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"Rocks"

Exodus 1:8-2:10 Matthew 16:13-20 Romans 12:1-8

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS 1:8-2:10

There arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph. Because of the Israelites growing numbers the Pharaoh orders all baby boys in Israel to be thrown into the Nile. One mother technically complied with the order, but she threw her son into the Nile in a basket. Hear the word of the Lord from EXODUS 1:8-2:10

INTRODUCTION TO MATTHEW 16:13-20

If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent us an educator; If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent us a scientist; If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent us an economist; If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer; But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Savior, a Redeemer, a Rescuer. (1) Hear the word of God from Matthew 16:13-20

Let's pray. Dear Lord, thank you for opening our eyes and, the eyes of our hearts even, to see what Peter said—that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Thank you that you are much more than a prophet, that you are the one the prophets [REDACTED] As we mediate on what that means for us, as we ponder our answer to your question of who WE say you are, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our [REDACTED] and our Redeemer.

Last Saturday night I left Houston so I could be here for Sunday, but when I got to Independence exit I turned around because the radio said that there were Tornado Warnings in Meyerland. I went back to Houston to be with Anne at our house in Meyer Park—a stone's throw from Meyerland. Consequently I wasn't able to get back to Baytown until last Wednesday. I don't like to say we canceled worship. I know there was a lot of praying going on in homes. I'd rather say we postponed corporate worship.

One of the first emails I got was from David Corder who said he hoped I would preach the sermon I intended to preach last Sunday this Sunday because their anthem went well with it. Considering that the choir would probably not practice and that our Administrative Assistant Joyce Parker had already made bulletins and the power point I decided to do just what David recommended. So this morning I am going to preach my very first sermon mulligan.

I did have DiAnne Wilson send it out last Sunday morning inviting you to read it at home so I'm curious. How many of you besides David read it? Ok you get to hear what you read. But not exactly.

The sermon I would have preached last Sunday pretty much ignored the Old Testament lesson other than introduce it and read it as a part of the service. Of course after the week we've been through I think that text has more to say to us than ever before.

We have been following the life of Abraham, his son Isaac, HIS son Jacob, who had his name changed to Israel after a wrestling match with God...that Lanie Garrett referenced in her article in the Sun this morning. We moved on to Israel's favorite son Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers only to rise to second in command in that land and as a result in the right place at the right time to be able to save his family and indeed all of Egypt during years of famine. When Joseph brought his family to live in Egypt to survive the famine years those immigrants became not residents but slave labor. Eventually, there came a king who "knew not Joseph." This king felt threatened by the growing number of Israelites and he decreed that all the Jewish baby boys be killed when they were born. Two of the midwives Shiprah and Puah disobeyed the king and boys continued to be born. So he made another decree that all the baby boys be thrown into the Nile.

For three months one mother refused to do so, but finally complied, technically. She threw her son in the Nile... in a basket. He was rescued by the king's daughter, nursed by his own mother --with pay, and grew to become a prince in the palace. The King's daughter named him Moses....because he was drawn out of the water.

Now that's a long "drawn out" story. But I retold it because Moses grew to become the deliverer. He became the deliverer from bondage in Egypt. He became the deliverer of the Law of God. He became the deliverer who led the children of Israel to the Promised Land. He became the deliverer who foreshadowed another who also thwarted a king's order that he be killed as a baby. Deliverance for the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt came through a baby in a basket. Deliverance for us all from bondage to sin came through a baby in a manger.

At Christmas we will focus on the baby in the manger, but this morning our focus is on Jesus in danger. Jesus is nearing the end of his teaching and healing ministry. It was time for him to get alone with his disciples far from the watchful eyes of the religious authorities and assess the last three years of ministry. Actually, Jesus left his "working vacation," in Lebanon This morning we see him on his session retreat Syria. They ventured into the District of Caesarea Philippi, an area about 25 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee.

The region had tremendous religious implications. The countryside was cluttered with the temples of the Syrian gods. Here also was the elaborate marble temple that had been erected by Herod the Great, father of the then ruling Herod

Antipas. Here also was the influence of the Greek gods. Here also the worship of Caesar as a God himself. In fact, the town was named after Caesar! —Caesarea! It was with this scene in the background that Jesus chose to ask the most crucial questions of his ministry.

Jesus wanted to find out if his disciples understood who he was. It was a critical moment and critical moments call for critical questions: Question number one was, "Who do men say that I am?"

