faith must start at this level. Saving faith always starts with who you think Jesus is. Unclear ideas of Jesus will always lead to impure faith and faulty practice.

A few weeks ago Pastor Noah Lee preached this specific text to you. And Noah did a great job fleshing out in more detail the nuances of verses 16-20 so if you want more information on this specific text you can find his sermon on our website. But what this enables me to do is to focus on the broader thrust of Matthew 16.

So I'm not going to spend much time on the nature of faith or the nuances of the church in these verses instead I'm going to focus on what Peter's confession of faith committed the church to. The church would be built as a community of people who confessed faith in Jesus, but they would be committed to something.

This is our first point today: **Confession commits the church to the Kingdom**. Whether Peter knew it or not at that point, his affirmation of who Jesus was brought with it a commitment which would direct the rest of his life.

Look back at the nature of the church in relation to the Kingdom of Heaven which has been the main theme of Matthew's gospel: **Matthew 16:18-19**.

The work of the church is connected to the Kingdom of Heaven. When we talk about the Kingdom of Heaven it is the place where God's people experience the full benefit of God: God's people, in God's place, with God's very presence.

It's important to note here the Jesus doesn't say the church is the kingdom of heaven, but its life and ministry is connected to it. When we arrive in the New Heavens and the New Earth, then we will live in the Kingdom of Heaven. But right now Jesus is saying the church, must be concerned with and committed to the Kingdom of Heaven while here on earth.

There are lots of things a church can do. But this text gives three central truths which should be the primary motivations in our actions and mission. First the church is a **community built on faith**. In verse 18 Jesus frames the church as a community built on Peter's credible confession. At the center of our community must be the faith which we share in Christ Jesus.

Second, the church is a **community bound by faith**. In verse 19, Jesus gave Peter keys. Keys open doors, and keys lock doors. The church is a place where everyone is welcome to come and hear about the life changing message of the gospel of Jesus, but the church also must be willing to make the distinction between who is really part of the Kingdom and who is not. We will not provide the comfort of salvation to those who will not and do not confess faith in Jesus Christ. We will plead with you, we will share the gospel with you, we will welcome you and we will pray for you. But we will not let you assume you are saved when you do not believe the gospel.

Just as Jesus did last week, we will move towards those who are lost but we refuse to think that belonging to the community of the church is what saves you. It is belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven which saves you.

And third, the church is a **community concerned with holiness**. When Jesus speaks of "binding" and "loosing" in verse 20, he is using common language of the day which referred to compelling and controlling actions. For those who have faith, for those who have been opened the Kingdom of Heaven, the expectation is that you would act in line with the Kingdom. Those who are part of the Kingdom of God, who confess faith in Jesus, ought to be concerned about the way their actions confess and bear witness to Christ. Christians whose life doesn't reflect the Kingdom need to be cared for and corrected.

All that to say, the church is not autonomous. It does not get to decide what is best based off of the desires of the day. It is bound by its confession to the Kingdom stewardship which Jesus here has created it for. It is the elder's job to ensure the church is fixed upon this Kingdom and it's the job of the whole church to make sure we are holding each other to this standard.

To be a church concerned with the Kingdom of Heaven is to be a church who will often find itself misunderstood or opposed by the kingdom of men. But one is a true Kingdom, and one is not.

A clear confession of who Jesus is will always be costly. When Peter confessed what he confessed in once sense he didn't fully understand the depth of the reality which was built into that affirmation of who Jesus was. But Jesus did. Jesus knew what it would cost. And that's what we turn to next. **Matthew 16:21-23**.

What we see in this text is that **Confession commits us to Christ**. Look at how Matthew opens verse 21, "From that time." That's Matthew's way of setting up a moment of great transition. That's because

when you understand Jesus with true clarity, it is not another mile marker on your journey. It is the starting gate. This confession became the new point of reference for what was going on in the disciple's life. It was ground zero. Once they confessed Christ things began to change.

What specifically? Jesus began to predict the cross. One thing I want you to notice in the text we just read was the passivity of what Jesus was saying would happen. Here is Jesus who is just professed to be the Messiah of God, the Son of God but look at the total helplessness which Jesus describes [verse 21]: he would suffer things from the elders, scribes and priests, he would be killed, and he would be raised again. All of these are passive. In other places we see Jesus laying down his life, here the grammar emphasizes the taking of it.

