

*“...The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live...” (Ecclesiastes 9:3)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before the high God?  
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;  
and what doth the LORD require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6.<sup>6,8</sup>)*

So shall it not be among you: the nature of true greatness and real power

## Part 1<sup>1</sup>

apostolic confession and rebuke

Matthew 16.<sup>13-23</sup>

<sup>13</sup>When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?”

<sup>14</sup>And they said, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”

<sup>15</sup>He saith unto them, “But whom say ye that I am?”

<sup>16</sup>And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

<sup>20</sup>Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

<sup>21</sup>From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. <sup>22</sup>Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”

<sup>23</sup>But he turned, and said unto Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

---

<sup>1</sup>In this series of homilies, we will explore the topic of “The Nature of True Greatness and Real Power” through the following texts: Matthew 16.<sup>13-23</sup>; Matthew 16.<sup>24-26</sup>; Luke 9.<sup>28-36, 44-45</sup>; Mark 9.<sup>33-37</sup> & Matthew 18.<sup>2-4</sup>; Luke 9.<sup>51-56</sup>; Mark 10.<sup>35-45</sup>; Matthew 21.<sup>1-5</sup>; and Philippians 2.<sup>1-11</sup>; Revelation 5.<sup>1-7</sup>

Mine is not, of course, the only way to structure or understand the synoptic Gospels. But it is one way. And it is a way that speaks to me. Perhaps it will speak to you as well.

As I understand the movement of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—approximately the first half of their narratives regularly report on miracles that Jesus performed in a very public demonstration of his greatness and power. Between the three synoptic Gospels, nearly 75% of the miracles traditionally identified as having been performed by Jesus (and over 80% in the case of Matthew and Mark) were reported in the first half of the Gospels.<sup>a</sup>

For example, in his book of roughly 24,000 words (in the KJV), Matthew records twenty-three traditionally identified miracles performed by Jesus. By the 12,000-word mark, Matthew has already recorded nineteen of them, leaving but four for the final 12,000 words. It is around the 12,000-word mark that Matthew arrives at Peter’s confession, “Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” with Jesus’ accompanying warning of his impending rejection and death, Peter’s rebuke of Jesus, and Jesus’ necessary rebuke of Peter as the latter demonstrates his misunderstanding concerning the true meaning and nature of Messianic greatness and power reflected in Jesus’ miracles.

These observations are more than a trifling bit of math wizardry. Peter’s confession represents a turning point in the Gospels, and, perhaps, in Jesus’ ministry. With this confession and rebuke comes a shift in emphasis and purpose. The second half of the synoptic Gospels’ arc contains far, far fewer reports of miracles. Replacing these reports of miracles are reports of Jesus’ attempts to help his disciples understand the true nature of the greatness and power that they accurately witness in his miracles. In addition, it is in association with Peter’s confession that Jesus speaks for the first time directly and openly of his looming rejection and death. He will, the text informs us, “from that time forth” issue predictions and warnings concerning his ultimate rejection and death.

Perhaps this Gospel structure represented a reality and necessity of Jesus’ actual earthly ministry. Perhaps the Gospel writers (or me) imposed the structure upon Jesus’ earthly

ministry in order to teach a principle that they had gleaned from Jesus' earthly ministry. Either way, there is much to learn from this structure.

Here is one of the principles we can glean from the structure. It is the principle upon which this series of homilies focuses. It is a principle, I believe, that Jesus himself held and lived by. It is a principle, I believe, that he attempted to pass on to his disciples.

True greatness and power; the kind of greatness and power that God exercises is something completely different than what the world imagines it to be. God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings themselves possess and wield greatness and power, such as it is. Further, God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings imagine and expect that *He* does. Finally, human beings must resist and reject the world's false ideas of the nature of greatness and power and adopt those of God. Only by so doing can human beings possess even the slightest glimmer of hope for peace in this world and an abiding existence in the world to come. To exercise greatness and power in a manner contrary to God's manner is to invite chaos and sure annihilation and extinction.

In this series of homilies we make the same points over and over again. We do so in a variety of ways. Hopefully, the repetition does grow weary. But, the fact is, the world as it is today is proof positive that it has not heard or heeded our Lord's warning voice. The world continues to suffer under notions of greatness and power that can only be described as anti-Christ. So, apparently, one can't speak the words of God too often. One can't speak too often of the nature of true greatness and real power as it exists in God and as it must exist in mortals. And, of course, the word of God never, ever grows mundane, but remains always vibrant and lively and quick and powerful and discerning.