The disciples begin sharing with Jesus the results of the latest polls. Survey said! (ding) "Some say that you are Elijah; others say John the Baptist, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

All of these descriptions tell us one thing. The people thought Jesus was a great prophet. The number one answer came first— , the greatest of all the prophets who did not die but was taken up to the heavens in a chariot of fire. Elijah was the prophet they expected to return. In fact, today at every Passover Jews set a place setting for Elijah at their celebration of the Seder meal hoping for his return.

The number 2 answer was , Jesus' cousin who was beheaded to please the daughter of the wife of Herod. The problem with this answer is that s. John the Baptist and Jesus were alive at the same time. For Jesus to be John the Baptist reincarnated Jesus would have to die and be born again as John come back and grow to a 30 year old man in a matter of days. Yet, that's what some people thought... it just goes to show that polls still sometimes don't necessarily reflect accurate information just held opinions.

Coming in third was the weeping prophet. But Jesus had too much fun to be Jeremiah—walking on water—(skiing without a boat), Casting demons into swine (making deviled ham) and changing water into wine. He was not a whiner he was a wine maker!

Jesus' first question was an important question, but it was just the . NOW Jesus turns to his disciples and he asks his most personal friends, his inner circle, his trusted students the second critical question: OK so that's what other people say, Who do

The world has turned on the heels of the answer to that question. By answering Elijah, John the Baptist and Jeremiah, the people paid Jesus compliments of the highest order. They were going as high as they could imagine. But it was the wrong answer.

Jesus says, "Is that final answer?" He gives them another chance. He says, "Who do YOU say I am?" Peter responded to the question with, "

Jesus immediately responds with a blessing. You got that right! **BLESSED** are you Simon son of Jonah." But then Jesus explains that Simon couldn't have come up with this on his own. [REDACTED] ☺

The people's polls [REDACTED] revealed that Jesus was a prophet. But Jesus' heavenly Father put the words in Simon's mouth to confess that Jesus was more than a prophet. He was the one the prophets spoke [REDACTED]. He was the one they predicted would come. He WAS the Christ, THE Anointed one, THE Son of the living God!

In his book Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis addressed the inclination to say nice things about Jesus, but stop short of calling him God. In essence he wrote that we don't have the option of thinking of Jesus as a prophet. He accepted Peter's claim that he was the Christ, the Son of Living God. If he agreed to that and he wasn't, he was either a [REDACTED], or a [REDACTED]. If he said he was and he was and is, then he is [REDACTED]. (3)

After Simon received Jesus' blessing for what God had revealed to him about Jesus, Simon gets a [REDACTED]. Jacob got a new name after wrestling with God—Israel. Simon gets a new name after wrestling with the answer to a crucial question. No longer will he be called [REDACTED], which means sand. From that point on he would be called [REDACTED] which means rock. Jesus changes his name from [REDACTED]. He changes his name from one that is shifting sand upon which nothing can be built, to one whose testimony is solid rock upon which Jesus could build His church.

One of the most intriguing things I discovered about this passage is that Matthew uses the masculine form of the Greek word for rock, [REDACTED] for Peter's name -- obviously because Peter is a man -- but he uses the feminine form [REDACTED], when he says, "Upon this rock I will build my church." The man who declared that Jesus was the Christ was given the name [REDACTED]. But the rock on which the church was given the name [REDACTED]. Peter is a Rock, but what he confessed is the Bedrock foundation upon which the church will be built. .

The use of the word rock for Peter's name and for the foundation of the church indicates that Peter is, indeed, a "rock" [REDACTED] the foundation of the church. This flesh-and-blood person, this fisherman from Galilee who had a wife and a mother-in-law, a house and a boat will be an integral part of the foundation upon which Jesus will build HIS church.

The variation in gender when Jesus says that on this rock he will build his church says that that rock is something more than the man Peter. It is built on the [REDACTED] of the man, on the [REDACTED] of the man on the [REDACTED] of the man, but not [REDACTED] the man. In English the closest we could get would be to say, "Your name will now be [REDACTED], and on this [REDACTED] I will build my church."

The church can't be built on one man. People come and go. Pastors come and go. That's why we have a CoPastor Nominating Committee!! ☺ I'm going and someone is coming! The church can't be built on any One man, or on any One woman. It must be built only on faith ■ one man, in the one man who was more than a man, more than a man among men, more than a prophet. It must be built on Jesus who was and is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!

Peter came and went. Rocky died. However, the Rockette on which the foundation of the church that Jesus has been building for the last 2,000 years has never died. That Rockette is something that death cannot defeat or diminish. THAT is something that not even the gates of hell can stand up against.

Gates are defensive. In Jesus' statement to Peter that He, Jesus would be the builder of the church, Jesus also says that the church is to be on the ■■■■■. He predicts that the church he will build will storm those gates and those gates won't be able to withstand ■■■■■ offense.

