

Don't Go Tell It On The Mountain

Mathew 6:13-28

#22 in Jesus Stories series

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Worship

“Go Tell it on the Mountain”

Prayer

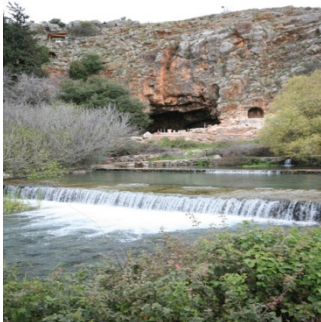
Lord God, we pray that you would help us to preach. We pray that together, as your sanctuary, we would be filled with your very self, the Living Word, and that you would transform us, and make us into the people that you want us to be and cause our lives to be an offering sent back up to you as praise and worship in everything that we do. Help us to preach in Jesus' name, amen.

Message

Matthew 16:13

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

Caesarea Philippi is north of Galilee, on the edge of Syria at the foot of Mt. Herman. It was an extremely pagan city. For ages it was known as a *Baal-gad*, or *Baal Hermon*, because it was a center for the worship of the Syrian fertility god, Baal. In Greco-Roman times, it was known as *Panyas*, for it became the center for the worship of the fertility god, *Pan* (the goat man).



From this cave issued a spring that fed the Jordan River. The Pagans believed that each winter their gods descended into Hades through this cave and then ascended in the spring. This was known as “The gates of Hades,” or translated into English, “The gates of Hell.”



This is me preaching at the gates of hell. Isn't that impressive? I'm, like, not even scared.

In Jesus day, Panyas had just recently been renamed Caesarea Philippi in honor of King Herod's son, Philip. And Caesar Augustus, who was worshiped here as a god, had a temple here.



So here, at the gates of hell, pagans sacrificed to Roman and Syrian idols, copulated with goats (it's said) and worshipped political leaders as gods. It was the edge of the Gentile world, the edge of Syria, and the edge of hell, which reminds me of the video we watched last week, when we prayed for the persecuted church.

Clip from Voice of the Martyrs

What Does it Mean to be a Christian in Syria?

[Peaceful images of Syria are shown.]

We were praying for revival, believing God would do a big work in Syria.

[A bomber jet flies overhead followed by explosions on the ground.]

Then the war came.

Now the terrorists are attacking Christian homes, churches, and even our children.

[Multiple images of Syria churches, children, and Bibles.]

Their goal is to empty Syria of the Christians.

We hate the spirit of Islam that is destroying our country.

[Images of Muslims and a war-torn Syria]

But we love our Muslim neighbors. They come to us and say, "In the name of our God terrorists rape and kill. Where is God?" We tell them about Jesus, and many are coming to know Him. Still others say, "We are, like, living in hell."

The Voice of the Martyrs presents Liena's prayer.

“We’re like living in hell.”

Biblically, that’s a very accurate statement, for in Scripture, *hades* begins on the surface of the earth and continues after the body dies under the earth, in the grave.

So, who on earth and how on earth could anyone “prevail against the gates of hell?” Good question.

Well, anyway, Jesus takes the twelve disciples to Caesarea Philippi to ask them this question: “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” Now, “*Son of Man*” means “*son of man*” as in “*your father is a man.*” And it’s used that way throughout the Old Testament until Daniel 7:13.

About four hundred ninety years before Christ, Daniel has a vision of “*a son of man*” who receives an eternal kingdom from the Ancient of Days consisting of “*all peoples.*”

It’s like a rock (Daniel 2:35) that strikes the kingdoms of this world and grows until it “*fills the whole earth.*” And Daniel seems to be told (Daniel 9:24) that this “*Son of Man*” will conquer in seventy weeks of years, that’s four hundred ninety years, which works out to about thirty-three A.D. The early church taught that the son of man came with his kingdom in the death and resurrection of Jesus [Athenasius, “*On the Incarnation*” p. 69]

Many modern American Christians say, “Well, it obviously didn’t happen, for we didn’t see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. And so the seventieth week of years skips two thousand years and all our end times books are still valid.”

Well, if you didn’t understand all of that, don’t worry. Just know that as Jesus asks this question, standing at the gates of hell, people were anticipating the coming of the Christ - the Son of God. So, “*Son of Man*” means a man, but it might also mean Son of God – Messiah.