Finally, a reminder. What we are doing here is homily, not commentary. We cannot, then, leave it at explication and discovery. We must move to application. We hope that this series encourages the reader to examine their own attitudes toward greatness and their own use of power, such as it is. In addition, we hope that the reader examines the world around them; examines those who are thought great and who exercise power in their community, in their

church, in their state, in their nation—in their life—and hold them up against Jesus’ standard. Do they, imperfect as they are, strive to exercise power as Jesus exercised it and as Jesus taught his disciples to exercise it? If so, then praise God. If not, then they must be challenged to do and be better. If they refuse to repent, they must be rejected and we more skilled in choosing to whom we grant power.

Very practical and applicable, this series of homilies.

### Introduction to today’s homily

---

“Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This was Peter’s true and inspired answer to the Savior’s question, “Whom say ye that I am?” In so confessing, Peter gave voice to each of the disciples’ beliefs and hopes. We need not use our imagination to understand what this meant to Peter and the other disciples. We know very well the Messianic tradition that they inherited and held amongst themselves.

Victorious and successful in all that he set his mind to, among Messiah’s endless powers was his power to defeat by any and every means every power—political and religious, temporal or eternal—that resisted him and threatened his people. Given Judah’s subjugation to the Romans, only the last in a series of national humiliations and subjugations, such a belief was like water to a man dying of thirst in the hottest and driest of deserts. We catch a glimpse of this thirst in Zachariah’s blessing of his son, John.

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel;  
for he hath visited and redeemed his people,  
and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David;  
as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets,  
which have been since the world began:  
that we should be saved from our enemies,  
and from the hand of all that hate us;

to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,  
and to remember his holy covenant;  
the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,  
that he would grant unto us,  
that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him,  
all the days of our life.”<sup>2</sup>

The disciples had, at the point of Peter’s confession, spent some two action-packed years with Jesus. They had watched him do the most amazing things. They were sure of his capacities. This man—who seemed more than man as he commanded even the elements, bringing peace to a raging sea and multiplying food sufficient for but a few into a feast for many—could do anything. Nothing could stand in his way. Failure of any kind was unthinkable. God was with him in an unprecedented and unexplainable manner. Jesus was, they had concluded for themselves, the powerful and always victorious Messiah. On this day of glorious confession, how promising the prospects must have looked to Peter as he uttered his confession and as he and his companions considered the future.

If there is any doubt as to Peter’s feelings and his expectations of Messiah, it is removed upon Peter’s response to Jesus’ well-timed, purposeful, and unwelcome warning that Jesus’ future held unexpected tragedy in what would look like failure and defeat in light of the disciples’ grandiose expectations. Here is Jesus’ warning, his first direct warning of his impending rejection and death ministry.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

And here is Peter’s response.

“Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Be it far from thee, Lord: this

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1.<sup>68-75</sup>

shall not be unto thee.”<sup>3</sup>

Failure and defeat, or even the appearance of such were not an option. This apostolic rebuke of the Church’s actual leader from the Church’s future visible leader was as much a “confession” as was that uttered just moments earlier: “Thou art the Christ. These two, confession and rebuke go hand in hand. One should not read the former without the latter. The latter informs the reader what the former meant in the minds of Jesus’ blind disciples. It also tells us how very, very far apart in principle and character were Jesus and his disciples; how very, very far apart was Jesus and this world when it came to understanding and exercising true greatness and power.

**f**rom that time forth

---

We know what produced the apostolic confession: a question. But we must have a closer look at what brought the apostolic rebuke, for it represents Jesus’ own and far worthier confession about the nature of his Messiahship and the true nature of greatness and power.

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”<sup>4</sup>

One can hardly imagine a bigger bubble buster. One can certainly feel for Peter. “You confess that I am the Messiah, and so I am. But, contrary to your expectations, I am a rejected Messiah who will die at the hands of far inferior and wicked men.” At the same time, his potentially comforting final words, “I will be raised the third day,” were incomprehensible to his disciples. Unappreciated, these concluding and promising words did not bring either the needed correction to a false expectation or the intended comfort.

We note Matthew’s, “from that time forth.” It seems, and is confirmed in the texts that report

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 16.<sup>21</sup>. Mark and Luke also report Jesus’ response to Peter’s confession, a response that drew the vociferous reply from Peter. See Mark 8.<sup>31-32</sup> and Luke 9.<sup>21-22</sup>.