Who do people say that YOU are? Are you one of God's Rocks? One of God's Rocks may be sitting on the throne of Peter in the Vatican. One of God's Rocks may also be sitting in a rocking CHAIR in a nursery singing "Jesus Loves Me"

I believe I have seen God's Rocks in action this week. I have seen God's Rocks rocking in boats to be deliverers. I have seen people being drawn out of the water like Moses was drawn out of the Nile. I believe those who have been drawn out will be forever changed. I believe they will too become deliverers.

Yesterday, as I was coming home from visiting the families that have taken on water I was approaching the stop sign and a driver coming toward me stopped and got out of her driver's side door and walked into the street. I stopped and watched as she bent down and picked up a small turtle in the middle of the road. She walked to the side of the road and put it into the grass. She was a deliverer.

I believe in one who like a Moses 2.0 was also drawn out of Egypt. Jesus had to flee to Egypt as a baby because of a decree from an evil King. Jesus was a refugee from one evil king who returned and grew up in a land named after Joseph's father Israel.

I believe that Jesus, who grew to be a man and stood before the kings of his day and called for his people's deliverance from bondage to sin. The difference though was that unlike Moses, who called for the final plague that took the lives of the first born of all of Egypt, Jesus delivered us all from bondage of sin through the death of One Only Begotten Son so that whosoever believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life.

Who do people say that ■■■■■ are? You are part of the church that Jesus is building. (Singing) If you believe in Jesus. If you believe he is the Son of God. If

you believe he died and rose again. If you believe he paid for us all. If you believe he's here now. Standing in our midst. Here with the power to heal now. And the grace to forgive...then you too are one of [REDACTED].

If you were flooded this week would you mind raising your hand so we can pray for you? If you wouldn't mind could I ask those around you to extend a hand toward you as I pray?

Dear Lord,

We have no words to express the grief, the loss, the daunting prospect of what lies ahead for these precious friends, your children. We pray for these who have taken the time to come this morning to worship. We pray for strength, courage, provision, for mercy in the eyes of the insurance adjustors and for help...for help to come alongside... for help from those who were not affected to lend help to those who were.

We pray for our brothers and sisters recovering from the wrath of Hurricane Harvey. We pray for those who have been injured, for the families of those who have lost loved ones, for the families who have lost possessions, and homes. We pray for those still in shelters, those who have been taken to cities where they know no one. For those who are able to return to their homes only to find such destruction.

For First Responders. For Good Samaritans. For neighbors helping neighbors. For strangers helping strangers. For the Cajun Navy.

We pray for those who are working to repair damage and restore power. We pray for those who have had to flee the explosions in the Arkema Plant. We pray for our neighbors in the Golden Triangle of Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange and every town in that triangle. We pray for not only those we know but for everyone from Rockport to Tennessee that has or even is now experiencing devastation from this storm.

Almighty God, as the flood waters recede and the extent of the devastation is revealed we cannot help but feel overwhelmed by the suffering of our neighbors, our neighbors in Texas, Louisiana, India, Sierra Leone, Pakistan and around the globe. The images we see are both harrowing and heartening: those grieving the loss of life, first responders and ordinary people alike, endangering themselves to rescue others, entire towns under water, entire nations mobilizing to bring relief. Help us to pay attention to both the pain and the hope so that we, too, will be moved to action.

Trusting that you have the power and the ability to bring light into the deepest darkness, we look without flinching at the inequities made glaringly obvious when disaster hits. While the rain falls indiscriminately on all, the ability to recover from

the damages it has wrought is anything but fair. Those already living on the edge have been washed over it, and now is the time for your people to intervene for justice long denied.

Lord, we are frail and faulted, confused and challenged. Yet from the beginning you have called people, faults and all, to be your children and to do marvelous deeds. We are humbled that you have called us and will be calling even more to join us in sharing the gospel with the world. Guide us O Lord. Give us wisdom and insight, strength and courage, energy and enthusiasm, passion and compassion.

We pray for patience, for strength, for perseverance, for hope, for deliverance from despair. We pray that in the midst of this season of testing that we will be God's Rocks.

- 1) C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, MacMillan, 1943, p. 55-56, with thanks to Paul Janke Here's C.S. Lewis' quote,

"I am here trying to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a [REDACTED]—on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the [REDACTED]. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a [REDACTED] you can spit at him and kill him as a [REDACTED]; or you can fall at his feet and call him [REDACTED] and God. But let us not come with any of that patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. Nor did he intend to." 1