Matthew 16:13-15

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” (Jesus has been referring to himself as the Son of Man.) He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

See, Jesus doesn’t want to know what Bible scholars and political leaders say about him. He wants to know who *you* say that he is. And the answer doesn’t come from some books or a tract. Jesus has been with these guys a few years by now. He could’ve just said at the very start, “Guys, I’m the Messiah, Son of God.” But instead, he lived with them, loved them, touched lepers and blessed little children and then asked, “Who do you say that I am?”

Matthew 16:16

Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

That is “You are man, and you are God.” “You’re the God-man,” the Revelation of God and the Revelation of man, the Messiah, or in Greek – the Christ.

Matthew 16:17

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

If you confess that Jesus is the Christ, you have heard the voice of God the Father. You may have thought it was your idea and your word, but it was God's idea in your heart and his Word on your tongue. And that means: Faith is not your own creation. Faith is something that God has created in you by grace.

In John 15, Jesus says, "You didn't choose me, I chose you." It's your faith because God gave it to you, but as soon as you think you are the "author and finisher" of your own faith, it's not faith, but a lie from hell. The *Son* reveals the Father, and the *Father* reveals the Son.

Matthew 16: 17-19

*Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!¹ For flesh and blood **has not** revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

So Bingo! Yatzee! Jackpot! Peter gives the right answer, and according to Roman Catholics, Jesus makes him Pope. Whatever the case, it does seem that Jesus makes Peter the head of his church. *Peter* is Greek for the name *Rocky*. So Jesus says, "You're Rocky and on this Rock I will build my church." So Peter's thinking "I'm the Messiah's wingman and we're gonna build the church."

Jesus has just fed the five thousand, and the four thousand, by making groups and sharing bread. So first, Peter must be thinking, "We'll build the church by providing bread." All sorts of people argue that to build the church we must form stones into bread; we must be relevant.

And Jesus had just done some spectacular miracles. So secondly, Peter has got to be thinking, "Me and Jesus have got to do more of that walking on water." "When we get to Jerusalem, we could even throw ourselves down from the temple and angels would catch us. And who wouldn't join our church then?"

There are all sorts of people that argue: If you want to grow a church, you need spectacle – signs and wonders . . . and if not that, at least a great band, nice building or stained glass windows.

¹ It's interesting that Jesus calls Peter "son of Jonah," for he's just talked about the sign of Jonah, and maybe Peter's like Jonah: "Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah."

And Jesus has just revealed He's the Messiah – the king, and they're about to go up to Jerusalem. The roads into Jerusalem were often lined with crosses on which the bodies of political dissidents were hung to be eaten by birds and issue warning to all who would challenge the power of Rome.

You know, ISIS didn't invent crucifixion. That was the Romans. The Romans make ISIS look like a pack of school girls.

Well, there are all sorts of people that would argue: if you want to grow the church, you need political power and an army - the strongest army so you can kill the killers, terrorize the terrorists and crucify the crucifiers.

Peter has got to be thinking, "We need relevance, spectacle and third, power. And Jesus said that he would give Peter some keys. In chapter 18, Jesus appears to give them to the other disciples as well. They seem to have something to do with church discipline and proclaiming forgiveness. Jesus says quite literally, *"Whatever you bind on earth will be having been bound in heaven,"* *"and whatever you loose on earth will be having been loosed in heaven."* And Jesus has made it clear: refuse to loose people of their sins, refuse to forgive and you will not be forgiven.

It's like Peter and the twelve are to be the cutting edge of the kingdom of relentless and eternal grace by the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. But of course, at this point, Peter really doesn't know what the heck that means. He just knows that he's the Messiah's wingman. And that their organization is going to storm the gates of Jerusalem, Rome, Syria and even hell. Why? Because he just found out – Jesus is the Christ! And so, at this point, we expect angels to start singing: "Go tell it on the Mountain that Jesus Christ is born."

Next verse, Matthew 16: 20

"Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ."

"Strictly charged them." "Look no t-shirts, no bumper stickers, no tracts, don't you dare tell!"

At the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus says, *"Going therefore disciple all nations."* But for most of the gospels, Jesus tells people to shut up more than speak up, with just a few notable exceptions: He doesn't say it to the Roman Centurion or Syro-Phoenician woman. And he actually tells one guy to go tell everyone in his country. He's the first evangelist – remember? He sends the Gerasene demoniac back into the Gentile Decapolis to tell his Gentile countrymen about Jesus.