Jesus' actions and words previous to this moment, that Jesus had not previously directly confronted his disciples with any such dilemma and contradiction concerning his ultimate fate. Additionally, "from that time forth," Jesus offered continuous corrective instruction concerning the nature of true greatness and real power. He did this by means of his teaching, his actions, and his correction to false attitudes and behaviors on the part of his disciples. In the upcoming homilies, we will explore these teachings, actions, and corrections that were meant to instruct and change his disciples' attitudes to both the nature of his own greatness and power and toward the nature of true greatness and real power in general.

For his part, Mark noted that Jesus "spake that saying *openly*." The Greek word translated, "openly" (*parrhēsia*) means to speak with candor or frankness. Negatively, it can also indicate "'impudence' or 'insolence' or 'shamelessness.'"<sup>5</sup> Mark, then, would have us understand that Jesus' response to Peter's confession was more than an objective statement of fact. It also served to challenge, without compromise, a misperception that Jesus discerned in Peter's confession. With Peter's rebuke of Jesus, Jesus was under the necessity of being more blunt and even more strident and uncompromising, Peter's feelings be damned.

"Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."

As it turns out, Jesus could read Peter's thoughts and motives. He understood that Peter's confession, "thou art the Christ," was spoken as much in the interest of himself, Peter, and winning the acceptance of others as it was in speaking "truth." We witness this same self-concern over and over in not only Peter, but in all the apostles. In addition, Peter's confession left room for the satanic impulse—an impulse older than this planet's existence and rebelliously exercised during a war in heaven—to misuse greatness and power for personal ends. In the end, Jesus had no choice but to point out Peter's satanic offensiveness "openly."

Through pure testimony and a stern rebuke, Jesus uttered a far truer confession of his Messiahship than that of Peter. Then, Jesus immediately returned his attention to the patient instruction of his blind disciples. We will examine this instruction concerning the nature of

---

<sup>5</sup> See *TDNT*.

true greatness and power in our next homily.

### Conclusion and benediction

---

Jesus never hid the reality of his greatness and power. He never denied his power to any who came to him in need, desperation even, and trust. But Jesus' greatness and power had nothing to do with that of the false traditions of greatness and power that his disciples envisioned when they contemplated him or his Messiahship. It had nothing to do with worldly estimations of greatness and power. Rather, Jesus' greatness and the clearest evidence and exercise of his power would be found in his suffering and death for others. Jesus would most clearly reveal his greatness, and most appropriately exercise his power, not from a throne, but from a cross.

Jesus' divine assertion was more than unfathomable to Peter and his fellow disciples. It was downright offensive, worthy of an apostolic rebuke as passionate as the earlier apostolic confession. Jesus met this unworthy apostolic rebuke and passion with his own passionate rebuke. Peter's ideas of Jesus' Messiahship, based upon false traditions concerning the nature of true greatness and real power, were contrary to the mind and will of God and stood in opposition to all that God stood for. It was therefore necessary, however unwelcome, to call these false traditions and practices by their proper name: satanic.

Sadly, the passion and beliefs behind Peter's apostolic rebuke of Jesus and his alarming claim about the nature of greatness and power are alive and well today. Notwithstanding Jesus' clear teachings, satanic attitudes toward greatness and the nature of power continue to dominate this sorry excuse of a planet to this very day—including, tragically and shamefully, among that portion of the planet's inhabitants that calls itself 'Christian.'

It is devastating when individuals hold and act upon satanic attitudes about the nature of greatness and power in their private life. People suffer, sometimes terribly, at their hands. However, when individuals act publicly to form communities, political parties, and nations based upon these same satanic attitudes and actions, they threaten more than a few



individuals. They threaten the very existence of society; indeed, of civilization itself. They threaten annihilation. We are, today, on the brink of annihilation. All because individuals and institutions reject, as Peter once did, the Messiah's unwelcome truth that true greatness and real power are found, not in Lordship, but in the selfless self-sacrifice for others.

So, how are you doing in your exercise of power, such as it is? How are others whom you think great and who wield power doing? Are they following, or striving to follow as best they can the divine example of true greatness and real power that Jesus so perfectly exemplified? If they are not, are you bold enough and faithful enough to admonish them? Are you bold enough and faithful enough to turn away from them if they refuse correction and repentance? Are you enough of a disciple of Jesus to do that? The world is counting on just such bold and faithful discipleship. It is counting on you.

