

First Sunday in Lent (2018)

Mark 8:27–38 And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? *For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*”

In the Name of Jesus.

WHAT a relief! Heaven, NOW, ONLY condemns—shames—those who deny and reject the Gospel!

What delights the disciples of Jesus and His holy angels is what delights the Father of the disciples and Jesus and His holy angels! The Gospel; which states that:

the ONLY thing Heaven now shames—meaning, CONDEMNNS!—is the LIE that says HEAVEN’S...CONDEMNATION...STILL..HANGS...OVER...ANY...MAN—depending on THAT MAN!

Satan-talk! To which Peter, and all men, are finely attuned! ‘Suffering, Lord?! Oh, this shall never happen to YOU—(squeak, squeak: or to us?!!!) Are we not trying to get OUT of, AWAY from others and their problems?!’

The NEW POWER of Christ has been revealed as THIS: that God’s power is made perfect in WEAKNESS! Ours—AND...CHRIST’S! And we are raised to HIS suffering for others, with others, bearing with the, bearing the cross. The WHOLE CURRICULUM of the disciples, the students, of Jesus.

This is what Peter means by calling Jesus ‘The Christ!’ He is the New David, the New King of the Jews; and no matter what government of a day, no matter what man boasting of his power—a mist that is here today and tomorrow is blown away—where DAVID was, the Living God of Israel was. And so, where THIS DAVID, THIS CHRIST rules, This Man—the God of all rules all! But, a rule like none of has ever known in this world!

The name of the place gives it away! ‘Caesarea Philippi.’ Named, of course, after some Caesar of Rome, from where the world gets all its republics. And named for the Greek-speaking people of the world; named after the father of Alexander the Great, who was named Philip.

Now, Philip and Caesar had much in common. They were both thugs; and they both ruined forms of government that were devoted to driving out the thugs. In Athens, in Greek lands, it was democracy. In Rome, it was the Republic. Such powerful ideas, that nearly all the powers of the world are called by one or the other of these names. In the Constitution of these United States, it declares that our form of government is a Republic.

But republics and democracies don’t seem to last; and thugs—Caesars, Philips, Alexanders—they always seem to

rise up to improve upon self-rule, to enlighten us all with their PRIVATE, INDIVIDUAL notions of what's best for us.

Jesus insisted on silence about His rule. “He strictly charged them to tell no one of this!” Palm Sunday would take care of THAT problem. Hailed as King—THAT would get the notice of the Greek speaking Roman powers sent out by a Caesar to rule the Jews. And our Christ's enemies knew that it would kill Him.

And right there, Peter stumbled at temptation. For OUR Christ is NOT going to play tug-o-war with puny kings and monarchs and czars and dictators; OR with any Republicans or Democrats or Superior Independents! IN FACT—He EXCLUDES from HIS Kingdom ANYONE who does not share HIS expulsion, HIS shame—‘whoever would save his life, his soul, himself, will lose it all!’

But He grants this happy, confident, expectant hope: ‘All that the powers of this world have IS this world! I am among you as the One Who put the world together in the first place. And I am among you to tell you that YOU are worth more than this entire world; certainly more than those who would push and shove you around in this world! Come after Me; and bear the cross!’

So, the writer to the Hebrews is glad to reveal:

At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why *he is not ashamed to call them brothers,* ¹² saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your
praise.”

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Why even bring THAT up?! Why WOULD Jesus, the Christ, be ashamed of calling His disciples His brothers? Even you and me?

Because of SATAN! The simple tune our evil master has taught us to sing and hum and chant and use to poison the ears of God's little ones:

‘Improve upon God; improve upon God; make progress on the Law; ADAVNCE BEYOND Christ, His Suffering, His Baptism, His Body and His Blood; move PAST—quickly!—the Gospel! To something more decisive: ANYONE ELSE! MOSES will do!!’

What freedom the Spirit of Jesus has brought! That against Satan and his pastors and his bound consciences, we are freed up to use even his lousy language:

‘Well, you make some good arguments there, Mr. Satan! I agree that the Law is not what I want to do; and the Gospel seems to let me and others off too easy! But Jesus is going to want NOTHING to do with me when He returns, if He doesn't find ME the most pitiable, helpless sinner in the world! So, I need to keep practicing the Ten Commandments, so I can please heaven now-and-then; but most of all so that I can pray God's mercy with desperation. And I need to keep singing of myself as chief of sinners—however little I'm sincere about that! And the next poor man needs from me nothing but stick-to-him-ness from me! He's got all the temptation and fear and doubt and guilt he

needs already; from you!’

Actually, my dear ones: best not to talk to Satan at all! Or call any of the pastors and priests and popes and preachers oppressing the Church ‘Satan’ either. Leave that to the One Who bested the liar, the murderer, the accuser; by the weakness of God and the foolishness of God that takes into Himself ALL offense!

But what we ARE freed up to do, is to rejoice that ALL the tricks Old Nick has come up with—well....our Brother, Jesus, has left them all in His dust, behind, out of heaven’s sight and out of heaven’s mind and out of heaven’s heart. ‘Get thee behind Me!’ Talk about SHAME! What child of God would fall for THAT?!! To take our eyes off the joy of the elephants on parade; and to focus on what treasures they’ve dropped on the road for the men with the shovels and buckets!

I hope this isn’t too much picture language for y’all. In plain language: Satan wants your poor preacher—and you—to emulate Peter, to move on from Christ’s work THEN, and His gifts NOW, HERE—and get to something interesting, RELEVANT (men say), PRAC-TICAL: the Law, works, judgment, excusing; Satan’s turf!

Whereas my namesake, Paul, brushed off those at Rome who wanted rules and threats and all that helpful guidance to swamp and drown the forgiveness that makes the next poor man certain that God will never unglue Himself from any man; and Paul wrote:

I am NOT ASHAMED of the Gospel! For it is the power of God unto salvation!

God's power, (Doctor Luther taught the Church), EVEN in the midst of our many, daily, unstoppable sins. That we may trust as the writer to the Hebrews continues:

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Heb 2:8–18). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Temptation One: Christ is too weak to attach Heaven to the likes of you and me. His water and Baptism is too little. His Body and Blood nothing great. His Church is a mess!

Temptation Two: God's Law is optional.

Jesus can even help us overcome the little temptation, regarding the Law: teaching us, out of gladness and thanksgiving, to behave—simply to please our Heavenly Father, His Spirit, and our Brother, Jesus.

But He's REALLY GOOD at helping us with temptation number one! He gave His Holy Supper; He suffered; He died; He rose; and now, He NEVER rebukes ANYONE, man, angel, devil or preacher, from declaring to the WORLD:

YOU...ARE UNABLE TO presume upon God!
NOW! No matter what YOU say about you; no matter what Satan says about you; no matter what any fleeting power of this world says about you—GOD, in Christ, has bound Himself to you more than you can take advantage of Him in the Name of Jesus! Amen!