In John, the Samaritan woman, on her seventh husband, tells the Samaritans and they believe. And of course, the shepherds tell, but they weren't told to tell, and the shepherds were the red-neck scum of their day—the poor and powerless. Yet, to religious Jews, (the people who know the Law—the people who have the knowledge of good and evil— the people who think they don't need mercy, for they've used the law to make themselves in God's image), to them, Jesus says, "Please, please, please, don't talk about me. . . at least not yet."

Have you ever had people speak for you? When I was the pastor of a really big church, staff people used to ask questions like, “Peter, do you think we should have the children lead the worship service one Sunday?” And I might say, “Well, I’d prefer if they lead part of the worship service one Sunday.” And then they’d say, “Peter doesn’t want children to lead worship.” And then others would say, “Peter won’t allow children in worship,” or “He doesn’t like children!” I finally made a law and told all thirty-five staff members: “No one is allowed to use my name to tell people to do or not do anything.”

And you know, I think that’s why God says, “You shall not take my name in vain.” It really has nothing to do with cuss words and everything to do with religious people using God’s name for their own vain purposes, everything to do with religious people using God’s name while not having a clue as to what it means.

So, Peter says, “Jesus, you’re the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” And Jesus says, “Right! But guys, please don’t tell anyone.” I wonder if Jesus would ever say that to us, as if we knew, he was the Messiah, but we didn’t have a clue as to what that meant? As if we didn’t have a clue as to what the name “Jesus” meant?

So why did Jesus strictly charge his disciples to NOT “go tell it on the mountain?”

Matthew 16:20

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! (Literally: Mercy to you!) This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance (scandalon) to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Holy, moly! In four verses, Peter goes from pope to Satan.

You could use these verses to argue that Peter is Pope and to argue that the pope is the anti-christ. And I think this gives us more than a clue as to why Jesus didn’t want Peter to go tell. Peter knew that Jesus was Messiah, but he didn’t know what Messiah meant. And not only was he wrong about what it meant, he was satanic. So, maybe we shouldn’t be so quick with our bumper stickers, t-shirts and evangelism programs. Maybe we shouldn’t be so quick to “Go tell it on the mountain” because when we say “the Christ is born” we have no clue as to what Christ means. When Christ is born, we think it means something like this is born:

Terminator meets Jesus video.

[The scene opens with angelic music, the Christmas star]

Narrator: *Unto this world, a child is born. (In a deep and intimidating voice)*

[December 25, 0000 flashes on the screen. Lightning flashes and strikes in a farmyard and a fully formed man, resembling Arnold Schwarzenegger appears crouching naked into the farm yard.]

Narrator: *He’s back. Arnold Schwarzenegger is the terminator in The Greatest Action Story Ever Told.*

[Jesus is standing on a hillside addressing a crowd.]

Jesus: *Alright. Alright. Settle down. Did I make enough? Good. Back to my sermon. Blessed are the...*

[Jesus turns to see three Roman soldiers approaching with spears.]

Crowd: *(screaming and running away)*

[The camera shows the Terminator coming up behind Jesus.]

Narrator: Now come, witness the miracle.

[The scene opens up with the twelve disciples and Jesus sitting around a table at the last supper.]

Jesus: (standing up) *Brothers, my time with you is almost over. But for now, let us eat.*

[The doors of the room burst open. Judas turns around to face the door and stares. The Terminator's eyepiece reads:

"Terminate at once. Judas: Warning. Will betray Jesus.]

(Arnold is shown in the doorway with his shotgun aimed.)

Terminator: *Eat this!*

Boom! (Judas flies backwards across the tables while everyone else scrambles and ducks.)

Jesus: *You, . . . you just don't get it do you?*

Terminator: *You have been targeted for termination*

Jesus: *I already told you. I'm supposed to die for the sins of mankind.*

[Jesus shakes his hands out like a surgeon and places them on Judas' chest. A bright light comes from his hands and angelic music sounds. Judas sits up.]

Terminator: *I'm programmed to protect you.*

Blam! (Down goes Judas. Everyone else ducks.)

Jesus: *Stop! Stop killing Judas!*

Terminator: *But he was going to betray you.*

Jesus: *I know. Look. Look, I've got a lot on my mind right now and you're really starting to stress me out! Okay? Okay?*

[Jesus places his hands on Judas's chest, the light shines out of his hands, angelic music sounds, and Judas starts to sit up.]