*“Wait on the Lord, and keep his way,  
and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land:  
when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.  
I have seen the wicked in great power,  
and spreading himself like a green bay tree.  
Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:  
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.”<sup>6</sup>*

*“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”*

---

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 27.<sup>34-36</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Following is a breakdown of Jesus' traditional miracles along with their distribution throughout the Gospels. Because John seems to possess an agenda even more radically different than even the very different agendas of the three synoptic Gospels, I have and will focus only on those three synoptic Gospels in my analysis.

<b>Miracle</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
Water turned to wine				2. <sup>1-11</sup>
Nobleman's son healed				4. <sup>46-54</sup>
Draught of fish			5. <sup>4-11</sup>	
Man with unclean spirit healed		1. <sup>21-27</sup>	4. <sup>31-36</sup>	
Peter's mother-in-law healed	8. <sup>14-15</sup>	1. <sup>30-31</sup>	4. <sup>38-39</sup>	
A multitude of sick healed	8. <sup>16</sup>	1. <sup>32-34</sup>	4. <sup>40-41</sup>	
Leper healed	8. <sup>2-4</sup>	1. <sup>40-42</sup>	5. <sup>12-13</sup>	
Palsied man healed	9. <sup>2-7</sup>	2. <sup>3-12</sup>	5. <sup>18-25</sup>	
Crippled man healed at Bethesda				5. <sup>1-9</sup>
Man with withered hand healed	12. <sup>10-13</sup>	3. <sup>1-5</sup>	6. <sup>6-10</sup>	
Centurion's son healed	8. <sup>5-13</sup>		7. <sup>1-10</sup>	
Nain widow's son raised from dead			7. <sup>11-15</sup>	
Calming the storm at sea	8. <sup>23-27</sup>	4. <sup>37-41</sup>	8. <sup>22-25</sup>	
Man with legions healed	8. <sup>28-34</sup>	5. <sup>1-15</sup>	8. <sup>27-39</sup>	
Woman with issue of blood healed	9. <sup>20-22</sup>	5. <sup>25-29</sup>	8. <sup>43-48</sup>	
Jarius' daughter raised from dead	9. <sup>18-19, 23-25</sup>	5. <sup>22-24, 38-42</sup>	8. <sup>41-42, 49-56</sup>	
Two blind men healed	9. <sup>27-31</sup>			
A possessed mute man healed	9. <sup>32-33</sup>			
Man with "devil," blind & dumb healed	12. <sup>22</sup>		11. <sup>14</sup>	
Feeding of 5,000	14. <sup>15-21</sup>	6. <sup>35-44</sup>	9. <sup>12-17</sup>	6. <sup>6-13</sup>
Jesus walks on water	14. <sup>25</sup>	6. <sup>48-51</sup>		6. <sup>19-20</sup>
Multitudes healed in Gennesaret	14. <sup>34-36</sup>	6. <sup>53-56</sup>		
Syrophenician woman's daughter healed	15. <sup>21-28</sup>	7. <sup>24-30</sup>		
Many, including deaf & dumb healed	15. <sup>29-31</sup>	7. <sup>31-37</sup>		
Feeding of 4,000	15. <sup>32-38</sup>	8. <sup>1-9</sup>		
Blind healed at Bethsaida		8. <sup>22-26</sup>		
<b>Peter's confession</b>	<b>16.<sup>13-20</sup></b>	<b>8.<sup>27-30</sup></b>	<b>9.<sup>18-21</sup></b>	
Demonic son healed	17. <sup>14-18</sup>	9. <sup>17-29</sup>	9. <sup>38-43</sup>	
Coin taken from fish	17. <sup>24-27</sup>			
Man born blind healed			11. <sup>14</sup>	9. <sup>1-7</sup>
Crippled woman healed			13. <sup>10-17</sup>	
Man with dropsy healed			14. <sup>1-4</sup>	

Lazarus raised from dead				11. <sup>1-44</sup>
Ten lepers healed			17. <sup>11-19</sup>	
Two blind (Bartimaeus) healed	20. <sup>29-34</sup>	10. <sup>46-52</sup>	18. <sup>35-43</sup>	
Fig tree cursed and withered	21. <sup>18-22</sup>	11. <sup>12-14, 20-25</sup>		
Soldier's severed ear healed			22. <sup>50-51</sup>	
	19/4 (23/83% before)	17/3 (20/85% before)	15/7 (22/68% before)	5/2 (7/71% before)
Synoptic 23/9 (31 total /74% before)				