

**Building Or Stumbling Block?**  
**Matthew 16:13-23**  
**Preached by Rev Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
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Did you ever have something like this happen to you? One minute you're on top of the world because of something you did or said, and the next you're cut down to size, because of something you said or did.

This is what happened to Peter. Jesus asked his disciples **"Who do you think I am?"** At first there is silence until Peter blurts out **"I know, you are the one we've been waiting for, you are the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ!"** Jesus praises Peter, **"God bless you, Peter, you are the very first person to figure me out. God blessed you with this sacred knowledge and you have the honor of being the very first member, the very first building block of the new church I am about to build!"**

Can you imagine how Peter felt, singled out and lionized for his brilliant spiritual insight? Most likely it went to his head, so he was feeling pretty good about himself.

But then, moments later Jesus cut Peter back down to size after revealing his new spin on what it really means to be the Messiah. Instead of being a triumphant Christ who would bring instant gratification and glory to his disciples, Jesus would become a suffering Messiah, by going to Jerusalem and allowing himself to be crucified. Instead of living triumphantly for his people, he would die horribly for our sins.

Peter didn't like this plan, wanting Jesus to be a more user friendly Christ who would make discipleship fun, safe and profitable. He didn't want a Christ who demanded the high cost of servanthood and sacrifice. So Peter objects. **"No Jesus, I forbid it. You will not follow your risky scheme and go to Jerusalem to die."**

Recognizing the devil was pulling Peter's strings the same way he tempted himself in the wilderness Jesus rebuked Peter. **"Peter, that's the devil speaking through you! You're acting like a stumbling block. Change your thinking. You can't love the world system and be a citizen of the Kingdom!"**

It was no accident Jesus asked his question **"Who do you think I am?"** in Caesarea Philippi, one of the great cities of the ancient world, just twenty five miles from Galilee. Unlike Jerusalem, a strictly Jewish city, Caesarea Philippi was a strictly Roman city, a symbol of Rome's power and glory. It was also the home of the Temple built in honor of the Greek god Pan.

Can you see why Jesus chose this venue to reveal his identity? It would be as Jesus took you to the Mall in Washington, D.C. or Times Square in New York, or Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills and in the midst of all the power and glitz pops the question **"Who am I?"** And when you answer, **"You are the Christ,"** he then answers **"Good, you gave the right answer. But now comes the harder question. Are you willing to give up the world's glitz and power, and instead take on a lifestyle of service and sacrifice?"** But before you answer, let me tell you something. **If you go the way of the world, if you spend your life obsessing over material wealth, being a control freak and always wanting to be number one, you'll end up being a loser. On the other hand, if you deny yourself these things and try to live like me you will gain all the good graces of my kingdom."**

This is the same challenge Jesus sets before you and me every day. Make your decision. Choose your destiny.

Like Peter, our spirits are willing, but the flesh is weak. Sometimes you become a building block in the Kingdom. Other times you become, for yourself and possibly others, a stumbling block. But remember, even when you fail Jesus still loves you. You will have your ups and downs and like Peter you may even deny Jesus three times ("**I don't know him, I have nothing to do with him**"). But even when you are a stumbling block, you are still loved and valued. ("**Jesus loves me this I know for the bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, They are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, the bible tells me so.**")

The need to be loved and valued, even when you don't love and value yourself, isn't that one of the reasons you came to Jesus and asked him to be your Lord and Savior?

But does that knowledge of unconditional love give you permission to go your way, embrace the World and forget the kingdom because whatever you do, Jesus still loves you no matter what?

You know the answer to that. God's unconditional love is supposed to empower you to change. That's exactly what happened to Peter. Read the Book of Acts, and you'll find a changed man, preaching and healing, defying the world because he was empowered by the presence of Christ to take Jesus' place and continue the ministry he started.

That's what you and I are supposed to do. Let Jesus' love change and empower you to become like Jesus and take his place in our broken world.

When Jesus asks the question, "**Who am I?**" immediately there is the follow up question, "**Who are you?**" Only you can answer that question as you discover your true identity. Like Peter, you walk that bumpy road of discipleship. Along the way you learn to pray, to talk and listen to God and embrace God's Word found in the Bible so you can change and be empowered to love and serve others, using the gifts and graces God gives you.

Two thousand years later Jesus continues to build his church one block at a time. We have the potential of being either a building block and even sometimes a stumbling block. Either way you are loved and accepted because of the Gospel of the Second Chance.

Of course the goal is to be a building block more times than you are a stumbling block. How do you begin to realize that goal?

One of the themes of this summer's sermon continues to be the importance of a disciplined prayer life grounded in scripture. Making time each day to pray for yourself and your loved ones, praying that God will build you up and empower you to be a good and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

Question. Have you heard this? Do you realize how essential it is to go to God in prayer so you can live your life abundantly?

If you read the September BellTower, you will find many opportunities to get a jump start by joining a small group for Bible Study and prayer. If none of the times are right for you, let me know. We'll start another group.

And as the fall continues we are making available other opportunities for discipleship, to help you identify your personal gifts that can be matched up with opportunities for ministry.

I have been praying that the Holy Spirit will place deep in your heart a burning desire to grow in Christ and serve in Christ's name so that more and more you will grow into your discipleship.

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Stumbling Block or Building Block? Choose wisely for Christ's sake.

Let us pray!