Terminator: *Pontius Pilate, ten o'clock!*

(Everyone turns to look.)

Blam!

Jesus: *Give me that thing!*

Narrator: *This Christmas, the meek shall inherit the action.*

[The scene opens up to Jesus carrying the cross and passing a woman standing next to the Terminator.]

Woman: *(crying.)*

Terminator: *Don't worry. He'll be back.* (He places his arm around the weeping woman next to him.)

Woman: *(crying.)*

Terminator: What?

That's maybe my all-time favorite video clip, not just because it's funny, but it reveals our psyche – the way we think. Most folks think Jesus is coming back just like the terminator is coming back. And since he didn't terminate his enemies the first time, he's coming back to terminate them the second time. And maybe he is, but Scripture says, "*He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"

So maybe we don't understand how the Messiah judges the world, storms the gates of hell, and terminates evil. Which means we, modern American Christians, may be just like Peter. So, when we speak about Jesus, we may be doing the work of satan for him, for maybe we have believed his lies and so perpetuate his lies.

And what's Satan's lie?

What is the lie that Peter has believed?

What is the lie that Peter has believed? Well, Jesus says the Messiah must suffer. The verb is *pascho*, from whence we get our word *passion*. Jesus says that he (the Son of Man and Son of God) must "*suffer many things.*" And Peter says, "*Mercy on you Lord. This shall never be.*" That is, "God loves you, so he won't let you suffer." Does that sound familiar?

How about:

“If you accept Jesus and join our group, God will make you wealthy and healthy. He won’t let you suffer.” Where have we heard something like that?

“Hey, if you’re the Son of God, turn these stones into bread. Why suffer hunger? Feed yourself and feed the world. Get relevant and build your church.”

“Hey, if you’re the Son of God, throw yourself down from the temple where everyone can see and the angels can catch you. Why suffer humiliation? Impress them with spectacle and build your church.”

“Hey, if you’re the Messiah, the king, do it my way, and I’ll give you Israel, Syria, Rome and all the kingdoms of this world. Why suffer death at the hands of your enemies? Instead, accuse your enemies, slander your enemies, enslave your enemies and force them to join your kingdom or die.”

Build your church with relevance, spectacle and power. That sounds familiar, because it’s the voice of satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness. And please understand, bread is good, miracles are good, and power can be good, but Jesus builds his church with something else. . .

In the words of Henri Nouwen, satan tempts Jesus with relevance, spectacle, and power. In the words of Fyodor Doestoyevski, satan tempts Jesus with miracle, mystery and authority. But Jesus builds his church with something else. . .

Jesus hears the voice of Satan coming through Peter and says, “*Get behind me Satan. You are a scandalon to me.*” “Not the rock, but a stumbling stone.” Peter’s words are a stumbling stone to Jesus, and to all who would follow in the steps of Jesus.

Imagine if someone came along and whispered in my son’s ear, when he was about five years old: “Hey, why, you’re Peter Hiett’s son! Hey buddy! I know your dad. He loves you. Your father loves you so much that you can be sure he’d never let you suffer. He’d never spank you or take you to the dentist or make you eat peas. And whatever you want at the grocery store, well, you just name it and claim it and take it. Why? Because your father loves you.”

If I overheard someone saying that to my son (or whispering that into his ear), I’d fly into a rage saying, “You better believe I love my son and everything I have is his. But, don’t you dare utter my name to my son ever, ever, ever again!”

Seventy years ago, American missionaries taught Chinese converts that Jesus would return to terminate his enemies and that, seven years before he did that, there would be a great tribulation. But God would rapture his people before the great tribulation, for God wouldn’t allow his chosen to suffer.

When the Communists took over and began to torture Christians, many new Chinese believers thought they missed the rapture and therefore missed the Messiah, and the Messiah did not love them, when in fact, the Messiah was in them, for he did love them. He was suffering, delighting in their faith, hope and love in the midst of suffering for his name.

You know many of the Jews couldn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, for they would not believe that the Messiah would suffer or let them suffer. The Koran teaches that Jesus wasn't crucified, for God would not allow his chosen one to suffer. Peter believed the lie that the Messiah wouldn't suffer. . .

What is the lie that Peter has believed?

- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer.