This is perhaps why Peter is so emphatic in his response: "This will never be! The savior of the world is no helpless man handed over to the decisions of another!" And the very man Jesus just blessed as being the model foundation for the church is now called Satan. Why? Look back at **Matthew 16:23**.

How did this happen? How did Peter the confessor become Peter the rebuked? It's not because he didn't affirm faith anymore. It's because in his faith he failed to set his mind on the things of God. I love how the King James Version puts it, "for thou does not savor the things of God."

Peter is not treasuring the plan of God. Instead he is treasuring the plans of man. Now that little clause helps us understand the thrust of this text a little more. Because it is easy to view this text from a merely theological lens.

That's the lens that looks at the theological implications of the cross and says: "Jesus had to die." This is very true. Without the death of Jesus there would be no faith. Without the death of Jesus our sins would not be atoned for. Without the death of Jesus there would be no resurrection, which means there would be no promise of new life. Without the death of Jesus there would be no King Jesus. Hebrews 9:22 says without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

This is very true, and is perhaps why Jesus told the disciples to be quite in verse 20. Jesus knew that he cannot be fully understood as the Messiah until he mounted the cross of the Messiah. But when Jesus rebukes Peter for setting his mind on the things of man, he is pointing out that Peter's rebuke is not a theological error on the nature of the atonement. Instead it is an error of expectation and experience. It is an error of pride.

Peter cannot fathom following a King who would have his life taken from him. If this were the true King of Israel, the true Son of God, the true Christ, then certainly he would need not submit himself to this. Peter didn't want Jesus to undergo this not only because he wanted Jesus to be spared, but certainly because he wanted himself to be spared the same humiliation.

If Jesus were to suffer like this, life as his disciple might not be a peaceful tram to the top, but instead a hard fought journey in the valley. This is why Peter was rebuked. He saw the object of his faith and the life of his faith through the lens of human ease not the lens of God's glory.

To confess Christ as King is to willingly place your trust in the humility of Christ, a humility which may be seen by the kingdom of man as weakness and foolishness. For instance in Matthew 6, Jesus warned his disciples about the danger of money. Just this week one NFL player received a contract which is historically the most ever paid to his position. In reflecting on it he was quoted this week as saying,

"Whoever said money doesn't make you happy, lied." Another popular band says it this way, "I hate those people who love to tell you money is the root of all that kills, they have never been poor, they have never had the joy of a welfare Christmas."

Consider the plan of God which Jesus set his mind to in **Philippians 2:1-8**. When we step outside of the faux altruism we all express on social media, do you think our world will look at the actions of Christ and see it as joyful? Satisfying? Ideal?

Neither did Peter. And Jesus rebukes him not only to make a theological point on the atonement, but to make a theological point which sustains us every moment of every day. To miss the Kingdom mindset Jesus is fighting for here is to miss the whole thrust of this text. If our faith is in Christ, then our life is in Christ as well.

How practical is this mindset? Let's read on: **Matthew 16:24-28**. This text just outlined the cost of following Jesus. To be a disciple of Jesus requires you to pick up your own cross and follow him. This means that when it comes to thinking about the responsibility our faith has on our actions the question is not: What does this cost me? The question is: "What did this cost Jesus?"

It is here we see our third commitment: **Confession commits us to a life of the cross**. That is to say to believe that Jesus is your savior is to also commit your life to living in the shadow of Jesus' humble submission to the glory of God.

Faith in Christ costs the church its cultural acceptance. Peter's confession of Christ would cost Christ his very life. And here we see it will also cost us our life. If Jesus being the messiah would cost him the very comfort of heaven, do you not think that faith in Christ would cost us the comforts of earth?

In America we have a weird relationship with the idea of costs. In one sense we try to do as much as we can to limit costs, but on the other hand we want things which are costly. No one daydreams about an AMC Gremlin. We daydream about new trucks, nice homes, and the money to pay for it.

I have heard this week about a clinic which offered free consultations and X-Rays but no one showed up. So they changed it from free to \$5 and their schedule filled up. Why? Because we understand that things which come at a great cost are typically the things with the greatest value.

Following Jesus will be the greatest cost you ever incur because it is the greatest value you will ever possess. Following Jesus will cost you because the cross is costly. If we want to be the church of God which bears witness to the wonderful Kingdom of God, if we want others to see the staggering value of God, then we must come to the reality that the church is nothing more than individuals living to that same end.