Even more, he believed the lie that the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies.

What is the Lie that Peter has believed?

- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer.
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies

In verse 21, Jesus told Peter and his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem; that it was the will of God that he "*suffer many things.*" Bible scholars point out that in Scripture "*many*" often means "*all*" because of the way Aramaic and Greek get translated and work together. And in this case, probably does mean all, for Jesus appears to be referencing Isaiah 53:6 "*The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us ALL.*" Verse 10, "*It was the will of the Lord to crush him.*"

As Saint Paul writes, "*Love bears all things.*"

Love bears all things on the cross. It's there that Jesus cries, "*Father forgive them.*" And who is them? It's all of us. We have all made ourselves his enemy. Satan's lie is that God wouldn't suffer for his enemies, for God doesn't love his enemies. Yet Jesus taught, "*Love your enemies. . . be merciful as your Father is merciful.*"

Satan's lie is that God wouldn't suffer for his enemies but only make his enemies suffer.

Well, God does make his enemies suffer, but then reveals that he suffers with them, in them, and for them.

He reveals he loves them.

He is love and he reveals it through suffering.

He suffers all and he suffers you.

He allows you to will what he doesn't will...

In order that you could see that he is good and freely will what he *does* will for all eternity.

It's how he makes you in his image. He allows you to make yourself his enemy so he can suffer for you, his enemy, crying out "*Father, forgive.*" God makes you in his own image with grace. Satan tempts you to believe that you make yourself in God's image with the "*knowledge of good and evil,*" the law. The Jews had the law and the law is good, but through the law the Jews were tempted to believe that they made themselves in God's image and therefore deserved the Messiah while others like Romans and Syrians did not.

They were tempted to believe that they could make God love them when in fact, God who is love, made them. See how upside down that is? They were tempted to believe that their choices saved them when in fact, their choices damned them and only God's choice could save them. God's choice is "*Jesus.*" The name "*Jesus*" means "*God is salvation.*"

Last week Christianity today ran a fascinating article about Evangelicals' favorite heresies. Number one was the belief that we seek God first and he responds with grace. (That's called Pelagianism.) The belief that it's our choice that creates God's choice to save rather than God's choice that creates our choice to be saved. 68% of Evangelicals said they agreed with the idea, and yet the idea was condemned as heresy by three of the great early church councils (418, 431 and 529) and Jesus said, "*You didn't choose me – I chose you.*"

You know the idea that Jesus ultimately chooses to redeem all, was never declared a heresy by any of the church ecumenical councils and many historians believe it was the dominant view of the early church until 500 AD in Rome. And so, why do Evangelical Christians freak out at the idea that God might choose to save all? Well, if God saves all, then God saves your enemies – which implies that you're no better than your enemies, which means you probably didn't save yourself and you ought to love your enemies.

And now I'm not talking about loving satan for I'm not sure there's anything to love in satan. I'm not sure he's a substance as much as an absence. And yet, I firmly believe we are tempted by him. And I also believe I've heard his lies audibly. I can't tell you the stories here and now, but let me say, that when I clearly heard his lies, I was surprised to discover they had nothing to do with Harry Potter, and everything to do with the idea that Jesus didn't suffer for his enemies. In other words, that Jesus didn't forgive his enemies, that is "God is not salvation," at least "not salvation for all," in other words, God is not Jesus for all.

I heard satan's lies and then was shocked to realize that they sounded so very familiar, not because I heard them from Led Zepplin or Ozzy Osborne, but because I heard them from people at church, people like Peter and people like me – accusers – that's what Satan means. Accusers, or devil (Satan, I think adversaries are devils slanderers.) Accusers make enemies and keep them. I heard Jesus didn't die for all. Jesus didn't suffer for his enemies. His enemies are the people on the other side of the wall, the people that haven't chosen him, the people predestined for hell or already in hell, the people on the other side of the gates of hades.

At church, I heard "Jesus wouldn't suffer for his enemies" or "If he did suffer for his enemies his suffering didn't redeem his enemies." In other words, "His cross did not work."

I think that's Satan's favorite lie.

What is the lie that Peter has believed?

- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer.
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies to redeem his enemies.

Jesus didn't suffer for his enemies and redeem his enemies.

And sometimes I've heard this "Well, Jesus suffered so we would not suffer." In other words, "Jesus bore a cross so that we would not."

Next verse, Mathew 16: 23-26

*Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up **his** cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life (psyche) will lose it, but whoever loses his life (psyche) for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (psyche) Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (psyche)*

Well, the Messiah not only suffers for his enemies to redeem his enemies, I think he suffers for his enemies to redeem his enemies through us - his body.

What is the lie that Peter has believed?

- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer.
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies to redeem his enemies.
- That the Messiah wouldn't suffer for his enemies to redeem his enemies through us.

And so, of course satan would lie to Peter and us saying, "Don't suffer for your enemies, accuse, condemn, and overpower your enemies. That's how the kingdom comes." "The kingdom comes the way the Terminator comes, the way the U.S. military comes the way ISIS comes. Same psyche, same way of thinking, just more power."

Mathew 16: 26-27

Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (psyche) For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay (give or reward) each person according to what he has done.

How does Jesus reward his enemies' deeds? Well, how does he reward your deeds? Jesus says The Son of Man will come, and he will judge each according to what he's done. What you do doesn't earn salvation, but salvation will judge what you have done. The grace of God will devour the chaff. It will burn away evil with unquenchable fire and it will purify the good, like gold is purified in a furnace. So, his coming is sweet for some and a terror for others. They may hide in hades for a time, but we will all stand before the judgment of Christ.

Mathew 16: 27-28

He will repay (give or reward) each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Now, that means that

1. Jesus didn't know what he was talking about, he was wrong.
2. Scripture is unreliable, inaccurate.
3. The king and his kingdom has been coming for two thousand years and some just can't see it, like, maybe something is wrong with their psyche, like the kingdom is at hand and they can't see it.

Or maybe it means he comes for each of us individually at death. He said to his disciples in John 14, *"I will come for you to take you to where I'm going."* If you run from him and hide from him, you literally run from life and hide in death and that place is called *hades* or hell. But if you surrender to him, you inherit his kingdom. He rewards you with himself and all things.

In Matthew 26:64, standing before the High Priest, Jesus says, *"From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* I think my dad saw Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven just seven years ago, the day he died, and yet it was the day he lived. For he was not trapped by death in the depths of the earth. He went home.

In Matthew 28, risen from the dead, Jesus says, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, going therefore disciple all nations."* In other words, because I am absolutely in charge, go love as I have loved you. Suffer for your enemies and I will redeem your enemies, even through you.

So, yes, Peter and yes, church, Jesus is the Messiah, but how does the Messiah conquer the gates of Hell?

Voice of the Martyrs Clip: *Liena's Prayer*

See the next page.

[The scene opens on a rubble strewn street in Syria]

Liena: We are like living in hell.

[The screen reads: The voice of the Martyrs presents Liena's prayer.]

Liena: *One day, while I was praying*

[A woman is shown with her head covered, praying.]

I asked God what he would have me do to be his witness (images of a Syrian streets) but he only asked me, "Will you give me your life?" As I prayed (image of a woman reading a Bible) I understood he wanted all of me and I said "Yes. If the time came, I was willing to die for Jesus." The next day, while I was praying (the image of the woman with her head covered, praying shows again.) I asked God again, "What he would have me do. (Images of a man having a pillow fight with his children and laughing.) This time he asked me, "Are you willing to give me your husband's life?" It is not easy to be ready to die. My husband and I prayed about this together. (A silhouette of a man holding his wife's hands as they face each other is portrayed.) We said yes to God. The third day, (The image of the woman praying shows again.) was the most difficult. On this day, God asked me if I was willing to give up my children's lives. (The screen shows the couple looking out over a balcony towards the Syrian countryside.) The terrorists know who we are and that we share Jesus with Muslims. It is not safe for our family. (An image of the husband and wife kneeling and praying together is shown.) My husband and I prayed and fasted and together we agreed. God gave us our precious children (Images of a boy and a girl laughing and chasing each other through a hall and into a room for a paper airplane). He has the freedom to take them back. When we agreed to put our children to put our children on the altar, I knew I had to tell them the truth. (Images of a boy and a girl sitting at a table with their mom.) I told them it's possible that men with swords may come through our door, men who didn't know Jesus. (Images of men wearing headscarves throwing open doors, yelling) they may say bad things to us and try to force us to convert to Islam. But no matter what they say, we should not answer them. (A bearded man wearing a headscarf throws open the door to the children's room where they look at him in fear as he yells at them in Arabic.) We should only tell them that Jesus loves them (The bearded man in the scarf comes out into the hall and yells in Arabic at the mom on the floor) and that we forgive them. (The scene goes back to the children at a table with their mom talking to them.) I also told them that as long as God wants us to be safe we will be safe. But he is in control. Even during the bloodshed, during the killing, he is carrying our future. This is what it means to be a Christian in Syria.