If you want others to see the gospel of Jesus and the beauty of salvation in our church, you must realize it has to start in your life.

The language of Jesus is very clear here: you must die to yourself. You must die to what the world says is for you joy, for your good, for your salvation. The very lens through which you interpret your circumstances and come to make your decisions must be the Kingdom of Heaven and not the kingdom of this world. That is what faith in Jesus signs you up for.

That doesn't mean you understand it and do it perfectly right away. We have already seen Peter needed clarity on the faith he confessed. We too will go through processes of being humbled by understanding the blind spots of our faith. But this is so important, in fact Jesus has already said this to his disciples back in **Matthew 10:38-39**.

So I have a question for you in here who are believers. Do you think a costly life of discipleship, a life which values the glory of God, the plan of God, and the worship of God over and above personal preference and comfort is an obligation? Is it something you have to do? Yes it is.

Now I understand how we might hate that very idea of an obligation. But in Matthew 10 Jesus says anyone who doesn't live that way is not worthy of me. And look at **Matthew 16:26-27**. To not live your life for Jesus is to step outside of the benefit of Jesus life. It is to risk living once more for your own glory and there is nothing more opposite our faith than that.

So what does this look like? Well let's do a little test right now. If tomorrow you were to take back your confession of faith, what would change? Outside of Sunday morning, would anything else be different? Would you work somewhere else? Would you parent differently? Date differently? Would you spend your money differently? Invite different people into your home? Spend your weekends differently?

I imagine that most of you share my own conviction when you consider those question. So what do we do with this? Do we wallow in our arrogance and try to white knuckle our way back into the obligation of faith? No.

For even though the life of faith is an obligation, it is a joyful obligation. It is an obligation unto life. For look at what Jesus says: **Matthew 16:25**. In 2005 Steve Jobs, then CEO of Apple, gave an address at Stanford University where he said this: **Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking.**

How do we reconcile the tension between these two ideologies? Well the first is that we must admit one of them is wrong. One says keep your life and find joy, the other says lose your life and find joy. They cannot both be true. So now we must consider the evidence.

Look at the defense Jesus gives of his logic in **Matthew 16:28**. Jesus here says take up your cross and follow me because outside of me is death, but inside of me is the coming Kingdom.

Now there is great debate among scholars as to what Jesus is talking about here. What does he mean that some of you will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom. Some say Jesus is referring to the transfiguration which we will look at next week. Some say he is referring to Jesus' death. Some say he is referring to his resurrection. Some say he is referring to his ascension into heaven. And some others say he is referring to his second coming.

All of them have just made my point. The debate for the validity of Jesus sign of confidence ends when the debate begins to argue which proof of confidence is the real proof of confidence. Does that make sense? When we have to ask ourselves which promise fulfilled is Jesus talking about here, we are already sitting neck deep in our answer.

Where does Jesus promise that the hard life of sacrifice and obligation is actually the only life? Where does he promise we will give everything and suffer no loss? Is it when he showed himself in his glorified

form? Was it when he died for your sins? Was it when he rose again? Was it when he ascended into heaven? Or is it when he comes back to setup his Kingdom forever?

Pick one and bank your life on it. Put Jesus to the test and give up your life for his sake. Test the merit of his kingdom by beginning to think first of his kingdom and his righteousness. Make yourself comfortable with the discomfort of following Jesus because there is joy to be had and life to be lived in the gospel of Jesus.

If we can trust Jesus' death to deal with our sins, can we not also trust Jesus' death to bring us life? This is what your faith affirms. This is the logical and responsible end of what we proclaim in the gospel. This is the life of the church, the joy of the saints, and the gift of Jesus.

So here is what I want all of us to do this week: I want you to think about your life in three categories: your time, your skills, and your money. And I want us then to take a week and pray Matthew 16:24-28 in regards to those three areas. Where can you use your time to help others either hear about the Kingdom of God, or understand it better? Where can you use your skills to serve the Kingdom of God? Where can you use your money to support the Kingdom of God?

If we want to be a church which has integrity in its faith, we must ask God to prepare our hearts to endure the cost of following him. I want you all to do this because for me to sit here and tell you what it looks like is to actually skip the cost of considering your own life and faith.

So this week we as a church are going to consciously pray about where God is asking us to give up more of our time, skills and money for his glory and for our joy. If we want to be a church with integrity, we must be a church who humbly asks God to help us where our faith is weak. If Christ is our confession, then Christ is our life.