The following words are show on the screen:

"This is what it means to be a Christian in Syria,"

"Or is this what it means to be a Christian?"

"This is what it means to be a Christian." I read on the Voice of the Martyrs website that Liena and her family were offered asylum in the West, but they prayed and chose to stay in Syria as a witness- we don't know whether they're alive or dead.

I've heard that at least a thousand believers have been slaughtered in Syria since this crisis began. So, how does the Messiah conquer the gates of hell? He uses people like you to look his enemies in the eye and tell them that he loves them and you forgive them. You see, I think that's exercising the power of the keys. I think that's how the church overpowers the gates of hell. I know it seems horrifying and even wrong and terrifying, but I think that's only because we don't believe what Jesus said.

He said, "*The Son of Man will suffer many things, be killed and on the third day rise.*" It seems that Peter missed that point. He said, "*lose your life and you will find it.*" We will all die. In fact, many are just the walking dead. We will all die, but until you die for love, you cannot live. Every day you can die for love and begin to live. And dying for love (sacrificial love) is how Jesus builds his church.

You can build human institutions with relevance, spectacle, and power. You can certainly build them through accusations, by finding enemies and making scapegoats, by telling some they're in because others are out. You can build human institutions through lust, pride, and fear, but Jesus builds his church and breaks down the gates of hell with sacrificial love.

Jesus doesn't battle hell by making more hell.

He battles hell by filling all things with love.

He is the death of death.

He is the condemnation of condemnation.

He is the terminator of termination.

And until you see Jesus the Messiah, crucified for the sins of the whole world, I think he'd say, "Hey could you take off the t-shirt and try not to talk about me so much?"

But if you know that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world...

- You can look your grumpy wife right in the eye,
- You can look your rebellious son right in the eye,
- You can look your worst enemy,
- You can look an ISIS militant right in the eye and say "Jesus loves you and I forgive you."

And in this way, Christ in you storms the gates of hell.

We're out of time and we'll talk about it more next week, but Peter denied knowing Christ and then saw Christ dying for the sins of the world. He lost his psyche and he found his psyche. As the risen Christ said, "*Now Peter, feed my sheep.*" So Peter told. Peter preached and Jesus built his church on Peter on Pentecost.

It was relevant, spectacular and powerful, but it wasn't the power of this world. Peter chose to die for his enemies on a cross outside of Rome and so he conquered Rome and now he's called the Bishop of Rome. In 1 Peter 4: 6, he wrote, "*The gospel was preached even to those who are dead (that's hades) that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the Spirit the way God does. The end, the telos, the perfection of all things is at hand.*" Jesus is the beginning and the end, the perfection of all things. And he is at hand.

Communion

On the night he was betrayed the Messiah took bread and he broke it, saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat, do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, after supper and having given thanks, he took the cup and he said, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, and do it in remembrance of me.

Do you see this? Do you believe this? Do you ingest and digest this? Then go tell it on the mountains over the hills and everywhere that Jesus is the Christ. In Jesus' name believe the gospel and speak the gospel. Amen.

[Several worship songs are sung]

Benediction

And so Jesus said, *"Love your enemies."* And he also said this, *"Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* Have you ever wondered, "Why didn't he say his enemies?"

Do you remember what Jesus said to Judas in the garden? *"Friend, do what you need to do, quickly."* So what was Judas? Well, [Peter holds up one finger] he was the son of perdition, and Jesus' friend. [Peter holds up two fingers.] The son of perdition will be destroyed and Jesus will redeem his friend. You see, Jesus conquers hell the way he conquered you. He turns his enemies into friends. This was confusing me a little bit. I was saying, "Well, something's not quite right here." And I think it's because I don't know that God really has enemies the way we have enemies. We make ourselves God's enemy every time we sin. That's what we're doing, we're saying, "I'm going to be the enemy of love." But when God looks at you, he says, "Yeah, but I call you my friend." His love is extravagant! So believe the gospel and preach the gospel, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.